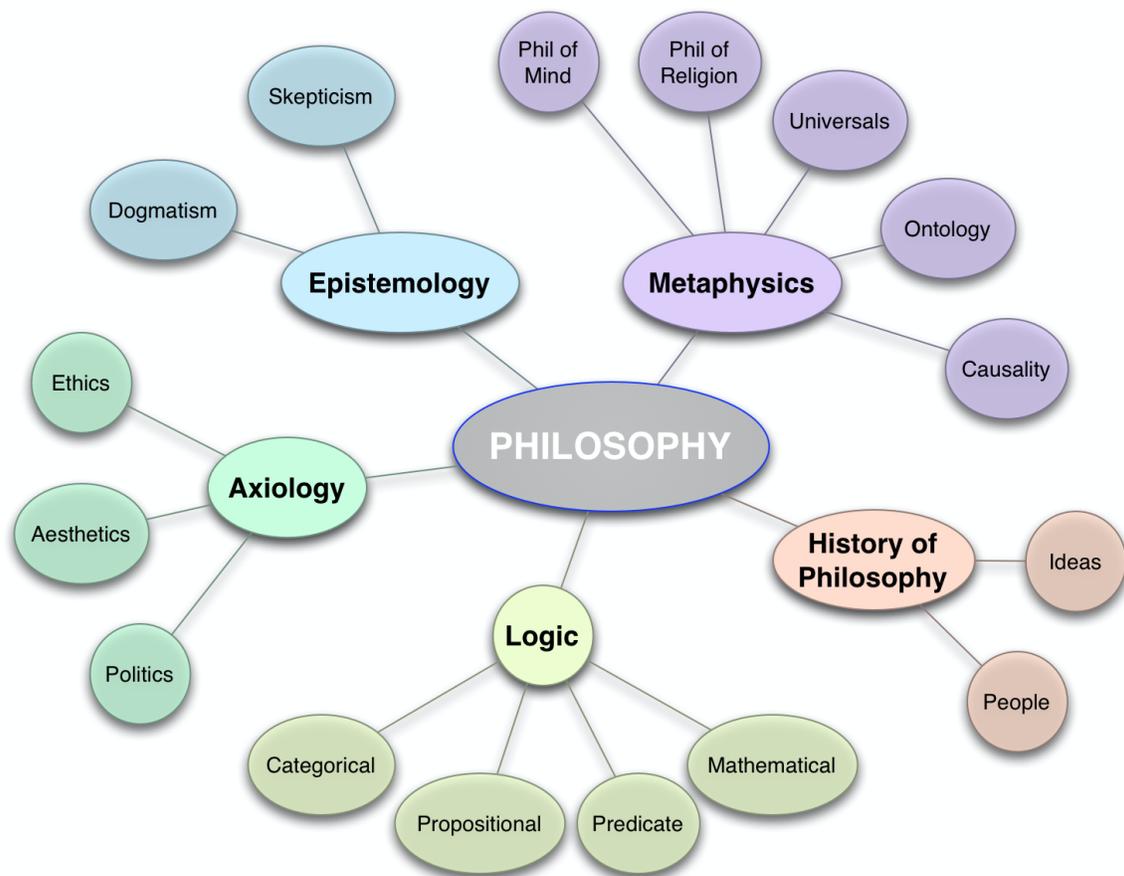


PHILOSOPHY 101

INTRODUCTION TO WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

2nd Edition



Edited by:

DR. BARRY F. VAUGHAN

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

What *is* Philosophy?

In the past, I've asked students what they thought Philosophy was, and often received interesting answers.

"Philosophy is . . ."

- "a bunch of crap that people do when they want to make money, but don't want to work."
- "Trying to answer questions through observation and thought. Philosophy could be a formula to life, or an informed way of life."
- "Different peoples' views on life, death, and the after-life."
- "Wanting to know more than the obvious; clarifying (using reason and logic) answers to questions ... arguing."
- "How a person thinks."
- "Sitting around, smoking cigarettes, and getting into deep discussions about life's little quirks."
- "The rational inquiry into the nature of the universe, both physical and metaphysical."
- "In-depth reasoning about literary works ... analyzing."
- "The search for truth through contemplation to reach a higher sense of self, or self-actualization."

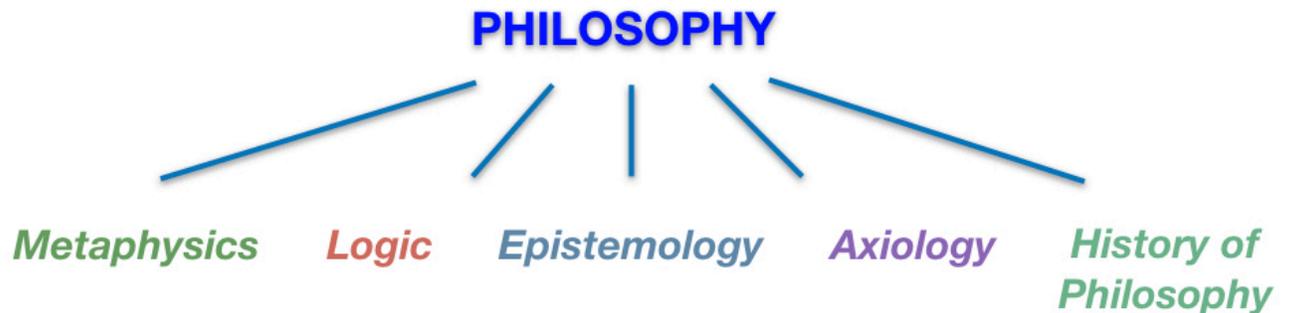
Each of these definitions is interesting in its own way, and captures *some* of what Philosophy—as an academic discipline—is about. What we can glean from each of these definitions is that Philosophy is a kind of *conversation* about important questions/puzzles, much of which is focused on human existence.

But more specifically, we can divide Philosophy into major groups of questions that we can call the "sub-disciplines" of Philosophy.

The Major Subdisciplines of Philosophy:

Within the academy (i.e., contemporary higher education) Philosophy is very like other disciplines in that it has a particular scope and a defined methodology. For example, Physical Science (including

Physics, Chemistry, Geology, etc.) is an academic investigation into the physical nature of the world and adheres to a strict methodology (i.e., the scientific method). But unlike other academic disciplines, Philosophy is very broad in its scope, it has five distinct subdisciplines with related, but distinct areas of inquiry.



Metaphysics - the *philosophical* study of *reality*:

Ontology - What kinds of things actually *exist*?

Philosophy of Mind - What is the nature of *consciousness*

Philosophy of Religion – What is the nature of God?

Logic - the *philosophical* study of *reason* and *arguments*

What is an argument?

What makes an argument work?

What makes an argument fail?

Epistemology - the *philosophical* study of *knowledge*:

What is knowledge?

Can we have knowledge?

How do we get knowledge?

Axiology - the *philosophical* study of *value*:

Ethics - the *philosophical* study of *morality*:

What makes an action Right or Wrong?

Is morality relative?

What do the words 'right' and 'wrong' actually mean?

Political Theory - the *philosophical* study of *justice*

Aesthetics - the *philosophical* study of *beauty*:

Philosophy of Literature -

Philosophy of Art -

Philosophy of Music -

History of Philosophy – the *philosophical* examination of the development of *ideas*

People – what did philosophers of the past think about and why?

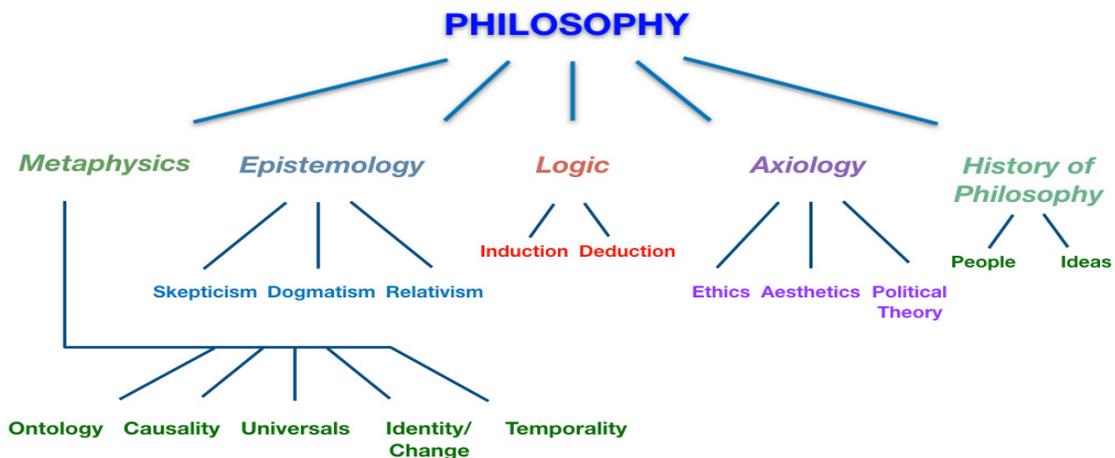
Ideas – how do ideas arise over time and influence the development of new ideas in the future?

These are the main *topics* or *problems* in Philosophy. Thinking about it in this way helps us understand why it is an academic discipline (i.e., an area of concentration in higher education). In the academic world, the word ‘philosophy’ is very much like the word ‘science’: it covers a wide variety of distinct, but related topics. But, as you can see, the field of Philosophy is more broad than Science because it has *more* primary subdisciplines (Science only has three: Physics, Chemistry, and Biology).

Unlike other academic disciplines, Philosophy also has a profoundly personal dimension. Many, if not most, people will—at some point in their life—struggle with philosophical questions. “Why am I here?” “Why do bad things happen?” “Is there consciousness beyond the death of the body?” “How do I know when I can trust my senses or the testimony of other people?” “Are the choices I make really free, and will they have an impact on my future?” And, of course, there’s the old classic from “The Breakfast Club,” “who am I?” Being aware of these questions, struggling with possible answers, considering how others have tried to answer them makes up the personal dimension of Philosophy.

In the readings that follow, and over the course of this semester, we will explore some of these questions both in their historical and contemporary contexts. The material we will be reading and discussing in class is aimed to help introduce you to, and guide you through this very cursory introduction to Philosophy as an academic discipline and way of life.

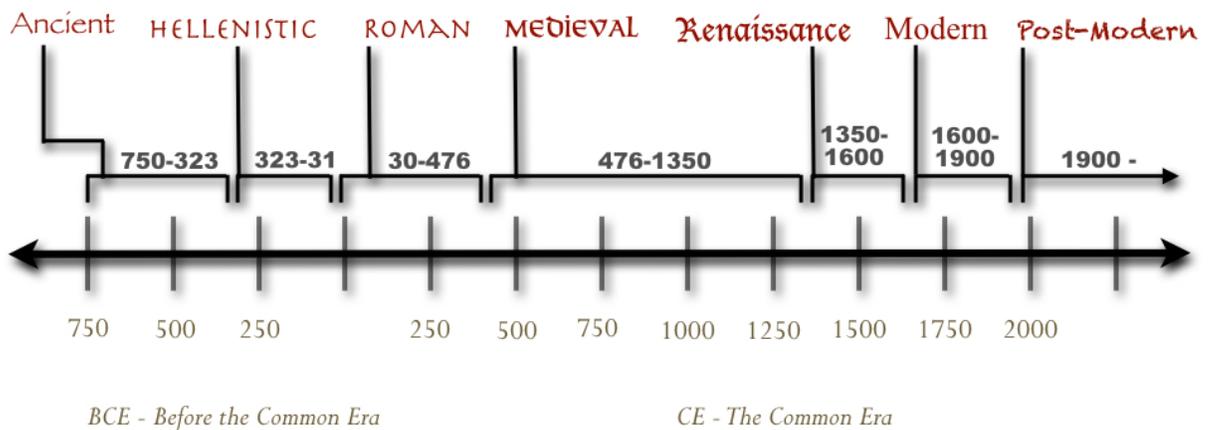
In the following unit we are going to confine ourselves to one simple question: ***What is Philosophy?***

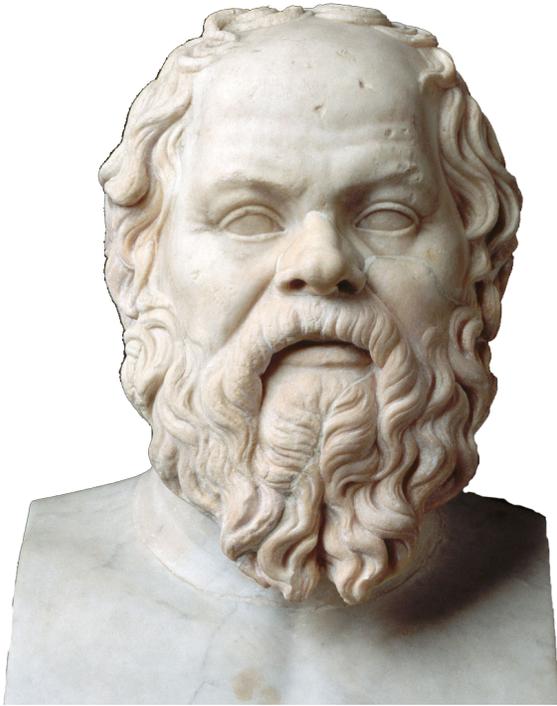


We are going to examine that question from a number of perspectives including, **where** the word

‘philosophy’ itself came from, **when** Philosophy (as we think of it) started, and **why**. In essence we will be giving three distinct definitions of Philosophy: an etymological definition, an academic definition, and finally an historical definition. We’ll finish up the first unit by examining three different paradigmatic philosophers from three very different periods of history (i.e., the Ancient, the Modern, and the *Post-Modern*) who can help us better understand what it is all about. Sokrates will give us some insight into what it was like to do Philosophy in Ancient Greece, where it all started. John Locke will give us a glimpse into Modern Philosophy, and Bertrand Russell will give us a peek into some of the concerns of philosophers closer to our own time.

A Timeline of Western Intellectual History





THE *APOLOGIA*¹ OF SOKRATES (*in part*)

by:
Plato (*Aristokles* 428-348 BCE)

Translated by: Benjamin Jowett
*Additions, corrections, and footnotes by Barry F. Vaughan*²

Persons of the Dialogue: Sokrates, Meletos, and the
Athenian Jury

Scene: The Athenian High Court

Section I: Sokrates' Defense

Sokrates: How you have felt, oh men of Athens, at hearing the speeches of my accusers, I cannot tell; but I know that their persuasive words almost made me forget who I was—such was the effect of them; and yet they have hardly spoken a word of truth. But many as their falsehoods were, there was one of them which quite amazed me; I mean when they told you to be upon your guard, and not to let yourselves be deceived by the force of my eloquence. They ought to have been ashamed of saying this, because they were sure to be detected as soon as I opened my lips and displayed my deficiency; they certainly did appear to be most shameless in saying this, unless by the force of eloquence they mean the force of truth; for then I do indeed admit that I am eloquent. But in how different a way from theirs!

Well, as I was saying, they have hardly uttered a word, or not more than a word, of truth; but you shall hear from me the whole truth: not, however, delivered after their manner, in a set oration duly ornamented with words and phrases. No indeed! I shall use the words and arguments which occur to me at the moment; for I am certain that this is right, and that at my time of life I ought not to be appearing before you, oh men of Athens, in the character of a juvenile orator—let no one expect this of me. And I must beg of you to grant me one favor, which is this—if you hear me using the same words in my defence which I have been in the habit of using, and which most of you may have heard

¹ Greek, 'defense'.

² From the Project Gutenberg's *Apology of Sokrates*, by Plato, www.gutenberg.org. For the full text visit the Project Gutenberg website. This edited version is intended for academic or personal use and may not be sold or used for profit. I have changed spellings of proper names to more accurately match the Greek text as opposed to the more traditional Latinized spellings which were dominant in Jowett's time. I have also changed UK spellings to US spellings where appropriate, as well as made clarifications in translation (noted with brackets) and have added explanatory footnotes.

in the agora³, and at the tables of the money-changers, or anywhere else, I would ask you not to be surprised at this, and not to interrupt me. For I am more than seventy years of age, and this is the first time that I have ever appeared in a court of law, and I am quite a stranger to the ways of the place; and therefore I would have you regard me as if I were really a stranger, whom you would excuse if he spoke in his native tongue, and after the fashion of his country; that I think is not an unfair request. Never mind the manner, which may or may not be good; but think only of the justice of my cause, and give heed to that: let the judge decide justly and the speaker speak truly.

And first, I have to reply to the older charges and to my first accusers, and then I will go to the later ones. For I have had many accusers, who accused me of old, and their false charges have continued during many years; and I am more afraid of them than of Anutos⁴ and his associates, who are dangerous, too, in their own way. But far more dangerous are these, who began when you were children, and took possession of your minds with their falsehoods, telling of one Sokrates, a wise man, who speculated about the heaven above, and searched into the earth beneath, and made the worse appear the better cause. These are the accusers whom I dread; for they are the circulators of this rumor, and their hearers are too apt to fancy that speculators of this sort do not believe in the gods...

I will begin at the beginning, and ask what the accusation is which has given rise to this slander [against] me, and which has encouraged Meletos⁵ to proceed against me. What do the slanderers say? They [will] be my prosecutors, and I will sum up their words in an affidavit:

"Sokrates is an evil-doer, and a curious person, who searches into things under the earth and in heaven, and he makes [weak arguments defeat strong arguments]; and he teaches [these] doctrines to others."

That is the nature of their claim, and that is what you have seen yourselves in the comedy of Aristophanes;⁶ who has introduced a man whom he calls 'Sokrates', going about and saying that he can walk in the air, and talking a deal of nonsense concerning matters of which I do not pretend to know either much or little—not that I mean to say anything disparaging of anyone who is a student of natural philosophy. I should be very sorry if Meletos could lay that to my charge. But the simple truth is, oh Athenians, that I have nothing to do with these studies. Very many of those here present are witnesses to the truth of this, and to them I appeal. Speak then, you who have heard me, and tell your neighbors whether any of you have ever known me hold forth in few words or in many upon matters of this sort. You hear their answer. And from what they say of this, you will be able to judge of the truth of the rest.

As little foundation is there for the report that I am a teacher, and take money; that is no more true

³ The Athenian market and public square.

⁴ Anutos, son of Anthemion, was an Athenian general during the Peloponnesian War, and the leader of the democratic faction that overthrew the "Thirty Tyrants" who had seized power from 404-403 BCE in the aftermath of the war. Anutos may have been suspicious of Sokrates because of his relationship with Alkibiades who seems to have held Anutos in some contempt. He may also have felt that Sokrates' constant criticism of the Athenian political system was a danger to the fragile, newly re-established democracy.

⁵ The lead prosecutor, and the youngest of the three who swore the affidavit against Sokrates.

⁶ "The Clouds" (*Nephelai*), first performed at Dionusia, in 423 BCE. The protagonist, Strepsiades, seeks to avoid paying his bills by having his son, Pheidippides, learn "the bad logic" from a sophist named 'Sokrates'.

than the other. Although, *if* a man is able to teach, I honor him for being paid. There is Gorgias of Leontini,⁷ and Prodikos of Keios,⁸ and Hippias of Elis,⁹ who go the round of the cities, and are able to persuade the young men to leave their own citizens, by whom they might be taught for nothing, and come to them, whom they not only pay, but are thankful if they may be allowed to pay them. There is actually a Parian philosopher residing in Athens, of whom I have heard; and I came to hear of him in this way: I met a man who has spent a world of money on the Sophists, Kallia the son of Hipponicus, and knowing that he had sons, I asked him: "Kallia," I said, "if your two sons were foals or calves, there would be no difficulty in finding someone [watch out for] them; we should hire a trainer of horses or a farmer probably who would improve and perfect them in their own proper virtue and excellence; but as they are human beings, whom are you thinking of placing over them? Is there anyone who understands human and political virtue? You must have thought about this as you have sons; is there anyone?"

"There is," he said.

"Who is he?" said I, "and of what country? and what does he charge?"

"Euehnos the Parian," he replied; "he is the man, and his charge is five *mina*¹⁰."

Happy is Euehnos, I said to myself, if he really has this wisdom, and teaches at such a modest charge. Had I the same, I should have been very proud and conceited; but the truth is that I have no knowledge of [this] kind.

I dare say, Athenians, that someone among you will reply, "*Why is this, Sokrates, and what is the origin of these accusations of you: for there must have been something strange which you have been doing? All this great fame and talk about you would never have arisen if you had been like other men: tell us, then, why this is, as we should be sorry to judge hastily of you.*" Now I regard this as a fair challenge, and I will endeavor to explain to you the origin of this name of "wise," and of this evil fame. Please to attend then. And although some of you may think I am joking, I declare that I will tell you the entire truth. Men of Athens, this reputation of mine has come of a certain sort of wisdom which I possess. If you ask me what kind of wisdom, I reply, such wisdom as is attainable by man, for to that extent I am inclined to believe that I am wise; whereas the persons of whom I was speaking have a superhuman wisdom, which I may fail to describe, because I have it not myself; and he who says that I have, speaks falsely, and is taking away my character.

And here, oh men of Athens, I must beg you not to interrupt me, even if I seem to say something extravagant. For the word which I will speak is not mine. I will refer you to a witness who is worthy of credit, and will tell you about my wisdom—whether I have any, and of what sort—and that

⁷ A first-generation Sophist sometimes referred to as "The Nihilist". Famous for a three-fold argument concerning ontology and epistemology: 1) Nothing exist; 2) If something exists, it is unknowable; 3) If something were knowable, it would not be communicable.

⁸ A first-generation Sophist who focused on Linguistics and ethics. He held that gods were merely personifications of natural phenomena like astronomical bodies and meteorological events.

⁹ A second-generation Sophist, contemporary of Sokrates, and polymath.

¹⁰ A unit of weight approximately equal to 50 shekels (1 shekel = 11 grams or 0.35 troy ounces); one *mina* was approximately six months wages for a day laborer.

witness shall be the god of Delphi.¹¹

You must have known Xairephon; he was early a friend of mine, and also a friend of yours, for he shared in the exile of the people, and returned with you.¹² Well, Xairephon, as you know, was very impetuous in all his [acts], and he went to Delphi and boldly asked the oracle to tell him whether—as I was saying, I must beg you not to interrupt—he asked the oracle to tell him whether there was anyone wiser than I was, and the Pythian prophetess answered that *there was no man wiser*. Xairephon is dead himself, but his brother, who is in court, will confirm the truth of this story.¹³

Why do I mention this? Because I am going to explain to you why I have such an evil name. When I heard the answer, I said to myself, “*what can the god mean? and what is the interpretation of this riddle? for I know that I have no wisdom, small or great. What can he mean when he says that I am the wisest of men?*” And yet he is a god and cannot lie;¹⁴ that would be against his nature.

After a long consideration, I at last thought of a method of [testing] the question. I reflected that if I could only find a man wiser than myself, then I might go to the god with a refutation in my hand. I should say to him, “*Here is a man who is wiser than I am; but you said that I was the wisest.*” Accordingly, I went to one who had the reputation of wisdom, and observed to him—his name I need not mention; he was a politician whom I selected for examination—and the result was as follows: When I began to talk with him, I could not help thinking that he was not really wise, although he was thought wise by many, and wiser still by himself; and I went and tried to explain to him that he thought himself wise, but was not really wise; and the consequence was that he hated me, and his enmity was shared by several who were present and heard me.

So I left him, saying to myself as I went away: “*Well, although I do not suppose that either of us knows anything really beautiful and good, I am better off than he is—for he knows nothing, and thinks that he knows. I neither know nor think that I know.*” In this latter particular, then, I seem to have slightly the advantage of him.

Then I went to another, who had still higher philosophical pretensions, and my conclusion was exactly the same. I made another enemy of him, and of many others besides him. After this I went to one man after another, being not unconscious of the [anger] which I provoked, and I lamented and feared this: but necessity was laid upon me—the word of god, I thought, ought to be considered first. And I said to myself, “*I must go to all who appear to know, and find out the meaning of the oracle.*” And I swear to you, Athenians, by the dog I swear—for I must tell you the truth—the result of my mission was just this: I found that the men most in repute were all but the most foolish; and that some inferior men were really wiser and better. I will tell you the tale of my wanderings and of the

¹¹ Delphi was a religious center on Mount Parnassos, north-west of Athens and home of the most popular oracle in Ancient Greece. The oracle at Delphi spoke on behalf of the god Apollo.

¹² The ‘exile’ Sokrates refers to is the period between 404 and 403 BCE when the Council of Thirty (or “Thirty Tyrants”) ruled Athens following the end of the Peloponnesian War. Many citizens fled the city to avoid the political turmoil and personal danger during this chaotic time.

¹³ Sokrates gives no indication of when Xairephon went to Delphi. However, if we assume Sokrates has been engaged in his philosophical mission for three or four decades, that would place the date between 460 and 450 BCE, which coincides with the rise of Perikles and the radical democratization of Athens.

¹⁴ Literally, “it is inappropriate for the god to lie”.

"Heraklean" labors,¹⁵ as I may call them, which I endured only to find at last the oracle irrefutable.

When I left the politicians, I went to the poets; tragic, dithyrambic, and all sorts. And there, I said to myself, you will be detected; now you will find out that you are more ignorant than they are. Accordingly, I took them some of the most elaborate passages in their own writings, and asked what was the meaning of them—thinking that they would teach me something. Will you believe me? I am almost ashamed to speak of this, but still I must say that there is hardly a person present who would not have talked better about their poetry than they did themselves. That showed me in an instant that not by wisdom do poets write poetry, but by a sort of genius and inspiration; they are like diviners or soothsayers who also say many fine things, but do not understand the meaning of them. And the poets appeared to me to be much in the same case; and I further observed that upon the strength of their poetry they believed themselves to be the wisest of men in other things in which they were not wise. So I departed, conceiving myself to be superior to them for the same reason that I was superior to the politicians.

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

This investigation has led to my having many enemies of the worst and most dangerous kind, and has given occasion also to many [slanders], and I am called 'wise', for my hearers always imagine that I myself possess the wisdom which I find [lacking] in others: but the truth is, oh men of Athens, that god only is wise; and in this oracle he means to say that the wisdom of men is little or nothing; he is not speaking of Sokrates, he is only using my name as an illustration, as if he said, "*He, oh men, is the wisest, who, like Sokrates, knows that his wisdom is in truth worth nothing.*" And so I go my way, obedient to the god, and make inquisition into the wisdom of anyone, whether citizen or stranger, who appears to be wise; and if he is not wise, then in vindication of the oracle I show him that he is not wise; and this occupation quite absorbs me, and I have no time to give either to any public matter of interest or to any concern of my own, but I am in utter poverty by reason of my devotion to the god.

There is another thing: young men of the richer classes, who have not much to do, [follow] me of their own accord; they like to hear the pretenders examined, and they often imitate me, and examine others themselves; there are plenty of persons, as they soon enough discover, who think that they know something, but really know little or nothing: and then those who are examined by them instead of being angry with themselves are angry with me: "*This confounded Sokrates,*" they say; "*this*

¹⁵ Herakles [*Lt.* Hercules], the son of Zeus and Alkmene, was assigned twelve "labors" (the *dodekathlon*) by king Eurustheos of Turins, as penance for killing his own wife and sons. The labors were to kill the Nemean Lion, the Lernaian Hydra, and the Stumphalian Birds, as well as capture the Erumanthian Boar, the Bull of Krete, the Mares of Diomedes, Kerberos, the Golden Hind of Artemis, the girdle of Hippoluta (queen of the Amazons), and the apples of the Hesperides.

villainous misleader of youth!”—and then if somebody asks them, *“Why, what evil does he practice or teach?”* they do not know, and cannot tell; but in order that they may not appear to be at a loss, they repeat the ready-made charges which are used against all philosophers about teaching things up in the clouds and under the earth, and having no gods, and making the worse appear the better cause; for they do not like to confess that their pretense of knowledge has been detected—which is the truth: and as they are numerous and ambitious and energetic, and are all in battle array and have persuasive tongues, they have filled your ears with their loud and inveterate [slanders]. And this is the reason why my three accusers, Meletos and Anutos and Lukos,¹⁶ have set upon me; Meletos, who has a quarrel with me on behalf of the poets; Anutos, on behalf of the craftsmen; Lukos, on behalf of the [orators]: and as I said at the beginning, I cannot expect to get rid of this mass of [slander] all in a moment. And this, oh men of Athens, is the truth and the whole truth; I have concealed nothing, I have dissembled nothing. And yet I know that this plainness of speech makes them hate me, and what is their hatred but a proof that I am speaking the truth?—this is the occasion and reason of their slander of me, as you will find out either in this or in any future inquiry.

I have said enough in my defence against the first class of my accusers; [now] I turn to the second class, who are headed by Meletos, that good and patriotic man, as he calls himself. And now I will try to defend myself against them: these new accusers must also have their affidavit read. What do they say? Something of this sort:

“That Sokrates is a doer of evil, and corrupter of the youth, and he does not believe in the gods of the state, and has other new divinities of his own.”

That is the sort of charge; and now let us examine the particular counts. He says that I am a doer of evil, who corrupt the youth; but I say, oh men of Athens, that Meletos is a doer of evil, and the evil is that he makes a joke of a serious matter, and is too ready at bringing other men to trial from a pretended zeal and interest about matters in which he really never had the smallest interest. And the truth of this I will endeavor to prove.

Come [here], Meletos, and let me ask a question of you. You think a great deal about the improvement of youth?

Meletos: Yes, I do.

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

Meletos: The laws.

Sokrates: But that, my good sir, is not my meaning. I want to know who the person is, who, in the

¹⁶ We know almost nothing about Lukos except that he was probably an orator and represented the anger of this class of professional “speech-givers” in Athens against Sokrates.

first place, knows the laws.

Meletos: The judges, Sokrates, who are present in court.

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

Meletos: Certainly they are.

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

Meletos: All of them.

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

Meletos: Yes, they do.

Sokrates: And the [members of the Council]?

Meletos: Yes, the [members of the Council] improve them.

Sokrates: But perhaps the members of the [public] assembly corrupt them?—or do they too improve them?

Meletos: They improve them.

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

Meletos: That is what I stoutly affirm.

Sokrates: I am very unfortunate if that is true. But suppose I ask you a question: Would you say that this also holds true in the case of horses? Does one man do them harm and all the world good? Is not the exact opposite of this true? One man is able to do them good, or at least not many; the trainer of horses, that is to say, does them good, and others who have to do with them rather injure them? Is not that true, Meletos, of horses, or any other animals? Yes, certainly. Whether you and Anutos say yes or no, that is no matter. Happy indeed would be the condition of youth if they had one corrupter only, and all the rest of the world were their improvers. And you, Meletos, have sufficiently shown that you never had a thought about the young: your carelessness is seen in your not caring about matters spoken of in this very indictment.

And now, Meletos, I must ask you another question: Which is better, to live among bad citizens, or among good ones? Answer, friend, I say; for that is a question which may be easily answered. Do not the good do their neighbors good, and the bad do them evil?

Meletos: Certainly.

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

Meletos: Certainly not.

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

Meletos: Intentionally, I say.

Sokrates: But you have just admitted that the good do their neighbors good, and the evil do them evil. Now is that a truth which your superior wisdom has recognized [this] early in life, and am I, at my age, in such darkness and ignorance as not to know that if a man with whom I have to live is corrupted by me, I am very likely to be harmed by him, and yet I corrupt him, and intentionally, too? That is what you are saying, and of that you will never persuade me or any other human being. But either I do not corrupt them, or I corrupt them unintentionally, so that on either view of the case you lie. If my offence is unintentional, the law has no cognizance of unintentional offences: you ought to have taken me privately, and warned and admonished me; for if I had been better advised, I should have left off doing what I only did unintentionally—no doubt I should; whereas you hated to converse with me or teach me, but you indicted me in this court, which is a place not of instruction, but of punishment.

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

Meletos: Yes, that I say emphatically.

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

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

Sokrates: That is an extraordinary statement, Meletos. Why do you say that? Do you mean that I do not believe in the godhead of the sun or moon, which is the common creed of all men?

Meletos: I assure you, judges, that he does not believe in them; for he says that the sun is stone, and

the moon earth.

Sokrates: Friend Meletos, you think that you are accusing Anaxagoras, and you have a bad opinion of the judges, if you fancy them ignorant to such a degree as not to know that those doctrines are found in the books of Anaxagoras the Clazomenian, who is full of them. And these are the doctrines which the youth are said to learn of Sokrates, when there are not infrequently exhibitions of them at the theatre (*price of admission one drachma at the most*); and they might cheaply purchase them, and laugh at Sokrates if he pretends to father such eccentricities. And so, Meletos, you really think that I do not believe in any god?

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

Sokrates: You are a liar, Meletos, not believed even by yourself. For I cannot help thinking, oh men of Athens, that Meletos is reckless and impudent, and that he has written this indictment in a spirit of mere wantonness and youthful bravado. Has he not compounded a riddle, thinking to try me? He said to himself: I shall see whether this wise Sokrates will discover my ingenious contradiction, or whether I shall be able to deceive him and the rest of them. For he certainly does appear to me to contradict himself in the indictment as much as if he said that Sokrates is guilty of not believing in the gods, and yet of believing in them—but this surely is a piece of fun.

I should like you, oh men of Athens, to join me in examining what I conceive to be his inconsistency; and do you, Meletos, answer. And I must remind you that you are not to interrupt me if I speak in my accustomed manner.

Did ever [a] man, Meletos, believe in the existence of human things, and not of human beings? I wish, men of Athens, that he would answer, and not be always trying to get up an interruption. Did ever any man believe in horsemanship, and not in horses? or in flute-playing, and not in flute-players? No, my friend; I will answer to you and to the court, as you refuse to answer for yourself. There is no man who ever did. But now please to answer the next question: Can a man believe in spiritual and divine agencies, and not in spirits or demigods?

Meletos: He cannot.

Sokrates: I am glad that I have extracted that answer, by the assistance of the court; nevertheless, you swear in the indictment that I teach and believe in divine [beings] or [demigods] (new or old, no matter for that); at any rate, I believe in [demigods], as you say and swear in the affidavit; but if I believe in [demigods], I must believe in spirits or gods; is not that true? Yes, that is true, for I may assume that your silence gives assent to that. Now what are spirits or demigods? Are they not either gods or the sons of gods? Is that true?

Meletos: Yes, that is true.

Sokrates: But this is just the ingenious riddle of which I was speaking: the demigods or [demons] are gods, and you say first that I don't believe in gods, and then again that I do believe in gods; that is, if I believe in demigods. For if the demigods are the illegitimate sons of gods, whether by the

Nymphs or by any other mothers, as is thought, that, as all men will allow, necessarily implies the existence of their parents. You might as well affirm the existence of mules, and deny that of horses and asses. Such nonsense, Meletos, could only have been intended by you as a trial of me. You have put this into the indictment because you had nothing real of which to accuse me. But no one who has a particle of understanding will ever be convinced by you that the same man can believe in divine and superhuman things, and yet not believe that there are gods and demigods and heroes.

I have said enough in answer to the charge of Meletos: any elaborate defence is unnecessary; but as I was saying before, I certainly have many enemies, and this is what will be my destruction if I am destroyed; of that I am certain; not Meletos, nor yet Anutos, but the envy and detraction of the world, which has been the death of many good men, and will probably be the death of many more; there is no danger of my being the last of them.

Someone will say: "*And are you not ashamed, Sokrates, of a course of life which is likely to bring you to an untimely end?*"

To him I may fairly answer: "*There you are mistaken: a man who is good for anything ought not to calculate the chance of living or dying; he ought only to consider whether in doing anything he is doing right or wrong—acting the part of a good man or of a bad.*" Whereas, according to your view, the heroes who fell at Troy were not good for much, and the son of Thetis above all, who altogether despised danger in comparison with disgrace; and when his goddess mother said to him, in his eagerness to slay Hektor, that if he avenged his companion Patroklos, and slew Hektor, he would die himself—"Fate," as she said, "waits upon you next after Hektor"; he, hearing this, utterly despised danger and death, and instead of fearing them, feared rather to live in dishonor, and not to avenge his friend. "Let me die next," he replies, "and be avenged of my enemy, rather than abide here by the beaked ships, a scorn and a burden of the earth." Had Achilles any thought of death and danger? For wherever a man's place is, whether the place which he has chosen or that in which he has been placed by a commander, there he ought to remain in the hour of danger; he should not think of death or of anything, but of disgrace. And this, oh men of Athens, is a true saying.

Strange, indeed, would be my conduct, oh men of Athens, if I who, when I was ordered by the generals whom you chose to command me at Potidaea and Amphipolis and Delium,¹⁷ remained where they placed me, like any other man, facing death; if, I say, now, when, as I conceive and imagine, god orders me to fulfill the philosophers mission of searching into myself and other men, I were to desert my post through fear of death, or any other fear; that would indeed be strange, and I might justly be arraigned in court for denying the existence of the gods, if I disobeyed the oracle because I was afraid of death: then I should be fancying that I was wise when I was not wise. For this fear of death is indeed the pretense of wisdom, and not real wisdom, being the appearance of knowing the unknown; since no one knows whether death, which they in their fear apprehend to be the greatest evil, may not be the greatest good. Is there not here conceit of knowledge, which is a disgraceful sort of ignorance? And this is the point in which, as I think, I am superior to men in general, and in which I might perhaps fancy myself wiser than other men, that whereas I know but little of the world below, I do not suppose that I know: **but I do know** that injustice and disobedience to a better, whether god or man, is evil and dishonorable, and I will never fear or avoid

¹⁷ These are three famous battles in which Sokrates fought as an Athenian hoplite.

a possible good rather than a certain evil.

And, therefore, if you let me go now, and reject the counsels of Anutos, who said that if I were not put to death I ought not to have been prosecuted, and that if I escape now, your sons will all be utterly ruined by listening to my words—if you say to me,

“Sokrates, this time we will not mind Anutos, and will let you off, but upon one condition, that are to inquire and speculate in this way anymore, and that if you are caught doing this again you shall die;”

if this was the condition on which you let me go, I should reply:

“Men of Athens, I honor and love you; but I shall obey god rather than you, and while I have life and strength I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy,”

exhorting anyone whom I meet after my manner, and convincing him, saying:

“oh my friend, why do you who are a citizen of the great and mighty and wise city of Athens, care so much about laying up the greatest amount of money and honor and reputation, and so little about wisdom and truth and the greatest improvement of the soul, which you never regard or heed at all? Are you not ashamed of this?”

And if the person with whom I am arguing says:

“Yes, but I do care;”

I do not depart or let him go at once; I interrogate and examine and cross-examine him, and if I think that he has no virtue, but only says that he has, I reproach him with undervaluing the greater, and overvaluing the less. And this I should say to everyone whom I meet, young and old, citizen and alien, but especially to the citizens, inasmuch as they are my [brothers]. For this is the command of god, as I would have you know; and I believe that to this day no greater good has ever happened in the state than my service to the god. For I do nothing but go about persuading you all, old and young alike, not to take thought for your body and your property, but first and chiefly to care about the greatest improvement of the soul. I tell you that virtue is not given by money, but that from virtue come money and every other good of man, public as well as private.

This is my “teaching”, and if this is the doctrine which corrupts the youth, my influence is ruinous indeed. But if anyone says that this is not my teaching, he is speaking an untruth. Wherefore, oh men of Athens, I say to you, do as Anutos bids or not as Anutos bids, and either acquit me or not; but whatever you do, know that I shall never alter my ways, not even if I have to die many times.

Men of Athens, do not interrupt, but hear me; there was an agreement between us that you should hear me out. And I think that what I am going to say will do you good: for I have something more to say, at which you may be inclined to cry out; but I beg that you will not do this. I would have you know that, if you kill such a one as I am, you will injure yourselves more than you will injure me.

Meletos and Anutos will not injure me: they cannot; for it is not in the nature of things that a bad man should injure a better than himself. I do not deny that he may, perhaps, kill him, or drive him into exile, or deprive him of civil rights; and he may imagine, and others may imagine, that he is doing him a great injury: but in that I do not agree with him; for the evil of doing as Anutos is doing—of unjustly taking away another mans life—is greater far.

And now, Athenians, I am not going to argue for my own sake, as you may think, but for yours, that you may not sin against the god, or lightly reject his [gift] by condemning me. For if you kill me you will not easily find another like me, who, if I may use such a ludicrous figure of speech, am a sort of gadfly, given to the state by the god; and the state is like a great and noble steed who is tardy in his motions owing to his very size, and requires to be stirred into life. I am that gadfly which god has given the state and all day long and in all places am always fastening upon you, arousing and persuading and reproaching you. And as you will not easily find another like me, I would advise you to spare me. I dare say that you may feel irritated at being suddenly awakened when you are caught napping; and you may think that if you were to strike me dead, as Anutos advises, which you easily might, then you would sleep on for the remainder of your lives, unless god in his care of you gives you another gadfly. And that I am given to you by god is proved by this: that if I had been like other men, I should not have neglected all my own concerns, or patiently seen the neglect of them during all these years, and have been doing yours, coming to you individually, like a father or elder brother, exhorting you to regard virtue; this I say, would not be like human nature. And had I gained anything, or if my exhortations had been paid, there would have been some sense in that: but now, as you will perceive, not even the impudence of my accusers dares to say that I have ever exacted or sought pay of anyone; they have no witness of that. And I have a witness of the truth of what I say; my poverty is a sufficient witness.

Someone may wonder why I go about in private, giving advice and busying myself with the concerns of others, but do not venture to come forward in public and advise the state. I will tell you the reason of this. You have often heard me speak of an oracle or sign which comes to me, and is the [demon] which Meletos ridicules in the indictment. This sign I have had ever since I was a child. The sign is a “voice” which comes to me and always forbids me to do something which I am going to do, but never commands me to do anything, and this is what stands in the way of my being a politician. And rightly, as I think. For I am certain, oh men of Athens, that if I had engaged in politics, I should have perished long ago and done no good either to you or to myself. And don’t be offended at my telling you the truth: for the truth is that no man who goes to war with you or any other multitude, honestly struggling against the commission of unrighteousness and wrong in the state, will save his life; he who will really fight for the right, if he would live even for a little while, must have a private station and not a public one.

I can give you as proofs of this, not words only, but deeds, which you value more than words. Let me tell you a passage of my own life, which will prove to you that I should never have yielded to injustice from any fear of death, and that if I had not yielded, I should have died at once. I will tell you a story—tasteless, perhaps, and commonplace, but nevertheless true.

The only office of state which I ever held, oh men of Athens, was that of councilor; the tribe Antiochis, which is my tribe, had the presidency at the trial of the generals who had not taken up the bodies of the slain after the battle of Arginusae; and you proposed to try them all together, which

was illegal, as you all thought afterwards; but at the time I was the only one of the councilors who was opposed to the illegality, and I gave my vote against you; and when the orators threatened to impeach and arrest me, and have me taken away, and you called and shouted, I made up my mind that I would run the risk, having law and justice with me, rather than take part in your injustice because I feared imprisonment and death. This happened in the days of the democracy.

But when the oligarchy of the Thirty was in power, they sent for me and four others into the rotunda, and bade us bring Leon the Salaminian from Salamis, as they wanted to execute him. This was a [example] of the sort of commands which they were always giving with the view of implicating as many as possible in their crimes; and then I showed, not in words only, but indeed, that, if I may be allowed to use such an expression, I cared not a straw for death, and that my only fear was the fear of doing an unrighteous or unholy thing. For the strong arm of that oppressive power did not frighten me into doing wrong; and when we came out of the rotunda the other four went to Salamis and fetched Leon, but I went quietly home. For which I might have lost my life, had not the power of the Thirty shortly afterwards come to an end. And to this many will witness.

Now do you really imagine that I could have survived all these years, if I had led a public life, supposing that like a good man I had always supported the right and had made justice, as I ought, the first thing? No, indeed, men of Athens, neither I nor any other. But I have been always the same in all my actions, public as well as private, and never have I yielded any base compliance to those who are slanderously termed my disciples or to any other. For the truth is that I have no regular disciples: but if anyone likes to come and hear me while I am pursuing my mission, whether he be young or old, he may freely come. Nor do I converse with those who pay only, and not with those who do not pay; but anyone, whether he be rich or poor, may ask and answer me and listen to my words; and whether he turns out to be a bad man or a good one, that cannot be justly laid to my charge, as I never taught him anything. And if anyone says that he has ever learned or heard anything from me in private which all the world has not heard, I should like you to know that he is speaking an untruth...

Well, Athenians, this is nearly all the defence which I have to offer. Yet a word more. Perhaps there may be someone who is offended at me, when he calls to mind how he himself, on a similar or even a less serious occasion, had recourse to prayers and supplications with many tears, and how he produced his children in court, which was a moving spectacle, together with a posse of his relations and friends. Whereas I, who am probably in danger of my life, will do none of these things. Perhaps this may come into his mind, and he may be set against me, and vote in anger because he is displeased at this. Now if there be such a person among you, which I am far from affirming, I may fairly reply to him:

“My friend, I am a man, and like other men, a creature of flesh and blood, and not of wood or stone”

as Homer says; and I have a family, yes, and sons, oh Athenians, three in number, one of whom is growing up, and the two others are still young. And yet I will not bring any of them [here] in order to petition you for an acquittal. And why not? Not from any self-will or disregard of you. Whether I am or am not afraid of death is another question, of which I will not now speak. But my reason simply is that I feel such conduct to be discreditable to myself, and you, and the whole state. One who has reached my years, and who has a name for wisdom, whether deserved or not, ought not to

debase himself. At any rate, the world has decided that Sokrates is in some way superior to other men. And if those among you who are said to be superior in wisdom and courage, and any other virtue, demean themselves in this way, how shameful is their conduct! I have seen men of reputation, when they have been condemned, behaving in the strangest manner: they seemed to fancy that they were going to suffer something dreadful if they died, and that they could be immortal if you only allowed them to live; and I think that they were a dishonor to the state, and that any stranger coming in would say of them that the most eminent men of Athens, to whom the Athenians themselves give honor and command, are no better than women. And I say that these things ought not to be done by those of us who are of reputation; and if they are done, you ought not to permit them; you ought rather to show that you are more inclined to condemn, not the man who is quiet, but the man who gets up a doleful scene, and makes the city ridiculous.

But, setting aside the question of dishonor, there seems to be something wrong in petitioning a judge, and thus procuring an acquittal instead of informing and convincing him. For his duty is, not to make a present of justice, but to give judgment; and he has sworn that he will judge according to the laws, and not according to his own good pleasure; and neither he nor we should get into the habit of perjuring ourselves—there can be no piety in that. Do not then require me to do what I consider dishonorable and impious and wrong, especially now, when I am being tried for impiety on the indictment of Meletos. For if, oh men of Athens, by force of persuasion and entreaty, I could overpower your oaths, then I should be teaching you to believe that there are no gods, and convict myself, in my own defence, of not believing in them. But that is not the case; for I do believe that there are gods, and in a far higher sense than that in which any of my accusers believe in them. And to you and to god I commit my cause, to be determined by you as is best for you and me.

The jury finds Sokrates guilty (some ancient sources put the vote at 281 to 220).

Section II: Sokrates' Sentencing Proposal

Sokrates: And so he (i.e., Meletos) proposes death as the penalty. And what shall I propose on my part, oh men of Athens? Clearly that which is my due. And what is that which I ought to pay or to receive? What shall be done to the man who has never had the wit to be idle during his whole life; but has been careless of what the many care about—wealth, and family interests, and military offices, and speaking in the assembly, and magistracies, and plots, and parties. Reflecting that I was really too honest a man to follow in this way and live, I did not go where I could do no good to you or to myself; but where I could do the greatest good privately to everyone of you, [here] I went, and sought to persuade every man among you that he must look to himself, and seek virtue and wisdom before he looks to his private interests, and look to the state before he looks to the interests of the state; and that this should be the order which he observes in all his actions. What shall be done to such a one? Doubtless some good thing, oh men of Athens, if he has his reward; and the good should be of a kind suitable to him. What would be a reward suitable to a poor man who is your benefactor, who desires leisure that he may instruct you? There can be no more fitting reward than maintenance in the Prytaneum,¹⁸ oh men of Athens, a reward which he deserves far more than the citizen who has won the prize at Olympia in the horse or chariot race, whether the chariots were drawn by two horses or by many. For I am in want, and he has enough; and he only gives you the appearance of

¹⁸ The public building where Athenian Olympic victors were honored with free food for bringing glory to the city.

happiness, and I give you the reality. And if I am to estimate the penalty justly, I say that maintenance in the Prytaneum is the just return.

Perhaps you may think that I am braving you in saying this, as in what I said before about the tears and prayers. But that is not the case. I speak rather because I am convinced that I never intentionally wronged anyone, although I cannot convince you of that—for we have had a short conversation only; but if there were a law at Athens, such as there is in other cities, that a capital cause should not be decided in one day, then I believe that I should have convinced you; but now the time is too short. I cannot in a moment refute great slanders; and, as I am convinced that I never wronged another, I will assuredly not wrong myself. I will not say of myself that I deserve any evil, or propose any penalty. Why should I? Because I am afraid of the penalty of death which Meletos proposes? When I do not know whether death is a good or an evil, why should I propose a penalty which would certainly be an evil? Shall I say imprisonment? And why should I live in prison, and be the slave of the magistrates of the year—of the Eleven? Or shall the penalty be a fine, and imprisonment until the fine is paid? There is the same objection. I should have to lie in prison, for money I have none, and I cannot pay. And if I say exile (and this may possibly be the penalty which you will affix), I must indeed be blinded by the love of life if I were to consider that when you, who are my own citizens, cannot endure my discourses and words, and have found them so grievous and odious that you would fain have done with them, others are likely to endure me. No, indeed, men of Athens, that is not very likely. And what a life should I lead, at my age, wandering from city to city, living in ever-changing exile, and always being driven out! For I am quite sure that into whatever place I go, as here so also there, the young men will come to me; and if I drive them away, their elders will drive me out at their desire: and if I let them come, their fathers and friends will drive me out for their sakes.

Someone will say:

“Yes, Sokrates, but cannot you hold your tongue, and then you may go into a foreign city, and no one will interfere with you?”

Now I have great difficulty in making you understand my answer to this. For if I tell you that this would be a disobedience to a divine command, and, therefore, that I cannot hold my tongue, you will not believe that I am serious; and if I say again that *“the greatest good of man is daily to converse about virtue, and all that concerning which you hear me examining myself and others, and that the life which is unexamined is not worth living”*—that you are still less likely to believe. And yet what I say is true, although a thing of which it is hard for me to persuade you. Moreover, I am not accustomed to think that I deserve any punishment. Had I money I might have proposed to give you what I had, and have been none the worse. But you see that I have none, and can only ask you to proportion the fine to my means. However, I think that I could afford a *mina*¹⁹, and therefore I propose that penalty; Plato, Krito, Kritobulos, and Apollodoros, my friends here, bid me say thirty *mina*, and they will be the sureties. Well then, say thirty *mina*, let that be the penalty; for that they will be ample security to you.

¹⁹ In ancient Greece a ‘mina’ was a unit of measurement (like a liter or a gallon) used as the base unit of silver. A single *mina* would have been, in Sokrates’ time, about six months wages for someone of the working class.

The jury condemns Sokrates to death (some ancient sources put the vote at 361 to 140).

Section III: Sokrates' Comments on his Sentence

Not much time will be gained, oh Athenians, in return for the evil name which you will get from the detractors of the city, who will say that you killed Sokrates, a wise man; for they will call me wise even although I am not wise when they want to reproach you. If you had waited a little while, your desire would have been fulfilled in the course of nature. For I am far advanced in years, as you may perceive, and not far from death. I am speaking now only to those of you who have condemned me to death. And I have another thing to say to them: *“You think that I was convicted through deficiency of words”*—I mean, that if I had thought fit to leave nothing undone, nothing unsaid, I might have gained an acquittal. Not so; the deficiency which led to my conviction was not of words—certainly not. But I had not the boldness or impudence or inclination to address you as you would have liked me to address you, weeping and wailing and lamenting, and saying and doing many things which you have been accustomed to hear from others, and which, as I say, are unworthy of me. But I thought that I ought not to do anything common or mean in the hour of danger: nor do I now repent of the manner of my defence, and I would rather die having spoken after my manner, than speak in your manner and live. For neither in war nor yet at law ought any man to use every way of escaping death. For often in battle there is no doubt that if a man will throw away his arms, and fall on his knees before his pursuers, he may escape death; and in other dangers there are other ways of escaping death, if a man is willing to say and do anything. The difficulty, my friends, is not in avoiding death, but in avoiding unrighteousness; for that runs faster than death. I am old and move slowly, and the slower runner has overtaken me, and my accusers are keen and quick, and the faster runner, who is unrighteousness, has overtaken them. And now I depart hence condemned by you to suffer the penalty of death, and they, too, go their ways condemned by the truth to suffer the penalty of villainy and wrong; and I must abide by my award—let them abide by theirs. I suppose that these things may be regarded as fated, and I think that they are well.

And now, oh men who have condemned me, I would prophesy to you; for I am about to die, and that is the hour in which men are gifted with prophetic power. And I prophesy to you who are my murderers, that immediately after my death punishment far heavier than you have inflicted on me will surely await you. Me you have killed because you wanted to escape the accuser, and not to give an account of your lives. But that will not be as you suppose: far otherwise. For I say that there will be more accusers of you than there are now; accusers whom [here]to I have restrained: and as they are younger, they will be more severe with you, and you will be more offended at them. For if you think that by killing men you can avoid the accuser censuring your lives, you are mistaken; that is not a way of escape which is either possible or honorable; the easiest and noblest way is not to be crushing others, but to be improving yourselves. This is the prophecy which I utter before my departure, to the judges who have condemned me.

Friends, who would have acquitted me, I would like also to talk with you about this thing which has happened, while the magistrates are busy, and before I go to the place at which I must die. Stay then awhile, for we may as well talk with one another while there is time. You are my friends, and I should like to show you the meaning of this event which has happened to me. Oh my judges—for you I may truly call judges—I should like to tell you of a wonderful circumstance. [Until now] the familiar [demon] within me has constantly been in the habit of opposing me even about [small

things], if I was going to make a slip or error about anything; and now as you see there has come upon me that which may be thought, and is generally believed to be, the last and worst evil. But the [demon] made no sign of opposition, either as I was leaving my house and going out in the morning, or when I was going up into this court, or while I was speaking, at anything which I was going to say; and yet I have often been stopped in the middle of a speech; but now in nothing I either said or did touching this matter has the oracle opposed me. What do I take to be the explanation of this? I will tell you. I regard this as a proof that what has happened to me is a good, and that those of us who think that death is an evil are in error. This is a great proof to me of what I am saying, for the customary sign would surely have opposed me had I been going to evil and not to good.

Let us reflect in another way, and we shall see that there is great reason to hope that death is a good, for [it is] one of two things: *either* death is a state of nothingness and utter unconsciousness, *or*, as men say, there is a change and migration of the soul from this world to another. Now if you suppose that there is no consciousness, but a sleep like the sleep of him who is undisturbed even by the sight of dreams, death will be an unspeakable gain. For if a person were to select the night in which his sleep was undisturbed even by dreams, and were to compare with this the other days and nights of his life, and then were to tell us how many days and nights he had passed in the course of his life better and more pleasantly than this one, I think that any man, I will not say a private man, but even the Great King²⁰, will not find many such days or nights, when compared with the others. Now if death is like this, I say that to die is gain; for eternity is then only a single night.

But if death is the journey to another place, and there, as men say, all the dead are, what good, oh my friends and judges, can be greater than this? If indeed when the pilgrim arrives in the world below, he is delivered from [who claim to be just] in this world, and finds the true judges who are said to give judgment there, Minos and Rhadamanthus²¹ and Aiaikos²² and Triptolemos²³, and other sons of god who were righteous in their own life, that pilgrimage will be worth making. What would not a man give if he might converse with Orpheus and Musaus and Hesiod and Homer?²⁴ Nay, if this be true, let me die again and again. I, too, shall have a wonderful interest in a place where I can converse with Palamedes²⁵, and Ajax²⁶ the son of Telamon, and other heroes of old, who have suffered death through an unjust judgment; and there will be no small pleasure, as I think, in comparing my own sufferings with theirs. Above all, I shall be able to continue my search into true and false knowledge; as in this world, so also in that; I shall find out who is wise, and who pretends to be wise, and is not. What would not a man give, oh judges, to be able to examine the leader of the

²⁰The “Great King” is a phrase used to refer to the Emperor of Persia. It is a colloquial idiom which we could translate as “the most powerful person in the world”.

²¹ The son of Zeus and Europa and mythical king of Krete who was deposed by Minos. Due to his unwavering virtue he is counted as one of the three judges of mortal lives in Hades; he is the judge of Asian souls.

²² The son of Zeus and Aegina and mythical king of Aegina. Known as one of the three judges of mortal lives in Hades; his is the judge of European souls.

²³ Mythical hero rescued by Demeter and taught the art of agriculture. Associated with the Eleusinian mystery cult of Demeter and Kore and thought to provide hope for the afterlife.

²⁴ Musaus, along with the better known Homer, Hesiod and Orpheus was a mythical poet and polymath (i.e., expert in many fields).

²⁵ Mythical hero of the Trojan War, leader of Nauplians. He was betrayed by Odusseus and convicted on false charges of treachery against his fellow Achaeans. He was stoned by Odusseus and Diomedes.

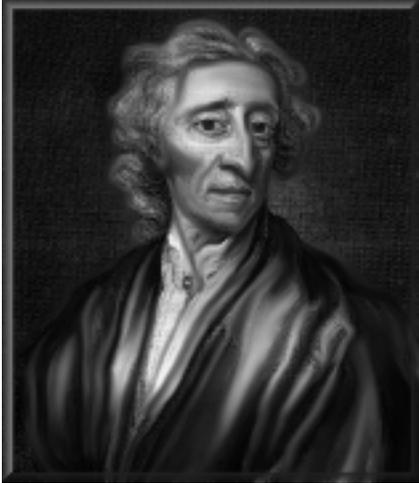
²⁶ Mythical hero of the Trojan War, cousin of Achilles and strongest of the Achaeans. He committed suicide after being denied the magical armor of Achilles in a contest with Odusseus.

great Trojan expedition; or Odusseos or Sisuphos, or numberless others, men and women too! What infinite delight would there be in conversing with them and asking them questions! For in that world they do not put a man to death for this; certainly not. For besides being happier in that world than in this, they will be immortal, if what is said is true.

Wherefore, oh judges, be of good cheer about death, and know this of a truth—that *no evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death*. He and his are not neglected by the gods; nor has my own approaching end happened by mere chance. But I see clearly that to die and be released was better for me; and therefore, the oracle gave no sign. For which reason also, I am not angry with my accusers, or my condemners; they have done me no harm, although neither of them meant to do me any good; and for this I may gently blame them.

Still I have a favor to ask of them. When my sons are grown up, I would ask you, oh my friends, to punish them; and I would have you trouble them, as I have troubled you, if they seem to care about riches, or anything, more than about virtue; or if they pretend to be something when they are really nothing, then reprove them, as I have reprovèd you, for not caring about that for which they ought to care, and thinking that they are something when they are really nothing. And if you do this, I and my sons will have received justice at your hands.

The hour of departure has arrived, and we go our ways—I to die, and you to live. Which is better god only knows.



The Problem Of Enthusiasm

By:
John Locke (1632-1704)

Modernization, format corrections, additions and footnotes by Barry Vaughan²⁷

1. The love of truth is necessary. Anyone who would seriously go searching for the truth should first prepare his mind with a love of it. Because, if he does not love it, he will not go to much trouble to find it; nor will he be bothered if he misses it.

There is nobody in the educated community who does not claim to love the truth; neither is there a rational being who would not be offended to be thought otherwise of. And yet, for all this, one may truly say, that there are very few people who love the truth for its own sake, even among those who persuade themselves that they do. How we know if a person loves the truth for its own sake is worth understanding, and I believe there is one undeniable sign of it, namely, that she will *not entertain any belief with more assurance than the evidence it is built upon will warrant*. It is plain that whoever goes beyond this degree of acceptance believes something, not because it is true, but for some other reason (perhaps because it is beneficial for some other purpose). The *evidence* that any proposition is true (except for self-evident propositions) lies *only* in the proofs we have for it, and any degree of acceptance given it beyond what the evidence supports, is because of some desire other than the love of truth. This is obvious because it is just as impossible that the love of truth should carry our assent *beyond* the available evidence, as that the love of truth should make us accept any proposition for the sake of evidence which it *lacks*—which is in effect to love something as a truth, because it is always possible, or probable, that it may *not* be true. Any proposition that does not gain entrance into our minds by the irresistible light of self-evidence, or by the force of logical demonstration, must be made *probable* by inductive arguments that make it reasonable for us to accept. And, we should never accept any belief unless it is sufficiently supported by such arguments. Any degree of reliability or authority we give to a proposition beyond what it receives from its arguments, is nothing more than our *desire* for it to be true, and this is evidence that one does not love the truth for its own sake: because the truth is neither more or less true because of our desire that it be true, and thus, how we *feel* about a proposition is *never* evidence that it *is* true.

2. The origin of authority-based belief. Assuming the authority to dictate to others, and having the boldness to tell others what to believe, is obvious evidence of biasness, and a corruption of our judgment. For it is almost unimaginable that those who impose their beliefs on others, have not already imposed on their own mind. Who can expect rational arguments and logical conviction from someone whose mind is not accustomed to thinking rationally when he deals with himself or others? Anyone who violates her own rational faculties tyrannizes her own mind, and usurps the prerogative

²⁷ “Of Enthusiasm” is Chapter 19 of Book 4 of John Locke’s An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, second edition, published in 1694. The full text is now available as an open source text. This translation/modernization is my own and is based on the Project Gutenberg edition (www.gutenberg.org). The best source for those interested in Locke is the critical edition edited and introduced by Peter H. Nidditch, Oxford University Press, 1975.

that belongs to truth alone: that prerogative is to command acceptance *solely by its own authority*, i.e. by and in proportion to the *evidence* that it presents.

3. *The force of enthusiasm which takes away reason.* I shall now take the opportunity to consider a third possible justification of belief, which among some people has the same authority, and is relied upon as much as faith or reason; I mean *enthusiasm*: which, while setting aside reason, proposes to justify divine revelation without it. Thus, it sets aside *both* reason and revelation, and puts in their place the unwarranted desires of a person's own brain, and assumes them as a foundation for both belief *and* action.

4. *The relationship between reason and revelation.* *Reason* is natural revelation, whereby the eternal Father of light and fountain of all knowledge [i.e., God], communicates to rational beings that part of the universe that He has made available to the five senses. *Divine revelation* is natural reason *enlarged* by a set of beliefs communicated by God *directly* into the mind; which reason justifies—by the testimony and evidence it gives—that they come from God.²⁸ Thus, if a person sets aside reason to make way for revelation, she puts out the light of both. This is analogous to persuading someone to blind themselves in order to more clearly see the distant light of a star through a telescope.

5. *The origin of enthusiasm.* Since it is easier to justify beliefs and control behavior through immediate “revelation” than by using the laborious, and sometimes unsuccessful, method of reason, it should not be surprising that some people are prone to *assume* they have a divine revelation and thus persuade themselves that their beliefs and actions are directed by God, *especially* when they cannot provide rational evidence or logical justification for them. Throughout time we see people in whom melancholy (i.e., depression)²⁹ is mixed with piety, and who believe they are more familiar with God, or who have special access to God's mind than others, and who persuade themselves that they have immediate and frequent communication with God and directly receive commands from the Divine Spirit. It cannot be denied that God is *able* to enlighten our minds with beliefs he communicates directly to us like a beam of light from the sun: and they believe He has promised to do this. Who, then, should have a more firm expectation of special revelation since they are “His” people, specially chosen, and who depend entirely on Him?

6. *The enthusiastic impulse.* Their minds being thus prepared, they believe whatever groundless opinion which settles itself strongly upon their fancy is an illumination of the Spirit of God, and therefore of divine authority. And, any action they strongly desire to perform, no matter how odd, they believe is a call or command from heaven, and therefore it must be obeyed—it is a divine commission, and they cannot be wrong in doing what they *feel* they should do.

7. *What is meant by ‘enthusiasm’.* This is how I understand the term ‘enthusiasm’, which, though

²⁸ For Locke, the problem is not whether divinely revealed beliefs are true, but rather whether a particular belief is, in fact, revealed by God. If a belief were revealed by God, it would have to be true because God is a perfect being and therefore incapable of deception. So, the role of reason is not to justify or give evidence *that* the revealed belief is true, but rather to verify that the revelation is genuinely *from* God.

²⁹ From the Greek – μελαγχολία (*melancholia*) meaning “black bile”. Derived from Humorism; the proto-medical theory of disease that held health and disease were caused by a balance/imbalance between the four “humors” or fluids: yellow bile, black bile, phlegm, and blood. Melancholy, or what is known today as depression, was supposed to be caused by an excess of black bile.

founded neither on reason nor divine revelation, but arising from an excited or presumptuous brain, is more powerful in generating beliefs and motivating peoples' actions than either reason or divine revelation (*or even both together*), once it gets established. This is because humans are most obedient to their own desires; and the whole person is likely to act more vigorously when they are directed by their own inclinations. Freed from the constraint of logic and reason, our subjective desires take on the force of divine authority when they operate outside the limitations of common sense.

8. *Enthusiasm accepts its supposed illumination without search and proof.* The strange opinions and exaggerated behaviors caused by enthusiasm should, in themselves, be a sufficient warning against it as a principle of belief and action—since it is so likely to misguide us. However, because we love extraordinary things, the feeling of being special and above the ordinary and natural way of knowing flatters many people's vanity and satisfies their laziness and ignorance. And once they become accustomed to this immediate "revelation", of "illumination" without effort, and "certainty" without proof and examination, it is difficult to get them out of it. Reasoning is lost upon them; they believe they are above it. They "see the light" within themselves and believe it is impossible to be mistaken about what they believe. The "truth" of their beliefs is clear and obvious like the light of the noon-day sun; it demonstrates itself, and needs no other proof beyond the fact that they believe it. They "feel" the hand of God guiding them, and they "hear" the voice of the Holy Spirit, and cannot be mistaken in what they "feel". This is how they defend their beliefs; they are convinced that reason has nothing to do with what they "know" to be true in their hearts. This kind of belief does not allow the possibility of doubt and it needs no investigation. To them it would be like asking for evidence that a light is shining if one sees it. The *feeling* of certainty that a belief is true is taken as proof *that* it is true, and therefore it does not need further proof. When the Holy Spirit enlightens our minds, it dispels doubt. We "see" it as clearly as the noon-day sun, and we do not need shadowy reason to make it clear. This "light from heaven" is strong, clear, and pure. It carries its own proof with it, and one might just as easily use a firefly to illuminate the sun as to use the dim candle of reason to examine this "internal light".

9. *How to detect Enthusiasm.* What these people claim amounts to no more than this: *they are sure, because they are sure*, and their beliefs are true, because they strongly believe them. When we strip away the metaphor of "seeing" and "feeling", this is all it is. And yet, these similes so impress them, that they are used as evidence for certainty in themselves, and they provide them as arguments to others.

10. *The supposed internal light examined.* Let us more closely examine this "internal light", and this "feeling" on which they build so many beliefs. These people claim to have clear "light" which makes them "see"; they have enhanced senses and they "feel" something. They are sure this cannot be doubted because when one sees or feels, no one can dispute that they sense and feel. But at this point I would like to ask: "This 'seeing', is it the perception of the truth of the proposition, or that it is a revelation from God?" "Is this 'feeling' the awareness of a desire to do something, or is it of the Spirit of God causing an inclination in me?" These are two very different *perceptions*, and they must be carefully distinguished from one another if we are not to deceive ourselves. I can perceive the truth of a proposition and at the same time not perceive that it is an immediate revelation from God. I can perceive the truth of a Euclidian proposition without it being—or indeed my thinking—it is a revelation. I can even perceive that I did not arrive at the proposition using ordinary reasoning,

and so may *believe* it to be revealed, and still not perceive that it comes from God. There are other spirits that could cause these ideas and set them before my mind so that I perceive a connection between them, without their being caused by God.³⁰ Thus, recognizing that a belief has come into my mind from an unknown source is *not* evidence that it is from God. Further, that fact that I strongly believe something is neither evidence that it is true, *nor* that it came from God. And regardless of whether it is labeled ‘light’ and ‘seeing’, it is clearly nothing more than *opinion* and *self-assurance*. And the proposition supposed to be a divine revelation is not *known* by them, but merely *believed* or *assumed* to be true. This is clear because if a proposition is *known* to be true, revelation is redundant: it is difficult to conceive how something could be revealed if it is already known. Therefore, if someone is persuaded that a belief is true, but they do not *know* that it is true, whatever they call it, it is not *seeing*, but *believing*. This is true because seeing and believing are two wholly different avenues for true beliefs to enter the mind—they are not the same. What is seen is *known* to be true by the evidence of the thing itself, but what is believed is *supposed* to be true based on some other evidence. But in order to be reliable, I must know that testimony has been given, otherwise what justification do I have for accepting the belief? I must see *that* it is God that gives the revelation, or I do not “see” anything. So, the question here is, “How do I know that God revealed this belief to me, that this impression is caused in my mind by his Holy Spirit, and therefore I ought to believe or obey?” If I do not know the answer to this question, it does not matter how much confidence I have, it is *groundless*. Whatever “light” I appeal to is nothing more than *enthusiasm*. Regardless of whether the supposedly revealed proposition is self-evident, visibly probable, or by ordinary knowledge uncertain, the proposition that must be grounded and justified is this: God is the revealer of the proposition; what I take to be a revealed belief is *certainly* put into my mind by Him, and it is not an illusion caused by some other spirit or created by my own imagination. If I am right, these people believe something is true because they *presume* that God revealed it. Is it not the case that the burden of proof that it is a genuine revelation lies with them? Otherwise all their confidence is nothing but presumption, and this “light” they are so dazzled by is nothing but an *ignis fatuus*³¹, that leads them around in a circle: it is a “revelation”, because they firmly believe it; and they firmly believe it, because it is a “revelation”.

11. *Enthusiasm fails to provide evidence that the proposition is from God.* Divine revelation requires no evidence except that it is indeed *from* God, because He can neither deceive, nor be deceived. But *how do we know* that any particular belief was put in our mind by God and is therefore genuinely revealed to us by Him and declared to us by Him (*and which we therefore ought to believe*)? This is where enthusiasm fails to provide sufficient evidence. Those possessed by enthusiasm claim to have an internal “light” by which they are “enlightened”, and given knowledge of this or that subject. But, if they know something is true they must see that it is self-evidently true or justified by rational argument. If it is true in either of these ways, it is ridiculous to suppose it is a revelation. This is because they know it is true using the same natural faculties as everyone else (without having to appeal to revelation). This is how all the truths, of whatever kind, come into, and are established in, our minds if we are not under inspiration. If someone says a belief is true because it is a divine revelation, they reason well. *But*, we must then demand evidence that it is a revelation from God. If they claim they cannot resist the belief because of the light it carries with it that illuminates their mind, I ask them to consider if this is anything more than what we have already

³⁰ Here he is referring to being deceived by demons or fallen angels. Such a revelation would be “supra-natural” but still not be Divine Revelation; i.e., a revelation from God.

³¹ Latin, “fool’s fire”. Meaning a false light, or optical illusion.

considered, namely, that it must be a genuine revelation because they strongly believe it is true. All the “light” they speak of is nothing but a strong, though unwarranted, persuasion that it is true. As for rational grounds, or proofs that it is true, they must admit that they *have none*. For if they did, it would not be a revelation but rather an ordinary belief resting on the same ordinary grounds as other beliefs. And, if they believe it is true because it is a revelation, but have no evidence that it is a revelation—other than they are persuaded that it is—then they believe it is a revelation solely because they strongly believe it. But this is very shaky ground upon which to base either beliefs or actions. Can you imagine an easier way to run into the most ridiculous errors and disasters than to set up desire as the supreme and sole guide for determining which beliefs are true and which actions are right? The *strength of our belief* is no evidence that we are correct: something crooked can be just as stiff and inflexible as something straight. Men may *feel* just as positive about true beliefs as false ones. How else could we explain the intransigence we see in the zealots of opposing political parties? If the “light” which everyone thinks they have in their own mind—which in this case is nothing more than the strength of their persuasion—counts as evidence that a belief is from God, then contrary opinions have an equal claim to be inspirations. Thus, God will not only be the Father of lights, but of opposing and contradictory lights, giving people contradictory commands. If ungrounded strength of belief is evidence that a proposition is a divine revelation, then contradictory propositions will be divine truths.

12. Firmness of persuasion is no proof that a proposition is from God. This conclusion is unavoidable so long as we allow personal conviction and confidence that one is right to act as evidence for the truth. St. Paul believed himself to be doing good and on a mission from God as he persecuted the Christians whom he thought were heretics.³² And yet, *he* was the one that was mistaken, not them. Even good people make mistakes, and sometimes eagerly entertain erroneous beliefs which they mistake for divine truth shining in their minds with the clearest “light”.

13. What is light in the mind? Light in the mind, *true* light, is and can be nothing other than *the evidence* of the truth of a proposition. If a belief is not self-evident, all the light it has, or can have, is from the strength and validity of the arguments that support it. To speak about any other light in the mind is to put one’s self in the dark—or in the power of the Prince of Darkness—and to freely give one’s self over to a delusion, to believe a lie. If strength of persuasion is the light that guides us, I would ask, “How can anyone distinguish between the delusions of Satan and the inspirations of the Holy Ghost?” After all, he can transform himself into an angel of light. And, those who are led by the Son of the Morning³³ are just as convinced of their “illumination”, i.e., are just as strongly persuaded that they are enlightened by the Spirit of God, as anyone who truly is. They celebrate as they give in to belief and are motivated to action; no one can be more certain, no one can be more right than they are.

14. Revelation must be judged by reason. Therefore, anyone who does not wish to give in to delusion and error must submit this internal light to investigation. When God makes the prophet, He does not *unmake* the man. God leaves all the natural faculties in place so that she may evaluate her inspirations, to know if they are divinely inspired or not. When God illuminates the mind with supernatural light, He does not extinguish the *natural light of reason*. If He wants us to accept a

³² Acts 8:1-3.

³³ Isaiah 14:12 – “How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, you who have weakened the nations!”

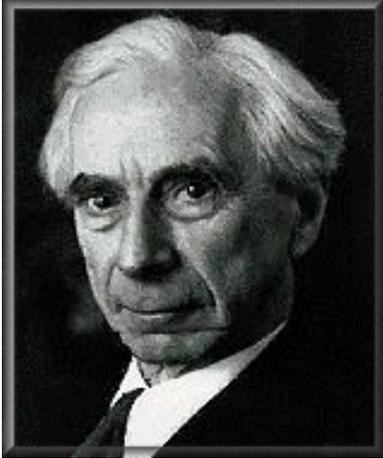
belief as true, He either demonstrates it through natural reason, or makes it known to be true by evidence one cannot mistake—that it comes from Him, and can be accepted on his authority. **Reason** must be our final judge and guide in all things. I am not claiming that if reason fails to be able to justify a genuine revelation that we should reject it. Rather, we must consult reason to determine if the belief is from God. If it is rational to believe that it came from God, then reason certifies it as much as any other truth, and gives it legitimacy. If we have nothing more than the strength of our conviction to evaluate true propositions, then every belief that strikes our imagination will pass for a divine inspiration. If we fail to use reason as an objective guide to truth, inspiration and delusion, truth and falsehood, will appear equal and it will not be possible to distinguish one from the other.

15. Belief is not proof of revelation. If an internal sense of assurance (or any belief we take to be inspired by God) is consistent with the principles of reason or the Word of God—which is *proven* revelation—it is rational and we can safely accept it as true and a justifiable ground for belief and action. If a belief is *not* justified by reason or Scripture, we cannot assume it is a genuine revelation—or even a true belief—until we have some evidence that it is true *beyond* our believing that it is true. As evidence for this consider the holy men from antiquity who had divine revelations: they had evidence *beyond* their subjective confidence in the belief that demonstrated their revelation was from God. They were not on their own to justify that they had a genuine revelation, they had *visible signs* to demonstrate who the author was. Further, when they had to convince others, they were given a power to demonstrate they had a genuine commission from heaven: they had visible signs to warrant the authenticity of their message. Moses observed a bush that burned—but was not consumed—and he heard a voice from the fire. This was evidence *beyond* a subjective desire to go to Pharaoh and bring his kinsmen out of Egypt. But even this was insufficient evidence for Moses. He did not go until God gave him *further* evidence—turning his staff into a snake—which he took to be sufficient to demonstrate to the Egyptians that he had been sent by God. Similarly, Gideon was commanded by an angel to rescue Israel from the Midianites, but he demanded a visible sign that the command was from God.³⁴ These, and many other examples from the lives of the prophets, are enough to prove that they did not think a subjective “seeing”, or the internal persuasion of their own correctness, was sufficient evidence, without further proof, that the revelation they received came from God (*even though the Scriptures do not mention this demand for evidence everywhere*).

16. The required criteria of a divine revelation. I would like to be clear that in the argument I have presented I do not deny that God *can*, and sometimes *does*, enlighten our minds in the apprehension of certain truths, or encourage us to do certain things, by the direct influence and assistance of the Holy Spirit *without* extraordinary signs. However, in those cases we have both *reason* and *Scripture* which are unerring guides to know if God is moving us. Wherever a belief is consistent with the written word of God, or an action conforms to the dictates of reason or the Bible, we can be certain that it is justified as is. Though perhaps it is not an immediate revelation from God operating on our minds, we can be sure that it is warranted by the revelations that He *has* given us. But it is *never* the subjective power of our own persuasion that justifies our belief that it is a message from God. Nothing can do that except the written word of God or the standard of reason which is common to us all. Anytime reason or Scripture is clear about a proposition or action, we can accept it as divinely inspired. But it is *never* the strength of our belief that provides it with justification. The predisposition of our minds may strongly *suggest* an idea to us, and indeed that may be evidence that

³⁴ Judges 6:16. Gideon also demanded evidence directly from God that the mission was indeed His will. 6:36-40.

we created it. But such a predisposition will never prove it to be of divine origin or derived from heaven.



THE VALUE OF PHILOSOPHY

by:
Bertrand Russell (1912)

Format, corrections, additions, and footnotes by Barry F. Vaughan³⁵

HAVING now come to the end of our brief and very incomplete review of the problems of Philosophy, it will be well to consider, in conclusion, what is the value of Philosophy and why it ought to be studied. It is the more necessary to consider this question, in view of the fact that many men, under the influence of science or of practical affairs, are inclined to doubt whether Philosophy is anything better than innocent but useless trifling, hair-splitting distinctions, and controversies on matters concerning which knowledge is impossible.

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

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

Philosophy, like all other studies, *aims primarily at knowledge*. The knowledge it aims at is the kind of *knowledge which gives unity and system to the body of the sciences*, and the kind which results from a critical examination of the grounds of our convictions, prejudices, and beliefs. But it cannot be maintained that Philosophy has had any very great measure of success in its attempts to provide definite answers to its questions. If you ask a mathematician, a mineralogist, a historian, or any other man of learning, what definite body of truths has been ascertained by his science, his answer will last

³⁵“The Value of Philosophy” is chapter 15 of Russell’s book, [The Problems of Philosophy](#), published in 1912 by Oxford University Press. The full text is now available as an open source text at www.gutenberg.org. This edition of the text is intended for academic use and may not be sold or used for profit. I have changed UK spellings to US spellings. All punctuation corrections, additions, footnotes and italicized emphases are my own.

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

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

Many philosophers, it is true, have held that Philosophy could establish the truth of certain answers to such fundamental questions. They have supposed that what is of most importance in religious beliefs could be proved by strict demonstration to be true. In order to judge of such attempts, it is necessary to take a survey of human knowledge, and to form an opinion as to its methods and its limitations. On such a subject it would be unwise to pronounce dogmatically; but if the investigations of our previous chapters have not led us astray, *we shall be compelled to renounce the hope of finding philosophical proofs of religious beliefs.* We cannot, therefore, include as part of the value of Philosophy any *definite* set of answers to such questions. Hence, once more, the value of Philosophy must not depend upon any supposed body of definitely ascertainable knowledge to be acquired by those who study it.

The value of Philosophy is, in fact, to be sought largely in its very uncertainty. The man who has no tincture of Philosophy goes through life imprisoned in the prejudices derived from common sense, from the habitual beliefs of his age or his nation, and from convictions which have grown up in his mind without the co-operation or consent of his deliberate reason. To such a man the world tends to become definite, finite, obvious; common objects rouse no questions, and unfamiliar possibilities are contemptuously rejected. As soon as we begin to philosophize, on the contrary, we find, as we saw in our opening chapters, that even the most everyday things lead to problems to which only very incomplete answers can be given. Philosophy, *though unable to tell us with certainty* what is the true

answer to the doubts which it raises, is *able to suggest many possibilities which enlarge our thoughts* and free them from the tyranny of custom. Thus, while diminishing our feeling of certainty as to what things are, it greatly increases our knowledge as to what they may be; it removes the somewhat arrogant dogmatism of those who have never travelled into the region of liberating doubt, and it keeps alive our sense of wonder by showing familiar things in an unfamiliar aspect.

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

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

For this reason, greatness of soul is not fostered by those philosophies which assimilate the universe to Man. *Knowledge is a form of union of Self and not-Self*; like all union, it is impaired by dominion, and therefore by any attempt to force the universe into conformity with what we find in ourselves. There is a widespread philosophical tendency towards the view which tells us that Man is the measure of all things,³⁶ that truth is man-made, that space and time and the world of universals are properties of the mind, and that, if there be anything not created by the mind, it is unknowable and of

³⁶ The phrase, “man is the measure of all things,” is attributed to the sophist, and friend of the Athenian statesman Perikles, Protagoras (c. 490–420 BCE). The phrase is a reflection of epistemological relativism, the view that truth is relative to a particular point of view as opposed to a statement of objective fact. In this case it could mean that truth is species relative (i.e., relative to the human point of view), or relative to the particular human (i.e., Subjectivism).

no account for us. This view, if our previous discussions were correct, is untrue; but in addition to being untrue, it has the effect of robbing philosophic contemplation of all that gives it value, since it fetters contemplation to Self. What it calls knowledge is not a union with the not-Self, but a set of prejudices, habits, and desires, making an impenetrable veil between us and the world beyond. The man who finds pleasure in such a theory of knowledge is like the man who never leaves the domestic circle for fear his word might not be law.

The true philosophic contemplation, on the contrary, finds its satisfaction in every enlargement of the not-Self, in everything that magnifies the objects contemplated, and thereby the subject contemplating. Everything, in contemplation, that is personal or private, everything that depends upon habit, self-interest, or desire, distorts the object, and hence impairs the union which the intellect seeks. By thus making a barrier between subject and object, such personal and private things become a prison to the intellect. The *free intellect will see as God might see*,³⁷ without a here and now, without hopes and fears, without the trammels of customary beliefs and traditional prejudices, calmly, dispassionately, in the sole and exclusive desire of knowledge—knowledge as impersonal, as purely contemplative, as it is possible for man to attain. Hence also the free intellect will value more the abstract and universal knowledge into which the accidents of private history do not enter, than the knowledge brought by the senses, and dependent, as such knowledge must be, upon an exclusive and personal point of view and a body whose sense-organs distort as much as they reveal.

The mind which has become accustomed to the freedom and impartiality of philosophic contemplation will preserve something of the same freedom and impartiality in the world of action and emotion. It will view its purposes and desires as parts of the whole, with the absence of insistence that results from seeing them as infinitesimal fragments in a world of which all the rest is unaffected by any one man's deeds. The impartiality which, in contemplation, is the unalloyed desire for truth, is the very same quality of mind which, in action, is justice, and in emotion is that universal love which can be given to all, and not only to those who are judged useful or admirable. Thus, contemplation enlarges not only the objects of our thoughts, but also the objects of our actions and our affections: it makes us citizens of the universe, not only of one walled city at war with all the rest. In this citizenship of the universe consists man's true freedom, and his liberation from the thralldom³⁸ of narrow hopes and fears.

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

³⁷ Russell is not suggesting that there *is* a god, but rather using the idea 'god' as a metaphor for a completely objective point of view. Russell is, in fact, an atheist; i.e., he believes that no god exists.

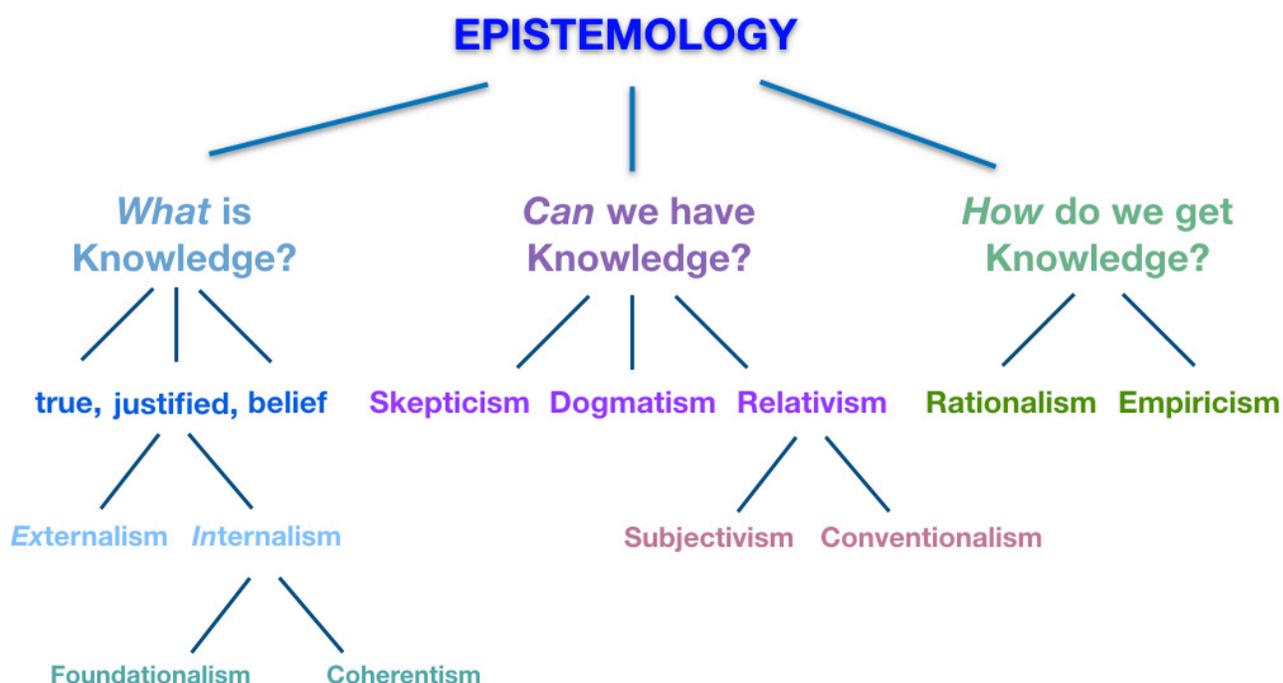
³⁸ I.e., 'slavery'.

CHAPTER 2

Epistemology

The Philosophical Investigation of Knowledge

In the previous section we struggled with the question, “What is Philosophy?” We answered the question by examining the etymology of the word, what Philosophy means in contemporary higher education, and the historical context in which it began. Then we examined three paradigmatic philosophers from three different historical periods to get a flavor of what *doing* Philosophy is like. In this section we’re going to examine Philosophy by taking a closer look at one of the academic subdisciplines of Philosophy: **Epistemology**.



The term ‘epistemology’, like many of the technical terms in the discipline is derived from the Greek language; in this case, ‘*logos*’ and ‘*episteme*’. *Logos* is a Greek term that can be rendered “argument”, or “account” or “explanation”, or “theory”. *Episteme* is best translated “knowledge” in this context, though as we discovered in Plato’s Defense of Sokrates it has a more precise connotation in Greek. So, for the purpose of our investigation we’ll take ‘epistemology’ in its literal sense of “the theory of knowledge”.

Of course, it’s not really that simple since there is no single theory of knowledge. From the presocratic beginnings of the discipline, philosophers have struggled to give rational (i.e., *logical*) accounts of the world around them. It quickly became apparent that differentiating between *believing* something and *knowing* something was an essential component of doing Philosophy. So in that sense, Epistemology was an original component of the philosophical revolution of the Seventh

Century BCE. But it would be nearly two hundred years before Plato attempted the first truly systematic analysis of the concept of knowledge. His most famous student, Aristotle, had serious misgivings about Plato's account and would eventually offer an alternative. And since that time, right up to the present, philosophers have been examining, offering, critiquing, adjusting, and reexamining our understanding of the nature of knowledge and the role it plays in our investigation



At the heart of Epistemology there is a core of three basic questions:

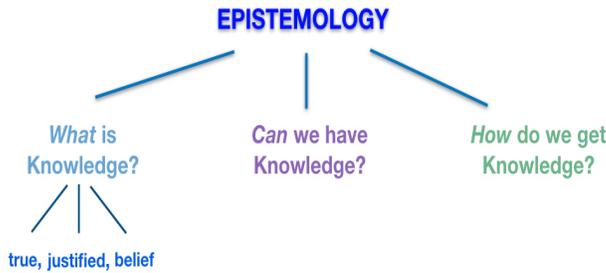
Each question focuses on a different problem regarding knowledge. The first, and perhaps most fundamental, is simply understanding what the word 'knowledge' means. As you will find throughout this course we always begin by defining our terms so we can avoid equivocating (i.e., applying different meanings to the same term in a single context), thus the first question is simply exploring the meaning of 'knowledge' and what makes it a distinct cognitive state as opposed to belief, hunch, hope, reflection, opinion and so on.

Upon reflection, it's obvious that knowledge and belief are related, but distinct; both are mental states regarding how the world is, but knowledge is stronger than belief. It may be less obvious, however, that knowledge is *dependent* upon belief. Suppose someone said, "I **know** triangles are three sided, but I don't **believe** it." We would consider anyone who said something like this to either be joking, or cognitively deficient in some serious way! Knowledge *requires* belief; we cannot know something without first believing it. Believing is the first step toward knowledge. But since it is obvious that knowledge is *stronger* than belief, there must be further conditions to meet.

Consider the situation where you are arguing with a friend about some matter of fact (*not opinion*). For example, suppose you are claiming that "Star Wars: Episode 4" premiered in 1977 while your friend claims it was released in 1979. It cannot be the case that you're both right (though you *could* both be wrong); at least one of you claims to *know* something when you don't! This scenario leads us to the second necessary component of knowledge: the truth. In order to *know* that something is the case, what you claim to know **must be true**. That is to say, the belief you hold must accurately reflect the actual state of affairs, it must correspond to how the world actually is. Alternatively, we could say that knowledge can never be false.

So far we've established that knowledge requires having true beliefs. But is that enough? A simple thought experiment demonstrates that it isn't. Suppose your friend claimed that "The Empire Strikes Back" was released in 1980 (which in fact it *was*). Your friend holds a *true belief*. But does your friend *know* that the blockbuster sequel was released in that year? Perhaps. But suppose you push

further and ask *why* she thinks that, and in reply she said, “I guessed.” She holds a true belief, but guessing correctly is clearly not the same as knowing. So, we can clearly see that merely **holding true beliefs is not sufficient** for having knowledge.



The third necessary condition for having knowledge is having adequate *justification*. In other words, what sort of evidence can a person provide to support their claim, how can

they show or demonstrate that their beliefs correspond to how the world actually is? As you can imagine, this is where it begins to get difficult. How much evidence should we consider *adequate*? What *kind* of evidence should we consider? How do we know when we’ve arrived at an adequate amount of the right kind of evidence to achieve knowledge? All these questions have to be addressed, and as you can imagine, philosophers disagree on the answers.

Once we’ve established a working definition of ‘knowledge’ (e.g., true, justified, belief) we can proceed to examine the second question: is it possible for finite beings like humans to actually achieve knowledge? Here again we’ll find a disagreement among philosophers. Some will argue that we can never reach a state of certainty in regard to our beliefs and, therefore, we fail to have knowledge. These **skeptics** are opposed by philosophers who think we *can* achieve certainty, if not in regard to all our beliefs, at least to some degree. As we’ll see with both skeptics and **dogmatists** (i.e., those who think we *can* have knowledge) there is a continuum of positions from absolute skepticism (no one can know anything) on one extreme to absolute dogmatism (anybody can know everything) on the other.

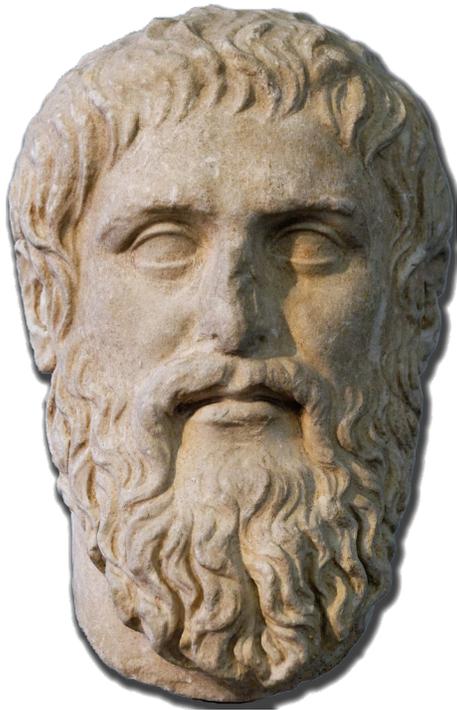
A third position regarding our ability to have knowledge is called **Relativism**. This is a radical position which will challenge some of the conditions we laid out in our definition of knowledge earlier. We’ll come back to this position in more detail in class.



Of course, the burden of proof always falls on those who make a positive claim, so the dogmatists owe us an explanation of *how* we can actually go about getting knowledge. This brings us to our third core questions in Epistemology: How do we get knowledge?

Here again we'll see that there is significant disagreement among philosophers. Fortunately, from the many different theories of knowledge put forward over the last two millennia, there are significant similarities that allow us to group dogmatic theories into two main groups: **Rationalism** and **Empiricism**.

In order to get a better sense of these two approaches to how knowledge might be attained, we'll look at four paradigmatic philosophers, two rationalists and two empiricists, who exemplify these two very different approaches.



The Republic (in part)

by:
Plato (*Aristokles* 428-348 BCE)

Translated by: BENJAMIN JOWETT
*Additions, corrections, and footnotes by Barry F. Vaughan*³⁹

Books VI and VII (*in part*):
The Divided Line and Allegory of the Cave

Speakers in this section: *Sokrates and Glaukon (Plato's older brother)*

...Still, I must implore you, Sokrates, said Glaukon, not to turn away just as you are reaching the goal; if you will give an explanation of the [G]ood as you have already given of [J]ustice and [T]emperance and the other virtues, we [will] be satisfied.

Yes, my friend, and I [will] be at least equally satisfied, but I cannot help fearing that I [will] fall, and that my indiscreet zeal will bring ridicule upon me. No, [gentlemen], let us not at present ask what is the actual nature of the good, for to reach what is now in my thoughts would be an effort too great for me. But of the child of the [G]ood who is most like him, I would [willing] speak, if I could be sure that you wished to hear—otherwise [I will] not.

By all means, he said, tell us about the child, and you [will owe us an explanation] of the parent [later].

⁵⁰⁷I wish, I replied, that I could [give], and you [could] receive, [an] account of the parent [now], and not of the [child] only; however, [take] this [as a down payment], and at the same time [be careful] that I do not render a false account, although I have no *intention* of deceiving you.

Yes, we will take all the care that we can: proceed.

³⁹ From the Project Gutenberg's Republic, by Plato, www.gutenberg.org. For the full text visit the Project Gutenberg website. This edited version is intended for academic or personal use and may not be sold or used for profit.

I have changed spellings of proper names to more accurately match the Greek text as opposed to the more traditional Latinized spellings which were dominant in Jowett's time. I have also changed UK spellings to US spellings where appropriate, as well as made clarifications in translation (noted with brackets) and have added explanatory footnotes.

UNIVERSALS VERSUS PARTICULARS

Yes, I said, but I must first come to an [agreement] with you, and remind you of what I have mentioned in the course of this discussion, and at many other times.

What?

The old story, that there are many beautiful [things] and many good [things], and so of other [objects] which we describe and define; to all of them [the word] 'many' is applied.

True, he said.

And there is an absolute [B]eauty and an absolute [G]ood, and of other things to which the term 'many' is applied there is [one] absolute [reality]; for they may be brought under a single [I]dea, which is called the *essence* of each.⁴⁰

Very true.

The many, as we say, are seen [i.e., perceived] but not known [i.e., comprehended], and the [I]deas are known [i.e., comprehended] but not seen [i.e., perceived].⁴¹

Exactly.

And what is the organ with which we see visible things?

Sight, he said.

And with hearing, I said, we hear, and with the other senses perceive the other objects of sense?

True.

But have you [every noticed] that sight is by far the most costly and complex piece of workmanship which the [creator] of the senses ever contrived?

No, I never have, he said.

Then reflect [with me for a moment]; has the ear or voice need of any third or additional nature in order that the one may be able to hear and the other to be heard?

Nothing of the sort.

No, indeed, I replied; and the same is true of most, if not all, the other senses; you would not say

⁴⁰ The 'many' are usually referred to by philosophers as "particulars" while the 'one' is called a "universal". The universal is that which all the particulars have in common.

⁴¹ The distinction introduced here is between material objects which are grasped with the senses and nonmaterial entities that are grasped with the mind.

that any of them requires such an addition?

Certainly not.

But you [understand] that without the addition of some other nature there is no seeing or being seen?

How do you mean?

Sight being, as I conceive, in the eyes, and he who has eyes wanting to see; color being also present in them, still unless there be a third nature specially adapted to the purpose, the owner of the eyes will see nothing and the colors will be invisible.

Of what nature are you speaking?

[What you call] light, I replied.

True, he said.

Noble, then, is the [connection] which links together sight and visibility, and ⁵⁰⁸great beyond other bonds by no small difference of nature; for light is their bond, and light is no ignoble thing?

N[o], he said, the [opposite] of ignoble.

And which, I said, of the gods in heaven would you say was the lord of this element? Whose is that light which makes the eye to see perfectly and the visible to appear? You mean the sun, as you and all mankind say. May not the relation of sight to this deity be described as follows?

How?

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

No.

Yet of all the organs of sense the eye is the most like the sun?

By far the most like.

And the power which the eye possesses is a sort of [discharge] which [comes] from the sun?

Exactly.

Then the sun is not sight, but the author of sight who is recognized by sight.

True, he said.

And this is he whom I call the child of the [G]ood, whom the [G]ood [produced] in his own likeness, to be in the visible world, in relation to sight and the things of sight, what the [G]ood is in the intellectual world in relation to [the] mind and the things of [the] mind.

Will you be a little more explicit, he asked?

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

Very true.

But when they are directed towards objects on which the sun shines, they see clearly and there is sight in them?

Certainly.

And *the soul is like the eye*: when resting upon that on which [T]ruth and [B]eing shine, the soul perceives and understands and is [glowing] with intelligence; but when turned towards the twilight of [B]ecoming and perishing, then she has opinion only, and goes [about] blinking, and first [holds] one opinion and then another, and seems to have no intelligence?

Just so.

Now, that which imparts truth to the known, and the power of knowing to the knower, is what I would have you term the [I]dea of [G]ood; and this you [should understand as] the *cause* of [knowledge], and of truth in so far as the latter becomes the subject of knowledge. [These are] beautiful, as are both truth and knowledge, you will be right in [believing] this other nature [to be] more ⁵⁰⁹beautiful than either [of the others]; and, as in the previous instance, light and sight may be truly said to be like the sun, and yet not to be the sun, so in this other [case], [knowledge] and truth may be deemed to be *like* the [G]ood, but not the [G]ood itself; the [G]ood has a place of honor [that is] higher.

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

God forbid, I replied; but may I ask you to consider the [analogy from] another point of view?

[From] what point of view?

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

Certainly.

In like manner the [G]ood may be said to be not only the [cause] of knowledge of all known things, but of their *being* and *essence*, and yet the [G]ood is not [an] essence, but far exceeds essence in dignity and power.

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

Yes, I said, and [you are responsible for this extravagant analogy]; for you [forced me to talk about my beliefs on the matter].

[Well please continue]; at any rate [tell us] if there is anything more to be said about the [analogy] of the sun.

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

Then [don't leave anything out], however [small].

THE DIVIDED LINE⁴²

I will do my best, I said; but I'm [afraid] a great deal will have to be [left out]. You have to imagine, that there are two ruling powers, and that one of them is set over the intellectual world, the other over the visible. I do not say heaven, lest you should fancy that I am playing upon the [words] (*ourhanos, orhatos*). May I suppose that you [understand] this distinction [between] the visible and intelligible fixed in your mind?

I have.

Now take a line which has been cut into two unequal parts, and divide each of them again in the same proportion, and suppose the two main divisions to [correspond], one to the visible and the other to the intelligible. [T]hen compare the subdivisions in respect of their clearness and [lack] of clearness, and you will find that the first section in the [realm]⁵¹⁰ of the visible consists of images. And by images I mean, in the first place, shadows, and in the second place, reflections in water and in [mirrors] and the like: Do you understand?

Yes, I understand.

Imagine, now, the [next] section, of which [the first] is only the [reflection], to include the [objects] which we see, and everything that grows or is made [i.e., the objects that cause the reflections].

Very good.

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

Most undoubtedly.

⁴² For a visual rendering of the Divided Line see my website: <https://barryvaughan.org/graph/charts/divideline.jpg>.

Next proceed to consider the manner in which the [realm] of the intellectual is to be divided.

In what manner?

[In the following way]: [like the other part we just considered] there are two subdivisions. In the lower the soul uses figures; [an] enquiry can only be hypothetical, and instead of going upwards to a principle, [it] descends to the other end. In the higher of the two [parts], the soul passes [beyond] hypotheses, and goes up to a principle which is above hypotheses, making no use of figures, as in the former case, but proceed[s] only in and through [I]deas themselves.

I do not quite understand your meaning, he said.

Then I will try again; you will understand me better when I have made some preliminary remarks. You [know] that students of geometry, arithmetic, and [other mathematical] sciences assume the [definitions of] odd and the even [numbers], and [shapes] and three kinds of angles, and [other mathematical axioms]. [T]hese are their hypotheses, which they and everybody are supposed to know, and therefore they do not [bother] to give any [explanation] of them, either to themselves or [anybody else]. [Rather] they begin with [these axioms], and [proceed from them] until they arrive at last, and in a [logical] manner, at their conclusion?

Yes, he said, I know.

And [you also] know that although they use visible [images of points and lines and shapes] and [think] about [those things], they are [not *really*] thinking [about these images], but [about] the [Ideas] which they [represent]. [The are] not [thinking about] the figures which they draw, but of the *absolute square* and the *absolute diameter*, and so on—the [images] which they draw or make, [or] which have shadows and reflections in water, are converted by them into images, but they are really seeking to “see” the things *themselves*, which can only be “seen” with the *eye of the mind*?

⁵¹¹That is true.

[This is what I meant by] the intelligible. The soul is compelled to use hypotheses [in search of it]; not ascending to a first principle, because she is unable to rise above the region of hypothesis, but employing the objects of which the shadows below are resemblances in their turn, as images, they—in relation to the shadows and reflections of them—have a greater distinctness, and therefore, a higher value.

I understand, he said, that you are [about] geometry and the [mathematical] arts.

And when I speak of the other division of the intelligible, you will understand me to speak of that other sort of knowledge which reason herself attains by the power of dialectic, using the hypotheses not as first principles, but only as hypotheses. That is to say, as steps and points of departure into a world which is above hypotheses, [so] she may soar beyond them to the first principle of the whole. Clinging to this, and then to that which depends on this, by successive

steps she descends again without the aid of any sensible object, from ideas, through ideas, and in ideas she ends.

I understand you, he replied; not perfectly, for you seem to me to be describing a task which is really tremendous; but, at any rate, I understand you to say that [K]nowledge and [B]eing, which the science of dialectic contemplates, are clearer than the notions of the arts—as they are termed—which proceed from hypotheses only. These are also contemplated by the understanding, and not by the senses. But, because they start from hypotheses and do not ascend to a principle, those who contemplate them appear to you not to exercise the higher [faculty of] reason upon them, although when a first principle is added to them, they are [grasped] by the [faculty of] higher reason. And the habit which is concerned with geometry and the [mathematical] sciences I suppose you would term ‘understanding’ and not ‘reason’, [because it is] intermediate between opinion and reason.

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

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

THE ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE

⁵¹⁴ And now, I said, let me show in [an analogy] how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened: Behold! Human beings living in a underground cave, which has a mouth open towards the light and reaching all along the cave; here they have been from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see [in front of] them, being prevented by chains from turning [a]round]. Above and behind them is a blazing fire at a distance, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised [platform]; and you will see, if you look, a low wall built along the [front of the platform], like the screen which marionette players have in front of them, over which they show puppets.

I see.

⁵¹⁵ And do you see, I said, men passing [behind] the wall carrying all sorts of [objects], and statues and figures of animals made of wood and stone and various materials, which appear over the wall? Some of them are talking, others silent.

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

[They are l]ike ourselves, I replied; and they only see their own shadows, or the shadows of one another, which the fire throws on the opposite wall of the cave?

True, he said; how could they see anything but the shadows if they were never allowed to move their heads?

And [they would also only see the shadows] of the objects which are being carried [on the platform]?

Yes, he said.

And if they were able to [talk] with one another, wouldn't [they] suppose that they were naming what was actually before them?

Very true.

And suppose further that the prison had an echo which came from the [front]; [wouldn't they believe that] when one of the passers-by spoke [from the platform] that the voice which they heard came from the shadow [in front of them]?

No question, he replied.

To them, I said, the "truth" would [seem to be] nothing [more than] the shadows of the images [on the wall].

That is certain.

And now look again, and see what will naturally follow if the prisoners are released and disabused of their error. At first, when any of them is liberated and compelled suddenly to stand up and turn [a]round and walk and look towards the light, he will suffer sharp pains; the glare will distress him, and he will be unable to see the realities of which in his former state he had seen the shadows; and then [imagine] someone saying to him, that what he saw before was an illusion, but that now, when he is approaching nearer to [B]eing and his eye is turned towards *more real existence*, he has a clearer vision; what will be his reply? And you may further imagine that his instructor is pointing to the objects as they pass and requiring him to name them; will he not be perplexed? Will he not fancy that the shadows which he formerly saw are "truer" than the objects which are now shown to him?

Far truer.

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

True, he now

And suppose once more, that he is reluctantly dragged up a steep and rugged ascent, and held fast until he is forced into the presence of the [S]un himself, is he not likely to be pained and irritated? When he ⁵¹⁶approaches the light his eyes will be dazzled, and he will not be able to see anything at all of what are now called realities.

Not all in a moment, he said.

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

Certainly.

Last of [all] he will be able to see the [S]un, and not mere reflections of Him in the water, but he will see Him in His own proper place, and not in another; and he will contemplate Him as He is.

Certainly.

He will then proceed to argue that this [i.e., the Sun] is He who gives the season and the years, and is the guardian of all that is in the visible world, and in a certain way the cause of all things which he and his fellows have been accustomed to [see]?

Clearly, he said, he would first see the [S]un and then reason about Him.

And when he remembered his old [life], and the wisdom of the cave and his fellow-prisoners, [don't you] suppose that he would [think himself lucky at] the change, and pity them?

Certainly, he would.

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

“Better to be the poor servant of a poor master, and to endure anything, rather than think as they do, and live after their manner?”

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

⁵¹⁷Imagine once more, I said, such a [person] coming suddenly out of the [S]un to be replaced in his old situation; would he not be certain to have his eyes full of darkness?

To be sure, he said. And if there were a contest, and he had to compete in measuring the shadows with the prisoners who had never moved out of the cave, while his sight was still weak, and before his eyes had become steady (and the time which would be needed to acquire this new habit of sight might be very considerable) would he not be ridiculous?

Men would say of him that [went up and came back down] without his eyes; and that it was better not even to think of ascending; and if anyone tried to [free] another [slave] and lead him

up to the light, let them only catch the offender, and they would put him to death.⁴³

No question, he said.

This entire allegory, I said, you may now [add], dear Glaukon, to the previous argument;⁴⁴ the [cave] is the world of sight, the light of the fire is the sun, and you will not misapprehend me if you interpret the journey upwards to be the ascent of the soul into the intellectual world according to my poor belief, which, at your desire, I have expressed whether rightly or wrongly, God [only] knows. But, whether true or false, my opinion is that in the World of Knowledge the idea of [G]ood appears last of all, and is “seen” only with an effort; and, when “seen”, is also inferred to be the [absolute cause] of all things beautiful and right, [cause] of [illumination] and of the lord of light in this visible world, [as well as] the immediate source of reason and truth in the intellectual [world]. This is the power upon which [the rational person]—[whether acting] in public or private life—must have his eye fixed.

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

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

Yes, very natural.

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

Anything but surprising, he replied.

⁵¹⁸Any one who has common sense will remember that the bewilderments of the eyes are of two kinds, and arise from *two causes*, either from coming out of the light or from going into the light, which is true of the mind's eye, quite as much as of the bodily eye; and he who remembers this when he sees any one whose vision is perplexed and weak, will not be too ready to laugh; he will first ask whether that soul of man has come out of the brighter light, and is unable to see because unaccustomed to the dark, or having turned from darkness to the day is dazzled by excess of light. And he will count the one happy in his condition and state of being, and he will pity the other; or, if he have a mind to laugh at the soul which comes from below into the light, there will be more reason in this than in the laugh which greets him who returns from above out of the light

⁴³ This is a rather transparent reference to Sokrates himself and his destiny at the hands of the Athenians.

⁴⁴ “The previous argument” refers to the Divided Line. The allegory is a narrative account of the same divisions and capacities elucidated in the metaphor of the line: the shadows of the cave equal reflections on the line, the shadow puppets represent the material objects which cause reflections, the objects outside the cave are the universals, or Ideas, derived via hypothesis, and the Sun represents Being itself which is grasped with unaided reason.

into the cave.⁴⁵

That, he said, is a very just distinction.

But then, if I am right, professors of [learning] must be wrong when they say that they can put knowledge into the soul which was not there before, like sight into blind eyes.⁴⁶

They undoubtedly say this, he replied.

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

Very true.

And [mustn't] there be some [skill] which will affect conversion in the easiest and quickest manner; not implanting the faculty of sight, for that exists already, but has been turned in the wrong direction, and is looking away from the truth?

Yes, he said, such a [skill] may be presumed.

And whereas the other so-called virtues of the soul seem to be akin to bodily qualities, for even when they are not originally innate they can be implanted later by habit and exercise, the virtue of wisdom, more than anything else, contains a [god-like] element which always remains, and by this conversion is rendered useful and profitable; or, on the other hand, ⁵¹⁹hurtful and useless. Did you never observe the narrow intelligence flashing from the keen eye of a clever rogue—how eager he is, how clearly his paltry soul sees the way to his end; he is the reverse of blind, but his keen eyesight is forced into the service of evil, and he is mischievous in proportion to his cleverness.

Very true, he said.

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

⁴⁵ The coming and going between the cave and the light is a reference to the doctrine of reincarnation, or *metempsychosis*. Herodotus attributes this doctrine to Pythagoros, who was an influence on Plato. Pythagoros is supposed to have picked up the idea from Egypt. However, while there is an idea of an afterlife—at least for the aristocracy—in pre-classical Egypt, they do not seem to have an idea of an immortal soul that passes back and forth between different metaphysical realms. If Pythagoros was indeed exposed to this idea in Egypt, it would make far more sense to attribute the idea to Indian traders who may have brought the idea—already long established in India—to Egypt along with goods from their homeland.

⁴⁶ See Meno 81d, Phaedo 70dff.

truth as keenly as they see what their eyes are turned to now.

Very likely.

Yes, I said; and there is another thing which is likely—or rather a necessary inference from what has preceded—that neither the uneducated and uninformed of the truth, nor those who never make an end of their education, will be [competent] rulers of [the] State; not the former, because they have no single aim of duty which is the rule of all their actions, private as well as public; nor the latter, because they will not act at all except upon compulsion, fancying that they are already dwelling apart in the islands of the blest.

Very true, he replied.

Then, I said, [our] business [as] founders of the State will be to *compel* the best minds to attain that knowledge which we have already shown to be the greatest of all—they must continue to ascend until they arrive at the [G]ood; but when they have ascended and seen enough we must not allow them to do as they do now.

What do you mean?

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

But isn't this unjust, he said; [should] we give them a worse life, when they might have a better [one]?

You have again forgotten, my friend, I said, the intention of the [ruler], who did not aim at making any one class in the State happy above the rest; the happiness was to be in the whole State, and he held ⁵²⁰the citizens together by persuasion and necessity, making them benefactors of the State, and therefore benefactors of one another; to this end he created them, not to please themselves, but to be his instruments in binding up the State.

True, he said, I had forgotten.

Observe, Glaukon, that there will be no injustice in compelling our philosophers to have a care [for] others; we [will] explain to them that in other States, men of their class are not obliged to share in the toils of politics: and this is reasonable, for they grow up at their own sweet will, and the government would rather not have them. Being self-taught, they cannot be expected to show any gratitude for a culture which they have never received. But we have brought you into the world to be rulers of the hive, kings of yourselves and of the other citizens, and have educated you far better and more perfectly than they have been educated, and you are better able to share in the double duty. Wherefore, each of you, when his turn comes, must go down to the [cave], and get the habit of seeing in the dark. When you have acquired the habit, you will see ten thousand times better than the [other] inhabitants of the cave, and you will know what the several images are, and what they represent, because you have seen the [B]eautiful and [J]ust and

[G]ood in their truth. And thus, our State, which is also yours, will be a reality, and not only a dream, and will be administered in a spirit unlike other States, in which men fight with one another about shadows and are distracted in the struggle for power, which in their eyes is a great good. Whereas the truth is that the State in which the rulers are most reluctant to govern is always the best and most quietly governed, and the State in which they are most eager [is] the worst.

Quite true, he replied.

And will our pupils, when they hear this, refuse to take their turn at the toils of State, when they are allowed to spend the greater part of their time with one another in the heavenly light?

Impossible, he answered; for they are just men, and the commands which we impose upon them are just; there can be no doubt that every one of them will take office as a stern necessity, and not after the fashion of our present rulers of State.

Yes, my friend, I said; and there lies the point. You must contrive for ⁵²¹your future rulers another and a better life than that of a ruler, and then you may have a well-ordered State; for only in the State which offers this, will [those who] rule [be] truly rich, not in silver and gold, but in virtue and wisdom, which are the true blessings of life. Whereas if they go to the administration of public affairs, poor and hungering after their own private advantage, thinking that [afterwards] they are to snatch the chief good, [there will never be] order; for they will be fighting about office[s], and the civil and domestic broils which thus arise will be the ruin of the rulers and the whole State.

Most true, he replied.

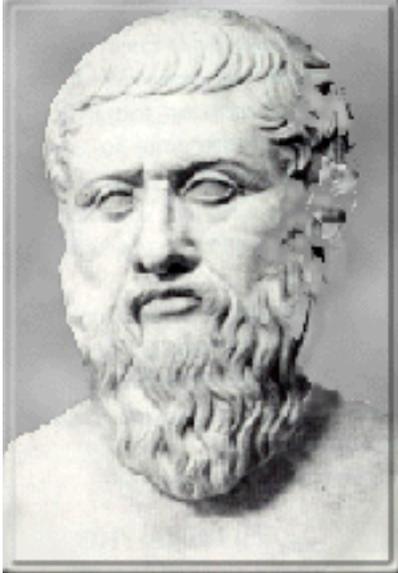
And the only life which looks down upon the life of political ambition is that of true philosophy. Do you know of any other?

Indeed, I do not, he said.

And those who govern ought not to be lovers of the task? For, if they are, there will be rival lovers, and they will fight.

No question.

Who then are those whom we [will] compel to be guardians? Surely they will be the men who are wisest about affairs of State, and by whom the State is best administered, and who at the same time have other honors and another and a better life than that of politics?



The Meno (*in part*)

by:
Plato (*Aristokles* 428-348 BCE)

Translated by: Benjamin Jowett

Additions, corrections, and footnotes by Barry F. Vaughan ⁴⁷

Persons of the Dialogue: *Sokrates, Meno, a slave boy from Meno's house*

^{70a}**Meno:** Can you tell me, Sokrates, whether virtue is acquired by teaching or by practice; or if neither by teaching nor practice, then whether it comes to man by nature, or in what other way?

Sokrates: Oh Meno, there was a time when the Thessalians were famous among the other Hellenes only for their riches and their riding; but now, if I am not mistaken, they are equally famous for their wisdom, especially at Larisa, which is the native city of your friend Aristippos.⁴⁸ And this is Gorgias⁴⁹ doing; for when he came there, the flower of the Aleuadai,⁵⁰ among them your admirer Aristippos, and the other chiefs of the Thessalians, fell in love with his wisdom. And he has taught you the habit of answering questions in a grand and bold style, which becomes those who know, and is the style in which he himself answers all comers; and any Hellene who likes may ask him anything. How different is our lot, my dear Meno. Here at Athens there is a dearth of the commodity, and all wisdom seems to have emigrated from us to you. I am certain that if you were to ask any Athenian whether virtue was natural or acquired, he would laugh in your face, and say:

"Stranger, you have far too good an opinion of me, if you think that I can answer your question. For I *literally do not know what virtue is*, and much less whether it is acquired by teaching or not."

⁴⁷ From the Project Gutenberg's Meno, by Plato, www.gutenberg.org. For the full text visit the Project Gutenberg website. This edited version is intended for academic or personal use and may not be sold or used for profit. I have changed spellings of proper names to more accurately match the Greek text as opposed to the more traditional Latinized spellings which were dominant in Jowett's time. I have also changed UK spellings to US spellings where appropriate, as well as made clarifications in translation (noted with brackets) and have added explanatory footnotes.

⁴⁸ Aristippos of Cyrene (c. 435 – c. 356 BCE), founder of the Cyrenaic school of Philosophy. Cyrenaism held that pleasure, especially physical pleasure, was the only intrinsic good and that it should be the sole guide to human action.

⁴⁹ Gorgias of Leontini (c. 485 - c. 380 BCE), a first generation Sophist sometimes referred to as "The Nihilist". Famous for a three-fold argument concerning ontology and epistemology: 1) Nothing exist; 2) If something exists, it is unknowable; 3) If something were knowable, it would not be communicable.

⁵⁰ The Aleuadai were an aristocratic family from ancient Thessily, Greece. They were very wealthy and very powerful.

^{71b}And I myself, Meno, living as I do in this region of poverty, am as poor as the rest of the world; and I confess with shame that I know literally nothing about virtue; and when I do not know [what a thing is, I can't tell you anything about it]? How, if I knew nothing at all of Meno, could I tell if he was fair, or the opposite of fair; rich and noble, or the reverse of rich and noble? Do you think that I could?

Meno: No, Indeed. But are you [serious], Sokrates, in saying that you do not know what virtue is? And am I to carry back this report of you to Thessaly?

Sokrates: Not only that, my dear boy, but you may say further that I have never known of any one else who did, in my judgment.

Meno: Then you have never met Gorgias when he was at Athens?

Sokrates: Yes, I have.

Meno: And did you not think that he knew?

Sokrates: I [do not have] a good memory, Meno, and therefore I cannot now tell what I thought of him at the time. And I dare say that he did know, and that you know what he said: please, therefore, to remind me of what he said; or, if you would rather, tell me your own view; for I suspect that you and he think much alike.

Meno: Very true.

Sokrates: [Well, since] he is not here, never mind him, and you tell me: by the gods, Meno, be generous, and tell me what you say virtue⁵¹ is; for I shall be truly delighted to find that I have been mistaken, and that you and Gorgias really have this knowledge; although I have been just saying that I have never found anybody who had.

^{71c}**Meno:** There will be no difficulty, Sokrates, in answering your question. Let us [consider] first the [excellence] of a man—he should know how to administer the state, and in the administration of it to benefit his friends and harm his enemies; and he must also be careful not to suffer harm himself. A woman's virtue, if you wish to know about that, may also be easily described: her duty is to order her house, and keep what is indoors, and obey her husband. Every age, every condition of life, young or old, male or female, bond or free, has a different [excellence]: there are virtues numberless, and no lack of definitions of them; for *virtue is relative* to the actions and ages of each of us in all that we do. And the same may be said of vice, Sokrates.

Sokrates: How fortunate I am, Meno! When I ask you for one virtue, you present me with a swarm of them, which are in your keeping. Suppose that I carry on the [metaphor] of the swarm, and ask you, “What is the nature of the bee?” And you answer that there are many kinds of bees,

⁵¹ The Greek term, *aretai* (ἀρετή), translated ‘virtue’ is more accurately rendered ‘excellence’. It denotes not just moral qualities, but any quality that makes something an excellent example of that kind of thing.

and I reply: “But do bees differ *as* bees, because there are many and different kinds of them; or are they not rather to be distinguished by some other *quality*, as for example beauty, size, or shape”? How would you answer me?

Meno: I [would] answer that bees do not differ from one another, *as* bees.

^{72c}**Sokrates:** And if I went on to say: “That is what I desire to know, Meno; tell me what is the quality in which they do not differ, but are all alike.” Would you be able to answer?

Meno: I should.

Sokrates: And so of the virtues, however many and different they may be, they all have a *common nature* which makes them [excellences]; and on this he who would answer the question, “What is virtue?” would do well to have his eye fixed: do you understand?

Meno: I am beginning to understand; but I do not as yet take hold of the question as I could wish.

Sokrates: When you say, Meno, that there is one virtue of a man, another of a woman, another of a child, and so on, does this apply only to virtue, or would you say the same of health, and size, and strength? Or is the nature of health always the same, whether in man or woman?

Meno: I should say that health is the same, both in man and woman.

Sokrates: And is not this true of size and strength? If a woman is strong, she will be strong by reason of the same [thing] and of the same strength subsisting in her which there is in the man. I mean to say that strength, *as strength*, whether of man or woman, is the same. Is there any difference?

Meno: I think not.

^{73a}**Sokrates:** And will not virtue, *as virtue*, be the same, whether in a child or in a grown—up person, in a woman or in a man?

Meno: I cannot help feeling, Sokrates, that this case is different from the others.

Sokrates: But why? Were you not saying that the virtue of a man was to order a state, and the virtue of a woman was to order a house?

Meno: I did say so.

Sokrates: And can either house or state or anything be well ordered without temperance and without justice?

Meno: Certainly not.

Sokrates: Then [those] who order a state or a house temperately or justly order them with temperance and justice?

Meno: Certainly.

Sokrates: Then both men and women, if they are to be *good* men and women, must have the *same* virtues of temperance and justice?

Meno: True.

Sokrates: And can either a young man or an [one] one be good, if they are intemperate and unjust?

Meno: They cannot.

Sokrates: They must be temperate *and* just?

Meno: Yes.

^{73c}**Sokrates:** Then all men are good in the same way, and by participation in the same virtues?

Meno: Such is the inference.

Sokrates: And they surely would not have been good in the same way, unless their virtue had been the same?

Meno: They would not.

Sokrates: [N]ow that the *sameness of all virtue* has been proven, try and remember what you and Gorgias say that virtue *is*.

Meno: Will you have one definition of them all?

Sokrates: That is what I am seeking.

Meno: If you want to have one definition of them all, I [don't know] what to say, [except] that virtue is *the power of governing mankind*.

Sokrates: And does this definition of virtue include all virtue? Is virtue the same in a child and in a slave, Meno? Can the child govern his father, or the slave his master; and would he who governed be any longer a slave?

Meno: I think not, Sokrates.

Sokrates: No, indeed; there would be small reason in that. Yet once more, fair friend; according to you, virtue is "the power of governing"; but do you not add "justly and not

unjustly"?

Meno: Yes, Sokrates; I agree there; for justice *is* virtue.

Sokrates: Would you say "virtue," Meno, or "*a virtue*"?

Meno: What do you mean?

Sokrates: I mean as I might say about anything; that a [sphere], for example, is "a [shape]" and not simply "[shape]," and I should adopt this mode of speaking, because there are other [shapes].

Meno: Quite right; and that is just what I am saying about virtue—that there are other virtues as well as justice.

^{74a}**Sokrates:** What are they; tell me [their] names, as I would tell you the names of the other figures if you asked me?

Meno: **Courage** and **temperance** and **wisdom** and **magnanimity** are virtues; and there are many others.

Sokrates: Yes, Meno; and again, we are in the same case: in searching after one virtue we have found many, though not in the same way as before; but *we have been unable to find the common virtue which runs through them all.*

Meno: Why, Sokrates, even now I am not able to follow you in the attempt to get at one common notion of virtue as of other things.

Sokrates: No wonder; but I will try to get nearer if I can, for you know that all things have a common notion. Suppose now that someone asked you the question which I asked before: Meno, he would say, "what is shape?" And if you answered "roundness," he would reply to you, in my way of speaking, by asking whether you would say that roundness is "shape" or "*a shape*"; and you would answer "*a shape*."

Meno: Certainly.

^{74c}**Sokrates:** And for this reason—that there are other shapes?

Meno: Yes.

Sokrates: And if he proceeded to ask, "What other shapes are there?" You would have told him.

Meno: I should.

Sokrates: And if he similarly asked what color is, and you answered "whiteness," and the questioner rejoined, "Would you say that whiteness is color or a color?" You would reply, "*A*

color,” because there are other colors as well.

Meno: I should.

Sokrates: And if he had said, “Tell me what they are”—you would have told him of other colors which are colors just as much as whiteness.

Meno: Yes.

Sokrates: And suppose that he were to pursue the matter in my way, he would say: “[We always seem to be coming back to] particulars, but this is not what I want; tell me then, since you call them by a common name, and say that they are all shapes, even when opposed to one another, what is that *common nature* which you designate as ‘shape’—which contains straight as well as round, and is no more one than the other—that would be your mode of speaking?”

Meno: Yes.

Sokrates: And in speaking thus, you do not mean to say that the round is round any more than straight, or the straight any more straight than round?

Meno: Certainly not.

Sokrates: You only assert that the round shape is not *more a shape* than the straight, or the straight than the round?

Meno: Very true.

^{75a}**Sokrates:** To what, then, do we give the name of ‘shape’? Try and answer. Suppose that when a person asked you this question either about shape or color, you were to reply, “Man, I do not understand what you want, or know what you are saying.” He would look rather astonished and say: “Do you not understand that I am looking for [what is the same in all of them]? And then he might put the question in another form: “Meno,” he might say, “what is [that which is common to them all] which you call ‘shape’, and which includes not only round and straight figures, but all?” Could you not answer that question, Meno? I wish that you would try; the attempt will be good practice with a view to the answer about virtue.

Meno: I would rather that you should answer, Sokrates.

Sokrates: Shall I indulge you?

Meno: By all means.

Sokrates: And then you will tell me about virtue?

Meno: I will.

Sokrates: Then I must do my best, for there is a prize to be won.

Meno: Certainly.

Sokrates: Well, I will try and explain to you what shape is. What do you say to this answer? Shape is the only thing which always [accompanies] color. Will you be satisfied with it, as I am sure that I should be, if you would let me have a similar definition of virtue?

Meno: But, Sokrates, it is such a simple answer.

Sokrates: Why simple?

Meno: Because, according to you, shape is that which always follows color.

Sokrates: Granted.

Meno: But if a person were to say that he does not know what color is, any more than what figure is—what sort of answer would you have given him?

Sokrates: I [would] have told him the truth. And if he were a philosopher of the eristic⁵² and antagonistic sort, I should say to him: “You have my answer, and if I am wrong, your business is to take up the argument and refute me.” But if we were friends, and were talking as you and I are now, I should reply in a milder strain and more in the dialectician's vein; that is to say, I should not only speak the truth, but I should make use of premises which the person [cross examined] would be willing to admit. And this is the way in which I shall endeavor to approach you. You will acknowledge, will you not, that there is such a thing as an end, or termination, or extremity—all which words use in the same sense, although I am aware that Prodikos⁵³ might draw distinctions about them: but still you, I am sure, would speak of a thing as ended or terminated—that is all which I am saying—not anything very difficult.

Meno: Yes, I should; and I believe that I understand your meaning.

^{76a}**Sokrates:** And you would speak of a surface and also a solid, as in geometry.

Meno: Yes.

Sokrates: Well then, you are now in a condition to understand my definition of ‘shape’. I define shape to be that in which the solid ends; or, more concisely, *the limit of solid....*

Sokrates:now, in your turn, you are to fulfill your promise, and tell me what virtue is in [itself]; and don't [turn] a singular into a plural, as the facetious say of those who break a thing, but [give me] virtue whole and sound, and not broken into a number of pieces: I have [shown you how to answer].

⁵² I.e., argumentative.

⁵³ Prodikos of Keos (465-395BCE), a first generation Sophist who taught Ethics and Linguistics in Athens. He was famous for insisting on the correct and precise use of terms in discourse in order to avoid confusion.

Meno: Well then, Sokrates, virtue, as I take it, is when he, who desires the honorable, is able to provide it for himself; so, the poet says, and I say too—virtue is the desire of things honorable and the power of attaining them.

Sokrates: And does he who desires the honorable also desire the good?

Meno: Certainly.

Sokrates: Then are there some who desire evil and others who desire good? Do not all men, my dear sir, desire good?

Meno: I think not.

Sokrates: There are some who desire evil?

Meno: Yes.

Sokrates: Do you mean that they [believe] the evils which they desire [are] good, or do they *know* that they are evil, and [still] desire them?

Meno: Both, I think.

Sokrates: And do you really imagine, Meno, that a [person] knows evils to be evils and [still] desires them?

Meno: Certainly I do.

Sokrates: And desire is [the motivation to possess something]?

Meno: Yes.

^{77d}**Sokrates:** And does he think that evils will benefit [those] who possesses them, or does he know that they will harm him?

Meno: There are some who think that evil [things] will do them good, and others who know that they will do them harm.

Sokrates: And, in your opinion, do those who think that they will do them good *know* that they are evils?

Meno: Certainly not.

Sokrates: Isn't it obvious that those who are *ignorant* of their nature do not desire them; but they desire what they *suppose* to be good although they are really evil; and if they are *mistaken* and suppose the evils [are] good they really desire goods?

Meno: Yes, in that case.

Sokrates: Well, and do those who, as you say, desire evils, and think that evils are hurtful to the possessor of them, *know* that they will be hurt by them?

Meno: They must know it.

Sokrates: And must they not suppose that those who are hurt are miserable in proportion to the hurt which is inflicted upon them?

Meno: How can it be otherwise?

^{78a}**Sokrates:** But are not the miserable [misfortunate]?

Meno: Yes, indeed.

Sokrates: And does anyone desire to be miserable and [misfortunate]?

Meno: I should say not, Sokrates.

Sokrates: *But if there is no one who desires to be miserable, there is no one, Meno, who desires evil; for what is misery but the desire and possession of evil?*

Meno: That appears to be the truth, Sokrates, and I admit that nobody *desires* evil.

Sokrates: And yet, weren't you saying just now that virtue is the desire and power of attaining good?

Meno: Yes, I did say so.

Sokrates: But if this be affirmed, then *the desire of good is common to all*, and one man is no better than another in that respect?

Meno: True.

Sokrates: And if one man is not better than another in desiring good, he must be better in the power of attaining it?

Meno: Exactly.

Sokrates: Then, according to your definition, virtue would appear to be the power of attaining good?

^{78c}**Meno:** I entirely approve, Sokrates, of the manner in which you now view this matter.

Sokrates: Then let us see whether what you say is true from another point of view; for very likely you may be right: You affirm virtue to be the power of attaining goods?

Meno: Yes.

Sokrates: And the goods which mean are such as health and wealth and the possession of gold and silver, and having office and honor in the state—those are what you would call goods?⁵⁴

Meno: Yes, I should include all those.

Sokrates: Then, according to Meno, who is the hereditary friend of the great king, virtue is the power of getting silver and gold; and would you add that they must be gained piously, justly, or do you deem this to be of no consequence? And is any mode of acquisition, even if unjust and dishonest, equally to be deemed virtue?

Meno: Not virtue, Sokrates, but vice.

Sokrates: Then justice or temperance or holiness, or some other part of virtue, as would appear, must accompany the acquisition, and without them the mere acquisition of good will not be virtue.

Meno: Why, how can there be virtue without these?

Sokrates: And the non—acquisition of gold and silver in a dishonest manner for oneself or another, or in other words the want of them, may be equally virtue?

Meno: True.

Sokrates: Then the acquisition of such goods is no more virtue than the non-acquisition and ^{79a}[lack] of them, but whatever is accompanied by justice or honesty is virtue, and whatever is devoid of justice is vice.

Meno: It cannot be otherwise, in my judgment.

Sokrates: And were we not saying just now that justice, temperance, and the like, were each of them a part of virtue?

Meno: Yes.

Sokrates: And so, Meno, this is the way in which you mock me.

Meno: Why do you say that, Sokrates?

Sokrates: Why, because I asked you to deliver virtue into my hands whole and unbroken, and I gave you a pattern according to which you were to frame your answer; and you have forgotten

⁵⁴ See Apology 36b.

already, and tell me that virtue is the power of attaining good justly, or with justice; and justice you acknowledge to be a part of virtue.

Meno: Yes.

Sokrates: Then it follows from your own admissions, that virtue is doing what you do with a part of virtue; for justice and the like are said by you to be parts of virtue.

Meno: What of that?

Sokrates: What of that! Why, did not I ask you to tell me the nature of virtue as a whole? And you are very far from telling me this; but declare every action to be virtue which is done with a part of virtue; as though you had told me and I must already know the whole of virtue, and this too when frittered away into little pieces. And, therefore, my dear I fear that I must begin again and repeat the same question: What is virtue? For otherwise, I can only say, that every action done with a part of virtue is virtue; what else is the meaning of saying that every action done with justice is virtue? Ought I not to ask the question over again; for can anyone who does not know virtue know a part of virtue?

Meno: No; I do not say that he can.

^{79d}**Sokrates:** Do you remember how, in the example of [shape], we rejected any answer given in terms which were as yet unexplained or not admitted?

Meno: Yes, Sokrates; and we were quite right in doing so.

Sokrates: But then, my friend, do not suppose that we can explain to any one the nature of virtue as a whole through some unexplained portion of virtue, or anything at all in that fashion; we should only have to ask over again the old question, "What is virtue?" Am I not right?

Meno: I believe that you are.

Sokrates: Then begin again, and answer me: What, according to you and your friend Gorgias, is the definition of virtue?

Meno: Oh Sokrates, I used to be told, before I knew you, that you were always doubting ^{80a}yourself and making others doubt; and now you are casting your spells over me, and I am getting bewitched and enchanted, and am at my wits' end. And if I may venture to make a [joke at your expense], you seem to me both in your appearance and in your power over others to be like the flat torpedo fish,⁵⁵ who [stuns] those who come near him and touch him, as you have now [stunned] me, I think. For my [mind] and my tongue are really [confused], and I do not know how to answer you. And although I have [given a great many] speeches about virtue before now, and to many [people] (and I thought they were very good ones), at this moment I cannot even [articulate] what virtue *is*. And I think you are very wise in not [traveling] and

⁵⁵ Torpediniformes, or electric ray. A member of the ray family of fish that generates a bioelectric charge it uses to stun prey and elude predators.

going away from home, [because] if you behaved in other places as do in Athens, you would be cast into prison as a magician.

Sokrates: You are a rogue, Meno, and had all but caught me.

Meno: What do you mean, Sokrates?

^{80c}**Sokrates:** I can tell why you made a simile about me.

Meno: Why?

Sokrates: In order that I might make [one] about you. For I know that all pretty young gentlemen like to have pretty similes made about them—as well they may—but I shall not return the compliment. As [for] my being an [electric ray], if the [ray] is [stunned] as well as the cause of [confusion] in others, then indeed I am a [ray], but not otherwise; for I perplex others, not because I am clear, but because I am utterly perplexed myself. I [don't] know not what virtue is, and you seem to be in the same [situation], although perhaps you knew before you touched me. However, I have no objection to join with you in the enquiry.

Meno: How will you enquire, Sokrates, into [a subject] which you do not know? What will you put forth as the subject of enquiry? And if you find what you want, how will you ever know that this is the thing which you did not know?

Sokrates: I know what you mean, Meno; but just see what a tiresome dispute you are introducing. You argue that [someone] cannot enquire either about that which he knows, or about that which he does not know; for if he knows, he [doesn't] need to enquire; and if [does not have knowledge], he cannot [enquire]; [because] he does not know the very subject about which he is to enquire.

^{81a}**Meno:** Well, Sokrates, isn't my argument sound?

Sokrates: [No].

Meno: Why not?

Sokrates: I will tell you why: I have heard from wise men and women who spoke of things divine that—

Meno: What did they say?

Sokrates: They spoke of a glorious truth, as I conceive.

Meno: What was it? Who were they?

Sokrates: Some of them were priests and priestesses, who had studied how they might be able to [justify] their profession. There, have also been poets who spoke by inspiration, like Pindar,

and many others who were inspired. And they say—[listen carefully] and see whether their words are true—they say that the soul of man is immortal. At one time it has an end—which is termed dying—and at another time it is born; but it is never destroyed. And the moral is that a [person] [should always] live in perfect holiness.

"For in the ninth year Persephone sends the souls of those from whom she has received the penalty of ancient crime back again from beneath into the light of the sun above, and these are they who become noble kings and mighty men and great in wisdom and are called saintly heroes in after ages."⁵⁶

[Since] the soul [is] immortal, and [has] been born many times, and [has] seen all [the] things that exist—whether in this world or in [Hades]—[it knows] them all. And, it is no wonder that she should be able to [remember] all that she ever knew about virtue, and about everything else. For as all nature is [related], and the soul has learned all things; there is no difficulty in her eliciting, or as men say ‘learning’, out of a single **recollection** all the rest, if a man is strenuous and does not faint. For all enquiry and all learning is [really nothing] but *recollection*. And therefore we [should] not listen to this [combative] argument about the impossibility of enquiry: for it will make us [lazy]; [it sounds pleasant] only to [a weak person]. But the other saying will make us active and inquisitive. In that [light], I will gladly enquire with you into the nature of virtue.

Meno: Yes, Sokrates; but what do you mean by saying that we do not learn, and that what we call *learning is only a process of recollection*? Can you teach me how this is?

^{82a}**Sokrates:** I told you, Meno, just now that you were a rogue, and now you ask whether I can teach you, when *I am saying that there is no teaching, but only recollection*; and thus you imagine that you will involve me in a contradiction.

Meno: Indeed, Sokrates, I protest that I had no such intention. I only asked the question from habit; but if you can prove to me that what you say is true, I wish that you would.

Sokrates: It will be no easy matter, but I will try to please you to the utmost of my power. Suppose that you call one of your numerous attendants, that I may demonstrate on him.

Meno: Certainly. Come [here], [young man].

Sokrates: He is Greek, and speaks Greek, does he not?

Meno: Yes, indeed; he was born in the house.

Sokrates: Attend now to the questions which I ask him, and observe whether he learns of me or only remembers.

Meno: I will.

⁵⁶ Pindar, Fr. 133.

Sokrates: Tell me, boy, do you know that a figure like this is a square?

Boy: I do.

^{82c}**Sokrates:** And you know that a square figure has these four lines equal?

Boy: Certainly.

Sokrates: And these lines which I have drawn through the middle of the square are also equal?

Boy: Yes.

Sokrates: A square may be of any size?

Boy: Certainly.

Sokrates: And if one side of the figure [is] of two [units], and the other side be of two [units], how much will the [area] be? Let me explain: if in one direction the space was of two [units], and in other direction of one [unit], the [area] would be of two [units multiplied] once?

Boy: Yes.

Sokrates : But since this side is also of two [units], there are twice two [units]?

Boy: There are.

Sokrates: Then the square [has an area] of twice two [units]?

Boy: Yes.

Sokrates: And how many are twice two [units]? Count and tell me.

Boy: Four, Sokrates.

Sokrates: [Now imagine] another square twice as large as this, and having like this the lines equal?

Boy: Yes.

Sokrates: And of how many [units] will that be?

Boy: Eight.

Sokrates: And now try and tell me the length of the line which forms the side of that double[d] square: this is two [units]—what will that be?

Boy: Clearly, Sokrates, it will be double.

Sokrates: Do you observe, Meno, that I am not teaching the boy anything, but only asking him questions; and now he [believes] that he knows how long a line is necessary in order to produce a figure of eight square [units]; does he not?

Meno: Yes.

Sokrates: And does he really know?

Meno: Certainly not.

Sokrates: He only guesses that because the square is double, the line is double.

Meno: True.

Sokrates: Observe him while he recalls the steps in regular order.

^{83a}(*To the boy*) Tell me, [young man], do you assert that a double [area] comes from a double line? Remember that I am not speaking of an [rectangle], but of a figure equal every way, and twice the size of this [of this one]—that is to say of eight [units]; and I want to know whether you still say that a double square comes from double line?

Boy: Yes.

Sokrates: But does not this line become doubled if we add another such line here?

Boy: Certainly.

Sokrates: And four such lines will make a space containing eight [units]?

Boy: Yes.

Sokrates: Let us describe such a [shape]: would you not say that this is the figure of eight [units]?

Boy: Yes.

Sokrates: And are there not these four divisions in the figure, each of which is equal to the figure of four [units]?

Boy: True.

Sokrates: And is not that four times four?

Boy: Certainly.

Sokrates: And four times is not double?

Boy: No, indeed.

Sokrates: But how much?

Boy: Four times as much.

Sokrates: Therefore, the doubled line has given [us] an [area], not twice, but four times as [large].

Boy: True.

Sokrates: Four times four are sixteen—are they not?

Boy: Yes.

Sokrates: What line would give you a space of eight [units], as this gives one of sixteen [units]; do you see?

Boy: Yes.

Sokrates: And the space of four [units] is made from this half line?

Boy: Yes.

Sokrates: Good; and is not an [area] of eight [units] twice the size of this, and half the size of the other?

Boy: Certainly.

Sokrates: Such an [area], then, will be made out of a line greater than this one, and less than that one?

^{83d}**Boy:** Yes; I think so.

Sokrates: Very good; I like to hear you say what you think. And now tell me, is not this a line of two [units] and that of four?

Boy: Yes.

Sokrates: Then the line which forms the side of eight [units] ought to be more than this line of two, and less than the other of four?

Boy: It [should].

Sokrates: Try and see if you can tell me how much it will be.

Boy: Three [units].

Sokrates: Then if we add a half to this line of two, that will be the line of three. Here are two and there is one; and on the other side, here are two also and there is one: and that makes the figure of which you speak?

Boy: Yes.

Sokrates: But if there are three [units] this way and three [units] that way, the whole space will be three times three?

Boy: That is evident.

Sokrates: And how much are three times three?

Boy: Nine.

Sokrates: And how much is the double of four?

Boy: Eight.

Sokrates: Then the [square] of eight is not made [from a side] of three [units]?

Boy: No.

^{84a}**Sokrates:** But from what line? Tell me exactly; and if you would rather not reckon, try and show me the line.

Boy: Indeed, Sokrates, I do not know.

Sokrates: Do you see, Meno, what advances he has made in his power of recollection? He did not know at first—and he does not know now—[the length of] the side of a figure of eight [square units]: but [before] he *thought* that he knew, and answered confidently *as if* he knew, and had no difficulty; now he has a difficulty, and neither knows nor [believes] that he knows.

Meno: True.

Sokrates: Is he not better off in knowing his ignorance?

Meno: I think that he is.

Sokrates: If we have made him doubt, and given him the "ray's shock," have we done him any harm?

Meno: I think not.

Sokrates: We have certainly, as would seem, assisted him in some degree to the discovery of the truth; and now he will wish to remedy his ignorance. But [before] he would have been ready to tell all the world again and again that the double [area] should have a double side.

Meno: True.

Sokrates: But do you suppose that he would ever have enquired into or learned what he [believed] that he knew—though he was really ignorant—until he had fallen into perplexity⁵⁷ under the idea that he did not know, and had desired to know?

Meno: I think not, Sokrates.

Sokrates: Then he [improved by] the [ray's] touch?

Meno: I think so.

Sokrates: Mark now the [further] development. I shall *only ask* him, and *not teach*⁵⁸ him, and he shall share the enquiry with me: and you watch and see if you find me telling or explaining anything to him, instead of eliciting his opinion. Tell me, boy, is not this a square of four [units] which I have drawn?

Boy: Yes.

Sokrates: And now I add another square equal to the former one?

Boy: Yes.

Sokrates: And a third, which is equal to either of them?

Boy: Yes.

Sokrates: Suppose that we fill up the vacant corner?

Boy: Very good.

Sokrates: Here, then, there are four equal [areas]?

Boy: Yes.

⁵⁷ The Greek term is *aporia* (ἀπορία) which means “confusion” or “disorientation”. This is the stunned condition which Sokrates’ cross-examination causes in his interlocutors. This is the same state that Meno found himself in earlier when trying to answer Sokrates’ question about the nature of virtue.

⁵⁸ The Greek term *didasko* (διδάσκω) is derived from the root *didomi* (δίδωμι) which means “to give”. Hence, in Greek, the concept of teaching implies giving, not discovering.

Sokrates: And how many times larger is this [area] than this other?

Boy: Four times.

Sokrates: But it ought to have been twice only, as you will remember.

Boy: True.

^{85a}**Sokrates:** And does not this line, reaching from corner to corner, bisect each of these spaces?

Boy: Yes.

Sokrates: And are there not here four equal lines which contain this [area]?

Boy: There are.

Sokrates: Look and see how much this space is.

Boy: I do not understand.

Sokrates: Has not each interior line cut off half of the four [areas]?

Boy: Yes.

Sokrates: And how many spaces are there in this section?

Boy: Four.

Sokrates: And how many in this?

Boy: Two.

Sokrates: And four is how many times two?

Boy: Twice.

Sokrates: And this [area] is of how many [units]?

Boy: Eight [units].

Sokrates: And from what line do you get this figure?

Boy: From this [one].

Sokrates: That is, from the line which extends from corner to corner of the [square] of four

[units]?

Boy: Yes.

Sokrates: And that is the line which [educated people] call the diagonal. And if this is the proper name, then you, Meno's slave, are prepared to affirm that the double [area] is the square of the diagonal?

Boy: Certainly, Sokrates.

Sokrates: What do you say of him, Meno? Were not all these answers given out of his own head?

^{85c}**Meno:** Yes, they were all his own.

Sokrates: And yet, as we were just now saying, he did not know?

Meno: True.

Sokrates: But still he [possessed] those notions of his—had he not?

Meno: Yes.

Sokrates: Then [a person] who does not [have knowledge] may still have true [beliefs] of that which he does not know?

Meno: He has.

Sokrates: And at present these [beliefs] have just been stirred up in him, as in a dream; but if he were frequently asked the same questions, in different forms, he would know as well as any one at last?

Meno: I dare say.

Sokrates: Without anyone teaching him he will *recover* his knowledge for himself, if he is only asked questions?

Meno: Yes.

Sokrates: And this spontaneous recovery of knowledge is recollection?

Meno: True.

Sokrates: And this knowledge which he now has, must he not either have acquired [it] or always possessed [it]?

Meno: Yes.

Sokrates: But if he always possessed this knowledge he would always have known; or if he has acquired the knowledge he could not have acquired it in this life, unless he [had] been taught geometry; for he may be made to do the same with all geometry and every other branch of knowledge. Now, has any one ever taught him all this? You must know about him, if, as you say, he was born and bred in your house.

Meno: And I am certain that no one ever [taught] him.

Sokrates: And yet he has the knowledge?

Meno: The fact, Sokrates, is undeniable.

^{86a}**Sokrates:** But if he did not acquire the knowledge in this life, then he must have had and learned it at some other time?

Meno: Clearly, he must.

Sokrates: Which must have been the time when he was not a man?

Meno: Yes.

Sokrates: And if there have always been true [beliefs] in him, both at the time when he was and was not a man, which only need to be *awakened* into knowledge by putting questions to him, his soul must have always possessed this knowledge, for he always either was or was not a man?

Meno: Obviously.

Sokrates: And if the truth of all things always existed in the soul, then the soul is immortal. [Therefore,] be of good cheer, and try to recollect what *you* do not know, or rather what you do not remember.

Meno: I feel, somehow, that I like what you are saying.

Sokrates: And I, Meno, like what I am saying. Some things I have said of which I am not altogether confident. But that we shall be better and braver and less helpless if we think that we ought to enquire, than we [would] have been if we indulged in the idle fancy that there was no knowing and no use in seeking to know what we do not know; that is a theme upon which I am ready to fight, in word and deed, [with all] my power...



Meditations on First Philosophy: In Which the Existence of God and the Distinction Between Mind and Body are Demonstrated (in part)

by: Rene Descartes (1647)

translated by: Elizabeth S. Haldane⁵⁹

Notes, corrections and footnotes by Barry F. Vaughan

Meditation 1

Of the things which may be brought within the sphere of the doubtful.

It is now some years since I detected *how many were the false beliefs* that I had from my earliest youth admitted as true, and how doubtful was everything I had since constructed on this basis; and from that time I was convinced that I must once for all seriously undertake to *rid myself* of all the opinions which I had formerly accepted, and *commence to build anew from the foundation*, if I wanted to establish any firm and permanent structure in the sciences. But as this enterprise appeared to be a very great one, I waited until I had attained an age so mature that I could not hope that at any later date I should be better fitted to execute my design. This reason caused me to delay so long that I should feel that I was doing wrong were I to occupy in deliberation the time that yet remains to me for action. To-day, then, since very opportunely for the plan I have in view I have delivered my mind from every care [and am happily agitated by no passions] and since I have procured for myself an assured leisure in a peaceable retirement,⁶⁰ I shall at last seriously and freely address myself to the *general upheaval of all my former opinions*.

⁵⁹ From Internet Sacred Text Archive, (www.sacred-texts.com); Copyright: 1996, Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. This file is of the 1911 edition of *The Philosophical Works of Descartes* (Cambridge University Press), translated by Elizabeth S. Haldane. Haldane uses brackets to indicate additions or corrections Descartes made in later versions of the text. I have added explanatory footnotes. This text is intended for academic or personal use and may not be sold or used for profit.

⁶⁰ Descartes' "retirement" would be considered something of an exaggeration by today's standards. Descartes was living in self-imposed exile in the Protestant region of the Dutch Republic (what we would call the Netherlands) and had no formal occupation from which to retire. He had served as an officer during a few military campaigns in the 30 Years War, but had long been living the life of a gentleman, on his personal inheritance. He was, however, something of a recluse and he often moved and kept his address a secret because he didn't like to be disturbed. In that sense, his life was somewhat "peaceable".

Now for this object it is not necessary that I should show that all of these are false—I shall perhaps never arrive at this end. But inasmuch as reason already persuades me that I ought no less carefully to withhold my assent from matters which are not entirely certain and indubitable than from those which appear to me manifestly to be false, if I am able to find in each one some reason to doubt, this will suffice to justify my rejecting the whole. And for that end it will not be requisite that I should examine each in particular, which would be an endless undertaking; for owing to the fact that the destruction of the foundations of necessity brings with it the downfall of the rest of the edifice, I shall only in the first place attack those principles upon which all my former opinions rested.

All that up to the present time I have accepted as most true and certain I have learned *either from the senses or through the senses*; but it is sometimes proved to me that these senses are deceptive, and it is wiser not to trust entirely to anything by which we have once been deceived.

But it may be that although the senses sometimes deceive us concerning things which are hardly perceptible, or very far away, there are yet many others to be met with as to which we cannot reasonably have any doubt, although we recognize them by their means. For example, there is the fact that I am here, seated by the fire, attired in a dressing gown, having this paper in my hands and other similar matters. And how could I deny that these hands and this body are mine, *were it not perhaps that I compare myself to certain persons*, devoid of sense, whose cerebella are so troubled and clouded by the violent vapors of black bile,⁶¹ that they constantly assure us that they think they are kings when they are really quite poor, or that they are clothed in purple when they are really without covering, or who imagine that they have an earthenware head or are nothing but pumpkins or are made of glass. But *they are mad*, and I should not be any the less insane were I to follow examples so extravagant.

At the same time, I must remember that I am a man, and that consequently *I am in the habit of sleeping*, and in my dreams representing to myself the same things or sometimes even less probable things, than do those who are insane in their waking moments. How often has it happened to me that in the night I dreamt that I found myself in this particular place, that I was dressed and seated near the fire, whilst in reality I was lying undressed in bed! At this moment it does indeed *seem* to me that it is with eyes awake that I am looking at this paper; that this head which I move is not asleep, that it is deliberately and of set purpose that I extend my hand and perceive it; what happens in sleep does not appear so clear nor so distinct as does all this. *But in thinking over this I remind myself that on many occasions I have in sleep been deceived by similar illusions, and in dwelling carefully on this reflection I see so manifestly that there are no certain indications by which we may clearly distinguish wakefulness from sleep that I am lost in astonishment.* And my astonishment is such that it is almost capable of persuading me that I now dream.

Now *let us assume that we are asleep* and that all these particulars, e.g. that we open our eyes, shake our head, extend our hands, and so on, are but false delusions; and let us reflect that

⁶¹ From the Greek – μελαγχολία (*melancholia*) meaning “black bile”. Derived from Humorism; the proto-medical theory of disease that held health and disease were caused by a balance/imbalance between the four “humors” or fluids: yellow bile, black bile, phlegm, and blood. Melancholy, or what is known today as depression, was supposed to be caused by an excess of black bile.

possibly neither our hands nor our whole body are such as they appear to us to be. At the same time we must at least confess that the things which are represented to us in sleep are like painted representations which can only have been formed as the counterparts of something real and true, and that in this way those general things at least, i.e. eyes, a head, hands, and a whole body, are not imaginary things, but things really existent. For, as a matter of fact, painters, even when they study with the greatest skill to represent sirens and satyrs by forms the most strange and extraordinary, cannot give them natures which are entirely new, but merely make a certain medley of the members of different animals; or if their imagination is extravagant enough to invent something so novel that nothing similar has ever before been seen, and that then their work represents a thing purely fictitious and absolutely false, it is certain all the same that the colors of which this is composed are necessarily real. And for the same reason, although these general things, to wit, [a body], eyes, a head, hands, and such like, may be imaginary, *we are bound at the same time to confess that there are at least some other objects yet more simple and more universal, which are real and true*; and of these just in the same way as with certain real colors, all these images of things which dwell in our thoughts, whether true and real or false and fantastic, are formed.

To such a class of things pertains corporeal nature in general, and its *extension*, the *figure* of extended things, their *quantity* or *magnitude* and *number*, as also the *place* in which they are, the *time* which measures their duration, and so on.

That is possibly why our reasoning is not unjust when we conclude from this that Physics, Astronomy, Medicine and all other sciences which have as their end the consideration of composite things, are very dubious and uncertain; but that Arithmetic, Geometry and other sciences of that kind which only treat of things that are very simple and very general, without taking great trouble to ascertain whether they are actually existent or not, contain some measure of certainty and an element of the indubitable. For whether I am awake or asleep, two and three together always form five, and the square can never have more than four sides, and it does not seem possible that truths so clear and apparent can be suspected of any falsity [or uncertainty].

Nevertheless, I have long had fixed in my mind the belief that an all-powerful God existed by whom I have been created such as I am. *But how do I know that He has not brought it to pass that there is no earth, no heaven, no extended body, no magnitude, no place, and that nevertheless [I possess the perceptions of all these things and that] they seem to me to exist just exactly as I now see them?* And, besides, as I sometimes imagine that others deceive themselves in the things which they think they know best, how do I know that I am not deceived every time that I add two and three, or count the sides of a square, or judge of things yet simpler, if anything simpler can be imagined? But possibly God has not desired that I should be thus deceived, for He is said to be supremely good. If, however, it is contrary to His goodness to have made me such that I constantly deceive myself, it would also appear to be contrary to His goodness to permit me to be sometimes deceived, and nevertheless I cannot doubt that He does permit this.

There may indeed be those who would prefer to deny the existence of a God so powerful, rather than believe that all other things are uncertain. But let us not oppose them for the present, and grant that all that is here said of a God is a fable; nevertheless in whatever way they suppose that I have arrived at the state of being that I have reached whether they attribute it to fate or to

accident, or make out that it is by a continual succession of antecedents, or by some other method since to err and deceive oneself is a defect, it is clear that the greater will be the probability of my being so imperfect as to deceive myself ever, as is the Author to whom they assign my origin the less powerful. To these reasons I have certainly nothing to reply, but at the end I feel constrained to confess that there is nothing in all that I formerly believed to be true, of which I cannot in some measure doubt, and that not merely through want of thought or through levity, but for reasons which are very powerful and maturely considered; so that henceforth I ought not the less carefully to refrain from giving credence to these opinions than to that which is manifestly false, if I desire to arrive at any certainty [in the sciences].

But it is not sufficient to have made these remarks, we must also be careful to keep them in mind. For these ancient and commonly held opinions still revert frequently to my mind, long and familiar custom having given them the right to occupy my mind against my inclination and rendered them almost masters of my belief; nor will I ever lose the habit of deferring to them or of placing my confidence in them, so long as I consider them as they really are, i.e. opinions in some measure doubtful, as I have just shown, and at the same time highly probable, so that there is much more reason to believe in than to deny them. That is why I consider that I shall not be acting amiss, if, taking of set purpose a contrary belief, I allow myself to be deceived, and for a certain time pretend that all these opinions are entirely false and imaginary, until at last, having thus balanced my former prejudices with my latter—so that they cannot divert my opinions more to one side than to the other—my judgment will no longer be dominated by bad usage or turned away from the right knowledge of the truth. For I am assured that there can be neither peril nor error in this course, and that I cannot at present yield too much to distrust, since I am not considering the question of action, but only of knowledge.

*I shall then suppose, **not** that God who is supremely good and the fountain of truth, but **some evil genius** not less powerful than deceitful, has employed his whole energies in deceiving me; I shall consider that the heavens, the earth, colors, figures, sound, and all other external things are [nothing] but the illusions and dreams of which this genius has availed himself in order to lay traps for my credulity; I shall consider myself as having no hands, no eyes, no flesh, no blood, nor any senses, yet falsely believing myself to possess all these things; I shall remain obstinately attached to this idea, and if by this means it is not in my power to arrive at the knowledge of any truth, I may at least do what is in my power [i.e. *suspend my judgment*], and with firm purpose avoid giving credence to any false thing, or being imposed upon by this arch deceiver, however powerful and deceptive he may be. But this task is a laborious one, and insensibly a certain lassitude leads me into the course of my ordinary life. And just as a captive who in sleep enjoys an imaginary liberty, when he begins to suspect that his liberty is but a dream, fears to awaken, and conspires with these agreeable illusions that the deception may be prolonged, so insensibly of my own accord I fall back into my former opinions, and I dread awakening from this slumber, lest the laborious wakefulness which would follow the tranquility of this repose should have to be spent not in daylight, but in the excessive darkness of the difficulties which have just been discussed.*

Meditation 2

Of the Nature of the Human Mind; and that it is more easily known than the Body.

The Meditation of yesterday filled my mind with so many doubts that it is no longer in my power to forget them. And yet I do not see in what manner I can resolve them; and, just as if I had all of a sudden fallen into very deep water, I am so disconcerted that I can neither make certain of setting my feet on the bottom, nor can I swim and so support myself on the surface. *I shall nevertheless make an effort and follow anew the same path as that on which I yesterday entered, i.e. I shall proceed by setting aside all that in which the least doubt could be supposed to exist, just as if I had discovered that it was absolutely false; and I shall ever follow in this road until I have met with something which is certain, or at least, if I can do nothing else, until I have learned for certain that there is nothing in the world that is certain.* Archimedes, in order that he might draw the terrestrial globe out of its place, and transport it elsewhere, demanded only that one point should be fixed and immovable; in the same way I shall have the right to conceive high hopes if I am happy enough to discover one thing only which is certain and indubitable.

I suppose, then, that all the things that I *see* are false; I persuade myself that nothing has ever existed of all that my fallacious *memory* represents to me. I consider that I possess no senses; I imagine that body, figure, extension, movement and place are but the fictions of my mind. What, then, can be esteemed as true? Perhaps nothing at all, unless that there is nothing in the world that is certain.

But how can I know there is not something different from those things that I have just considered, of which one cannot have the slightest doubt? Is there not some god, or some other being by whatever name we call it (i.e., 'Evil Genius'), who puts these reflections into my mind? That is not necessary, for *is it not possible that I am capable of producing them myself?* I myself, am I not at least something? But I have already denied that I had senses and body. Yet I hesitate, for what follows from that? *Am I so dependent on body and senses that I cannot exist without these?* But I was persuaded that there was nothing in all the world, that there was no heaven, no earth, that there were no minds, nor any bodies: was I not then likewise persuaded that I did not exist? *Not at all; of a surety I myself did exist since I persuaded myself of something [or merely because I thought of something].* But there is some deceiver or other, very powerful and very cunning, whoever employs his ingenuity in deceiving me. *Then without doubt I exist also* if he deceives me, and let him deceive me as much as he will, **he can never cause me to be nothing so long as I think that I am something.** So that after having reflected well and carefully examined all things, we must come to the definite conclusion that this proposition: 'I am', 'I exist', is *necessarily true* each time that I pronounce it, or that I mentally conceive it.

But I do not yet know clearly enough *what* I am; I who am certain *that* I am. And hence I must be careful to see that I do not imprudently take some other object in place of myself, and thus that I do not go astray in respect of this knowledge that I hold to be the most certain and most evident of all that I have formerly learned. That is why *I shall now consider anew what I believed myself to be before I embarked upon these last reflections;* and of my former opinions I

shall withdraw all that might even in a small degree be invalidated by the reasons which I have just brought forward, in order that there may be nothing at all left beyond what is absolutely certain and indubitable.

What then did I formerly believe myself to be? Undoubtedly, I believed myself to be a man. But what is a man? Shall I say a reasonable animal?⁶² Certainly not; for then I should have to inquire what an animal is, and what is reasonable; and thus from a single question I should insensibly fall into an infinitude of others more difficult; and I should not wish to waste the little time and leisure remaining to me in trying to unravel subtleties like these. But I shall rather stop here to consider the thoughts which of themselves spring up in my mind, and which were not inspired by anything beyond my own nature alone when I applied myself to the consideration of my being. In the first place, then, I considered myself as having a face, hands, arms, and all that system of members composed on bones and flesh as seen in a corpse which I designated by the name of 'body'. In addition to this I considered that I was nourished, that I walked, that I felt, and that I thought, and I referred all these actions to the 'soul': but I did not stop to consider *what the soul was*, or if I did stop, I imagined that it was something extremely rare and subtle like a wind, a flame, or an *ether*, which was spread throughout my grosser parts. As to *body* I had no manner of doubt about its nature, but thought I had a very clear knowledge of it; and if I had desired to explain it according to the notions that I had then formed of it, I should have described it thus: by 'body' I understand all that which can be *defined by a certain figure*: something which can be *confined in a certain place*, and which can *fill a given space* in such a way that every other body will be excluded from it; *which can be perceived* either by touch, or by sight, or by hearing, or by taste, or by smell: *which can be moved* in many ways not, in truth, by itself, but by something which is foreign to it, by which it is touched [and from which it receives impressions]: for to have the power of self-movement, as also of feeling or of thinking, I did not consider to appertain to the nature of body: on the contrary, I was rather astonished to find that faculties similar to them existed in some bodies.

But what am *I*, now that I suppose that there is a certain genius which is extremely powerful, and, if I may say so, malicious, who employs all his powers in deceiving me? Can I affirm that I possess the least of all those things which I have just said pertain to the nature of body? I pause to consider, I revolve all these things in my mind, and I find none of which I can say that it pertains to *me*. It would be tedious to stop to enumerate them. Let us pass to the attributes of soul and see if there is any one which is in me? What of nutrition or walking [the first mentioned]? But *if it is so that I have no body it is also true that I can neither walk nor take nourishment*. Another attribute is *sensation*. *But one cannot feel without body*, and besides I have thought I perceived many things during sleep that I recognized in my waking moments as not having been experienced at all. What of *thinking*? ***I find here that thought is an attribute that belongs to me***; it alone cannot be separated from me. I am, I exist, that is certain. But how often? *Just when I think*; for it might possibly be the case ***if I ceased entirely to think, that I should likewise cease altogether to exist***. I do not now admit anything which is not necessarily true: to speak accurately *I am not more than a thing which thinks*, that is to say a *mind* or a *soul*, or an *understanding*, or a *reason*, which are terms whose significance was formerly unknown to

⁶² This is a reference to Aristotle who defined humans as the rational, social, animal. Nicomachean Ethics I, 13. See also De Anima III, 11 where he also emphasizes the ability to imagine as a unique quality that makes humans distinct from other animals.

me. *I am, however, a real thing and really exist*; but what thing? I have answered: ***a thing which thinks***.

And what more? I shall exercise my imagination—in order to see if I am not something more. I am not a collection of members which we call the human body: I am not a subtle air distributed through these members, I am not a wind, a fire, a vapor, a breath, nor anything at all which I can imagine or conceive; because I have assumed that all these were nothing. Without changing that supposition, I find that I only leave myself certain of the fact that I am somewhat. But perhaps it is true that these same things which I supposed were non-existent because they are unknown to me, are really not different from the self which I know. I am not sure about this, I shall not dispute about it now; I can only give judgment on things that are known to me. I know that I exist, and I inquire what I am, I whom I know to exist. But it is very certain that the knowledge of my existence taken in its precise significance does not depend on things whose existence is not yet known to me; consequently, it does not depend on those which I can feign in imagination. And indeed, the very term ‘feign’ in imagination proves to me my error, for I really do this if I image myself a something, since to imagine is nothing else than to contemplate the figure or image of a corporeal thing. But I already know for certain that I am, and that it may be that all these images, and, speaking generally, all things that relate to the nature of body are nothing but dreams [and chimeras]. For this reason I see clearly that I have as little reason to say, "I shall stimulate my imagination in order to know more distinctly what I am," than if I were to say, "I am now awake, and I perceive somewhat that is real and true: but because I do not yet perceive it distinctly enough, I shall go to sleep of express purpose, so that my dreams may represent the perception with greatest truth and evidence." And, thus, I know for certain that nothing of all that I can understand by means of my imagination belongs to this knowledge which I have of myself, and that it is necessary to recall the mind from this mode of thought with the utmost diligence in order that it may be able to know its own nature with perfect distinctness.

But what then am I? A thing which thinks. What is a thing which thinks? It is a thing which doubts, understands, [conceives], affirms, denies, wills, refuses, which also imagines and feels.

Certainly, it is no small matter if all these things pertain to my nature. But why should they not so pertain? Am I not that being who now doubts nearly everything, who nevertheless understands certain things, who affirms that one only is true, who denies all the others, who desires to know more, is averse from being deceived, who imagines many things, sometimes indeed despite his will, and who perceives many likewise, as by the intervention of the bodily organs? Is there nothing in all this which is as true as it is certain that I exist, even though I should always sleep and though he who has given me being employed all his ingenuity in deceiving me? Is there likewise any one of these attributes which can be distinguished from my thought, or which might be said to be separated from myself? For it is so evident of itself that it is I who doubts, who understands, and who desires, that there is no reason here to add anything to explain it. And I have certainly the power of imagining likewise; for although it may happen (as I formerly supposed) that none of the things which I imagine are true, nevertheless this power of imagining does not cease to be really in use, and it forms part of my thought. Finally, I am the same who feels, that is to say, who perceives certain things, as by the organs of sense, since it truth I see light, I hear noise, I feel heat. But it will be said that these phenomena are false and that I am dreaming. Let it be so; still it is at least quite certain that it seems to me that I see light,

that I hear noise and that I feel heat. That cannot be false; properly speaking it is what is in me called feeling; 11 and used in this precise sense that is no other thing than thinking.

From this time I begin to know what I am with a little more clearness and distinction than before; but nevertheless it still seems to me, and I cannot prevent myself from thinking, that corporeal things, whose images are framed by thought, which are tested by the senses, are much more distinctly known than that obscure part of me which does not come under the imagination. Although really it is very strange to say that I know and understand more distinctly these things whose existence seems to me dubious, which are unknown to me, and which do not belong to me, than others of the truth of which I am convinced, which are known to me and which pertain to my real nature, in a word, than myself. But I see clearly how the case stands: my mind loves to wander, and cannot yet suffer itself to be retained within the just limits of truth. Very good, let us once more give it the freest rein, so that, when afterwards we seize the proper occasion for pulling up, it may the more easily be regulated and controlled.

Let us begin by considering the commonest matters, those which we believe to be the most distinctly comprehended, to wit, the bodies which we touch and see; not indeed bodies in general, for these general ideas are usually a little more confused, but let us consider one body in particular. Let us take, for example, this piece of wax: it has been taken quite freshly from the hive, and it has not yet lost the sweetness of the honey which it contains; it still retains somewhat of the odor of the flowers from which it has been culled; its color, its figure, its size are apparent; it is hard, cold, easily handled, and if you strike it with the finger, it will emit a sound. Finally, all the things which are requisite to cause us distinctly to recognize a body, are met with in it. But notice that while I speak and approach the fire what remained of the taste is exhaled, the smell evaporates, the color alters, the figure is destroyed, the size increases, it becomes liquid, it heats, scarcely can one handle it, and when one strikes it, now sound is emitted. Does the same wax remain after this change? We must confess that it remains; none would judge otherwise. What then did I know so distinctly in this piece of wax? It could certainly be nothing of all that the senses brought to my notice, since all these things which fall under taste, smell, sight, touch, and hearing, are found to be changed, and yet the same wax remains.

Perhaps it was what I now think, viz. that this wax was not that sweetness of honey, nor that agreeable scent of flowers, nor that particular whiteness, nor that figure, nor that sound, but simply a body which a little while before appeared to me as perceptible under these forms, and which is now perceptible under others. But what, precisely, is it that I imagine when I form such conceptions? Let us attentively consider this, and, abstracting from all that does not belong to the wax, let us see what remains. Certainly nothing remains excepting a certain extended thing which is flexible and movable. But what is the meaning of flexible and movable? Is it not that I imagine that this piece of wax being round is capable of becoming square and of passing from a square to a triangular figure? No, certainly it is not that, since I imagine it admits of an infinitude of similar changes, and I nevertheless do not know how to compass the infinitude by my imagination, and consequently this conception which I have of the wax is not brought about by the faculty of imagination. What now is this extension? Is it not also unknown? For it becomes greater when the wax is melted, greater when it is boiled, and greater still when the heat increases; and I should not conceive [clearly] according to truth what wax is, if I did not think that even this piece that we are considering is capable of receiving more variations in extension

than I have ever imagined. We must then grant that I could not even understand through the imagination what this piece of wax is, and that it is my mind alone which perceives it. I say this piece of wax in particular, for as to wax in general it is yet clearer. But what is this piece of wax which cannot be understood excepting by the [understanding or] mind? It is certainly the same that I see, touch, imagine, and finally it is the same which I have always believed it to be from the beginning. But what must particularly be observed is that its perception is neither an act of vision, nor of touch, nor of imagination, and has never been such although it may have appeared formerly to be so, but only an intuition of the mind, which may be imperfect and confused as it was formerly, or clear and distinct as it is at present, according as my attention is more or less directed to the elements which are found in it, and of which it is composed.

Yet in the meantime I am greatly astonished when I consider [the great feebleness of mind] and its proneness to fall [insensibly] into error; for although without giving expression to my thought I consider all this in my own mind, words often impede me and I am almost deceived by the terms of ordinary language. For we say that we see the same wax, if it is present, and not that we simply judge that it is the same from its having the same color and figure. From this I should conclude that I knew the wax by means of vision and not simply by the intuition of the mind; unless by chance I remember that, when looking from a window and saying I see men who pass in the street, I really do not see them, but infer that what I see is men, just as I say that I see wax. And yet what do I see from the window but hats and coats which may cover automatic machines? Yet I judge these to be men. And similarly, solely by the faculty of judgment which rests in my mind, I comprehend that which I believed I saw with my eyes.

A man who makes it his aim to raise his knowledge above the common should be ashamed to derive the occasion for doubting from the forms of speech invented by the vulgar; I prefer to pass on and consider whether I had a more evident and perfect conception of what the wax was when I first perceived it, and when I believed I knew it by means of the external senses or at least by the common sense as it is called, that is to say by the imaginative faculty, or whether my present conception is clearer now that I have most carefully examined what it is, and in what way it can be known. It would certainly be absurd to doubt as to this. For what was there in this first perception which was distinct? What was there which might not as well have been perceived by any of the animals? But when I distinguish the wax from its external forms, and when, just as if I had taken from it its vestments, I consider it quite naked, it is certain that although some error may still be found in my judgment, I can nevertheless not perceive it thus without a human mind.

But finally, what shall I say of this mind, that is, of myself, for up to this point I do not admit in myself anything but mind? What then, I who seem to perceive this piece of wax so distinctly, do I not know myself, not only with much more truth and certainty, but also with much more distinctness and clearness? For if I judge that the wax is or exists from the fact that I see it, it certainly follows much more clearly that I am or that I exist myself from the fact that I see it. For it may be that what I see is not really wax, it may also be that I do not possess eyes with which to see anything; but it cannot be that when I see, or (for I no longer take account of the distinction) when I think I see, that I myself who think am {nothing}. So if I judge that the wax exists from the fact that I touch it, the same thing will follow, to wit, that I am; and if I judge that my imagination, or some other cause, whatever it is, persuades me that the wax exists, I shall still conclude the same. And what I have here remarked of wax may be applied to all other things

which are external to me [and which are met with outside of me]. And further, if the [notion or] perception of wax has seemed to me clearer and more distinct, not only after the sight or the touch, but also after many other causes have rendered it quite manifest to me, with how much more [evidence] and distinctness must it be said that I now know myself, since all the reasons which contribute to the knowledge of wax, or any other body whatever, are yet better proofs of the nature of my mind! And there are so many other things in the mind itself which may contribute to the elucidation of its nature, that those which depend on body such as these just mentioned, hardly merit being taken into account.

But finally here I am, having insensibly reverted to the point I desired, for, since it is now manifest to me that even bodies are not properly speaking known by the senses or by the faculty of imagination, but by the understanding only, and since they are not known from the fact that they are seen or touched, but only because they are understood, I see clearly that there is nothing which is easier for me to know than my mind. But because it is difficult to rid oneself so promptly of an opinion to which one was accustomed for so long, it will be well that I should halt a little at this point, so that by the length of my meditation I may more deeply imprint on my memory this new knowledge.

Meditation 3

Of God: that He exists.

I shall now close my eyes, I shall stop my ears, I shall call away all my senses, I shall efface even from my thoughts all the images of corporeal things, or at least (for that is hardly possible) I shall esteem them as vain and false; and thus holding converse only with myself and considering my own nature, I shall try little by little to reach a better knowledge of and a more familiar acquaintanceship with myself. I am a thing that thinks, that is to say, that doubts, affirms, denies, that knows a few things, that is ignorant of many [that loves, that hates], that wills, that desires, that also imagines and perceives; for as I remarked before, although the things which I perceive and imagine are perhaps nothing at all apart from me and in themselves, I am nevertheless assured that these modes of thought that I call perceptions and imaginations, inasmuch only as they are modes of thought, certainly reside [and are met with] in me.

And in the little that I have just said, I think I have summed up all that I really know, or at least all that hitherto I was aware that I knew. In order to try to extend my knowledge further, I shall now look around more carefully and see whether I cannot still discover in myself some other things which I have not hitherto perceived. I am certain that I am a thing which thinks; but do I not then likewise know what is requisite to render me certain of a truth? Certainly in this first knowledge there is nothing that assures me of its truth, excepting the clear and distinct perception of that which I state, which would not indeed suffice to assure me that what I say is true, if it could ever happen that a thing which I conceived so clearly and distinctly could be false; and accordingly it seems to me that already I can establish as a general rule that all things which I perceive very clearly and very distinctly are true.

At the same time, I have before received and admitted many things to be very certain and manifest, which yet I afterwards recognized as being dubious. What then were these things? They were the earth, sky, stars and all other objects which I apprehended by means of the senses. But what did I clearly [and distinctly] perceive in them? Nothing more than that the ideas or thoughts of these things were presented to my mind. And not even now do I deny that these ideas are met with in me. But there was yet another thing which I affirmed, and which, owing to the habit which I had formed of believing it, I thought I perceived very clearly, although in truth I did not perceive it at all, to wit, that there were objects outside of me from which these ideas proceeded, and to which they were entirely similar. And it was in this that I erred, or, if perchance my judgment was correct, this was not due to any knowledge arising from my perception.

But when I took anything very simple and easy in the sphere of arithmetic or geometry into consideration, e.g. that two and three together made five, and other things of the sort, were not these present to my mind so clearly as to enable me to affirm that they were true? Certainly if I judged that since such matters could be doubted, this would not have been so for any other reason than that it came into my mind that perhaps a God might have endowed me with such a nature that I may have been deceived even concerning things which seemed to me most manifest. But every time that this preconceived opinion of the sovereign power of a God presents itself to my thought, I am constrained to confess that it is easy to Him, if He wishes it, to cause me to err, even in matters in which I believe myself to have the best evidence. And, on the other hand, always when I direct my attention to things which I believe myself to perceive very clearly, I am so persuaded of their truth that I let myself break out into words such as these: let who will deceive me, He can never cause me to be nothing while I think that I am, or someday cause it to be true to say that I have never been, it being true now to say that I am, or that two and three make more or less than five, or any such thing in which I see a manifest contradiction. And, certainly, since I have no reason to believe that there is a God who is a deceiver, and as I have not yet satisfied myself that there is a God at all, the reason for doubt which depends on this opinion alone is very slight, and so to speak metaphysical. But in order to be able altogether to remove it, I must inquire whether there is a God as soon as the occasion presents itself; and if I find that there is a God, I must also inquire whether He may be a deceiver; for without a knowledge of these two truths I do not see that I can ever be certain of anything.

And in order that I may have an opportunity of inquiring into this in an orderly way [without interrupting the order of meditation which I have proposed to myself, and which is little by little to pass from the notions which I find first of all in my mind to those which I shall later on discover in it] it is requisite that I should here divide my thoughts into certain kinds, and that I should consider in which of these kinds there is, properly speaking, truth or error to be found. Of my thoughts some are, so to speak, images of the things, and to these alone is the title "idea" properly applied; examples are my thought of a man or of a chimera, of heaven, of an angel, or [even] of God. But other thoughts possess other forms as well. For example in willing, fearing, approving, denying, though I always perceive something as the subject of the action of my mind, yet by this action I always add something else to the idea which I have of that thing; and of the thoughts of this kind some are called volitions or affections, and others judgments.

Now as to what concerns ideas, if we consider them only in themselves and do not relate them to anything else beyond themselves, they cannot properly speaking be false; for whether I imagine a goat or a chimera, it is not less true that I imagine the one than the other. We must not fear likewise that falsity can enter into will and into affections, for although I may desire evil things, or even things that never existed, it is not the less true that I desire them. Thus, there remains no more than the judgments which we make, in which I must take the greatest care not to deceive myself. But the principal error and the commonest which we may meet with in them, consists in my judging that the ideas which are in me are similar or conformable to the things which are outside me; for without doubt if I considered the ideas only as certain modes of my thoughts, without trying to relate them to anything beyond, they could scarcely give me material for error.

But among these ideas, some appear to me to be innate, some adventitious, and others to be formed [or invented] by myself; for, as I have the power of understanding what is called a thing, or a truth, or a thought, it appears to me that I hold this power from no other source than my own nature. But if I now hear some sound, if I see the sun, or feel heat, I have hitherto judged that these sensations proceeded from certain things that exist outside of me; and finally it appears to me that sirens, hippogryphs,⁶³ and the like, are formed out of my own mind. But again, I may possibly persuade myself that all these ideas are of the nature of those which I term adventitious, or else that they are all innate, or all fictitious: for I have not yet clearly discovered their true origin.

And my principal task in this place is to consider, in respect to those ideas which appear to me to proceed from certain objects that are outside me, what are the reasons which cause me to think them similar to these objects. It seems indeed in the first place that I am taught this lesson by nature; and, secondly, I experience in myself that these ideas do not depend on my will nor therefore on myself—for they often present themselves to my mind in spite of my will. Just now, for instance, whether I will or whether I do not will, I feel heat, and thus I persuade myself that this feeling, or at least this idea of heat, is produced in me by something which is different from me, i.e. by the heat of the fire near which I sit. And nothing seems to me more obvious than to judge that this object imprints its likeness rather than anything else upon me.

Now I must discover whether these proofs are sufficiently strong and convincing. When I say that I am so instructed by nature, I merely mean a certain spontaneous inclination which impels me to believe in this connection, and not a natural light which makes me recognize that it is true. But these two things are very different; for I cannot doubt that which the natural light causes me to believe to be true, as, for example, it has shown me that I am from the fact that I doubt, or other facts of the same kind. And I possess no other faculty whereby to distinguish truth from falsehood, which can teach me that what this light shows me to be true is not really true, and no other faculty that is equally trustworthy. But as far as [apparently] natural impulses are concerned, I have frequently remarked, when I had to make active choice between virtue and vice, that they often enough led me to the part that was worse; and this is why I do not see any reason for following them in what regards truth and error.

⁶³ “Hippogryphs” are a mythical mash-up of a horse and a griffin. They are composed of numerous animal parts. Descartes’ point is that once we have ideas of sensible objects we can manipulate them to form new ideas that we could not have gained directly through the *a posteriori* or *a priori*, they are purely fictional.

And as to the other reason, which is that these ideas must proceed from objects outside me, since they do not depend on my will, I do not find it any the more convincing. For just as these impulses of which I have spoken are found in me, notwithstanding that they do not always concur with my will, so perhaps there is in me some faculty fitted to produce these ideas without the assistance of any external things, even though it is not yet known by me; just as, apparently, they have hitherto always been found in me during sleep without the aid of any external objects.

And finally, though they did proceed from objects different from myself, it is not a necessary consequence that they should resemble these. On the contrary, I have noticed that in many cases there was a great difference between the object and its idea. I find, for example, two completely diverse ideas of the sun in my mind; the one derives its origin from the senses, and should be placed in the category of adventitious ideas; according to this idea the sun seems to be extremely small; but the other is derived from astronomical reasonings, i.e. is elicited from certain notions that are innate in me, or else it is formed by me in some other manner; in accordance with it the sun appears to be several times greater than the earth. These two ideas cannot, indeed, both resemble the same sun, and reason makes me believe that the one which seems to have originated directly from the sun itself, is the one which is most dissimilar to it.

All this causes me to believe that until the present time it has not been by a judgment that was certain [or premeditated], but only by a sort of blind impulse that I believed that things existed outside of, and different from me, which, by the organs of my senses, or by some other method whatever it might be, conveyed these ideas or images to me [and imprinted on me their similitudes].

But there is yet another method of inquiring whether any of the objects of which I have ideas within me exist outside of me. If ideas are only taken as certain modes of thought, I recognize amongst them no difference or inequality, and all appear to proceed from me in the same manner; but when we consider them as images, one representing one thing and the other another, it is clear that they are very different one from the other. There is no doubt that those which represent to me substances are something more, and contain so to speak more objective reality within them [that is to say, by representation participate in a higher degree of being or perfection] than those that simply represent modes or accidents; and that idea again by which I understand a supreme God, eternal, infinite, [immutable], omniscient, omnipotent, and Creator of all things which are outside of Himself, has certainly more objective reality in itself than those ideas by which finite substances are represented.

Now it is manifest by the natural light that there must at least be as much reality in the efficient and total cause as in its effect. For, pray, whence can the effect derive its reality, if not from its cause? And in what way can this cause communicate this reality to it, unless it possessed it in itself? And from this it follows, not only that something cannot proceed from nothing, but likewise that what is more perfect—that is to say, which has more reality within itself—cannot proceed from the less perfect. And this is not only evidently true of those effects which possess actual or formal reality, but also of the ideas in which we consider merely what is termed objective reality. To take an example, the stone which has not yet existed not only cannot now commence to be unless it has been produced by something which possesses within itself, either formally or eminently, all that enters into the composition of the stone [i.e. it must possess the

same things or other more excellent things than those which exist in the stone] and heat can only be produced in a subject in which it did not previously exist by a cause that is of an order [degree or kind] at least as perfect as heat, and so in all other cases. But further, the idea of heat, or of a stone, cannot exist in me unless it has been placed within me by some cause which possesses within it at least as much reality as that which I conceive to exist in the heat or the stone. For although this cause does not transmit anything of its actual or formal reality to my idea, we must not for that reason imagine that it is necessarily a less real cause; we must remember that [since every idea is a work of the mind] its nature is such that it demands of itself no other formal reality than that which it borrows from my thought, of which it is only a mode [i.e. a manner or way of thinking]. But in order that an idea should contain some one certain objective reality rather than another, it must without doubt derive it from some cause in which there is at least as much formal reality as this idea contains of objective reality. For if we imagine that something is found in an idea which is not found in the cause, it must then have been derived from nought; but however imperfect may be this mode of being by which a thing is objectively [or by representation] in the understanding by its idea, we cannot certainly say that this mode of being is nothing, nor consequently, that the idea derives its origin from nothing.

Nor must I imagine that, since the reality that I consider in these ideas is only objective, it is not essential that this reality should be formally in the causes of my ideas, but that it is sufficient that it should be found objectively. For just as this mode of objective existence pertains to ideas by their proper nature, so does the mode of formal existence pertain to the causes of those ideas (this is at least true of the first and principal) by the nature peculiar to them. And although it may be the case that one idea gives birth to another idea, that cannot continue to be so indefinitely; for in the end we must reach an idea whose cause shall be so to speak an archetype, in which the whole reality [or perfection] which is so to speak objectively [or by representation] in these ideas is contained formally [and really]. Thus, the light of nature causes me to know clearly that the ideas in me are like [pictures or] images which can, in truth, easily fall short of the perfection of the objects from which they have been derived, but which can never contain anything greater or more perfect.

And the longer and the more carefully that I investigate these matters, the more clearly and distinctly do I recognize their truth. But what am I to conclude from it all in the end? It is this, that if the objective reality of any one of my ideas is of such a nature as clearly to make me recognize that it is not in me either formally or eminently, and that consequently I cannot myself be the cause of it, it follows of necessity that I am not alone in the world, but that there is another being which exists, or which is the cause of this idea. On the other hand, had no such an idea existed in me, I should have had no sufficient argument to convince me of the existence of any being beyond myself; for I have made very careful investigation everywhere and up to the present time have been able to find no other ground.

But of my ideas, beyond that which represents me to myself, as to which there can here be no difficulty, there is another which represents a God, and there are others representing corporeal and inanimate things, others angels, others animals, and others again which represent to me men similar to myself.

As regards the ideas which represent to me other men or animals, or angels, I can however easily conceive that they might be formed by an admixture of the other ideas which I have of myself, of corporeal things, and of God, even although there were apart from me neither men nor animals, nor angels, in all the world.

And in regard to the ideas of corporeal objects, I do not recognize in them anything so great or so excellent that they might not have possibly proceeded from myself; for if I consider them more closely, and examine them individually, as I yesterday examined the idea of wax, I find that there is very little in them which I perceive clearly and distinctly. Magnitude or extension in length, breadth, or depth, I do so perceive; also figure which results from a termination of this extension, the situation which bodies of different figure preserve in relation to one another, and movement or change of situation; to which we may also add substance, duration and number. As to other things such as light, colors, sounds, scents, tastes, heat, cold and the other tactile qualities, they are thought by me with so much obscurity and confusion that I do not even know if they are true or false, i.e. whether the ideas which I form of these qualities are actually the ideas of real objects or not [or whether they only represent chimeras which cannot exist in fact]. For although I have before remarked that it is only in judgments that falsity, properly speaking, or formal falsity, can be met with, a certain material falsity may nevertheless be found in ideas, i.e. when these ideas represent what is nothing as though it were something. For example, the ideas which I have of cold and heat are so far from clear and distinct that by their means I cannot tell whether cold is merely a privation of heat, or heat a privation of cold, or whether both are real qualities, or are not such. And inasmuch as [since ideas resemble images] there cannot be any ideas which do not appear to represent some things, if it is correct to say that cold is merely a privation of heat, the idea which represents it to me as something real and positive will not be improperly termed false, and the same holds good of other similar ideas.

To these it is certainly not necessary that I should attribute any author other than myself. For if they are false, i.e. if they represent things which do not exist, the light of nature shows me that they issue from nought, that is to say, that they are only in me so far as something is lacking to the perfection of my nature. But if they are true, nevertheless because they exhibit so little reality to me that I cannot even clearly distinguish the thing represented from non-being, I do not see any reason why they should not be produced by myself.

As to the clear and distinct idea which I have of corporeal things, some of them seem as though I might have derived them from the idea which I possess of myself, as those which I have of substance, duration, number, and such like. For [even] when I think that a stone is a substance, or at least a thing capable of existing of itself, and that I am a substance also, although I conceive that I am a thing that thinks and not one that is extended, and that the stone on the other hand is an extended thing which does not think, and that thus there is a notable difference between the two conceptions—they seem, nevertheless, to agree in this, that both represent substances. In the same way, when I perceive that I now exist and further recollect that I have in former times existed, and when I remember that I have various thoughts of which I can recognize the number, I acquire ideas of duration and number which I can afterwards transfer to any object that I please. But as to all the other qualities of which the ideas of corporeal things are composed, to wit, extension, figure, situation and motion, it is true that they are not formally in me, since I am only a thing that thinks; but because they are merely certain modes of substance [and so to speak the

vestments under which corporeal substance appears to us] and because I myself am also a substance, it would seem that they might be contained in me eminently.

Hence there remains only the idea of God, concerning which we must consider whether it is something which cannot have proceeded from me myself. By the name God I understand a substance that is infinite [eternal, immutable], independent, all-knowing, all-powerful, and by which I myself and everything else, if anything else does exist, have been created. Now all these characteristics are such that the more diligently I attend to them, the less do they appear capable of proceeding from me alone; hence, from what has been already said, we must conclude that God necessarily exists.

For although the idea of substance is within me owing to the fact that I am substance, nevertheless I should not have the idea of an infinite substance—since I am finite—if it had not proceeded from some substance which was veritably infinite.

Nor should I imagine that I do not perceive the infinite by a true idea, but only by the negation of the finite, just as I perceive repose and darkness by the negation of movement and of light; for, on the contrary, I see that there is manifestly more reality in infinite substance than in finite, and therefore that in some way I have in me the notion of the infinite earlier than the finite—to wit, the notion of God before that of myself. For how would it be possible that I should know that I doubt and desire, that is to say, that something is lacking to me, and that I am not quite perfect, unless I had within me some idea of a Being more perfect than myself, in comparison with which I should recognize the deficiencies of my nature?

And we cannot say that this idea of God is perhaps materially false and that consequently I can derive it from nought [i.e. that possibly it exists in me because I am imperfect], as I have just said is the case with ideas of heat, cold and other such things; for, on the contrary, as this idea is very clear and distinct and contains within it more objective reality than any other, there can be none which is of itself more true, nor any in which there can be less suspicion of falsehood. The idea, I say, of this Being who is absolutely perfect and infinite, is entirely true; for although, perhaps, we can imagine that such a Being does not exist, we cannot nevertheless imagine that His idea represents nothing real to me, as I have said of the idea of cold. This idea is also very clear and distinct; since all that I conceive clearly and distinctly of the real and the true, and of what conveys some perfection, is in its entirety contained in this idea. And this does not cease to be true although I do not comprehend the infinite, or though in God there is an infinitude of things which I cannot comprehend, nor possibly even reach in any way by thought; for it is of the nature of the infinite that my nature, which is finite and limited, should not comprehend it; and it is sufficient that I should understand this, and that I should judge that all things which I clearly perceive and in which I know that there is some perfection, and possibly likewise an infinitude of properties of which I am ignorant, are in God formally or eminently, so that the idea which I have of Him may become the most true, most clear, and most distinct of all the ideas that are in my mind.

But possibly I am something more than I suppose myself to be, and perhaps all those perfections which I attribute to God are in some way potentially in me, although they do not yet disclose themselves, or issue in action. As a matter of fact I am already sensible that my knowledge

increases [and perfects itself] little by little, and I see nothing which can prevent it from increasing more and more into infinitude; nor do I see, after it has thus been increased [or perfected], anything to prevent my being able to acquire by its means all the other perfections of the Divine nature; nor finally why the power I have of acquiring these perfections, if it really exists in me, shall not suffice to produce the ideas of them.

At the same time, I recognize that this cannot be. For, in the first place, although it were true that every day my knowledge acquired new degrees of perfection, and that there were in my nature many things potentially which are not yet there actually, nevertheless these excellences do not pertain to [or make the smallest approach to] the idea which I have of God in whom there is nothing merely potential [but in whom all is present really and actually]; for it is an infallible token of imperfection in my knowledge that it increases little by little. and further, although my knowledge grows more and more, nevertheless I do not for that reason believe that it can ever be actually infinite, since it can never reach a point so high that it will be unable to attain to any greater increase. But I understand God to be actually infinite, so that He can add nothing to His supreme perfection. And finally, I perceive that the objective being of an idea cannot be produced by a being that exists potentially only, which properly speaking is nothing, but only by a being which is formal or actual.

To speak the truth, I see nothing in all that I have just said which by the light of nature is not manifest to anyone who desires to think attentively on the subject; but when I slightly relax my attention, my mind, finding its vision somewhat obscured and so to speak blinded by the images of sensible objects, I do not easily recollect the reason why the idea that I possess of a being more perfect than I, must necessarily have been placed in me by a being which is really more perfect; and this is why I wish here to go on to inquire whether I, who have this idea, can exist if no such being exists.

And I ask, from whom do I then derive my existence? Perhaps from myself or from my parents, or from some other source less perfect than God; for we can imagine nothing more perfect than God, or even as perfect as He is.

But [were I independent of every other and] were I myself the author of my being, I should doubt nothing and I should desire nothing, and finally no perfection would be lacking to me; for I should have bestowed on myself every perfection of which I possessed any idea and should thus be God. And it must not be imagined that those things that are lacking to me are perhaps more difficult of attainment than those which I already possess; for, on the contrary, it is quite evident that it was a matter of much greater difficulty to bring to pass that I, that is to say, a thing or a substance that thinks, should emerge out of nothing, than it would be to attain to the knowledge of many things of which I am ignorant, and which are only the accidents of this thinking substance. But it is clear that if I had of myself possessed this greater perfection of which I have just spoken [that is to say, if I had been the author of my own existence], I should not at least have denied myself the things which are the more easy to acquire [to wit, many branches of knowledge of which my nature is destitute]; nor should I have deprived myself of any of the things contained in the idea which I form of God, because there are none of them which seem to me specially difficult to acquire: and if there were any that were more difficult to acquire, they

would certainly appear to me to be such (supposing I myself were the origin of the other things which I possess) since I should discover in them that my powers were limited.

But though I assume that perhaps I have always existed just as I am at present, neither can I escape the force of this reasoning, and imagine that the conclusion to be drawn from this is, that I need not seek for any author of my existence. For all the course of my life may be divided into an infinite number of parts, none of which is in any way dependent on the other; and thus from the fact that I was in existence a short time ago it does not follow that I must be in existence now, unless some cause at this instant, so to speak, produces me anew, that is to say, conserves me. It is as a matter of fact perfectly clear and evident to all those who consider with attention the nature of time, that, in order to be conserved in each moment in which it endures, a substance has need of the same power and action as would be necessary to produce and create it anew, supposing it did not yet exist, so that the light of nature shows us clearly that the distinction between creation and conservation is solely a distinction of the reason.

All that I thus require here is that I should interrogate myself, if I wish to know whether I possess a power which is capable of bringing it to pass that I who now am shall still be in the future; for since I am nothing but a thinking thing, or at least since thus far it is only this portion of myself which is precisely in question at present, if such a power did reside in me, I should certainly be conscious of it. But I am conscious of nothing of the kind, and by this I know clearly that I depend on some being different from myself.

Possibly, however, this being on which I depend is not that which I call God, and I am created either by my parents or by some other cause less perfect than God. This cannot be, because, as I have just said, it is perfectly evident that there must be at least as much reality in the cause as in the effect; and thus since I am a thinking thing, and possess an idea of God within me, whatever in the end be the cause assigned to my existence, it must be allowed that it is likewise a thinking thing and that it possesses in itself the idea of all the perfections which I attribute to God. We may again inquire whether this cause derives its origin from itself or from some other thing. For if from itself, it follows by the reasons before brought forward, that this cause must itself be God; for since it possesses the virtue of self-existence, it must also without doubt have the power of actually possessing all the perfections of which it has the idea, that is, all those which I conceive as existing in God. But if it derives its existence from some other cause than itself, we shall again ask, for the same reason, whether this second cause exists by itself or through another, until from one step to another, we finally arrive at an ultimate cause, which will be God.

And it is perfectly manifest that in this there can be no regression into infinity, since what is in question is not so much the cause which formerly created me, as that which conserves me at the present time.

Nor can we suppose that several causes may have concurred in my production, and that from one I have received the idea of one of the perfections which I attribute to God, and from another the idea of some other, so that all these perfections indeed exist somewhere in the universe, but not as complete in one unity which is God. On the contrary, the unity, the simplicity or the inseparability of all things which are in god is one of the principal perfections which I conceive to be in Him. And certainly the idea of this unity of all Divine perfections cannot have been

placed in me by any cause from which I have not likewise received the ideas of all the other perfections; for this cause could not make me able to comprehend them as joined together in an inseparable unity without having at the same time caused me in some measure to know what they are [and in some way to recognize each one of them].

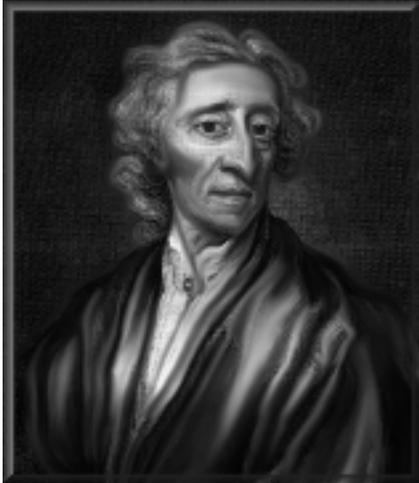
Finally, so far as my parents [from whom it appears I have sprung] are concerned, although all that I have ever been able to believe of them were true, that does not make it follow that it is they who conserve me, nor are they even the authors of my being in any sense, in so far as I am a thinking being; since what they did was merely to implant certain dispositions in that matter in which the self—i.e. the mind, which alone I at present identify with myself—is by me deemed to exist. And thus, there can be no difficulty in their regard, but we must of necessity conclude from the fact alone that I exist, or that the idea of a Being supremely perfect—that is of God—is in me, that the proof of God's existence is grounded on the highest evidence.

It only remains to me to examine into the manner in which I have acquired this idea from God; for I have not received it through the senses, and it is never presented to me unexpectedly, as is usual with the ideas of sensible things when these things present themselves, or seem to present themselves, to the external organs of my senses; nor is it likewise a fiction of my mind, for it is not in my power to take from or to add anything to it; and consequently the only alternative is that it is innate in me, just as the idea of myself is innate in me.

And one certainly ought not to find it strange that God, in creating me, placed this idea within me to be like the mark of the workman imprinted on his work; and it is likewise not essential that the mark shall be something different from the work itself. For from the sole fact that God created me it is most probable that in some way he has placed his image and similitude upon me, and that I perceive this similitude (in which the idea of God is contained) by means of the same faculty by which I perceive myself—that is to say, when I reflect on myself I not only know that I am something [imperfect], incomplete and dependent on another, which incessantly aspires after something which is better and greater than myself, but I also know that He on whom I depend possesses in Himself all the great things towards which I aspire [and the ideas of which I find within myself], and that not indefinitely or potentially alone, but really, actually and infinitely; and that thus He is God. And the whole strength of the argument which I have here made use of to prove the existence of God consists in this, that I recognize that it is not possible that my nature should be what it is, and indeed that I should have in myself the idea of a God, if God did not veritably exist—a God, I say, whose idea is in me, i.e. who possesses all those supreme perfections of which our mind may indeed have some idea but without understanding them all, who is liable to no errors or defect [and who has none of all those marks which denote imperfection]. From this it is manifest that He cannot be a deceiver, since the light of nature teaches us that fraud and deception necessarily proceed from some defect.

But before I examine this matter with more care, and pass on to the consideration of other truths which may be derived from it, it seems to me right to pause for a while in order to contemplate God Himself, to ponder at leisure His marvelous attributes, to consider, and admire, and adore, the beauty of this light so resplendent, at least as far as the strength of my mind, which is in some measure dazzled by the sight, will allow me to do so. For just as faith teaches us that the supreme felicity of the other life consists only in this contemplation of the Divine Majesty, so we

continue to learn by experience that a similar meditation, though incomparably less perfect, causes us to enjoy the greatest satisfaction of which we are capable in this life.



AN ESSAY CONCERNING HUMAN UNDERSTANDING (in part)

by:
John Locke (1632 - 1704)

Modernization, additions and footnotes by Barry F. Vaughan⁶⁴

BOOK I CHAPTER 1

Introduction And Overview of the Essay

1. *An Inquiry into the understanding, pleasant and useful.* Because the understanding sets humans above the rest of sensible beings, and gives them all the advantage and dominion which they have over them, it is certainly a subject, even for its nobility, worthy of our time and effort to investigate. The understanding is like the eye. While the eye makes us see and perceive other things, it does not see itself. And, it would require great skill, and perhaps some difficulty, to set it at a distance and observe itself. But whatever obstacles lie in the path of this investigation, whatever prevents us from understanding our own minds, I am sure that all the light we can shed upon it, all the acquaintance we can make with our own understanding, will not only be very pleasant, but it will also bring us great advantage in directing our thoughts in the search for knowledge of everything else.

2. *Design.* This is my purpose: to inquire into the *origin, certainty, and extent* of human knowledge, as well as the *evidence and degrees* of belief, opinion, and acceptance. Therefore, in this essay I will *not* delve into the physical components of the mind, or examine its essence. Neither will I examine how the motions of our spirits⁶⁵ or actions of our bodies cause experiences

⁶⁴ From Project Gutenberg's [An Essay Concerning Human Understanding](#), by John Locke. This modernization/translation is my own and is based on the Project Gutenberg edition (www.gutenberg.org). The best source for those interested in Locke is the critical edition edited and introduced by Peter H. Nidditch, Oxford University Press, 1975.

⁶⁵ This is a reference to 'animal spirits' (*Lt., spiritus animalis*) which was posited by Renaissance and Modern physicians and philosophers as the substance in the nerves that communicated information between the sense organs and brain. It was thought to be one of three fluid substances which account for the function of the organs in living bodies, the others being the *vital spirit* (associated with the heart), and the *natural spirit* (associated with the liver). What is important to note here is that Locke is trying to avoid the question of Reductivism: are mental events nothing more than physical/chemical events in the brain? If the answer is yes, as Hobbes had claimed, the whole notion of personal accountability in an afterlife becomes problematical. As a physician, Locke was fully aware that

through our sense organs, or ideas in our minds, and whether or not any—or all—of those ideas depend on matter. These are speculations which I shall avoid because they are beyond the scope of my current project (no matter how curious and entertaining they might be). It will be sufficient, for the purposes of this essay, to examine the human faculties of understanding as they are focused on the objects that they are designed to illuminate. I will consider my efforts successful in this examination if I can provide a plain and historically accurate account of how the mind attains all its beliefs, and if I can demonstrate the certainty entailed by *knowledge*, as well as explain the various, different, and sometimes contradictory evidence for *belief* which we observe among people—asserted with such confidence and assurance, put forward with such fondness and devotion, held with such eagerness and resolution—which when considered rationally might cause a person to suspect either that there is no such thing as truth at all, or that humans are insufficiently equipped to achieve knowledge of it.

3. **Method.** Therefore, it is worth our effort to explore the differences between opinion and knowledge, and examine the degree to which we ought to regulate our acceptance and moderate our persuasion, regarding beliefs that do not have the certainty of knowledge. In order to achieve this goal, I shall pursue the following method:

Firstly, I will inquire into the *origin of those ideas*, [beliefs], notions, or whatever else you want to call them, which a person observes—and is aware of—in their own mind; further, I will examine the various ways the understanding comes to have them.

Secondly, I will endeavor to show what *knowledge* the mind can obtain using those ideas: along with the certainty, evidence, and extent of it.

Thirdly, I will investigate the nature and *grounds* of ‘faith’ or ‘opinion’: by which I mean the assent which we give to any proposition as true, when the truth of the proposition has not yet, or perhaps cannot, be known for certain. And here we will have the opportunity to examine the evidence for our beliefs, and the varying degrees to which they may be justified.

CHAPTER 2

There Are No Innate Ideas in the Mind

1. A demonstration that innate ideas are not necessary for knowledge. There is an established opinion among some people, that there exists in the mind certain innate ideas, first beliefs, κοινὰ ἐννοιαί (*koinai ennoiai*)⁶⁶, characters, as it were, stamped upon the human mind, which the soul receives at its creation and brings into the world with it. It would be sufficient to convince unprejudiced readers that this claim is false if I were only to demonstrate—as I hope to do in the following parts of this essay—how we attain all the knowledge we have, simply using our natural faculties, without the need for any innate ideas or principles. For I believe anyone will admit that it would be ridiculous to suppose that the idea of color is innate in a being whom God has provided the power of sight, and the ability to receive it through the eyes from external

the physiological and anatomical models of the day could no more satisfactorily answer the question than epistemological models.

⁶⁶ *Gk* – “commonly held beliefs”.

objects. It would also be unreasonable to think other mental phenomena innate, or natural impressions, when we are fully aware that we have faculties designed specifically to cause them in us just as easily as if they had been innate parts of the mind. However, because a person is not permitted to follow his own thoughts in search of truth whenever he departs from the popular path, I will clarify the reasons that cause me to doubt the existence of innate ideas as an excuse for my mistake—if indeed I am making one. That judgment I leave to be made by those who, like me, commit themselves to embrace the truth wherever they find it.

2. *The Argument from Universal Consent.* There is nothing more commonly taken for granted than that there are certain principles, both speculative and practical, (for they⁶⁷ speak of both), universally acknowledged by all mankind. The fact that there is universal acknowledgement of the truth of these propositions, they argue, is evidence that they must be innate beliefs which human souls receive at their creation, and which are necessarily brought into the world and are just as real as natural faculties.⁶⁸

3. *The Argument from Universal Consent is insufficient to prove innate ideas.* This argument, based on universal consensus, has this misfortune in it: if it were in fact true that some beliefs were universally agreed to be true, that agreement would not prove they were innate, if an alternative explanation of how people arrived at a universal consensus can be demonstrated—which I presume can be done.

4. *The laws of non-contradiction and identity are not universally acknowledged.* But, what is worse is that this argument from universal consent (which is used to prove innate ideas), appears to me to be a demonstration that there are no innate ideas, because there are none to which all mankind give universal assent. I will begin with the greatest and the most popular examples of abstract deductive principles: "What ever is, is," and "It is impossible for the same thing to exist and to not exist [in the same way, at the same time]." I think these, of all others, have the strongest claim to be innate. These ideas have such an established reputation as universally accepted propositions that it would seem strange for anyone to challenge them. However, I take the liberty to claim that these propositions are so far from being universally believed that we can safely say there is a significant part of humanity that is not even conscious of them.

5. *Examples of those who are not in the general consensus.* First, it is evident that young children and those with cognitive malfunctions do not have the slightest understanding or even awareness of the aforementioned universal principles. That absence is sufficient to destroy any claim of universal agreement which would be necessary *if* innate ideas existed. To me it seems almost contradictory to claim that there are ideas *imprinted* on the soul, but at the same time claim that the soul is not aware of them: if the term 'imprinting' is to mean anything at all in this context, it must mean "to be aware of something". Thus, to *imprint* anything on the mind without the mind's awareness of it, seems to me an unintelligible claim. Therefore, if children and the cognitively deficient have souls—have minds—with those impressions in them, they must be *aware* of them, and they must necessarily *know* and *assent* to them.

⁶⁷ Locke is referring to Rationalists in general, and Cartesians in particular.

⁶⁸ By "natural faculties" Locke here means the five bodily senses. The concept of natural faculties will later be expanded to include the mind's capacity for memory as well as its ability to reflect on and organize both sensations and ideas.

But they do not; and this is evidence that children and the cognitively deficient do not have such impressions. If so-called ‘innate’ ideas are not beliefs naturally imprinted on the mind, how can they be considered innate? And if there *are* naturally imprinted beliefs, how could they be unnoticed? To claim that an idea is imprinted on the mind, and at the very same time claim that the mind is unaware of it and has never noticed it, reduces this so-called ‘impression’ to nothing at all. One cannot consistently claim that a proposition exists in the mind if the mind did not know it, nor was ever even conscious that it existed. If it *were* rational to claim that ideas exist innately in the mind while also being unknown to the mind, then one could also claim that *every* true proposition, *every* idea the mind is capable of assenting to, is imprinted and exists in the mind *because*, saying an unknown innate idea exists in the mind could only mean that the mind is *capable* of knowing it. If this is true, one could further claim that ideas *could* be imprinted on the mind which it never *has*, nor even *can* know. Certainly, a person may live a long time and die without knowing many of the things she was capable of knowing. But if the *capacity* for knowledge is all we are talking about, then all the ideas a person ever does or could have *should* be considered innate, and this whole debate will reduce to nothing more than a verbal confusion. That is, while it *seems* we are asserting something different, we are in fact *really* agreeing with those who deny innate ideas. No one, so far as I know, has ever denied that the mind is *capable* of acquiring beliefs: the capacity is innate while knowledge is acquired. But if that is the case, why is there such a fuss over innate beliefs? If ideas can be imprinted on the mind without being noticed, I see no real difference between what the mind is *capable* of knowing, and the *source* of that knowledge: either all ideas are innate or all ideas are derived from experience. Attempting to distinguish them is useless.

Therefore, if anyone claims there are innate notions in the mind, he cannot mean (assuming he intends to make any sense at all) there exist beliefs which the mind has never noticed and is ignorant of. If the words, “to be in the understanding” have any meaning at all, they mean, “to be understood”. Thus, to be in the understanding and *not* to be understood, to exist in the mind and never be noticed, is the same as saying an idea both is, and is not, in the mind at the same time. Therefore, if the claims, “What is, is,” and “It is impossible for the same thing to both exist and not exist [in the same way at the same time]” are innate to the mind, children *cannot* be ignorant of them. Infants, and all beings with a soul, must necessarily *have* them in their minds, *grasp* that they are true, and *agree* that they are true.

BOOK II CHAPTER 1

What Ideas Are, and Where They Come From

1. Ideas are the objects of consciousness. Every person is aware that he is thinking. And, the objects which the consciousness is focused on while thinking are the ideas that are in the mind. Therefore, it is beyond doubt that people have in their minds many ideas, such as are expressed by the words ‘whiteness’, ‘hardness’, ‘sweetness’, ‘thinking’, ‘motion’, ‘man’, ‘elephant’, ‘army’, ‘drunkenness’, and others. So, the first order of business is it is to inquire, how he comes by them?

I know it is a popular view that people have native ideas, original beliefs, stamped upon their minds at their creation. I have already examined this doctrine in detail, and I suppose what I said in the previous Book will be more easily accepted after I demonstrate how the mind gets all its ideas. In what follows I will show the way ideas come into the mind, and as evidence I will appeal to every one's own observation and experience.

2. All ideas come from sensation or reflection. Let us hypothesize that the mind is, as one might say, white paper,⁶⁹ void of all marks, without any ideas: how does it come to be furnished? How does it get the vast number of ideas which the busy and boundless imagination of humanity has painted on it with an almost endless variety? How does it get all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from **EXPERIENCE**. In that all our knowledge is founded; and from that it is ultimately derived. Our observation employed either about external sensible objects, or about the internal operations of the mind that we perceive and reflect upon, is the source which supplies our understandings with all the materials of thinking. These are the two sources of knowledge, from which all the ideas we have, or *can* naturally have, spring.

3. Sensible objects are one source of ideas. First, our sensory organs, capable of detecting particular sensible objects, convey into the mind several different perceptions of external objects, based on the different ways they are affected by those external objects. This is how we get ideas like ‘yellow’, ‘white’, ‘heat’, ‘cold’, ‘soft’, ‘hard’, ‘bitter’, ‘sweet’, and all the other ideas we call *sensible* qualities. When I say, “convey into the mind” I mean that external objects have the ability to cause a mental event that I call a *perception*. I use the term ‘sensation’ to designate the whole group of ideas which are entirely derived from the sensory organs.

4. The operations of our minds are a second source of ideas. Second, the other source from which experience produces ideas in our minds is our *awareness of the operations* of our own minds within us, as it focuses on the ideas within it. These operations, when the soul comes to reflect on and consider, furnishes the mind with another set of ideas, which could not be produced by external objects [alone]. For example, *perception, thinking, doubting, believing, reasoning, knowing, willing*, and all the other distinct [operations] of our minds—of which we are conscious and observe *in ourselves*—cause distinct ideas *of those operations* in us, similarly to how external objects cause distinct ideas in our minds. This source of ideas is completely internal to the mind, and although it has nothing to do with sensations—because it is not caused by external objects—is still very much *like* sensation and might legitimately be labeled ‘internal sensation’. However, since I labeled mental events caused by external objects ‘sensation’, I will label this set of events ‘reflection’ because the ideas it generates can only be attained by *reflecting* on the internal operations of the mind itself. Therefore, in the rest of this essay I will use the term ‘reflection’ to mean the awareness the mind has of its own operations, and their distinct qualities, that create an idea of those operations in our mind. My position is that these

⁶⁹ The concept Locke introduces here is known as the *tabula rasa*, or “blank slate”. Aristotle, in Περὶ Ψυχῆς (On the Soul) Book 3, Chapter 4 (429b31-430a2) refers to the mind as a “tablet upon which nothing is written”, which may be the earliest articulation of the empirical hypothesis in the Western philosophical tradition. The concept was later developed more fully in the works of Ibn Sina which were influential on the philosophical novel, *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* (Alive, son of Awake) by ibn Tufail. The Latin translation of the novel (*Philosophus Autodidactus*), published in 1671, was a significant influence on Locke’s articulation of the hypothesis in this essay.

are the only two sources from which all our ideas arise, *viz.*, external material objects which cause *sensations*, and the operations of our own minds within, which causes *reflection*. It should be noted that I use the term ‘operation’ in a broad sense to mean *comprehending*—not just the actions of the mind regarding ideas—but also to include the affectations arising from them, for example the satisfaction or uneasiness that arises *from* a thought.

5. All ideas come from sensation or reflection. It seems to me the mind does not have the least glimmering of any ideas which it does not receive from one of these two [sources]. External objects provide the mind with ideas of sensible qualities, which are all the many different perceptions they produce in us; and the mind provides the understanding with ideas of its own operations.

When we have surveyed all our ideas, their distinct modes, combinations and the relations between them, we find a complete set, and we discover nothing in our minds which did not arise from one of these two sources. Let anyone examine their own thoughts and thoroughly investigate their own mind, and then let them tell me if they find anything other than ideas derived from their senses or the operations of their minds—which I call ‘reflection’. No matter how great a body of knowledge they find, taking this strict view, they will realize that there are no ideas in the mind that have not been imprinted by either sensation or reflection (although there may be an infinite variety composed and enlarged by the mind, as we will soon see).

6. What we observable in children. If a person carefully observes a new-born child, she will find little evidence to think the baby’s mind is full of ideas that will later develop into knowledge. Ideas develop over time. Although the ideas of obvious and common qualities are imprinted before the memory begins to make a record and keep track of them, there are few people who cannot remember their first experience with them (even though later experiences with unusual qualities may obscure their origin). And if there were some overriding purpose, it is no doubt that a child’s experience, even with ordinary ideas, could be controlled and limited until they were grown. But because when a person is born into the world they are surrounded with bodies that continually and variously affect them, a variety of ideas are imprinted on their minds whether or not it is intended. Light and colors are ubiquitous when the eye is open, sounds and tangible qualities do not fail to excite their corresponding sense organs and force entry into the mind. But I think it would be easily granted that if a child were kept in a controlled environment and never saw anything but black and white until he was grown, he would have no more idea of red or green, than someone who had never tasted an oyster or pineapple has of those exotic dishes...

CHAPTER 8

The Cause of Simple Ideas

8. Ideas and the qualities of objects. Whatever we are aware of in our own minds, whatever is an immediate object of perception, thought, or understanding, I label ‘idea’. And the *cause* of that cognition in my mind I call the ‘quality’ of an object (which *just is* the power of the object to cause a reaction in my mind). For example, a snowball has the *power* to produce in my mind the distinct ideas of ‘white’, ‘cold’, and ‘round’. Because the *causes* of the ideas are in the snowball,

I call them *qualities* of the snowball. Because ‘white’, ‘cold’, and ‘round’ are sensations or perceptions in the mind, I call them ‘ideas’. If I should, on occasion, accidentally refer to *ideas in objects*, let me clarify now that I am referring to the qualities (or powers) in the objects which produce ideas in the mind.

9. *The Primary Qualities of objects.* The qualities of particular bodies are: *Firstly*, those qualities which are inseparable from bodies, regardless of their state, regardless of the alterations or changes they undergo, no matter how much force is placed upon the body, they (the qualities) remain constant. A *primary quality* is what the senses *always find associated with a material object* whether or not it is large enough to be perceived directly. For example, take a grain of wheat and divide into two parts; each of the two parts still has *solidity, extension, shape* and *mobility*. If we divide it a second time it retains all the same qualities (i.e., solidity, extension, shape, etc.). If we continue dividing the pieces until they become too small to see, they must still retain all these same qualities. Division (which is really all a mill, or pestle, or any other cutting tool effects upon a body when it reduces it to insensible parts) cannot eliminate solidity, extension, shape, or movability from a body; it only makes two or more distinct clumps of matter out of the original one. Each of these distinct masses, understood to be nothing more than distinct bodies, composes a particular number. These are what I call ‘original’, or ‘primary’ qualities of body each of which produces a corresponding simple idea in the mind, namely, ‘solidity’, ‘extension’, ‘shape’, ‘motion/rest’, and ‘number’.

10. *The Secondary Qualities of bodies.* *Secondly*, those qualities which do not exist in the external object itself, but rather are the powers of primary qualities (i.e., bulk, shape, texture, motion, etc.) to cause distinct sensations in our minds, these I call ‘secondary qualities’—for example, *colors, sounds, tastes*, etc. We might also add a third sort of quality, which is just as real, but yet a different sort of power. For example, there is in the primary qualities of fire a power to produce new colors, or consistencies in wax or clay, just as it might produce in me the idea or sensation of ‘warmth’ or ‘burning’, which was not produced in me by my other experiences with bulk, texture, and motion.

11. *How objects produce ideas in us.* Next we must consider how bodies, or external objects, produce ideas in our minds. Obviously, the only way in which we can conceive of bodies operating is by motion.

12. *Ideas are produced by motions, in and outside our bodies.* If it is not the case that external objects are connected directly to the mind when they produce ideas in us, and yet we have perceptions of the qualities of external bodies from our senses, there must be some motion in our nerves, or animal spirits, through the parts of our body to the brain—or seat of sensation—which produces the ideas in our mind from them. And, since extension, figure, number and motion (in bodies large enough to be seen) are perceived at a distance by sight, it is evident that some external thing must be transmitted from the object to the eyes that then moves to the brain which in turn produces the ideas we have of the primary qualities of the object.

13. *How secondary qualities produce their ideas.* We can conclude that the ideas of secondary qualities are produced in the same way that the ideas of primary qualities are produced in the mind, namely, by the impact of tiny particles on our sense organs. It is obvious that there are a

large number of objects that are so small we cannot directly observe their size, shape, or motion as in the case of the particles of air and water and even smaller things (just as the particles of air and water are smaller than peas or hailstones, so too there are surely particles much smaller than air and water). Thus, let us suppose that the motions and shapes, sizes and numbers, of such particles, affecting our sense organs, produce in the mind different sensations of colors and smells. For example, a violet causes the ideas of a particular *shade of blue* and of *fragrant sweetness* in our minds by the motion of tiny particles of matter that have different shapes and sizes and are moving in different directions at different velocities. It is no less conceivable that God could have connected ideas like *color* and *fragrance* to the motion of particles—to which they have no similarity—than that He could have connected the idea of *pain* to the motion of a steel blade dividing our flesh—with which the idea has no similarity.

14. Secondary Qualities are dependent on Primary Qualities. What I have just said concerning colors and smells also holds of tastes and sounds, and other sensible qualities. Though we often mistakenly think these qualities really exist in external objects, they are, in truth, nothing other than the *powers* which produce sensations in us and which are dependent for their existence on the Primary Qualities of matter: size, shape, texture and motion, as I have already said.

15. Ideas of Primary Qualities are resemblances; the ideas of Secondary Qualities are not. From what I have just said I think it is easy to conclude that the ideas of the Primary Qualities of external objects bear a resemblance to the properties of the object, and their patterns really exist in external material objects themselves. But our ideas of Secondary Qualities have no resemblance to external objects at all. There is nothing similar to our ideas existing in the lumps of matter themselves. The only thing that exists in the external body is the power to cause a sensation in us. What is ‘sweet’, or ‘blue’, or ‘warm’ in the idea is nothing but the particular size, shape, and motion of the insensible particles of the external object.

16. Examples. A flame is described as ‘hot’ and ‘bright’, snow, ‘white’ and ‘cold’, manna, ‘white’ and ‘sweet’ because of the ideas the object produces in us. These qualities are commonly believed to exist in the objects themselves as a mirror image of the ideas in our mind, and most people would find it difficult to suppose differently. However, if one were to stop and consider that the very same fire at one distance causes the sensation of warmth, and at a closer distance the very different sensation of pain, ought to wonder what reason he has to claim that warmth is in the fire, but pain—caused by the very same fire—is not. Why are the ideas ‘whiteness’ and ‘coldness’ considered to be in the snow, but ‘pain’ is not? Snow is the cause of them all, and as I have argued can only do so by the size, shape, number, and motion of its solid parts.

17. Primary Qualities are the only real qualities. The particular size, number, shape and motion of the parts of fire or snow really exist in their objects, whether or not anyone perceives them, and therefore, they may be rightly called *real qualities* because they really exist in material bodies. But ‘brightness’, ‘heat’, ‘whiteness’, or ‘coldness’ are no more in external bodies than are ‘sickness’ or ‘pain’ in manna.⁷⁰ If you take away the sensations of them—block light from

⁷⁰ ‘Manna’ is an extract from the sap of the Manna Ash tree (*Fraxinus ornus*) that was used medicinally as a laxative and expectorant.

the eye, block sound from the ear, taste from the palate and smell from the nose—all the ideas of colors, tastes, odors and sounds cease to exist and vanish and are reduced to their causes (i.e., size, shape, and the motion of parts).

18. Secondary Qualities only exist as modes of primary Qualities. A quantity of manna, so long as it is enough to be perceived, is capable of producing the idea of a ‘round’ or ‘square’ shape in our minds, and if it is moved, the idea of ‘motion’. The idea ‘motion’ is representative of the actual motion of the manna; the same is true of ‘circle’ or ‘square’ whether we are talking about the idea or the object, what is taking place in the mind or what is taking place in the manna itself. Both motion and shape *really exist* in the manna, whether or not we notice them—everybody agrees on this. Further, these same qualities, i.e., size, shape, texture, and the motion of the parts of the manna, also contain the power that causes the sensation of nausea, and sometimes even acute pains and cramps in us. And, everyone agrees that the ideas of ‘nausea’ and ‘pain’ are not in the medicine, but rather the effects of our observation *of* the medicine; they do not exist at all if we do not feel them. Despite this, it is difficult to convince people that ‘sweetness’ and ‘whiteness’—which are nothing but the effects of the manna (via its motion, size, and the shape of its particles) on the eyes and palate—are *not* really in the manna. The experience of pain and nausea caused by our observation of the medicine is *nothing but* the effects of its [the manna’s] operations on the stomach and intestines—caused by the size, motion, and shape of its [the manna’s] insensible parts (because that is the only way bodies can operate, as has already been shown)—as if the manna could not operate on the eyes and palate to produce distinct ideas in the mind (i.e., ‘whiteness’ and ‘sweetness’) in just the same way it effects our intestines and stomach (causing cramps and nausea). Seeing that they are all ideas caused in the same way, explaining the supposed difference between ‘nausea’ and ‘cramps’—which are agreed to only exist in the mind and to be caused by our observation of the medicine—on the one hand, and ‘whiteness’ and ‘sweetness’—which are somehow supposed to exist outside the mind in the medicine itself—on the other, falls to those who insist on making such distinctions....

21. The Water Bucket Argument. Now that we have distinguished between the ideas of Primary and Secondary Qualities we can explain how the very same water, at the very same time, can cause the feeling of ‘hot’ in one hand and ‘cold’ in the other. If the ideas ‘hot’ and ‘cold’ existed *in* the water (and not in the mind), it would be impossible for this to happen. But if we imagine ‘warmth’ is nothing more than a kind or degree of motion in the small particles of our nerves—or animal spirits—we can understand how it is possible that the same water can, at the same time, produce the sensation of hot in one and cold in the other. This never happens with shape: the same object when touched by two hands at the same time never produces the idea of ‘cube’ in one hand and ‘sphere’ in the other. However, if the sensation of hot and cold is nothing but an increase or decrease in the motion of tiny structures in our bodies, caused by the tiny particles of an external body, it is easy to understand. If there is a different amount of motion in the nerves of our two hands, each will be affected differently when they come in contact with the same external body. The hand with a greater amount of motion in its nerves will be experience a decrease in motion, and the hand with a smaller amount of motion in its nerves will experience an increase in motion. This is the cause of the distinct sensations of hot and cold that the hands feel....

BOOK IV
Chapter 11

Our Knowledge of External Objects

1. Knowledge of finite beings is only from actual sensation. The knowledge of our own existence is derived from intuition.⁷¹ The knowledge of God's existence is clearly derived from rational argument, as I have already shown. The knowledge of the existence of anything else can *only* be derived from sensation. With the sole exception of God, there is no necessary connection between an idea in the mind and the existence of an external object. No one can know the existence of any other thing *except* when it acts upon the senses of the perceiver causing itself to be perceived. The existence of an idea in the mind provides no more proof of the existence of the object than a picture of a man provides evidence that he actually exists in the world, or that images in a dream compose an accurate account of history.

2. Example: the whiteness of this paper. The fact that we actually receive ideas from external objects is what causes us to be aware of the *existence* of external objects, and causes us to know that something exists—at that moment—outside ourselves and is the cause of our idea of it, even though we may not fully comprehend or even be aware of the process. But, the fact that we may not fully comprehend or even be aware of the process does not diminish the *certainty* we derive from our senses. For example, while I am writing this, I have, because the paper is affecting my eyes, the idea produced in my mind that I call 'white' (whatever object causes it). Because of this I know that the quality or accident—whose appearance before my eyes always causes the same corresponding idea—really exists independently of me. Given the capacities of my faculties, the strongest evidence I can possibly have that things exist outside me is the testimony of my eyes, which are the best and sole judges of those things. Their testimony I reasonably rely on as so certain that I can no more doubt that I see white and black while I'm writing on this paper (and that it exists outside me and causes those sensations in me), than that I can move my hand and therefore write. This is as much certainty as we are humanly capable of regarding the existence of anything except our self, or the existence of God.

3. Awareness of sensation, though not as certain as a demonstration, may be called 'knowledge' and proves the existence of external objects. The awareness we have of the existence of external objects via our senses deserves to be *called* 'knowledge' even though it is *not as certain* as **intuitive knowledge** or **rational deductions** from clearly defined abstract ideas. If we believe that our sensory organs accurately convey information about the existence of the external bodies that affect them, our belief is rational. I do not think anyone can be *so* skeptical as to doubt the existence of the things he sees and feels. And, anyone who *is* capable of such radical skepticism (however dubious he is regarding his own beliefs) will never have a quarrel with me since he can never be sure that I say anything contrary to his own opinion. As for myself, I am satisfied that God has given me sufficient evidence to believe in external objects since I experience both pleasure and pain—which is one of my primary concerns in this life—when I interact with them. This much is certain: our confidence that our sense organs do not deceive us is the greatest assurance we are currently capable of when it comes to the existence of

⁷¹ Locke is using the term 'intuition' in the logical or mathematical sense to mean an immediate, obvious, and uncontrovertibly truth. It is by intuition that we grasp the truth of tautological and analytical propositions.

external objects. We cannot act in the world except through our faculties, nor can we even discuss knowledge itself except through those faculties which are designed to apprehend what knowledge is.

Beyond our assurance that the senses do not lie concerning the information they give us about the external objects they interact with, there is further evidence of their reliability:

4. We cannot have ideas without sensation: *Firstly*, it is obvious that perceptions are produced in us by exterior causes affecting our sense organs because people who do not have a particular sense organ do not have the corresponding ideas in their minds. This is so obvious it cannot be doubted. Therefore, we are sure that sensations are caused by external stimulations of our sense organs and nothing else. Further, it is obvious that sensations are not caused by the sense organs *alone* because if they were, a person's eyes, in the dark, would produce colors, and their nose would smell roses in winter. But it is clear that nobody gets a desire for pineapple until he first goes to the pacific and tastes it.

5. Ideas from sensations are very different from memory. *Secondly*, sometimes I find that I cannot avoid having ideas produced in my mind. When my eyes are shut or the curtains are drawn I can easily *imagine* the ideas of 'light' or the 'sun' from my previous sensations which are stored in memory. Further, I can set these ideas aside and think of the scent of a rose or the taste of sugar. But if I turn my eyes toward the sun at noon I cannot avoid the ideas which the light or the sun produces in me. Clearly there is a significant difference between ideas in memory and those which force themselves upon me, which I cannot avoid having. If ideas were solely in memory I would have absolute power to call them up or set them aside at will. Therefore, it is necessary that there is some external cause, some object outside myself whose powers I cannot resist, that acts on my senses to produce ideas in my mind, whether I want them or not. No one fails to notice the difference between *thinking* about the sun and actually *looking* at it. These two thoughts are so different from one another that it is hard to imagine two ideas more different. Therefore, we are certain that these are not both internal actions of the mind or ideas in our memory or internal imaginations; *seeing* requires an external cause....

CHAPTER XV

Knowledge of Probability

1. Probability is the appearance of agreement based upon fallible arguments. A **demonstration** is an argument that shows the agreement (or disagreement) between two ideas using one or more proofs that have a constant, unchanging, and obvious connection with each other.⁷² **Probability**, on the other hand, is establishing the *likelihood* of agreement (or disagreement) between ideas using arguments whose connections are *not* absolute and immutable—or at least it is not clear that there is an absolute connection between them.⁷³ 'Probability' refers to the *appearance* of a connection between ideas that is sufficient to induce the mind to accept that proposition *as* true or false. For example, in Geometry we can demonstrate that the interior angles of a triangle are equal to the sum of two right angles (i.e.,

⁷² In contemporary Logic this is called 'deduction'.

⁷³ In contemporary Logic this is called 'induction'.

180°) using an argument composed of a series of statements that are obviously and unchangeably connected to each other, from which the conclusion is derived. Thus, by intuitively grasping the agreement (or disagreement) of the intermediate ideas in each step of the argument, the whole series is considered a demonstration of the necessity of the conclusion, and thus we have certain knowledge that the conclusion is true. But suppose someone who never bothered to think through the proof for themselves heard an expert, a mathematician, assert, “the sum of the interior angles of a triangle are equal to the sum of two right angles,” and *believed* that it was true. In this case the evidence for her accepting the proposition *as* true is the *probability* of its truth, based on the testimony of the expert (whom it is *supposed* will not assert anything contrary to or beyond the scope of their knowledge of the field). It is the *supposed* honesty of the expert that causes her to accept the truth of the proposition, not her own understanding that the ideas agree, nor her own knowledge that it is true.

2. *Probability fills in for our lack of knowledge.* Because, as we have shown, we have very little knowledge and we find very little certainty among the ideas we have opportunity to consider, most of the propositions we think, reason, or talk about—indeed even *act* upon—fall far short of indubitable knowledge. Any yet, some of these ideas are so close to certainty that we hardly doubt them. We accept them as firmly—and we often act according to that assent—as *if* they had been demonstrated and that we had perfect and certain knowledge of their truth. However, there is a continuum between certainty and uncertainty, varying degrees of likelihood between demonstration and improbability, right down to impossibility. Similarly, there are varying degrees of assent from absolute assurance and confidence, all the way down to conjecture, doubt, and distrust. Therefore, since I have already discovered the connection between human knowledge and certainty, in what follows I will examine the different degrees and evidence of probability, along with belief or ‘faith’.

3. *Probability makes us presume things to be true, before we have knowledge.* Probability is the likelihood that something is true; the very meaning of the word signifies a proposition for which there are arguments to make it *likely*, or be accepted *as* true. ‘Belief’, ‘assent’, or ‘opinion’ are the words which we use to indicate our mind’s accepting, admitting, or receiving any proposition *as* true, based on the arguments which persuade us that it *likely* is true—even though we do not yet *know* that it is true. Herein lies the difference between probability and certainty, between faith and knowledge: in every part of knowledge there is an immediate intuitive grasp of the necessary connection between each idea. This is not the case with belief. The evidence for belief is something separate from the idea that I believe; it is not logically connected on both sides, and therefore does not necessarily show the agreement (or disagreement) of the ideas about which I am thinking.

4. *Two kinds of evidence for belief: conformity with our own experience, or the testimony of others' experience.* Since the function of probability is to fill in the gaps between what we know—what we are certain of—and to guide us in the absence of knowledge, it solely deals with propositions that fall short of certainty and only have a degree of evidence that they *are likely* to be true. To put it briefly, the following are the two appropriate kinds of evidence for belief:

Firstly, the *conformity* of an idea with our own knowledge, observations, and experiences.

Secondly, the *testimony* of another person, vouching for their own observations and experiences. When we consider the testimony of someone else we must consider:

1. the *number* of witnesses,
2. the *integrity* of the witnesses,
3. the *skill* of the witnesses,
4. the *intention* of the author (where it is testimony taken from a book),
5. the *consistency* of the testimony, and *circumstances* under which it was given, and
6. any contrary testimony that may exist.

In this, all the arguments for and against a belief ought to be examined, before we make a judgment as to the likelihood of its being true.

Probability *lacks* the direct evidence that infallibly determines conclusions and thereby produces certain knowledge; therefore, if the mind is to proceed rationally it ought to examine all the evidence which makes a belief probable, and examine how it makes the belief stronger or weaker, *before* the mind assents or dissents from it (proportionately to the preponderance of the evidence on one side or the other). For example:

If I see a man walk on the ice, it is beyond probability—it is knowledge. But, if someone else tells me he *saw* a man in England, in the middle of a cold winter, walk upon water solidified by the cold, this *so strongly conforms* with what is commonly observed that I am naturally disposed to believe it. Unless, that is, there is something clearly suspicious about the claim being made. But if the same proposition is presented to someone from the equatorial region of the planet, someone who had never seen or heard of anything like ice, then the whole probability of the belief depends on the reliability of the testimony. So long as there are numerous trustworthy witnesses with no hidden agenda or reason to lie, the belief is likely to be found credible. However, to a person who has *no common experience* and who has *never heard* of such a thing, even strong evidence is likely to be met with skepticism. This is just what happened to the Dutch ambassador, who while entertaining the king of Thailand with the unique features of his country—which he was quite interested to learn—among other things told him that the water in Holland would sometimes, in cold weather, be so hard that men walked upon it, and that it would even bear the weight of an elephant. To which the king is said to have replied, “Up till now I have believed the strange things you have told me because I thought you were an honest man, but now I am sure you lie.”



AN ENQUIRY CONCERNING HUMAN UNDERSTANDING (1757) *(in part)*

by: **David Hume** (1711-1776)

Additions, corrections, and footnotes by Barry F. Vaughan⁷⁴

SECTION II

OF THE ORIGIN OF IDEAS

EVERY one will readily allow, that there is a considerable difference between the perceptions of the mind, when a man feels the pain of excessive heat, or the pleasure of moderate warmth, and when he afterwards recalls to his memory this sensation, or anticipates it by his imagination. These faculties may mimic or copy the perceptions of the senses; but they never can entirely reach the force and vivacity of the original sentiment. The utmost we say of them, even when they operate with greatest vigor, is, that they represent their object in so lively a manner, that we could almost say we feel or see it: But, except the mind be disordered by disease or madness, they never can arrive at such a pitch of vivacity, as to render these perceptions altogether undistinguishable. All the colors of poetry, however splendid, can never paint natural objects in such a manner as to make the description be taken for a real landscape. *The most lively thought is still inferior to the dullest sensation.*

We may observe a like distinction to run through all the other perceptions of the mind. A man in a fit of anger, is actuated in a very different manner from one who only thinks of that emotion. If you tell me, that any person is in love, I easily understand your meaning, and from a just conception of his situation; but never can mistake that conception for the real disorders and agitations of the passion. When we reflect on our past sentiments and affections, our thought is a faithful mirror, and copies its objects truly; but the colors which it employs are faint and dull, in comparison of those in which our original perceptions were clothed. It requires no nice discernment or metaphysical head to mark the distinction between them.

⁷⁴ From Project Gutenberg's [An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding](http://www.gutenberg.org), by David Hume, www.gutenberg.org. For the full text visit the Project Gutenberg website. This edited version is intended for academic or personal use and may not be sold or used for profit. I have changed UK spellings to US spellings where appropriate, as well as made clarifications noted with brackets and added explanatory footnotes where needed. Author's footnotes are noted in brackets.

Here therefore we may divide all the perceptions of the mind into **two classes or species**, which are distinguished by their different degrees of force and vivacity. The less forcible and lively are commonly denominated *Thoughts* or *Ideas*. The other species want a name in our language, and in most others; I suppose, because it was not requisite for any, but philosophical purposes, to rank them under a general term or appellation. Let us, therefore, use a little freedom, and call them Impressions; employing that word in a sense somewhat different from the usual. By the term impression, then, I mean all our more lively perceptions, when we hear, or see, or feel, or love, or hate, or desire, or will. And impressions are distinguished from ideas, which are the less lively perceptions, of which we are conscious, when we reflect on any of those sensations or movements above mentioned.

Nothing, at first view, may seem more unbounded than the thought of man, which not only escapes all human power and authority, but is not even restrained within the limits of nature and reality. To form monsters, and join incongruous shapes and appearances, costs the imagination no more trouble than to conceive the most natural and familiar objects. And while the body is confined to one planet, along which it creeps with pain and difficulty; the thought can in an instant transport us into the most distant regions of the universe; or even beyond the universe, into the unbounded chaos, where nature is supposed to lie in total confusion. What never was seen, or heard of, may yet be conceived; nor is anything beyond the power of thought, except what implies an absolute contradiction.

But though our thought seems to possess this unbounded liberty, we shall find, upon a nearer examination, that it is really confined within very narrow limits, and that all this creative power of the mind amounts to no more than the faculty of compounding, transposing, augmenting, or diminishing the materials afforded us by the senses and experience. When we think of a golden mountain, we only join two consistent ideas, gold, and mountain, with which we were formerly acquainted. A virtuous horse we can conceive; because, from our own feeling, we can conceive virtue; and this we may unite to the figure and shape of a horse, which is an animal familiar to us. In short, all the materials of thinking are derived either from our outward or inward sentiment: the mixture and composition of these belongs alone to the mind and will. Or, to express myself in philosophical language, *all our Ideas or more feeble perceptions are copies of our Impressions or more lively ones.*

To prove this, the two following arguments will, I hope, be sufficient. *First*, when we analyze our thoughts or ideas, however compounded or sublime, we always find that they resolve themselves into such simple ideas as were copied from a precedent feeling or sentiment. Even those ideas, which, at *First* view, seem the most wide of this origin, are found, upon a nearer scrutiny, to be derived from it. The idea of God, as meaning an infinitely intelligent, wise, and good Being, arises from reflecting on the operations of our own mind, and augmenting, without limit, those qualities of goodness and wisdom. We may prosecute this enquiry to what length we please; where we shall always find, that every idea which we examine is copied from a similar impression. Those who would assert that this position is not universally true nor without exception, have only one, and that an easy method of refuting it; by producing that idea, which, in their opinion, is not derived from this source. It will then be incumbent on us, if we would maintain our doctrine, to produce the impression, or lively perception, which corresponds to it. *Secondly*. If it happen, from a defect of the organ, that a man is not susceptible of any species of

sensation, we always find that he is as little susceptible of the correspondent ideas. A blind man can form no notion of colors; a deaf man of sounds. Restore either of them that sense in which he is deficient; by opening this new inlet for his sensations, you also open an inlet for the ideas; and he finds no difficulty in conceiving these objects. The case is the same, if the object, proper for exciting any sensation, has never been applied to the organ. A Laplander or Negro has no notion of the relish of wine. And though there are few or no instances of a like deficiency in the mind, where a person has never felt or is wholly incapable of a sentiment or passion that belongs to his species; yet we find the same observation to take place in a less degree. A man of mild manners can form no idea of inveterate revenge or cruelty; nor can a selfish heart easily conceive the heights of friendship and generosity. It is readily allowed, that other beings may possess many senses of which we can have no conception; because the ideas of them have never been introduced to us in the only manner by which an idea can have access to the mind, to wit, by the actual feeling and sensation.

There is, however, one contradictory phenomenon, which may prove that it is not absolutely impossible for ideas to arise, independent of their correspondent impressions. I believe it will readily be allowed, that the several distinct ideas of color, which enter by the eye, or those of sound, which are conveyed by the ear, are really different from each other; though, at the same time, resembling. Now if this be true of different colors, it must be no less so of the different shades of the same color; and each shade produces a distinct idea, independent of the rest. For if this should be denied, it is possible, by the continual gradation of shades, to run a color insensibly into what is most remote from it; and if you will not allow any of the means to be different, you cannot, without absurdity, deny the extremes to be the same. Suppose, therefore, a person to have enjoyed his sight for thirty years, and to have become perfectly acquainted with colors of all kinds except one particular shade of blue, for instance, which it never has been his fortune to meet with. Let all the different shades of that color, except that single one, be placed before him, descending gradually from the deepest to the lightest; it is plain that he will perceive a blank, where that shade is wanting, and will be sensible that there is a greater distance in that place between the contiguous color than in any other. Now I ask, whether it be possible for him, from his own imagination, to supply this deficiency, and raise up to himself the idea of that particular shade, though it had never been conveyed to him by his senses? I believe there are few but will be of opinion that he can: and this may serve as a proof that the simple ideas are not always, in every instance, derived from the correspondent impressions; though this instance is so singular, that it is scarcely worth our observing, and does not merit that for it alone we should alter our general maxim.

Here, therefore, is a proposition, which not only seems, in itself, simple and intelligible; but, if a proper use were made of it, might render every dispute equally intelligible, and banish all that jargon, which has so long taken possession of metaphysical reasonings, and drawn disgrace upon them. All ideas, especially abstract ones, are naturally faint and obscure: the mind has but a slender hold of them: they are apt to be confounded with other resembling ideas; and when we have often employed any term, though without a distinct meaning, we are apt to imagine it has a determinate idea annexed to it. On the contrary, all impressions, that is, all sensations, either outward or inward, are strong and vivid: the limits between them are more exactly determined: nor is it easy to fall into any error or mistake with regard to them. *When we entertain, therefore, any suspicion that a philosophical term is employed without any meaning or idea (as is but too*

frequent), we need but enquire, from what Impression is that supposed idea derived? And if it be impossible to assign any, this will serve to confirm our suspicion. By bringing ideas into so clear a light we may reasonably hope to remove all dispute, which may arise, concerning their nature and reality.⁷⁵

SKEPTICAL DOUBTS CONCERNING THE OPERATIONS OF THE UNDERSTANDING

PART I

Relations of Ideas vs. Matters of Fact: Knowledge of Cause and Effect

ALL the objects of human reason or enquiry may naturally be divided into two kinds, to wit, *Relations of Ideas*, and *Matters of Fact*. Of the *First* kind are the sciences of Geometry, Algebra, and Arithmetic; and in short, every affirmation which is either intuitively or demonstratively certain. That the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the square of the two sides, is a proposition which expresses a relation between these figures. That three times five is equal to the half of thirty, expresses a relation between these numbers. Propositions of this kind are discoverable by the mere operation of thought, without dependence on what is anywhere existent in the universe. Though there never were a circle or triangle in nature, the truths demonstrated by Euclid would forever retain their certainty and evidence.

Matters of fact, which are the second objects of human reason, are not ascertained in the same manner; nor is our evidence of their truth, however great, of a like nature with the foregoing. The contrary of every matter of fact is still possible; because it can never imply a contradiction, and is conceived by the mind with the same facility and distinctness, as if ever so conformable to reality. That the sun will not rise to-morrow is no less intelligible a proposition, and implies no more contradiction than the affirmation, that it will rise. We should in vain, therefore, attempt to

⁷⁵ [Hume's original footnote] It is probable that no more was meant by these, who denied innate ideas, than that all ideas were copies of our impressions; though it must be confessed, that the terms, which they employed, were not chosen with such caution, nor so exactly defined, as to prevent all mistakes about their doctrine. For what is meant by innate? If innate be equivalent to natural, then all the perceptions and ideas of the mind must be allowed to be innate or natural, in whatever sense we take the latter word, whether in opposition to what is uncommon, artificial, or miraculous. If by innate be meant, contemporary to our birth, the dispute seems to be frivolous; nor is it worth while to enquire at what time thinking begins, whether before, at, or after our birth. Again, the word idea, seems to be commonly taken in a very loose sense, by LOCKE and others; as standing for any of our perceptions, our sensations and passions, as well as thoughts. Now in this sense, I should desire to know, what can be meant by asserting, that self-love, or resentment of injuries, or the passion between the sexes is not innate?

But admitting these terms, impressions and ideas, in the sense above explained, and understanding by innate, what is original or copied from no precedent perception, then may we assert that all our impressions are innate, and our ideas not innate.

To be ingenuous, I must own it to be my opinion, that LOCKE was betrayed into this question by the schoolmen, who, making use of undefined terms, draw out their disputes to a tedious length, without ever touching the point in question. A like ambiguity and circumlocution seem to run through that philosopher's reasonings on this as well as most other subjects.

demonstrate its falsehood. Were it demonstratively false, it would imply a contradiction, and could never be distinctly conceived by the mind.

It may, therefore, be a subject worthy of curiosity, to enquire what is the nature of that evidence which assures us of any real existence and matter of fact, beyond the present testimony of our senses, or the records of our memory. This part of philosophy, it is observable, has been little cultivated, either by the ancients or moderns; and therefore, our doubts and errors, in the prosecution of so important an enquiry, may be the more excusable; while we march through such difficult paths without any guide or direction. They may even prove useful, by exciting curiosity, and destroying that implicit faith and security, which is the bane of all reasoning and free enquiry. The discovery of defects in the common philosophy, if any such there be, will not, I presume, be a discouragement, but rather an incitement, as is usual, to attempt something more full and satisfactory than has yet been proposed to the public.

All reasonings concerning matter of fact seem to be founded on the relation of Cause and Effect. By means of that relation alone we can go beyond the evidence of our memory and senses. If you were to ask a man, why he believes any matter of fact, which is absent; for instance, that his friend is in the country, or in France; he would give you a reason; and this reason would be some other fact; as a letter received from him, or the knowledge of his former resolutions and promises. A man finding a watch or any other machine in a desert island, would conclude that there had once been men in that island. All our reasonings concerning fact are of the same nature. And here it is constantly supposed that there is a connection between the present fact and that which is inferred from it. Were there nothing to bind them together, the inference would be entirely precarious. The hearing of an articulate voice and rational discourse in the dark assures us of the presence of some person: Why? because these are the effects of the human make and fabric, and closely connected with it. If we anatomize all the other reasonings of this nature, we shall find that they are founded on the relation of cause and effect, and that this relation is either near or remote, direct or collateral. Heat and light are collateral effects of fire, and the one effect may justly be inferred from the other.

If we would satisfy ourselves, therefore, concerning the nature of that evidence, which assures us of matters of fact, we must enquire how we arrive at the knowledge of cause and effect.

I shall venture to affirm, as a general proposition, which admits of no exception, that the knowledge of this relation is not, in any instance, attained by reasonings *a priori*; but arises entirely from experience, when we find that any particular objects are constantly conjoined with each other. Let an object be presented to a man of ever so strong natural reason and abilities; if that object be entirely new to him, he will not be able, by the most accurate examination of its sensible qualities, to discover any of its causes or effects. Adam, though his rational faculties be supposed, at the very first, entirely perfect, could not have inferred from the fluidity and transparency of water that it would suffocate him, or from the light and warmth of fire that it would consume him. No object ever discovers, by the qualities which appear to the senses, either the causes which produced it, or the effects which will arise from it; nor can our reason, unassisted by experience, ever draw any inference concerning real existence and matter of fact.

This proposition, that causes and effects are discoverable, not by reason but by experience, will

readily be admitted with regard to such objects, as we remember to have once been altogether unknown to us; since we must be conscious of the utter inability, which we then lay under, of foretelling what would arise from them. Present two smooth pieces of marble to a man who has no tincture of natural philosophy; he will never discover that they will adhere together in such a manner as to require great force to separate them in a direct line, while they make so small a resistance to a lateral pressure. Such events, as bear little analogy to the common course of nature, are also readily confessed to be known only by experience; nor does any man imagine that the explosion of gunpowder, or the attraction of a loadstone, could ever be discovered by arguments *a priori*. In like manner, when an effect is supposed to depend upon an intricate machinery or secret structure of parts, we make no difficulty in attributing all our knowledge of it to experience. Who will assert that he can give the ultimate reason, why milk or bread is proper nourishment for a man, not for a lion or a tiger?

But the same truth may not appear, at first sight, to have the same evidence with regard to events, which have become familiar to us from our first appearance in the world, which bear a close analogy to the whole course of nature, and which are supposed to depend on the simple qualities of objects, without any secret structure of parts. We are apt to imagine that we could discover these effects by the mere operation of our reason, without experience. We fancy, that were we brought on a sudden into this world, we could at first have inferred that one Billiard-ball would communicate motion to another upon impulse; and that we needed not to have waited for the event, in order to pronounce with certainty concerning it. Such is the influence of custom, that, where it is strongest, it not only covers our natural ignorance, but even conceals itself, and seems not to take place, merely because it is found in the highest degree.

But to convince us that all the laws of nature, and all the operations of bodies without exception, are known only by experience, the following reflections may, perhaps, suffice. Were any object presented to us, and were we required to pronounce concerning the effect, which will result from it, without consulting past observation; after what manner, I beseech you, must the mind proceed in this operation? It must invent or imagine some event, which it ascribes to the object as its effect; and it is plain that this invention must be entirely arbitrary. The mind can never possibly find the effect in the supposed cause, by the most accurate scrutiny and examination. For the effect is totally different from the cause, and consequently can never be discovered in it. Motion in the second Billiard-ball is a quite distinct event from motion in the first; nor is there anything in the one to suggest the smallest hint of the other. A stone or piece of metal raised into the air, and left without any support, immediately falls: but to consider the matter *a priori*, is there anything we discover in this situation which can beget the idea of a downward, rather than an upward, or any other motion, in the stone or metal?

And as the first imagination or invention of a particular effect, in all natural operations, is arbitrary, where we consult not experience; so must we also esteem the supposed tie or connection between the cause and effect, which binds them together, and renders it impossible that any other effect could result from the operation of that cause. When I see, for instance, a Billiard-ball moving in a straight line towards another; even suppose motion in the second ball should by accident be suggested to me, as the result of their contact or impulse; may I not conceive, that a hundred different events might as well follow from that cause? May not both these balls remain at absolute rest? May not the first ball return in a straight line, or leap off from

the second in any line or direction? All these suppositions are consistent and conceivable. Why then should we give the preference to one, which is no more consistent or conceivable than the rest? All our reasonings *a priori* will never be able to show us any foundation for this preference. In a word, then, *every effect is a distinct event from its cause*. It could not, therefore, be discovered in the cause, and the first invention or conception of it, *a priori*, must be entirely arbitrary. And even after it is suggested, the conjunction of it with the cause must appear equally arbitrary; since there are always many other effects, which, to reason, must seem fully as consistent and natural. In vain, therefore, should we pretend to determine any single event, or infer any cause or effect, without the assistance of observation and experience.

Hence, we may discover the reason why no philosopher, who is rational and modest, has ever pretended to assign the ultimate cause of any natural operation, or to show distinctly the action of that power, which produces any single effect in the universe. It is confessed, that the utmost effort of human reason is to reduce the principles, productive of natural phenomena, to a greater simplicity, and to resolve the many particular effects into a few general causes, by means of reasonings from analogy, experience, and observation. But as to the causes of these general causes, we should in vain attempt their discovery; nor shall we ever be able to satisfy ourselves, by any particular explication of them. These ultimate springs and principles are totally shut up from human curiosity and enquiry. Elasticity, gravity, cohesion of parts, communication of motion by impulse; these are probably the ultimate causes and principles which we shall ever discover in nature; and we may esteem ourselves sufficiently happy, if, by accurate enquiry and reasoning, we can trace up the particular phenomena to, or near to, these general principles. The most perfect philosophy of the natural kind only staves off our ignorance a little longer: as perhaps the most perfect philosophy of the moral or metaphysical kind serves only to discover larger portions of it. Thus, the observation of human blindness and weakness is the result of all philosophy, and meets us at every turn, in spite of our endeavors to elude or avoid it.

Nor is geometry, when taken into the assistance of natural philosophy, ever able to remedy this defect, or lead us into the knowledge of ultimate causes, by all that accuracy of reasoning for which it is so justly celebrated. Every part of mixed mathematics proceeds upon the supposition that certain laws are established by nature in her operations; and abstract reasonings are employed, either to assist experience in the discovery of these laws, or to determine their influence in particular instances, where it depends upon any precise degree of distance and quantity. Thus, it is a law of motion, discovered by experience, that the moment or force of any body in motion is in the compound ratio or proportion of its solid contents and its velocity; and consequently, that a small force may remove the greatest obstacle or raise the greatest weight, if, by any contrivance or machinery, we can increase the velocity of that force, so as to make it an overmatch for its antagonist. Geometry assists us in the application of this law, by giving us the just dimensions of all the parts and figures which can enter into any species of machine; but still the discovery of the law itself is owing merely to experience, and all the abstract reasonings in the world could never lead us one step towards the knowledge of it. When we reason *a priori*, and consider merely any object or cause, as it appears to the mind, independent of all observation, it never could suggest to us the notion of any distinct object, such as its effect; much less, show us the inseparable and inviolable connection between them. A man must be very sagacious who could discover by reasoning that crystal is the effect of heat, and ice of cold, without being previously acquainted with the operation of these qualities.

SECTION V SKEPTICAL SOLUTION OF THESE DOUBTS

PART I

Beliefs of Matters of Fact Based on Constant Conjunction

THE passion for philosophy, like that for religion, seems liable to this inconvenience, that, though it aims at the correction of our manners, and extirpation of our vices, it may only serve, by imprudent management, to foster a predominant inclination, and push the mind, with more determined resolution, towards that side which already draws too much, by the bias and propensity of the natural temper. It is certain that, while we aspire to the magnanimous firmness of the philosophic sage, and endeavor to confine our pleasures altogether within our own minds, we may, at last, render our philosophy like that of Epictetus, and other Stoics, only a more refined system of selfishness, and reason ourselves out of all virtue as well as social enjoyment. While we study with attention the vanity of human life, and turn all our thoughts towards the empty and transitory nature of riches and honors, we are, perhaps, all the while flattering our natural indolence, which, hating the bustle of the world, and drudgery of business, seeks a pretense of reason to give itself a full and uncontrolled indulgence. There is, however, one species of philosophy which seems little liable to this inconvenience, and that because it strikes in with no disorderly passion of the human mind, nor can mingle itself with any natural affection or propensity; and that is the Academic or Sceptical philosophy. The academics always talk of doubt and suspense of judgment, of danger in hasty determinations, of confining to very narrow bounds the enquiries of the understanding, and of renouncing all speculations which lie not within the limits of common life and practice. Nothing, therefore, can be more contrary than such a philosophy to the supine indolence of the mind, its rash arrogance, its lofty pretensions, and its superstitious credulity. Every passion is mortified by it, except the love of truth; and that passion never is, nor can be, carried to too high a degree. It is surprising, therefore, that this philosophy, which, in almost every instance, must be harmless and innocent, should be the subject of so much groundless reproach and obloquy. But, perhaps, the very circumstance which renders it so innocent is what chiefly exposes it to the public hatred and resentment. By flattering no irregular passion, it gains few partisans: By opposing so many vices and follies, it raises to itself abundance of enemies, who stigmatize it as libertine, profane, and irreligious.

Nor need we fear that this philosophy, while it endeavors to limit our enquiries to common life, should ever undermine the reasonings of common life, and carry its doubts so far as to destroy all action, as well as speculation. Nature will always maintain her rights, and prevail in the end over any abstract reasoning whatsoever. Though we should conclude, for instance, as in the foregoing section, that, in all reasonings from experience, there is a step taken by the mind which is not supported by any argument or process of the understanding; there is no danger that these reasonings, on which almost all knowledge depends, will ever be affected by such a discovery. If the mind be not engaged by argument to make this step, it must be induced by some other principle of equal weight and authority; and that principle will preserve its influence as long as human nature remains the same. What that principle is may well be worth the pains of enquiry.

Suppose a person, though endowed with the strongest faculties of reason and reflection, to be brought on a sudden into this world; he would, indeed, immediately observe a continual succession of objects, and one event following another; but he would not be able to discover anything farther. He would not, at *First*, by any reasoning, be able to reach the idea of cause and effect; since the particular powers, by which all natural operations are performed, never appear to the senses; nor is it reasonable to conclude, merely because one event, in one instance, precedes another, that therefore the one is the cause, the other the effect. Their conjunction may be arbitrary and casual. There may be no reason to infer the existence of one from the appearance of the other. And in a word, such a person, without more experience, could never employ his conjecture or reasoning concerning any matter of fact, or be assured of anything beyond what was immediately present to his memory and senses.

Suppose, again, that he has acquired more experience, and has lived so long in the world as to have observed familiar objects or events to be constantly conjoined together; what is the consequence of this experience? He immediately infers the existence of one object from the appearance of the other. Yet he has not, by all his experience, acquired any idea or knowledge of the secret power by which the one object produces the other; nor is it by any process of reasoning, he is engaged to draw this inference. But still he finds himself determined to draw it: and though he should be convinced that his understanding has no part in the operation, he would nevertheless continue in the same course of thinking. There is some other principle which determines him to form such a conclusion.

This principle is Custom or Habit. For wherever the repetition of any particular act or operation produces a propensity to renew the same act or operation, without being impelled by any reasoning or process of the understanding, we always say, that this propensity is the effect of Custom. By employing that word, we pretend not to have given the ultimate reason of such a propensity. We only point out a principle of human nature, which is universally acknowledged, and which is well known by its effects. Perhaps we can push our enquiries no farther, or pretend to give the cause of this cause; but must rest contented with it as the ultimate principle, which we can assign, of all our conclusions from experience. It is sufficient satisfaction, that we can go so far, without repining at the narrowness of our faculties because they will carry us no farther. And it is certain we here advance a very intelligible proposition at least, if not a true one, when we assert that, after the constant conjunction of two objects—heat and flame, for instance, weight and solidity—we are determined by custom alone to expect the one from the appearance of the other. This hypothesis seems even the only one which explains the difficulty, why we draw, from a thousand instances, an inference which we are not able to draw from one instance, that is, in no respect, different from them. Reason is incapable of any such variation. The conclusions which it draws from considering one circle are the same which it would form upon surveying all the circles in the universe. But no man, having seen only one body move after being impelled by another, could infer that every other body will move after a like impulse. All inferences from experience, therefore, are effects of custom, not of reasoning.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ [Hume's original footnote] Nothing is more useful than for writers, even, on moral, political, or physical subjects, to distinguish between reason and experience, and to suppose, that these species of argumentation are entirely different from each other. The former are taken for the mere result of our intellectual faculties, which, by considering *a priori* the nature of things, and examining the effects, that must follow from their operation, establish particular principles of science and philosophy. The latter are supposed to be derived entirely from sense and

Custom, then, is the great guide of human life. It is that principle alone which renders our experience useful to us, and makes us expect, for the future, a similar train of events with those which have appeared in the past. Without the influence of custom, we should be entirely ignorant of every matter of fact beyond what is immediately present to the memory and senses. We should never know how to adjust means to ends, or to employ our natural powers in the production of any effect. There would be an end at once of all action, as well as of the chief part of speculation.

But here it may be proper to remark, that though our conclusions from experience carry us beyond our memory and senses, and assure us of matters of fact which happened in the most distant places and most remote ages, yet some fact must always be present to the senses or

observation, by which we learn what has actually resulted from the operation of particular objects, and are thence able to infer, what will, for the future, result from them. Thus, for instance, the limitations and restraints of civil government, and a legal constitution, may be defended, either from reason, which reflecting on the great frailty and corruption of human nature, teaches, that no man can safely be trusted with unlimited authority; or from experience and history, which inform us of the enormous abuses, that ambition, in every age and country, has been found to make so imprudent a confidence.

The same distinction between reason and experience is maintained in all our deliberations concerning the conduct of life; while the experienced statesman, general, physician, or merchant is trusted and followed; and the unpracticed novice, with whatever natural talents endowed, neglected and despised. Though it be allowed, that reason may form very plausible conjectures with regard to the consequences of such a particular conduct in such particular circumstances; it is still supposed imperfect, without the assistance of experience, which is alone able to give stability and certainty to the maxims, derived from study and reflection.

But notwithstanding that this distinction be thus universally received, both in the active and speculative scenes of life, I shall not scruple to pronounce, that it is, at bottom, erroneous, at least, superficial.

If we examine those arguments, which, in any of the sciences above mentioned, are supposed to be mere effects of reasoning and reflection, they will be found to terminate, at last, in some general principle or, conclusion, for which we can assign no reason but observation and experience. The only difference between them and those maxims, which are vulgarly esteemed the result of pure experience, is, that the former cannot be established without some process of thought, and some reflection on what we have observed, in order to distinguish its circumstances, and trace its consequences: Whereas in the latter, the experienced event is exactly and fully familiar to that which we infer as the result of any particular situation. The history of a TIBERIUS or a NERO makes us dread a like tyranny, were our monarchs freed from the restraints of laws and senates: But the observation of any fraud or cruelty in private life is sufficient, with the aid of a little thought, to give us the same apprehension; while it serves as an instance of the general corruption of human nature, and shows us the danger which we must incur by reposing an entire confidence in mankind. In both cases, it is experience which is ultimately the foundation of our inference and conclusion.

There is no man so young and inexperienced, as not to have formed, from observation, many general and just maxims concerning human affairs and the conduct of life; but it must be confessed, that, when a man comes to put these in practice, he will be extremely liable to error, till time and farther experience both enlarge these maxims, and teach him their proper use and application. In every situation or incident, there are many particular and seemingly minute circumstances, which the man of greatest talent is, at first, apt to overlook, though on them the justness of his conclusions, and consequently the prudence of his conduct, entirely depend. Not to mention, that, to a young beginner, the general observations and maxims occur not always on the proper occasions, nor can be immediately applied with due calmness and distinction. The truth is, an unexperienced reasoner could be no reasoner at all, were he absolutely unexperienced; and when we assign that character to any one, we mean it only in a comparative sense, and suppose him possessed of experience, in a smaller and more imperfect degree.

memory, from which we may *First* proceed in drawing these conclusions. A man, who should find in a desert country the remains of pompous buildings, would conclude that the country had, in ancient times, been cultivated by civilized inhabitants; but did nothing of this nature occur to him, he could never form such an inference. We learn the events of former ages from history; but then we must peruse the volumes in which this instruction is contained, and thence carry up our inferences from one testimony to another, till we arrive at the eyewitnesses and spectators of these distant events. In a word, if we proceed not upon some fact, present to the memory or senses, our reasonings would be merely hypothetical; and however the particular links might be connected with each other, the whole chain of inferences would have nothing to support it, nor could we ever, by its means, arrive at the knowledge of any real existence. If I ask why you believe any particular matter of fact, which you relate, you must tell me some reason; and this reason will be some other fact, connected with it. But as you cannot proceed after this manner, *in infinitum*, you must at last terminate in some fact, which is present to your memory or senses; or must allow that your belief is entirely without foundation.

What, then, is the conclusion of the whole matter? A simple one; though, it must be confessed, pretty remote from the common theories of philosophy. *All belief of matter of fact or real existence is derived merely from some object, present to the memory or senses, and a **customary conjunction** between that and some other object.* Or in other words; having found, in many instances, that any two kinds of objects—flame and heat, snow and cold—have always been conjoined together; if flame or snow be presented anew to the senses, the mind is carried by custom to expect heat or cold, and to believe that such a quality does exist, and will discover itself upon a nearer approach. This belief is the necessary result of placing the mind in such circumstances. It is an operation of the soul, when we are so situated, as unavoidable as to feel the passion of love, when we receive benefits; or hatred, when we meet with injuries. All these operations are a species of natural instincts, which no reasoning or process of the thought and understanding is able either to produce or to prevent.

At this point, it would be very allowable for us to stop our philosophical researches. In most questions we can never make a single step farther; and in all questions we must terminate here at last, after our most restless and curious enquiries. But still our curiosity will be pardonable, perhaps commendable, if it carry us on to still farther researches, and make us examine more accurately the nature of this belief, and of the *customary conjunction*, whence it is derived. By this means we may meet with some explications and analogies that will give satisfaction; at least to such as love the abstract sciences, and can be entertained with speculations, which, however accurate, may still retain a degree of doubt and uncertainty. As to readers of a different taste; the remaining part of this section is not calculated for them, and the following enquiries may well be understood, though it be neglected.

CHAPTER 3

Metaphysics

The Philosophical Investigation of Ultimate Reality

Of all the subdisciplines of Philosophy, Metaphysics is perhaps the most diverse in subject matter as well as esoteric in content. Like most of the technical vocabulary in Philosophy, the term ‘metaphysics’ is derived from a combination of Greek words: ‘*meta*’ (meaning, ‘about’ or ‘after’) and ‘*phusis*’ (meaning ‘nature’). But unlike most of the vocabulary we’ve encountered in our study of Philosophy thus far, knowing the components of the word ‘metaphysics’ does not give us clear insight into the subject matter of this area of Philosophy. That is because the word was coined by scholars during the translation and editing of the rediscovered works of Aristotle in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century. They invented the word to refer to a particularly difficult and esoteric part of Aristotle’s writings that came *after* (*meta*) his work on *nature* (*phusis*). Thus, the term was originally meant to identify the location of a set of questions in the Aristotelian corpus, not to identify a particular subdiscipline of Philosophy. However, the term came to be used by subsequent philosophers to identify a specific *kind* of problem—the ultimate nature of reality—and continues to be used by philosophers in that way to the present day.

Thinking of Metaphysics as a part of the academic discipline of Philosophy, we can adopt, as a conventional definition, that it is the *critical* or *rational* investigation into the first principles or most basic questions regarding reality. That is, Metaphysics investigates what actually exists, what *might* exist, and what cannot possibly exist. Or, to be even more precise, Metaphysics investigates questions regarding *what-ness*, *when-ness*, *where-ness*, *how-ness* and *why-ness*. Not the specific facts surrounding some phenomena or other, but rather the deeper questions about what the exact nature of existence itself is. If we say that something did exist, but no longer does, we are providing a temporal frame for the phenomena. But what is time? If we say it used to exist here, we are providing a spatial frame, but what is space? If we claim that it was tall, we are giving a relational frame, but what is the nature of relative relations? And if we say it was an accident, we are providing a causal frame. But what is the nature of causation? These are some of the perplexing questions of Metaphysics.

Consider, for a moment, existence itself. Suppose we say that something “is”. What does that mean? What is the nature of that which does, as opposed to that which does not, exist? This type of question falls under the subdivision of Metaphysics known as **Ontology** (*literally the logic of is-ness*). Since the very beginning of the Philosophical Revolution of the late Seventh Century BCE philosophers have struggled to understand the nature of existence. How many kinds of existence are there? Some have held that everything that exists must have one ultimate nature in common. This position is called:

Monism – there is *only one* kind of existence.

But what *exactly* is the one thing they share in common? What is the one stuff from which all things that are, are composed?

One answer is that everything that is, is composed of a non-reducible (or properly basic) substance we call “matter”.

Materialism – everything that exists is made of *material* substance.

But others disagreed and held that the ultimate nature of existence is a mental substance.

Idealism – everything that exists is made of *ideal/mental* substance.

A far more popular view held that both these properly basic substances existed, and everything that exists must be one or the other, or perhaps a combination of the two. This is the view known as:

Dualism – there are *two* kinds of existence: mind *and* matter.

There have even been some who held that there are lots of different kinds of properly basic substances, perhaps even an infinite number of them. This view is called:

Pluralism – there are many (*three or more*) kinds of existence.

Regardless of what the correct answer turns out to be, this gives you a sense of what struggling with the question of *what-ness* looks like in the field of Metaphysics.

Examining the nature of existence has obvious similarities to other academic disciplines, most notably Physics. The difference between the scientific investigation of ultimate reality and the philosophical one has to do both with methodological and substantive assumptions. Physics assumes, as a point of departure, that all reality is material in nature and can only be identified via the scientific method (i.e., applied Empiricism). Ontology, on the other hand, uses the logical method of argumentation, and makes no preliminary assumptions about what it is that ultimately exists. So, while they are related, and even overlap in some areas, they are distinct investigations.

Beyond investigating the nature of existence (*is-ness*) itself, Metaphysics is also interested, as we mentioned above, in investigating *how* existence *exists*. It has long been recognized by philosophers that we can distinguish between *necessary* and *contingent* existence. That is, some things exist in a way that is changeable (i.e., contingent) and others things are not changeable (i.e., they are necessary). As a very simple example, we can recognize that there is a difference between a particular dog and the idea of dog (i.e., *dog-ness*). While a particular dog is born, lives, then dies (i.e., comes into, then goes out, of existence), the idea or *nature* of what a dog *is* does not change in the same way. The essence of what a dog is remains constant while an individual Chihuahua is remarkably different from an individual Akita. Philosophers refer to the thing that is constant or necessary as a ‘universal’—the one that stands over the many. Recognizing this distinction leads us to another area of investigation in Metaphysics: the nature of universals.

Whether or not universals exist is an ontological question. But if we grant, for the sake of argument, that they exist in *some* sense, philosophers want to know what that sense is. This leads to two very different views of the nature of universals:

Realism – universals are ontologically *independent* of minds, and
Nominalism – universals are *dependent* on minds.

Imagine a rather simple, and indeed boring, universe in which there are no individuated objects that exist. Would it be true in such a universe, where there is nothing to count, that $2+2=4$? Are universals like numbers *dependent* for their existence on other things like material objects, or would they exist even in the absence of such things? Or, consider a universe in which there are lots of things, but no one around to count them? In a universe devoid of any mind or consciousness at all, would it still be true that $2+2=4$? Would it still be true that triangles are three-sided? Realists hold that universals are *not* dependent either on individuated objects (i.e., particulars) or minds to consider them. But the nominalists hold just the opposite.

Aside from universals, there are many other unusual “things” that Metaphysics considers. These are generally categorized as *abstract entities*, which metaphysicians are keen to analyze and understand. As I suggested above, some of these diverse and abstract things are Time, Space, Causation, Change, Relation, and Identity.

Other phenomena of philosophical investigation that fall within the broad sweep of Metaphysics are God and consciousness. These form their own unique sub-subdisciplines in Metaphysics: the **Philosophy of Religion** (i.e., what is the nature of divinity and its relationship to the universe) and the **Philosophy of Mind** (i.e., what is the nature of consciousness).

In the readings that follow, we will examine the question of divine existence through the lens of Philosophy. Can we provide arguments that either prove, or make it rational to believe, that God exists? There are literally thousands of arguments for and against God’s existence. We will only be looking at a hand full of the most celebrated arguments from the history of Western Philosophy.



PROSLOGIUM (in part)

by:
St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109)

and

AN APPENDIX IN BEHALF OF THE FOOL

by: Gaunilo of Marmoutiers

Translated by: SIDNEY NORTON DEANE, B.A.
Additions, corrections, and footnotes by Barry F. Vaughan⁷⁷

CHAPTER II – *Truly there is a God, although the fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.*

AND so, Lord, do you, who gives understanding to faith, give me, so far as you know it to be profitable, to understand that you exist as we believe [you do]; and that you are that [kind of thing] which we believe [you are]. And indeed, we believe that you are *a being than which nothing greater can be conceived*.⁷⁸ Or, is there no such nature, since the fool⁷⁹ has said in his heart, there is no God?⁸⁰ But, at any rate, this very fool, when he hears of this being of which I speak—a being than which nothing greater can be conceived—understands what he hears, and what he understands is in his mind; although he does not believe it to exist.

For, it is one thing for an object to be in the mind, and another to understand that the object exists. When a painter first conceives of what he will afterwards perform, he has it in his mind, but he does not yet believe it to [yet] exist, because he has not yet performed it. But *after* he has made the painting, he *both* has it in his mind, and he believes that it exists, because he has made it.

Hence, *even the fool* is convinced that something exists in the mind, at least, *than which nothing*

⁷⁷ This text is from the Christian Classics Ethereal Library at Calvin College, <http://www.ccel.org>, generated on demand from ThML source. Also available on the Fordham University “Internet History Sourcebooks Project”, (<http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/index.asp>). It is intended for academic use and may not be sold or used for profit. Punctuation corrections, language modernizations, additions, and footnotes are my own.

⁷⁸ The phrase, “a being than which nothing greater can be conceived” can be shortened to “greatest conceivable being.”

⁷⁹ Anselm is using the term ‘fool’ as a euphemism for the term ‘atheist’.

⁸⁰ Psalms xiv. 1

greater can be conceived. For, when he hears of this, he understands it. And whatever is understood, exists in the mind. But assuredly *that than which nothing greater can be conceived* cannot exist in the mind alone. For, suppose it [does] exist in the mind alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality, which is *greater*.

Therefore, if *that than which nothing greater can be conceived* exists in the mind alone, that very being *than which nothing greater can be conceived* is one than which a greater *can* be conceived. But obviously this is impossible. Hence, there is no doubt that there exists a being—than which nothing greater can be conceived—and it exists both in the mind and in reality.

CHAPTER III – *God cannot be conceived not to exist. God is that, than which nothing greater can be conceived. That which can be conceived not to exist is not God.*

AND it assuredly exists so truly, that it cannot be conceived not to exist. For, it is possible to conceive of a being which cannot be conceived not to exist; and this is *greater* than one which *can* be conceived not to exist. Hence, if *that than which nothing greater can be conceived*, can be conceived not to exist, it *is not* that *than which nothing greater can be conceived*. But this is an irreconcilable contradiction. There is, then, so truly a being than which nothing greater can be conceived to exist, that it *cannot even be conceived not* to exist; and *this* being you are, O Lord, our God.

So truly, therefore, dost you exist, O Lord, my God, that you cannot be conceived not to exist; and rightly. For, if a mind could conceive of a being better than you, the creature would rise above the Creator; and this is most absurd. And, indeed, whatever else there is, except you alone, *can* be conceived *not* to exist. To you alone, therefore, it belongs to exist more truly than all other beings, and hence *in a higher degree* than all others. For, whatever else exists does not exist so truly, and hence in a less degree it belongs to it to exist. Why, then, has the fool said in his heart, there is no God⁸¹, since it is so evident, to a rational mind, that you do exist in the highest degree of all? Why, except that he is dull and a fool?

ON BEHALF OF THE FOOL:

An Answer to the Argument of Anselm in the Proslogium

By:

Gaunilo, A Monk Of Marmoutiers

1. IF one doubts or denies the existence of a being of such a nature that nothing greater than it can be conceived, he receives this answer:

The existence of this being is proved, in the first place, by the fact that he himself, in his doubt or denial regarding this being, already has it in his understanding; for in hearing it spoken of he

⁸¹ Psalms xiv. 1

understands what is spoken of. It is proved, therefore, by the fact that what he understands must exist not only in his understanding, but in reality also.

And the proof of this is as follows: It is a greater thing to exist both in the understanding and in reality than to be in the understanding alone. And if this being is in the understanding alone, whatever has even in the past existed in reality will be greater than this being. And so that which was greater than all beings will be less than some being, and will not be greater than all: which is a manifest contradiction.

And hence, that which is greater than all, already proved to be in the understanding, must exist not only in the understanding, but also in reality: for otherwise it will not be greater than all other beings.

2. The fool might make this reply:

This being is said to be in my understanding already, only because I understand what is said. Now could it not with equal justice be said that I have in my understanding all manner of unreal objects, having absolutely no existence in themselves, because I understand these things if one speaks of them, whatever they may be?

Unless indeed it is shown that this being is of such a character that it cannot be held in concept like all unreal objects, or objects whose existence is uncertain: and hence I am not able to conceive of it when I hear of it, or to hold it in concept; but I must understand it and have it in my understanding; because, it seems, I cannot conceive of it in any other way than by understanding it, that is, by comprehending in my knowledge its existence in reality.

But if this is the case, in the first place there will be no distinction between what has precedence in time--namely, the having of an object in the understanding--and what is subsequent in time--namely, the understanding that an object exists; as in the example of the picture, which exists first in the mind of the painter, and afterwards in his work.

Moreover, the following assertion can hardly be accepted: that this being, when it is spoken of and heard of, cannot be conceived not to exist in the way in which even God can be conceived not to exist. For if this is impossible, what was the object of this argument against one who doubts or denies the existence of such a being?

Finally, that this being so exists that it cannot be perceived by an understanding convinced of its own indubitable existence, unless this being is afterwards conceived of—this should be proved to me by an indisputable argument, but not by that which you have advanced: namely, that what I understand, when I hear it, already is in my understanding.

For thus in my understanding, as I still think, could be all sorts of things whose existence is uncertain, or which do not exist at all, if some one whose words I should understand mentioned them. And so much the more if I should be deceived, as often happens, and believe in them: though I do not yet believe in the being whose existence you would prove.

3. Hence, your example of the painter who already has in his understanding what he is to paint

cannot agree with this argument. For the picture, before it is made, is contained in the artificer's art itself; and any such thing, existing in the art of an artificer, is nothing but a part of his understanding itself. A joiner, St. Augustine says, when he is about to make a box in fact, first has it in his art. The box which is made in fact is not life; but the box which exists in his art is life. For the artificer's soul lives, in which all these things are, before they are produced. Why, then, are these things life in the living soul of the artificer, unless because they are nothing else than the knowledge or understanding of the soul itself?

With the exception, however, of those facts which are known to pertain to the mental nature, whatever, on being heard and thought out by the understanding, is perceived to be real, undoubtedly that real object is one thing, and the understanding itself, by which the object is grasped, is another. Hence, even if it were true that there is a being than which a greater is inconceivable: yet to this being, when heard of and understood, the not yet created picture in the mind of the painter is not analogous.

4. Let us notice also the point touched on above, with regard to this being which is greater than all which can be conceived, and which, it is said, can be none other than God himself. I, so far as actual knowledge of the object, either from its specific or general character, is concerned, am as little able to conceive of this being when I hear of it, or to have it in my understanding, as I am to conceive of or understand God himself: whom, indeed, for this very reason I can conceive not to exist. For I do not know that reality itself which God is, nor can I form a conjecture of that reality from some other like reality. For you yourself assert that that reality is such that there can be nothing else like it.

For, suppose that I should hear something said of a man absolutely unknown to me, of whose very existence I was unaware. Through that special or general knowledge by which I know what man is, or what men are, I could conceive of him also, according to the reality itself, which man is. And yet it would be possible, if the person who told me of him deceived me, that the man himself, of whom I conceived, did not exist; since that reality according to which I conceived of him, though a no less indisputable fact, was not that man, but any man.

Hence, I am not able, in the way in which I should have this unreal being in concept or in understanding, to have that being of which you speak in concept or in understanding, when I hear the word God or the words, a being greater than all other beings. For I can conceive of the man according to a fact that is real and familiar to me: but of God, or a being greater than all others, I could not conceive at all, except merely according to the word. And an object can hardly or never be conceived according to the word alone.

For when it is so conceived, it is not so much the word itself (which is, indeed, a real thing—that is, the sound of the letters and syllables) as the signification of the word, when heard, that is conceived. But it is not conceived as by one who knows what is generally signified by the word; by whom, that is, it is conceived according to a reality and in true conception alone. It is conceived as by a man who does not know the object, and conceives of it only in accordance with the movement of his mind produced by hearing the word, the mind attempting to image for itself the signification of the word that is heard. And it would be surprising if in the reality of fact it could ever attain to this.

Thus, it appears, and in no other way, this being is also in my understanding, when I hear and understand a person who says that there is a being greater than all conceivable beings. So much for the assertion that this supreme nature already is in my understanding.

5. But that this being must exist, not only in the understanding but also in reality, is thus proved to me:

If it did not so exist, whatever exists in reality would be greater than it. And so the being which has been already proved to exist in my understanding, will not be greater than all other beings.

I still answer: if it should be said that a being which cannot be even conceived in terms of any fact, is in the understanding, I do not deny that this being is, accordingly, in my understanding. But since through this fact it can in no wise attain to real existence also, I do not yet concede to it that existence at all, until some certain proof of it shall be given.

For he who says that this being exists, because otherwise the being which is greater than all will not be greater than all, does not attend strictly enough to what he is saying. For I do not yet say, no, I even deny or doubt that this being is greater than any real object. Nor do I concede to it any other existence than this (if it should be called existence) which it has when the mind, according to a word merely heard, tries to form the image of an object absolutely unknown to it.

How, then, is the veritable existence of that being proved to me from the assumption, by hypothesis, that it is greater than all other beings? For I should still deny this, or doubt your demonstration of it, to this extent, that I should not admit that this being is in my understanding and concept even in the way in which many objects whose real existence is uncertain and doubtful, are in my understanding and concept. For it should be proved first that this being itself really exists somewhere; and then, from the fact that it is greater than all, we shall not hesitate to infer that it also subsists in itself.

6. For example: it is said that somewhere in the ocean is an island, which, because of the difficulty, or rather the impossibility, of discovering what does not exist, is called the lost island. And they say that this island has an inestimable wealth of all manner of riches and delicacies in greater abundance than is told of the Islands of the Blest; and that having no owner or inhabitant, it is more excellent than all other countries, which are inhabited by mankind, in the abundance with which it is stored.

Now if some one should tell me that there is such an island, I should easily understand his words, in which there is no difficulty. But suppose that he went on to say, as if by a logical inference: "You can no longer doubt that this island which is more excellent than all lands exists somewhere, since you have no doubt that it is in your understanding. And since it is more excellent not to be in the understanding alone, but to exist both in the understanding and in reality, for this reason it must exist. For if it does not exist, any land which really exists will be more excellent than it; and so, the island already understood by you to be more excellent will not be more excellent."

If a man should try to prove to me by such reasoning that this island truly exists, and that its existence should no longer be doubted, either I should believe that he was jesting, or I know not which I ought to regard as the greater fool: myself, supposing that I should allow this proof; or him, if he should suppose that he had established with any certainty the existence of this island. For he ought to show first that the hypothetical excellence of this island exists as a real and indubitable fact, and in no wise as any unreal object, or one whose existence is uncertain, in my understanding.

IN REPLY TO GAUNILO'S ANSWER IN BEHALF OF THE FOOL

It was a fool against whom the argument of my Proslogium was directed. Seeing, however, that the author of these objections is by no means a fool, and is a Catholic, speaking in behalf of the fool, I think it sufficient that I answer the Catholic.

CHAPTER I: *A general refutation of Gaunilo's argument. It is shown that a being than which a greater cannot be conceived exists in reality.*

YOU say, whosoever you may be, who say that a fool is capable of making these statements—that a being than which a greater cannot be conceived is not in the understanding in any other sense than that in which a being that is altogether inconceivable in terms of reality, is in the understanding. You say that the inference that this being exists in reality, from the fact that it is in the understanding, is no more just than the inference that a lost island most certainly exists, from the fact that when it is described the hearer does not doubt that it is in his understanding.

But I say: if a being than which a greater is inconceivable is not understood or conceived, and is not in the understanding or in concept, certainly either God is not a being than which a greater is inconceivable, or else he is not understood or conceived, and is not in the understanding or in concept. But I call on your faith and conscience to attest that this is most false. Hence, that than which a greater cannot be conceived is truly understood and conceived, and is in the understanding and in concept. Therefore, either the grounds on which you try to controvert me are not true, or else the inference which you think to base logically on those grounds is not justified.

But you hold, moreover, that supposing that a being than which a greater cannot be conceived is understood, it does not follow that this being is in the understanding; nor, if it is in the understanding, does it therefore exist in reality.

In answer to this, I maintain positively: if that being can be even conceived to be, it must exist in reality. For that than which a greater is inconceivable cannot be conceived except as without beginning. But whatever can be conceived to exist, and does not exist can be conceived to exist through a beginning. Hence what can be conceived to exist, but does not exist, is not the being than which a greater cannot be conceived. Therefore, if such a being can be conceived to exist, necessarily it does exist.

Furthermore: if it can be conceived at all, it must exist. For no one who denies or doubts the existence of a being than which a greater is inconceivable, denies or doubts that if it did exist, its non-existence, either in reality or in the understanding, would be impossible. For otherwise it would not be a being than which a greater cannot be conceived. But as to whatever can be conceived, but does not exist—if there were such a being, its non-existence, either in reality or in the understanding, would be possible. Therefore, if a being than which a greater is inconceivable can be even conceived, it cannot be nonexistent.

But let us suppose that it does not exist, even if it can be conceived. Whatever can be conceived, but does not exist, if it existed, would not be a being than which a greater is inconceivable. If, then, there were a being a greater than which is inconceivable, it would not be a being than which a greater is inconceivable: which is most absurd. Hence, it is false to deny that a being than which a greater cannot be conceived exists, if it can be even conceived; much the more, therefore, if it can be understood or can be in the understanding.

Moreover, I will venture to make this assertion: without doubt, whatever at any place or at any time does not exist—even if it does exist at some place or at some time—can be conceived to exist nowhere and never, as at some place and at some time it does not exist. For what did not exist yesterday, and exists to-day, as it is understood not to have existed yesterday, so it can be apprehended by the intelligence that it never exists. And what is not here, and is elsewhere, can be conceived to be nowhere, just as it is not here. So with regard to an object of which the individual parts do not exist at the same places or times: all its parts and therefore its very whole can be conceived to exist nowhere or never.

For, although time is said to exist always, and the world everywhere, yet time does not as a whole exist always, nor the world as a whole everywhere. And as individual parts of time do not exist when others exist, so they can be conceived never to exist. And so it can be apprehended by the intelligence that individual parts of the world exist nowhere, as they do not exist where other parts exist. Moreover, what is composed of parts can be dissolved in concept, and be non-existent. Therefore, whatever at any place or at any time does not exist as a whole, even if it is existent, can be conceived not to exist.

But that than which a greater cannot be conceived, if it exists, cannot be conceived not to exist. Otherwise, it is not a being than which a greater cannot be conceived: which is inconsistent. By no means, then, does it at any place or at any time fail to exist as a whole: but it exists as a whole everywhere and always.

Do you believe that this being can in some way be conceived or understood, or that the being with regard to which these things are understood can be in concept or in the understanding? For if it cannot, these things cannot be understood with reference to it. But if you say that it is not understood and that it is not in the understanding, because it is not thoroughly understood; you should say that a man who cannot face the direct rays of the sun does not see the light of day, which is none other than the sunlight. Assuredly a being than which a greater cannot be conceived exists, and is in the understanding, at least to this extent--that these statements regarding it are understood.

CHAPTER II: *The argument is continued. It is shown that a being than which a greater is inconceivable can be conceived, and also, in so far, exists.*

I HAVE said, then, in the argument which you dispute, that when the fool hears mentioned a being than which a greater is inconceivable, he understands what he hears. Certainly a man who does not understand when a familiar language is spoken, has no understanding at all, or a very dull one. Moreover, I have said that if this being is understood, it is in the understanding. Is that in no understanding which has been proved necessarily to exist in the reality of fact?

But you will say that although it is in the understanding, it does not follow that it is understood. But observe that the fact of its being understood does necessitate its being in the understanding. For as what is conceived, is conceived by conception, and what is conceived by conception, as it is conceived, so is in conception; so what is understood, is understood by understanding, and what is understood by understanding, as it is understood, so is in the understanding. What can be more clear than this?

After this, I have said that if it is even in the understanding alone, it can be conceived also to exist in reality, which is greater. If, then, it is in the understanding alone, obviously the very being than which greater cannot be conceived is one than which a greater can be conceived. What is more logical? For if it exists even in the understanding alone, can it not be conceived also to exist in reality? And if it can be so conceived, does not he who conceives of this conceive of a thing greater than that being, if it exists in the understanding alone? What more consistent inference, then, can be made than this: that if a being than which a greater cannot be conceived is in the understanding alone, it is not that than which a greater cannot be conceived?

But, assuredly, in no understanding is a being than which a greater is conceivable a being than which a greater is inconceivable. Does it not follow, then, that if a being than which a greater cannot be conceived is in any understanding, it does not exist in the understanding alone? For if it is in the understanding alone, it is a being than which a greater can be conceived, which is inconsistent with the hypothesis.

CHAPTER III: *A criticism of Gaunilo's example, in which he tries to show that in this way the real existence of a lost island might be inferred from the fact of its being conceived.*

BUT, you say, it is as if one should suppose an island in the ocean, which surpasses all lands in its fertility, and which, because of the difficulty, or the impossibility, of discovering what does not exist, is called a lost island; and should say that there can no doubt that this island truly exists in reality, for this reason, that one who hears it described easily understands what he hears.

Now I promise confidently that if any man shall devise anything existing either in reality or in concept alone (except that than which a greater be conceived) to which he can adapt the sequence of my reasoning, I will discover that thing, and will give him his lost island, not to be lost again.

But it now appears that this being than which a greater is inconceivable cannot be conceived not

to be, because it exists on so assured a ground of truth; for otherwise it would not exist at all.

Hence, if any one says that he conceives this being not to exist, I say that at the time when he conceives of this either he conceives of a being than which a greater is inconceivable, or he does not conceive at all. If he does not conceive, he does not conceive of the non-existence of that of which he does not conceive. But if he does conceive, he certainly conceives of a being which cannot be even conceived not to exist. For if it could be conceived not to exist, it could be conceived to have a beginning and an end. But this is impossible.

He, then, who conceives of this being conceives of a being which cannot be even conceived not to exist; but he who conceives of this being does not conceive that it does not exist; else he conceives what is inconceivable. The non-existence, then, of that than which a greater cannot be conceived is inconceivable...



SUMMA THEOLOGICA (in part)

by:
St. Thomas of Aquinas (1225-1274)

From the Complete American Edition

Translators: Fathers of the English Dominican Province⁸²
Additions, corrections, and footnotes by Barry F. Vaughan

Part One, Question 2: *The Existence of God*; Third Article – *Whether God Exists?*

Objection 1: It seems that God does not exist; because if one of two contraries be infinite, the other would be altogether destroyed. But the word ‘God’ means that He is infinite goodness. If, therefore, God existed, there would be no evil discoverable; but there is evil in the world. Therefore, God does not exist.

Objection 2: Further, it is superfluous to suppose that what can be accounted for by a few principles has been produced by many. But it seems that everything we see in the world can be accounted for by other principles, supposing God did not exist. For all natural things can be reduced to one principle which is nature; and all voluntary things can be reduced to one principle which is human reason, or will. Therefore, there is no need to suppose God's existence.

On the contrary—It is said in the person of God: "I am Who am" (Ex. 3:14).

I answer that: The existence of God can be *proved* in five ways.

The first and more manifest way is the argument from motion:

- 1) It is certain, and evident to our *senses*, that in the world some things are in motion.
- 2) Now, whatever is in motion is put in motion by [something else].
- 3) [This is true because] nothing can be in motion except it is *in [a state of] potentiality* to that towards which it is *in motion*.

⁸² This text is from Project Gutenberg's *Summa Theologica*, by Thomas Aquinas, www.gutenberg.org. Electronic edition produced by: Sandra K. Perry, with corrections and supplementation by David McClamrock. For the full text visit the Project Gutenberg website. This edited version is intended for academic or personal use and may not be sold or used for profit.

I have made additions and clarifications in translation (noted with brackets) and have added explanatory footnotes.

- 4) [But] a thing moves [when] it is in [a state of actuality]. For motion is nothing else than the reduction of something from [a state of] potentiality to [a state of] actuality. But nothing can be reduced from potentiality to actuality, except by something in a state of actuality. Thus, that which is *actually* hot—[like] fire—makes wood—which is [only] *potentially* hot—to be actually hot; thereby [it] moves and changes it.
- 5) Now it is [impossible] that the same thing should be [at the same time] in [a state of] actuality *and* potentiality in [reference to the same thing], but only in [reference to different things]. For what is *actually* hot cannot simultaneously be potentially hot; but it is simultaneously potentially *cold*.
- 6) It is impossible, therefore, that in the same respect and in the same way a thing should be *both* mover and moved, i.e. that it [c]ould move itself.
- 7) Therefore, whatever is in motion must be put in motion by [something else]. [And], if that [which puts it in motion is itself in motion], then [it] also must be put in motion by [something else], and so on.
- 8) But, this cannot go on to infinity; because [if it did], there would be no first mover, and, consequently, no other mover—[because secondary] movers only move [if] they are put in motion by [a primary] mover; e.g., as [a] staff moves only because it is put in motion by [a] hand.

Conclusion: Therefore, it is necessary to arrive at a *first mover*, [which is] put in motion by nothing else; and *this* everyone understands to be ‘God’.

The second way is from the nature of the efficient cause:

- 1) In the world of [material objects] we find there is an order of efficient causes.⁸³
- 2) There is no case known—neither is it, indeed, possible—in which a thing is the efficient cause of itself (for [if] so, it would be prior to itself, which is impossible).
- 3) Now, [among] efficient causes it is not possible to go on to infinity—[that’s] because in all efficient causes following [an] order, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate is the cause of the [last] cause—whether the intermediate cause be several, or only one.
- 4) Now, to take away [a] cause is [also] to take away the effect. Therefore, if there [is] no first cause among efficient causes, there will be no ultimate, nor any intermediate cause(s).

⁸³ The notion of “efficient cause” is taken from Aristotle’s theory of causation. He holds that every material event has four distinct causes (e.g., the material, formal, final, and efficient cause) and that complete knowledge of an event requires an understanding of each. Aristotle, *Physics* 194 b17-20, *Posterior Analytics* 71 b9-11, 94 a20.

- 5) But *if*—[among] efficient causes—it [*were*] possible to go on to infinity, [then] there [would] be no first efficient cause; [and *if there were no first* efficient cause], neither [would] there be an ultimate effect, nor any intermediate efficient causes; all of which is plainly false.

Conclusion: Therefore, it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of ‘God’.

*The third way is taken from **necessity and [contingency]**, and runs thus:*

- 1) [In nature we find] things that are [capable of existing] and [of not existing],⁸⁴ since they are found to be [created], and [destroyed], and consequently, they are [capable of] being *and* not [being].
- 2) But, it is impossible for these [these kinds of things] to *always* exist, for [these kinds of things fail to exist at some time].
- 3) Therefore, if everything [were contingent], then at one time there could have been nothing in existence [at all].
- 4) Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist only begins to exist by [the agency of] something already existing [i.e., you can’t get something from nothing]. Therefore, if at one time nothing [existed], it would have been impossible for anything to have begun to exist; and thus, even now, nothing would [exist]—which is absurd.
- 5) Therefore, not all beings are [contingent], but there must exist something which is necessary.
- 6) But every necessary thing either has its necessity caused by another, or not.
- 7) Now, it is impossible to go on to infinity in necessary things which have their necessity caused by another—as has been already proved in regard to efficient causes.

Conclusion: Therefore, we cannot but postulate the existence of some being [which is necessary in itself], and not receiving its [necessity] from another [thing], but rather [it is the cause of necessity] in other [things]. *This* all men speak of as ‘God’.

*The fourth way is taken from the **[degrees of excellence]** to be found in things:*

- 1) Among beings there are some more, and some, less good, true, noble and the like.
- 2) But [the terms] ‘more’ and ‘less’ are predicated of different things, [because] they resemble in different ways something which is the [greatest]—as a thing is said to be

⁸⁴ The technical term for things which have temporal existence (i.e., things that come and go) is ‘contingent’. The opposite of contingent existence is *necessary* existence. A thing exists necessarily if *it cannot fail* to exist.

‘hotter’ [because] it more nearly resembles that which is *hottest*. [In the same way we say] there is something which is *truest*, something *best*, something *noblest* and, consequently, something which is [greatest in] being—for those things that are greatest in truth are [also] greatest in being, as it is written in *Metaphysics*, Book II (by Aristotle).

- 3) Now the [greatest] in any genus is the cause of all [things] in that genus; as fire, which is the [greatest in] heat, is the cause of all hot things.

Conclusion: Therefore, there must also be something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection; and this we call ‘God’.

*The fifth way is taken from the **governance of the world**:*

- 1) We see that things which lack intelligence, such as natural bodies, act for [a purpose], and this is evident from their always acting, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result.
- 2) Hence, it is plain that [it is not by accident], but design, [that] they achieve their end. Now whatever lacks intelligence cannot move towards an end, unless it [is] directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence—as the arrow is shot to its [target] by the archer.

Conclusion: Therefore, some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call ‘God’.

Reply to Objection 1: As Augustine says (*Enchiridion* xi): "Since God is the highest good, He would not allow any evil to exist in His works, *unless* His omnipotence and goodness were such as to bring good even out of evil." This is part of the infinite goodness of God, that He should allow evil to exist, and out of it produce good.

Reply Objection 2: Since nature works for a determinate end under the direction of a higher agent, whatever is done by nature must be traced back to God, as to its first cause. So also whatever is done voluntarily must also be traced back to some higher cause other than human reason or will, since these can change or fail; for all things that are changeable and capable of defect must be traced back to an immovable and self-necessary first principle, as was shown in the [the third and fifth argument above].



NATURAL THEOLOGY:
Or, Evidences of the Existence and
Attributes of the Deity
Collected from the Appearances of
Nature
(*in part*)

By:
William Paley, D.D.
Late Archdeacon of Carlisle (1802)

The Twelfth Edition⁸⁵

Edited, additions, corrections, and footnotes by Barry F. Vaughan

In crossing a heath, suppose I pitched my foot against a *stone*, and were asked, how the stone came to be there? I might possibly answer, that, for any thing I knew to the contrary, it had lain there forever. Nor would it perhaps be very easy to show the absurdity of this answer. But suppose I had found a *watch* upon the ground, and it should be inquired how the watch happened to be in that place. I should hardly think of the answer which I had before given: that, for anything I knew, the watch might have always been there. Yet why should not this answer serve for the watch as well as for the stone? Why is it not as admissible in the second case, as in the first? For this reason, and for no other, *viz.*,⁸⁶ that, when we come to inspect the watch, we perceive (what we could not discover in the stone) that its several parts are framed and put together for a purpose—*e. g.*, that they are so formed and adjusted as to produce motion, and that motion so regulated as to point out the hour of the day. [We discover] that, if the different parts had been differently *shaped* from what they are, of a different *size* from what they are, or *placed* after any other manner, or in any other order, than that in which they are placed, either no motion at all would have been carried on in the machine, or none which would have answered the use that is now served by it.

To reckon up a few of the plainest of these parts, and of their [functions]—all tending to one result—we see a cylindrical box containing a coiled elastic spring, which, by its endeavor to relax itself, turns round the box. We next observe a flexible chain (artificially wrought for the

⁸⁵ From “Darwin Online,” (<http://darwin-online.org.uk/content/frameset?itemID=A142&viewtype=text&pageseq=1>). Digitized by and reproduced with the permission of the University of Michigan Digital Library Production Service. Reformatted by John van Wyhe 9.2006. This text is intended for academic or personal use and may not be sold or used for profit. I have changed UK to US spellings and made additions and corrections, noted in brackets, as well as added explanatory footnotes where needed.

⁸⁶ From the Latin contraction, *videlicet*, meaning “namely”, “that is”, or the archaic “to wit”.

sake of flexure), communicating the action of the spring from the box to the fuse. We then find a series of wheels, the teeth of which catch in, and apply to, each other, conducting the motion from the fuse to the balance, and from the balance to the pointer; and at the same time, by the size and shape of those wheels, so regulating that motion, as to terminate in causing an index, by an equable and measured progression, to pass over a given space in a given time. We take notice that the wheels are made of brass in order to keep them from rust; the springs of steel, no other metal being so elastic; that over the face of the watch there is placed a glass, a material employed in no other part of the work, but in the room of which, if there had been any other than a transparent substance, the hour could not be seen without opening the case. This mechanism being observed (it requires indeed an examination of the instrument, and *perhaps* some previous knowledge of the subject, to perceive and understand it; but being once, as we have said, observed and understood), the inference, we think, is inevitable, that the watch must have had a maker: that there must have existed, at some time, and at some place or other, an artificer or artificers who formed it for the purpose which we find it actually to answer; who comprehended its construction, and designed its use.

I. Nor would it, I apprehend, weaken the conclusion, that we had never seen a watch made; that we had never known an artist capable of making one; that we were altogether incapable of executing such a piece of workmanship ourselves, or of understanding in what manner it was performed; all this being no more than what is true of some exquisite remains of ancient art, of some lost arts, and, to the generality of mankind, of the more curious productions of modern manufacture. Does one man in a million know how oval frames are turned? Ignorance of this kind exalts our opinion of the unseen and unknown artist's skill, if he be unseen and unknown, but raises no doubt in our minds of the existence and agency of such an artist, at some former time, and in some place or other. Nor can I perceive that it varies at all the inference, whether the question arise concerning a human agent, or concerning an agent of a different species, or an agent possessing, in some respects, a different nature.

II. Neither, secondly, would it invalidate our conclusion, that the watch sometimes went wrong, or that it seldom went exactly right. The purpose of the machinery, the design, and the designer, might be evident, and in the case supposed would be evident, in whatever way we accounted for the irregularity of the movement, or whether we could account for it or not. It is not necessary that a machine be perfect, in order to show with what design it was made: still less necessary, where the only question is, whether it were made with any design at all.

III. Nor, thirdly, would it bring any uncertainty into the argument, if there were a few parts of the watch, concerning which we could not discover, or had not yet discovered, in what manner they conduced to the general effect; or even some parts, concerning which we could not ascertain, whether they conduced to that effect in any manner whatever. For, as to the first branch of the case; if by the loss, or disorder, or decay of the parts in question, the movement of the watch were found in fact to be stopped, or disturbed, or retarded, no doubt would remain in our minds as to the utility or intention of these parts, although we should be unable to investigate the manner according to which, or the connection by which, the ultimate effect depended upon their action or assistance; and the more complex is the machine, the more likely is this obscurity to arise. Then, as to the second thing supposed, namely, that there were parts which might be spared, without prejudice to the movement of the watch, and that we had proved this by

experiment—these superfluous parts, even if we were completely assured that they were such, would not vacate the reasoning which we had instituted concerning other parts. The indication of contrivance remained, with respect to them, nearly as it was before.

IV. Nor, fourthly, would any man in his senses think the existence of the watch, with its various machinery, accounted for, by being told that it was one out of possible combinations of material forms; that whatever he had found in the place where he found the watch, must have contained some internal configuration or other; and that this configuration might be the structure now exhibited, *viz.*, of the works of a watch, as well as a different structure.

V. Nor, fifthly, would it yield his inquiry more satisfaction to be answered, that there existed in things a principle of order, which had disposed the parts of the watch into their present form and situation. He never knew a watch made by the principle of order; nor can he even form to himself an idea of what is meant by a principle of order, distinct from the intelligence of the watch-maker.

VI. Sixthly, he would be surprised to hear that the mechanism of the watch was no proof of contrivance, only a motive to induce the mind to think so.

VII. And not less surprised to be informed, that the watch in his hand was nothing more than the result of the laws of *metallic* nature. It is a perversion of language to assign any law, as the efficient, operative cause of any thing. A law presupposes an agent; for it is only the mode, according to which an agent proceeds: it implies a power; for it is the order, according to which that power acts. Without this agent, without this power, which are both distinct from itself, the *law* does nothing; is nothing. The expression, the law of metallic nature, may sound strange and harsh to a philosophic ear; but it seems quite as justifiable as some others which are more familiar to him, such as the law of vegetable nature, the law of animal nature, or indeed as the law of nature in general, when assigned as the cause of phenomena, in exclusion of agency and power; or when it is substituted into the place of these.

VIII. Neither, lastly, would our observer be driven out of his conclusion, or from his confidence in its truth, by being told that he knew nothing at all about the matter. He knows enough for his argument: he knows the utility of the end: he knows the subservience and adaptation of the means to the end. These points being known, his ignorance of other points, his doubts concerning other points, affect not the certainty of his reasoning. The consciousness of knowing little, need not beget a distrust of that which he does know...

...For every indication of contrivance, every manifestation of design which existed in the watch, exists in the works of nature; with the difference, on the side of nature, of being greater and more, and that in a degree which exceeds all computation. I mean that the contrivances of nature surpass the contrivances of art, in the complexity, subtlety, and curiosity of the mechanism; and still more, if possible, do they go beyond them in number and variety; yet, in a multitude of cases, are not less evidently mechanical, not less evidently contrivances, not less evidently accommodated to their end, or suited to their office, than are the most perfect productions of human ingenuity...



Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion (in part)

by:
David Hume (1779)

Additions, corrections, and footnotes by Barry F. Vaughan⁸⁷

CLEANTHES: Look round the world: contemplate the whole and every part of it: you will find it to be nothing but one great machine, subdivided into an infinite number of lesser machines, which again admit of subdivisions to a degree beyond what human senses and faculties can trace and explain. All these various machines, and even their most minute parts, are adjusted to each other with an accuracy which ravishes into admiration all men who have ever contemplated them. The curious adapting of means to ends, throughout all nature, resembles exactly, though it much exceeds, the productions of human contrivance; of human designs, thought, wisdom, and intelligence. Since, therefore, the effects resemble each other, we are led to infer, by all the rules of analogy, that the causes also resemble; and that the Author of Nature is somewhat similar to the mind of man, though *possessed of much larger faculties*, proportioned to the grandeur of the work which he has executed. By this argument *a posteriori*,⁸⁸ and by this argument alone, do we prove at once the existence of a Deity, and his similarity to human mind and intelligence.

DEMEA: I shall be so free, Cleanthes, as to tell you, that from the beginning, I could not approve of your conclusion concerning the similarity of the Deity to men; still less can I approve of the mediums by which you endeavor to establish it. What! No *demonstration*⁸⁹ of the Being of God! No abstract arguments! No proofs *a priori*⁹⁰! Are these, which have hitherto been so much insisted on by philosophers, all fallacy, all sophism? Can we reach no further in this subject than experience and probability? I will not say that this is betraying the cause of a Deity: But surely, by this affected candor, you give advantages to Atheists, which they never could obtain by the mere dint of argument and reasoning.

PHILO: What I chiefly scruple in this subject, is not so much that all religious arguments are by Cleanthes reduced to experience, as that they appear not to be even the most certain and irrefragable of that inferior kind. That a stone will fall, that fire will burn, that the earth has solidity, we have observed a thousand and a thousand times; and when any new instance of this nature is presented, we draw without hesitation the accustomed inference. The exact similarity

⁸⁷ From Project Gutenberg's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, by David Hume. (This selection is taken from parts 2 and 5.) You can view the entire book at www.gutenberg.org. I have changed UK to US spellings as well as added emphases in italics and explanatory footnotes where needed. This text is intended for academic or personal use and may not be sold or used for profit.

⁸⁸ "By experience," or, "from the senses."

⁸⁹ By 'demonstration' Demea means to distinguish **deductive** from inductive **reasoning**. Deductive arguments yield conclusions that are necessary, while inductive ones only give probable conclusions.

⁹⁰ "Prior to sensation," or "without the aid of the senses."

of the cases gives us a perfect assurance of a similar event; and a stronger evidence is never desired nor sought after. But *wherever you depart, in the least, from the similarity of the cases, you diminish proportionately the evidence; and may at last bring it to a very weak analogy, which is confessedly liable to error and uncertainty.* After having experienced the circulation of the blood in human creatures, we make no doubt that it takes place in Titius and Maevius [i.e., in particular men]. But from its circulation in frogs and fishes, it is only a *presumption*, though a strong one, *from analogy*, that it takes place in men and other animals. The analogical reasoning is much weaker, when we infer the circulation of the sap in vegetables from our experience that the blood circulates in animals; and those, who hastily followed that imperfect analogy, are found, by more accurate experiments, to have been mistaken.

If we see a house, Cleanthes, we conclude, with the greatest certainty, that it had an architect or builder; because this is precisely that species of effect which we have experienced to proceed from that species of cause. But surely you will not affirm, that the universe bears such a resemblance to a house, that we can with the same certainty infer a similar cause, or that the analogy is here entire and perfect. The dissimilitude is so striking, that the utmost you can here pretend to is a guess, a conjecture, a presumption concerning a similar cause; and how that pretension will be received in the world, I leave you to consider.

CLEANTHES: It would surely be very ill received; and I should be deservedly blamed and detested, did I allow, that the proofs of a Deity amounted to no more than a guess or conjecture. But is the whole adjustment of means to ends in a house and in the universe so slight a resemblance? The economy of final causes? The order, proportion, and arrangement of every part? Steps of a stair are plainly contrived, that human legs may use them in mounting; and this inference is certain and infallible. Human legs are also contrived for walking and mounting; and this inference, I allow, is not altogether so certain, because of the dissimilarity which you remark; but does it, therefore, deserve the name only of presumption or conjecture?

DEMEA: Good God! Where are we? Zealous defenders of religion allow that the proofs of a Deity fall short of perfect evidence! And you, Philo, on whose assistance I depended in proving the adorable mysteriousness⁹¹ of the Divine Nature, do you assent to all these extravagant opinions of Cleanthes? For what other name can I give them or, why spare my censure, when such principles are advanced, supported by such an authority, before so young a man as Pamphilus?⁹²

PHILO: You seem not to apprehend, that I argue with Cleanthes in his own way; and, by showing him the dangerous consequences of his tenets, hope at last to reduce him to our opinion. But what sticks most with you, I observe, is the representation which Cleanthes has made of the argument *a posteriori*; and finding that that argument is likely to escape your hold and vanish into air, you think it so disguised, that you can scarcely believe it to be set in its true light. Now, however much I may dissent, in other respects, from the dangerous principles of Cleanthes, I must allow that he has fairly represented that argument; and I shall endeavor so to state the matter to you, that you will entertain no further scruples with regard to it.

⁹¹ By 'mysteriousness' Demea means to suggest that the nature of God is unknowable without the aid of divine revelation.

⁹² A character in the dialogues who does not speak in this section.

Were a man to abstract from every thing which he knows or has seen, he would be altogether incapable, merely from his own ideas, to determine what kind of scene the universe must be, or to give the preference to one state or situation of things above another. For as nothing which he clearly conceives could be esteemed impossible or implying a contradiction, every chimera of his fancy would be upon an equal footing; nor could he assign any just reason why he adheres to one idea or system, and rejects the others which are equally possible.

Again; after he opens his eyes, and contemplates the world as it really is, it would be impossible for him at first to assign the cause of any one event, much less of the whole of things, or of the universe. He might set his fancy a rambling; and she might bring him in an infinite variety of reports and representations. These would all be possible; but being all equally possible, he would never of himself give a satisfactory account for his preferring one of them to the rest. Experience alone can point out to him the true cause of any phenomenon.

Now, according to this method of reasoning, Demea, it follows, (and is, indeed, tacitly allowed by Cleanthes himself,) that *order, arrangement, or the adjustment of final causes*, is not of itself any *proof* of design; but only so far as it has been experienced to proceed from that principle. For aught we can know *a priori*, matter may contain the source or spring of order originally within itself, as well as mind does; and there is no more difficulty in conceiving, that the several elements, from an internal unknown cause, may fall into the most exquisite arrangement, than to conceive that their ideas, in the great universal mind, from a like internal unknown cause, fall into that arrangement. *The equal possibility of both these suppositions is allowed.* But, by experience, we find, (according to Cleanthes), that there is a difference between them. Throw several pieces of steel together, without shape or form; they will never arrange themselves so as to compose a watch. Stone, and mortar, and wood, without an architect, never erect a house. But the ideas in a human mind, we see, by an unknown, inexplicable economy, arrange themselves so as to form the plan of a watch or house. *Experience*, therefore, proves, that there is an original principle of order in mind, not in matter. *From similar effects we infer similar causes.* The adjustment of means to ends is alike in the universe, as in a machine of human contrivance. *The causes, therefore, must be resembling.*

I was from the beginning scandalized, I must own, with this resemblance, which is asserted, between the Deity and human creatures; and must conceive it to imply such a degradation of the Supreme Being as *no sound Theist could endure.* With your assistance, therefore, Demea, I shall endeavor to defend what you justly call the adorable mysteriousness of the Divine Nature, and shall refute this reasoning of Cleanthes, provided he allows that I have made a fair representation of it.

When Cleanthes had assented, Philo, after a short pause, proceeded in the following manner.

PHILO: That all inferences, Cleanthes, concerning fact, are founded on experience; and that all experimental reasonings are founded on the supposition that similar causes prove similar effects, and similar effects similar causes; I shall not at present much dispute with you. But observe, I entreat you, with what extreme caution all just reasoners proceed in the transferring of

experiments to similar cases. Unless the cases be exactly similar, they repose no perfect confidence in applying their past observation to any particular phenomenon. *Every alteration of circumstances occasions a doubt concerning the event*; and it requires new experiments to prove certainly, that the new circumstances are of no moment or importance. A change in bulk, situation, arrangement, age, disposition of the air, or surrounding bodies; any of these particulars may be attended with the most unexpected consequences: and unless the objects be quite familiar to us, it is the highest temerity to expect with assurance, after any of these changes, an event similar to that which before fell under our observation. The slow and deliberate steps of philosophers here, if any where, are distinguished from the precipitate march of the vulgar, who, hurried on by the smallest similitude, are incapable of all discernment or consideration.

But can you think, Cleanthes, that your usual phlegm and philosophy have been preserved in so wide a step as you have taken, when you compared to the universe houses, ships, furniture, machines, and, from their similarity in some circumstances, inferred a similarity in their causes? Thought, design, intelligence, such as we discover in men and other animals, is no more than one of the springs and principles of the universe, as well as heat or cold, attraction or repulsion, and a hundred others, which fall under daily observation. It is an active cause, by which some particular parts of nature, we find, produce alterations on other parts. But can a conclusion, with any propriety, be transferred from parts to the whole? Does not the great disproportion bar all comparison and inference? From observing the growth of a hair, can we learn any thing concerning the generation of a man? Would the manner of a leaf's blowing, even though perfectly known, afford us any instruction concerning the vegetation of a tree?

But, allowing that we were to take the operations of one part of nature upon another, for the foundation of our judgment concerning the origin of the whole, (which never can be admitted,) yet why select so minute, so weak, so bounded a principle, as the reason and design of animals is found to be upon this planet? What peculiar privilege has this little agitation of the brain which we call 'thought', that we must thus make it the model of the whole universe? Our partiality in our own favor does indeed present it on all occasions; but sound philosophy ought carefully to guard against so natural an illusion.

So far from admitting that the operations of a part can afford us any just conclusion concerning the origin of the whole, I will not allow any one part to form a rule for another part, if the latter be very remote from the former. Is there any reasonable ground to conclude, that the inhabitants of other planets possess thought, intelligence, reason, or any thing similar to these faculties in men? When nature has so extremely diversified her manner of operation in this small globe, can we imagine that she incessantly copies herself throughout so immense a universe? And if thought, as we may well suppose, be confined merely to this narrow corner, and has even there so limited a sphere of action, with what propriety can we assign it for the original cause of all things? The narrow views of a peasant, who makes his domestic economy the rule for the government of kingdoms, is in comparison a pardonable sophism.

But were we ever so much assured, that a thought and reason, resembling the human, were to be found throughout the whole universe, and were its activity elsewhere vastly greater and more commanding than it appears in this globe; yet I cannot see, why the operations of a world constituted, arranged, adjusted, can with any propriety be extended to a world which is in its

embryo state, and is advancing towards that constitution and arrangement. By observation, we know some[thing] of the economy, action, and nourishment of a finished animal; but we must transfer with great caution that observation to the growth of a fetus in the womb, and still more to the formation of an animalcule⁹³ in the loins of its male parent. Nature, we find, even from our limited experience, possesses an infinite number of springs and principles, which incessantly discover themselves on every change of her position and situation. And what new and unknown principles would actuate her in so new and unknown a situation as that of the formation of a universe, we cannot, without the utmost temerity, pretend to determine.

A very small part of this great system, during a very short time, is very imperfectly discovered to us; and do we thence pronounce decisively concerning the origin of the whole?

Admirable conclusion! Stone, wood, brick, iron, brass, have not, at this time, in this minute globe of earth, an order or arrangement without human art and contrivance; therefore, the universe could not originally attain its order and arrangement, without something similar to human art. But is a part of nature a rule for another part very wide of the former? Is it a rule for the whole? Is a very small part a rule for the universe? Is nature in one situation, a certain rule for nature in another situation vastly different from the former?

And can you blame me, Cleanthes, if I here imitate the prudent reserve of Simonides,⁹⁴ who, according to the noted story, being asked by Hiero, “*What God was?*” desired a day to think of it, and then two days more; and after that manner continually prolonged the term, without ever bringing in his definition or description? Could you even blame me, if I had answered at first, that I did not know, and was sensible that this subject lay vastly beyond the reach of my faculties? You might cry out skeptic and railler,⁹⁵ as much as you pleased: but having found, in so many other subjects much more familiar, the imperfections and even contradictions of human reason, I never should expect any success from its feeble conjectures, in a subject so sublime, and so remote from the sphere of our observation. When two species of objects have always been observed to be conjoined together, I can infer, by custom, the existence of one wherever I see the existence of the other; and this I call an argument from experience. But how this argument can have place, where the objects, as in the present case, are single, individual, without parallel, or specific resemblance, may be difficult to explain. And will any man tell me with a serious countenance, that an orderly universe must arise from some thought and art like the human, because we have experience of it? To ascertain this reasoning, it were requisite that we had experience of the origin of worlds; and it is not sufficient, surely, that we have seen ships and cities arise from human art and contrivance...

But to show you still more inconveniences, continued in your anthropomorphism, please to take a new survey of your principles. Like effects prove like causes. This is the experimental argument; and this, you say too, is the sole theological argument. Now, it is certain, that the liker the effects are which are seen, and the liker the causes which are inferred, the stronger is the argument. *Every departure on either side diminishes the probability, and renders the experiment*

⁹³ Latin, “little animal.” This is an archaic term for ‘microorganism’ and is used here by Philo to refer to sperm.

⁹⁴ Simonides of Keos (c.556-468 BCE) was a lyric poet noted for his ability to portray the complexities of human life in very simple terms.

⁹⁵ Someone who mocks or jeers others.

less conclusive. You cannot doubt of the principle; neither ought you to reject its consequences.

All the new discoveries in astronomy, which prove the immense grandeur and magnificence of the works of Nature, are so many additional arguments for a Deity, according to the true system of Theism; but, according to your hypothesis of experimental Theism, they become so many objections, by removing the effect still further from all resemblance to the effects of human art and contrivance. For, if Lucretius,⁹⁶ even following the old system of the world, could exclaim,

*Quis regere immensi summam, quis habere profundi
Indu manu validas potis est moderanter habenas?
Quis pariter coelos omnes convertere? et omnes
Ignibus aetheriis terras suffire feraces?
Omnibus inque locis esse omni tempore praesto?*⁹⁷

If Tully⁹⁸ esteemed this reasoning so natural, as to put it into the mouth of his Epicurean:

*Quibus enim oculis animi intueri potuit vester Plato fabricam illam
tanti operis, qua construi a Deo atque aedificari mundum facit? quae
molitio? quae ferramenta? qui vectes? quae machinae? qui ministri tanti
muneris fuerunt? quemadmodum autem obedire et parere voluntati architecti
aer, ignis, aqua, terra potuerunt?*⁹⁹

If this argument, I say, had any force in former ages, how much greater must it have at present, when the bounds of Nature are so infinitely enlarged, and such a magnificent scene is opened to us? It is still more unreasonable to form our idea of so unlimited a cause from our experience of the narrow productions of human design and invention.

The discoveries by microscopes, as they open a new universe in miniature, are still objections, according to you, arguments, according to me. The further we push our researches of this kind, we are still led to infer the universal cause of all to be vastly different from mankind, or from any object of human experience and observation.

And what say you to the discoveries in anatomy, chemistry, botany?...

⁹⁶ Titus Lucretius Carus (99-55 BCE) was a Roman philosopher and poet. His views are dominated by the work of Epikuros and he is attributed with introducing Epicureanism to the Roman world. Epicureanism is dominated by a materialistic—specifically, atomistic—ontology. Given that humans are, like the rest of the universe, nothing but a random collection of atoms moving through a void, the end or purpose of human life is concluded to be maximizing pleasure through an avoidance of discomfort. However, this does not mean excitement of the physical sense of pleasure, but rather an intellectual life that avoids ordinary entitlements that cause stress.

⁹⁷ “Who is strong enough to rule the sun, who to hold in hand and control the mighty bridle of the unfathomable deep? Who to turn about all the heavens at one time, and warm the fruitful worlds with eather’s fires, or to be present in all places and at all times?” *On the Nature of Things*, Book 2, 1096-1099.

⁹⁸ Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BCE) was a Roman philosopher, Senator, and orator

⁹⁹ “What power of mental vision enabled your master Plato to descry the vast and elaborate architectural process which, as he makes out the deity adopted in building the structure of the universe? What method of engineering was employed? What tools and levers and derricks? What agents carried out so vast an understanding? And how were air, fire, water, and earth enabled to obey and execute the will of the architect?” *The Nature of the Gods*, Book I, 8;19.

CLEANTHES: These surely are no objections, they only discover new instances of art and contrivance. It is still the image of mind reflected on us from innumerable objects.

PHILO: Add, a mind like the human.

CLEANTHES: I know of no other.

PHILO: And the liker the better?

CLEANTHES: To be sure.

PHILO: Now, Cleanthes, mark the consequences. First, by this method of reasoning, you *renounce all claims to infinity* in any of the attributes of the Deity. For, as the cause ought only to be proportioned to the effect, and the effect, so far as it falls under our cognizance, is not infinite; what pretensions have we, upon your suppositions, to ascribe that attribute to the Divine Being? You will still insist, that, by removing him so much from all similarity to human creatures, we give in to the most arbitrary hypothesis, and at the same time weaken all proofs of his existence.

Secondly, You have no reason, on your theory, for ascribing *perfection* to the Deity, even in his finite capacity, or for supposing him free from every error, mistake, or incoherence, in his undertakings. There are many inexplicable difficulties in the works of Nature, which, if we allow a perfect author to be proved *a priori*, are easily solved, and become only seeming difficulties, from the narrow capacity of man, who cannot trace infinite relations. But according to your method of reasoning, these difficulties become all real; and perhaps will be insisted on, as new instances of likeness to human art and contrivance. At least, you must acknowledge, that it is impossible for us to tell, from our limited views, whether this system contains any great faults, or deserves any considerable praise, if compared to other possible, and even real systems. Could a peasant, if the *Aeneid* were read to him, pronounce that poem to be absolutely faultless, or even assign to it its proper rank among the productions of human wit, he, who had never seen any other production?

But were this world ever so perfect a production, it must still remain uncertain, whether all the excellences of the work can justly be ascribed to the workman. If we survey a ship, what an exalted idea must we form of the ingenuity of the carpenter who framed so complicated, useful, and beautiful a machine? And what surprise must we feel, when we find him a stupid mechanic, who imitated others, and copied an art, which, through a long succession of ages, after multiplied trials, mistakes, corrections, deliberations, and controversies, had been gradually improving? Many worlds might have been botched and bungled, throughout an eternity, ere this system was struck out; much labor lost, many fruitless trials made; and a slow, but continued improvement carried on during infinite ages in the art of world-making. In such subjects, who can determine, where the truth; nay, who can conjecture where the probability lies, amidst a great number of hypotheses which may be proposed, and a still greater which may be imagined?

And what shadow of an argument can you produce, from your hypothesis, to prove the *unity* of

the Deity? A *great number* of men join in building a house or ship, in rearing a city, in framing a commonwealth; why may not several deities combine in contriving and framing a world? This is only so much greater similarity to human affairs. By sharing the work among several, we may so much further limit the attributes of each, and get rid of that extensive power and knowledge, which must be supposed in one deity, and which, according to you, can only serve to weaken the proof of his existence. And if such foolish, such vicious creatures as man, can yet often unite in framing and executing one plan, how much more those deities or demons, whom we may suppose several degrees more perfect!

To multiply causes without necessity, is indeed contrary to true philosophy: but this principle applies not to the present case. Were one deity antecedently proved by your theory, who were possessed of every attribute requisite to the production of the universe; it would be needless, I own, (though not absurd,) to suppose any other deity existent. But while it is still a question, whether all these attributes are united in one subject, or dispersed among several independent beings, by what phenomena in nature can we pretend to decide the controversy? Where we see a body raised in a scale, we are sure that there is in the opposite scale, however concealed from sight, some counterpoising weight equal to it; but it is still allowed to doubt, whether that weight be an aggregate of several distinct bodies, or one uniform united mass. And if the weight requisite very much exceeds anything which we have ever seen conjoined in any single body, the former supposition becomes still more probable and natural. An intelligent being of such vast power and capacity as is necessary to produce the universe, or, to speak in the language of ancient philosophy, so prodigious an animal exceeds all analogy, and even comprehension.

But further, Cleanthes, men are *mortal*, and renew their species by generation; and this is common to all living creatures. The two great sexes of male and female, says Milton, animate the world. Why must this circumstance, so universal, so essential, be excluded from those numerous and limited deities? Behold, then, the theogony¹⁰⁰ of ancient times brought back upon us.

And why not become a perfect Anthropomorphite?¹⁰¹ Why not assert the deity or deities to be corporeal, and to have eyes, a nose, mouth, ears, etc.? Epikuros maintained, that no man had ever seen reason but in a human figure; therefore, the gods must have a human figure. And this argument, which is deservedly so much ridiculed by Cicero, becomes, according to you, solid and philosophical.

In a word, Cleanthes, a man who follows your hypothesis is able, *perhaps*, to assert or conjecture, that the universe, sometime, arose from something *like* design: but *beyond that position he cannot ascertain one single circumstance*; and is left afterwards to fix every point of his theology by *the utmost license of fancy and hypothesis*. This world, for aught he knows, is very faulty and imperfect, compared to a superior standard; and was only the first rude essay of some infant deity, who afterwards abandoned it, ashamed of his lame performance: it is the work only of some dependent, inferior deity; and is the object of derision to his superiors: it is the production of old age and dotage in some superannuated deity; and ever since his death, has run on at adventures, from the first impulse and active force which it received from him. You justly

¹⁰⁰ Greek term meaning “birth of the gods”. See Hesiod, *Theogony*.

¹⁰¹ Someone who attributes human qualities to a non-human entity, in this case, God.

give signs of horror, Demea, at these strange suppositions; but these, and a thousand more of the same kind, are Cleanthes's suppositions, not mine. From *the moment the attributes of the Deity are supposed finite, all these have place*. And I cannot, for my part, think that so wild and unsettled a system of theology is, in any respect, preferable to none at all.

CHAPTER 4

Ethics

The Philosophical Investigation of Morality

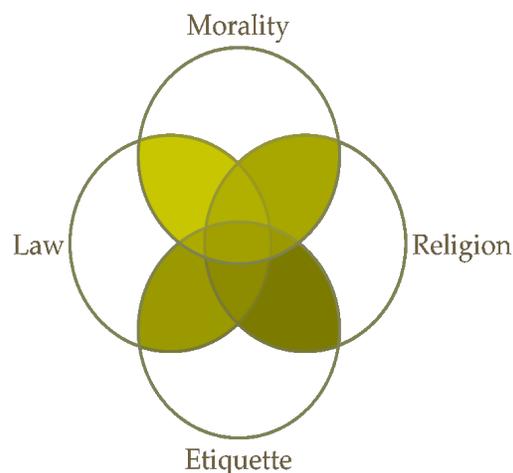
One of the most practical applications for the study of Philosophy is in the field of Ethics.

Definition: Ethics is the systematic philosophical study of morality.

But what is the difference between *ethics* and *morality*? Don't they mean the same thing? Not really. Given our definition we should be able to infer that '*ethics*' names a **field** of inquiry while '*morality*' names the **object** of that inquiry. Thus, we need to offer a definition of morality so we know what, exactly, is being studied in Ethics. Broadly speaking, we can define 'morality' as follows:

Definition: Morality is the normative *moral* code, or codes, of behavior acceptable/prohibited behavior within a particular group at a particular time.

It is important to note that there are several different kinds of *normative*, or behavioral, codes that are recognized within communities and we need to distinguish them from one another, even though they are related. First of all, there is the **law**. A legal code represents the minimum acceptable behavior of a particular group. Members of a society who are unwilling to abide by the law are sanctioned by the community as a whole (though sanctions vary in severity based on the perceived harm to the community). Secondly, there is the **moral code**. The moral code represents a much broader set of normative controls and is identifiable by the inverse proportion to the severity of the sanctions associated with the legal code. That is, societies tend to be more tolerant of moral violations than of violations of the law. We don't use economic sanctions or restrictions of liberty or life for those who act immorally. Thirdly, there is **etiquette** which represents the broadest possible set of behavioral expectations of a society. Those who violate the etiquette codes suffer the least serious sanctions of all. While one might insult a host or bring disgrace to Miss Manners, violations of politeness are not treated as harshly as either violations of the law or the moral code. What each of these codes have in common is their attempt to control the behavior of individuals within society.



The distinction between each code seems to be located in the severity of the punishments associated with each kind of violation.

In addition to the three normative codes noted above there is another type of social normative system: **religion**. Like law, morality and etiquette, religion is a normative system, i.e., it tells people how to behave. Unlike the three systems mentioned above, it usually entails *non-natural* sanctions for violations of the code of conduct (i.e., reincarnation, heaven/hell, etc.).

One of the things that makes an analysis of morality

difficult is the fact that these four different normative social systems overlap creating, in some cases, fuzzy boundaries. For example, while failing to pay your taxes is clearly a violation of the legal code, it does not seem to be rude, immoral, or impious. Murder, on the other hand, is not only a violation of the law, it is also generally considered to be impious, immoral, *and* rude! Thus, when we are thinking about morality, we must be careful to keep our analysis focused on the sphere of morality to avoid conflations of religious and legal questions. Attempting to draw the distinction between the legal and the moral, and to understand exactly what makes some social prescriptions part of the moral code as opposed to the legal or religious code, is in part, what some ethicists do. Thus, we can think of an ethicist (i.e., someone who *does* Ethics) as a philosopher who investigates the *nature of morality*. Ethicists are interested in the following kinds of questions:

1. What are the *grounds of morality* (i.e., why do people think one action is right and another wrong, and yet another permissible, but not obligatory), or the source of our moral intuitions?
2. Can we give a *systematic justification* of our moral intuitions (i.e., which actions really are right, wrong and permissible, and how can we *know* that they are)?
3. Are moral codes *objective* or *relative* (i.e., does right and wrong *vary* from place to place, time to time, or group to group)? and
4. How does the language of morality work (i.e., what do words like '*right*' and 'wrong' and '*permissible*' mean?)?

These four questions represent the foundation of ethical theory; they are the main problems ethicists try to resolve.

We should also note that a person may *study* Ethics without being moral, just as a person may be moral without knowing anything about Ethics. This should not be too surprising since we see many similar examples: an ornithologist studies birds without being one! However, what normally motivates the study of Ethics is a deep desire to know what is right and wrong and to be able to consistently apply that knowledge in all aspects of our lives. It would be frustrating, to say the least, to be condemned to go through life guessing at which actions are proper and which not. And yet, if one doesn't study Ethics, or at least put together some elementary ethical system, this is precisely what one must do. In fact, most people have some ethical system, some intellectual framework that guides their behavior. This is usually a patchwork system made of scraps taken from different sources. But if Ethics is given very little thought one is as likely as not to end up with an inconsistent set of beliefs which will collapse upon itself with only moderate external pressure, i.e., when we encounter a moral crisis. To avoid this, we need to apply philosophical scrutiny to our so-called *moral* behavior. Only then can we have some assurance that we are behaving as we ought.

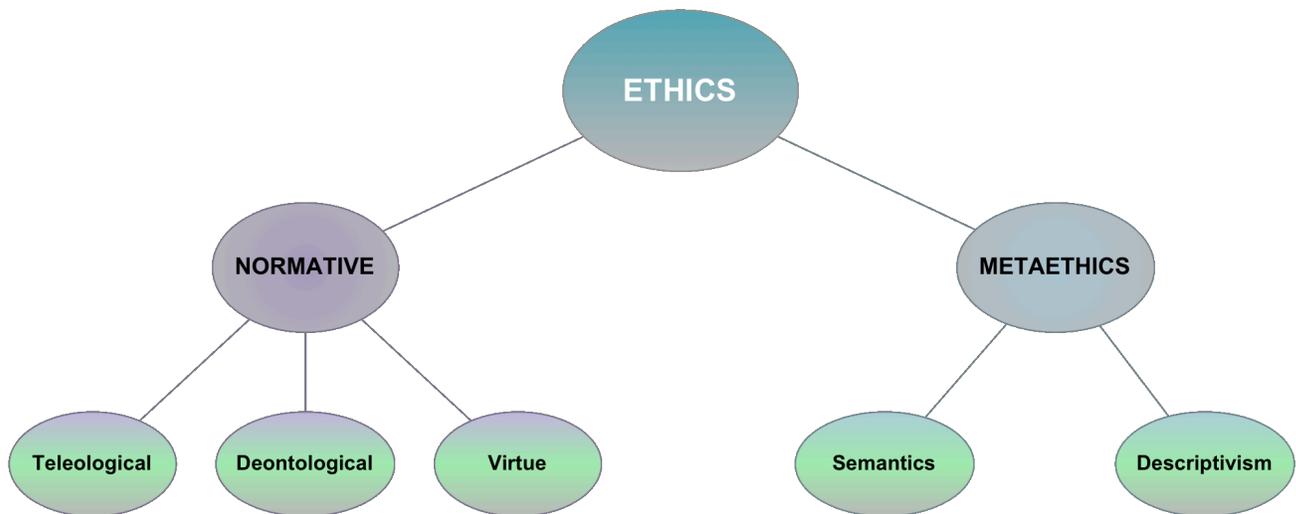
Where do we go from here?

As a subdiscipline of Philosophy, Ethics can be divided into two major parts, each part dealing with two of the basic questions noted above. One part of Ethics deals with the first two questions about the origins and justifications of our moral intuitions; we call this part *Normative* Ethics. The term

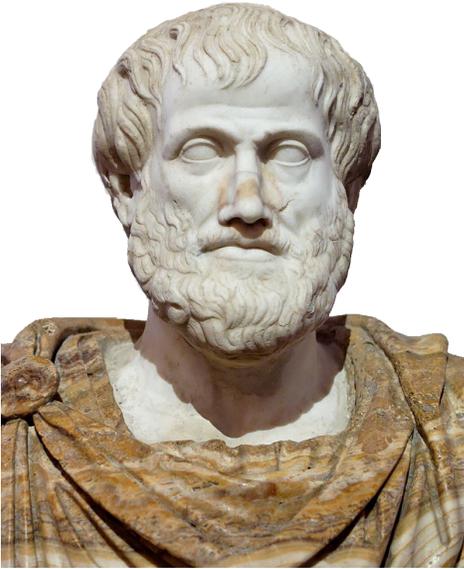
'normative' broadly means "action guiding." Thus, Normative Ethics is that part of ethical theory which tells us what we ought to do (this is what most people think of when they think of Ethics).

Definition: 'Normative Ethics' is that part of ethical theory which deals with the systematic articulation and justification of moral intuitions.

The second major part of ethical theory tells us **nothing** about *how to live* the moral life. Thus, it is best labeled 'Non-Normative' as it gives us no guidance. Non-Normative Ethics deals with the second pair of basic questions listed above: the nature of moral language (generally labeled '**Metaethics**'), and the objectivity of the codes articulated under the normative side of ethical theory. While I will offer a brief introduction to the problem of moral language, we will focus our attention on the more perplexing (and more interesting) problem of the objectivity of moral codes which is called '**Descriptivism**'.



We're going to divide our investigation of Ethics according to the division between the Normative and Non-Normative parts of the theory: **first**, we will look at a general problem (or 'meta problem') for any ethical theory to consider - are moral systems objective features of the world, or are they the subjective creations of particular individuals, cultures, or species (sometimes called **Moral Relativism**)? This is part of what we've called 'Non-Normative Ethics'. **Second**, we'll investigate the normative side of Ethics and the three main types of theories that are part of this part of the ethical enquiry. We will accomplish this by reading representatives from each of the three normative families (Aristotle - Virtue Ethics, and Immanuel Kant - Deontology, and John S. Mill - Consequentialism).



NICOMACHEAN ETHICS

(in part)

By:
Aristotle

Translated by: Benjamin Jowett
Additions, corrections, and footnotes by Barry F. Vaughan¹⁰²

BOOK I: The Teleology of Human Action

Chapter 1 – Every Action has an End

^{1094A}Every art (*τεχνη-technē*) and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good (*αγαθου-agathou*); and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim (*τελων-telōn*). But a certain difference is found among ends; some are activities, others are products apart from the activities that produce them. Where there are ends apart from the actions, it is the nature of the products to be better than the activities.

Now, as there are many actions, arts, and sciences (*επιστημων-epistemon*), their ends also are many; the end of the medical art is health, that of shipbuilding a vessel, that of strategy victory, that of economics wealth. But where such arts fall under a single capacity—as bridle-making and the other arts concerned with the equipment of horses fall under the art of riding, and this and every military action under strategy, in the same way other arts fall under yet others—in all of these the ends of the master arts are to be preferred to all the subordinate ends; for it is for the sake of the former that the latter are pursued. It makes no difference whether the activities themselves are the ends of the actions, or something else apart from the activities, as in the case of the sciences just mentioned.

Chapter 2 – Human Action is Political

If, then, there is some end of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake (*everything else being desired for the sake of this*), and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else

¹⁰² From the Internet Classics Archive. Full text available for download at <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.html>.

I have changed spellings to more accurately match the Greek text as opposed to the more traditional Latinized spellings. I have also changed UK spellings to US spellings where appropriate, as well as made clarifications in translation noted with brackets and added explanatory footnotes. This text is intended for academic or personal use and may not be sold or used for profit.

(for at that rate the process would go on to infinity, so that our desire would be empty and vain), clearly *this must be the good and the chief good*. Will not the knowledge of it, then, have a great influence on life? Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what is right? If so, we must try, in outline at least, to determine what it is, and of which of the sciences or capacities it is the object. It would seem to belong to the most authoritative art and that which is most truly the master art. And *politics* (*πολιτικη-politike*) *appears to be of this nature*; for it is this ^{1094b} that ordains which of the sciences should be studied in a state, and which each class of citizens should learn and up to what point they should learn them; and we see even the most highly esteemed of capacities to fall under this, e.g., strategy, economics, rhetoric; now, since *politics uses the rest of the sciences* (*επιστημων-epistemon*), and since, again, it legislates as to what we are to do and what we are to abstain from, the end of this science must include those of the others, so that *this end must be the good for man*. For even if the end is the same for a single man and for a state, that of the state seems at all events something greater and more complete whether to attain or to preserve; though it is worth while to attain the end merely for one man, it is finer and more godlike to attain it for a nation or for city-states. These, then, are the ends at which our inquiry aims, since it is political science, in one sense of that term.

Chapter 4 – Happiness is the Goal of Action

...In view of the fact that *all knowledge and every pursuit aims at some good*, what it is that we say political science aims at and what is the highest of all goods achievable by action. *Verbally* there is very general agreement; for both the general run of men and people of superior refinement say that it is *happiness* (*ευδαιμονια-eudaimonia*), and identify *living well* and *doing well* with *being happy*; but with regard to *what happiness is* they differ, and the many do not give the same account as the wise. For the former think it is some plain and obvious thing, like *pleasure, wealth, or honor*; they differ, however, from one another—and often even the same man identifies it with different things, with health when he is ill, with wealth when he is poor; but, conscious of their ignorance, they admire those who proclaim some great ideal that is above their comprehension. Now some thought that apart from these many goods there is another which is self-subsistent and causes the goodness of all these as well...

Chapter 5 – Different Conceptions of ‘Happiness’

...To judge from the lives that men lead, most men, and men of the most vulgar type, seem (not without some ground) to *identify the good, or happiness, with pleasure* (*ηδονην-hedonen*); which is the reason why they love the life of enjoyment. For there are, we may say, *three prominent types of life*¹⁰³—that just mentioned, the *political*, and thirdly the *contemplative* life. Now the mass of mankind are evidently quite slavish in their tastes, preferring a life suitable to beasts, but they get some ground for their view from the fact that many of those in high places share the tastes of Sardanapallus.¹⁰⁴ A consideration of the prominent types of life shows that people of superior refinement and of active disposition identify happiness with honor; for this is, roughly speaking, the

¹⁰³ The notion of three kinds of lives (i.e., the life of pleasure, the life of politics, the life of observation/contemplation) was a common trope in Classical Greek culture and probably originates with the Pythagorean School.

¹⁰⁴ The name ‘Sardanapalus’ is either mythical, or a corruption of ‘Ashurbanipal’ who was an emperor of Assyria in the 7th Century BCE. To a Classical Greek the name is associated with a life of corruption, effeminacy, gluttony, and general excess.

end of the political life. But it seems too superficial to be what we are looking for, since it is thought to *depend on those who bestow honor rather than on him who receives it*, but the good we divine to be something proper to a man and not easily taken from him. Further, men seem to pursue honor *in order that they may be assured* of their goodness; at least it is by men of practical wisdom (*φρονιμων-phronimon*) that they seek to be honored, and among those who know them, and on the ground of their virtue; clearly, then, according to them, at any rate, virtue (*αρετην-aretē*)¹⁰⁵ is better. And perhaps one might even suppose this to be—rather than honor—the end of the political life. But even this appears somewhat incomplete; for possession of [excellence] seems actually compatible with being asleep, or with lifelong inactivity, and, further, with the greatest ^{1096a}sufferings and misfortunes; but a man who was living so no one would call happy, unless he were maintaining a thesis at all costs. But enough of this; for the subject has been sufficiently treated even in the current discussions. Third comes the contemplative life, which we shall consider later.

The life of money-making is one undertaken under compulsion, and wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking; for it is *merely* useful, and *for the sake of something else*. And so one might rather take the aforementioned objects to be ends; for they are loved *for* themselves. But it is evident that not even these are ends; yet many arguments have been thrown away in support of them...

Chapter 7 – The Purpose of Human Life

Let us again return to the good we are seeking, and ask what it can be. It seems different in different actions and arts; it is different in medicine, in strategy, and in the other arts likewise. What then is the good of each? Surely, *that for whose sake everything else is done*. In medicine this is health, in strategy victory, in architecture a house, in any other sphere something else, and in every action and pursuit the end; for it is *for the sake of* this that all men do whatever else they do. Therefore, if there is an end for all that we do, this will be the good achievable by action, and if there are more than one, these will be the goods achievable by action.

So the argument has by a different course reached the same point; but we must try to state this even more clearly. Since there [is] evidently more than one end, and we choose some of these (e.g., wealth, flutes, and in general instruments) *for the sake of something else*, clearly **not all ends are final ends**; but *the chief good is evidently something final*. Therefore, if there is only one final end, this will be what we are seeking, and if there are more than one, the most final of these will be what we are seeking. Now we call *that which is in-itself worthy of pursuit* more final than that which is worthy of pursuit for the sake of something else, and that which is never desirable for the sake of something else more final than the things that are desirable both in themselves and for the sake of that other thing, and therefore, we call ‘final’—without qualification—that which is **always desirable in-itself and never for the sake of something else**.

Now such a thing **happiness**, above all else, is held to be; for this we choose always for self and never for the sake of something else, but honor, pleasure, reason, and every virtue we choose indeed for themselves (for if nothing resulted from them we should still choose each of them), but we choose them also for the sake of happiness, judging that by means of them we shall be happy.

¹⁰⁵ While usually translated ‘virtue’ the Greek word *αρεται* is more accurately rendered ‘excellence’.

Happiness, on the other hand, no one chooses for the sake of these, nor, in general, for anything other than itself...

Presumably, however, to say that happiness is the chief good seems a platitude, and a clearer account of what it is, [is] still desired. This might perhaps be given, if we could first ascertain *the function of man*. For just as for a flute-player, a sculptor, or an artist, and, in general, for all things that have a function or activity, the good and the 'well' is thought to reside in the function, so would it seem to be for man, if he has a function. Have the carpenter, then, and the tanner certain functions or activities, and has man none? Is he born without a function? Or as eye, hand, foot, and in general each of the parts evidently has a function, may one lay it down that man similarly has a function apart from all these? What then can this be? Life seems to be common even to plants, but we are seeking what is *peculiar* to man. Let us ^{1098a}exclude, therefore, the *life of nutrition and growth*.¹⁰⁶

Next there would be a *life of perception*,¹⁰⁷ but it also seems to be common even to the horse, the ox, and every animal. There remains, then, *an active life of the element that has a rational principle*; of this, one part has such a principle in the sense of being obedient to one, the other in the sense of possessing one and *exercising thought*. And, as 'life of the rational element' also has two meanings, we must state that life in the sense of activity is what we mean; for this seems to be the more proper sense of the term. Now if the function of man is an activity of soul which follows or implies a rational principle, and if we say 'so-and-so-and 'a good so-and-so' have a function which is the same in kind, e.g., a lyre, and a good lyre-player, and so without qualification in all cases, eminence in respect of goodness being added to the name of the function (for the function of a lyre-player is to play the lyre, and that of a good lyre-player is to do so well): if this is the case, and we state the function of man to be a certain kind of life, and this to be an activity or actions of the soul implying a rational principle, and the function of a good man to be the good and noble performance of these, and if any action is well performed when it is performed in accordance with the appropriate excellence: if this is the case, *human good turns out to be activity of soul in accordance with virtue*, and if there [is] more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete.

But we must add 'in a complete life.' For,

one swallow does not make a summer,

nor does one day; and so too one day, or a short time, does not make a man blessed and happy.

BOOK II: How Moral Virtue is Produced

Chapter 1 – Two Kinds of Virtue/Excellence

[Excellence], then, being of two kinds, *intellectual* and [ethical] (*εθικης—ethikes*), intellectual [excellence] in the main owes both its *birth and its growth to teaching* (for which reason it requires **experience** and **time**), while [ethical excellence] *comes about as a result of habit*, whence also its

¹⁰⁶ The 'nutritive' soul is the life of a plant; it takes in and processes nutrition; it grows and reproduces; it dies.

¹⁰⁷ The 'sensitive' soul differs from the nutritive soul in that it not only processes nutrition, but to do so it must have senses. Without the capacity of sensation, animals would be unable to find food and mates.

name is one that is formed by a slight variation from the word (i.e., *ηθος*–*ethos*). From this it is also plain that *none* of the [ethical excellences] *arises in us by nature*; for nothing that exists by nature can form a habit contrary to its nature. For instance, the stone which by nature moves downwards cannot be habituated to move upwards, not even if one tries to train it by throwing it up ten thousand times; nor can fire be habituated to move downwards, nor can anything else that by nature behaves in one way be trained to behave in another. Neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature do the virtues arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit.

Again, of all the things that come to us by nature we first acquire the potentiality and later exhibit the activity (this is plain in the case of the senses; for it was not by often seeing or often hearing that we got these senses, but on the contrary we had them before we used them, and did not come to have them by using them); but *the virtues we get by first exercising them*, as also happens in the case of the arts as well. For the things we have to learn before we can do them, *we learn by doing them*, e.g., men become builders by building and lyre-players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts..

Again, it is from the same causes and by the same means that every [excellence] is both produced and destroyed, and similarly every art; for it is from playing the lyre that both good and bad lyre-players are produced. And the corresponding statement is true of builders and of all the rest; men will be good or bad builders as a result of building well or badly. For if this were not so, there would have been no need of a teacher, but all men would have been born good or bad at their craft. This, then, is the case with the virtues also; *by doing the acts that we do in our transactions with other men we become just or unjust*, and by doing the acts that we do in the presence of danger, and being habituated to feel fear or confidence, we become *brave or cowardly*. The same is true of appetites and feelings of anger; some men become *temperate* and good-tempered, others *self-indulgent* and irascible, by behaving in one way or the other in the appropriate circumstances. Thus, in one word, *states of character arise out of like activities*. This is why the activities we exhibit must be of a certain kind; it is because the states of character correspond to the differences between these. It makes no small difference, then, whether we form habits of one kind or of another from our very youth; *it makes a very great difference, or rather all the difference*.

Chapter 2 – Moral Virtue is the Mean Between Lack and Excess

Since, then, the present inquiry does not aim at theoretical knowledge like the others (for we are inquiring, not in order to know what virtue *is*, but in order to *become* good, since otherwise our inquiry would have been of no use), *we must examine the nature of actions*, namely how we ought to do them; for these determine also the nature of the states of character that are produced, as we have said.

Now, *that we must act according to the right rule* is a common principle and must be assumed—it will be discussed later, i.e., *both what* the right rule is, and *how* it is related to the other virtues. But this must be agreed upon beforehand, that the whole account of matters of conduct must be given in outline and not precisely, as we said at the very beginning that the accounts we demand must be in accordance with the subject-matter; matters concerned with conduct and questions of what is good for us have no fixity, any more than matters of health. The general account being of this nature, the account of particular cases is yet more lacking in exactness; for they do not fall under any art or

precept but *the agents themselves must in each case consider what is appropriate to the occasion*, as happens also in the art of medicine or of navigation.

...First, then, let us consider this, that it is the nature of such things to be destroyed by [**lack**] and **excess**, as we see in the case of strength and of health; both *excessive* and *defective exercise* destroys the strength, and similarly drink or food which is above or below a certain amount destroys the health, while that which is proportionate both produces and increases and preserves it. So too is it, then, in the case of *temperance* and *courage* and the other virtues. For the man who flies from and fears everything and does not stand his ground against anything becomes a coward, and the man who fears nothing at all but goes to meet every danger becomes rash; and similarly the man who indulges in every pleasure and abstains from none becomes self-indulgent, while the man who shuns every pleasure, as boors do, becomes in a way insensible; *temperance and courage, then, are destroyed by excess and [lack], and preserved by the mean.*

But not only are the sources and causes of their origination and growth the same as those of their destruction, but also the sphere of their actualization will be the same; for this is also true of the things which are more evident to sense, e.g., of strength; it is produced by taking much food and undergoing much exertion, and it is the strong man that will be most able to do these things. So too is it with the virtues; *by abstaining from pleasures we become temperate*, and it is when we have become so that we are most able to abstain from them; and similarly too in the case of courage; *for by being habituated to despise things that are terrible and to stand our ground against them we become brave*, and it is when we have become so that we shall be most able to stand our ground against them.

Chapter 3 – Moral Virtue Deals with Pleasure and Pain

We must take as *a sign of states of character* the pleasure or pain that ensues on acts; for *the man who abstains from bodily pleasures and delights in this very fact is temperate*, while *the man who is annoyed at it is self-indulgent*, and *he who stands his ground against things that are terrible and delights in this or at least is not pained is brave*, while *the man who is pained is a coward*. For [ethical] excellence is concerned with pleasures and pains; it is on account of the pleasure that we do bad things, and on account of the pain that we abstain from noble ones. Hence, we ought to have been brought up in a particular way from our very youth, as Plato says, *so as both to delight in and to be pained by the things that we ought*; for this is the right education.

Again, if the virtues are concerned with actions and passions, and every passion and every action is accompanied by pleasure and pain, for *this reason also virtue will be concerned with pleasures and pains*. *This is indicated also by the fact that punishment is inflicted by these means; for it is a kind of cure, and it is the nature of cures to be effected by contraries.*

Again, as we said [before], *every state of soul has a nature relative to and concerned with the kind of things by which it tends to be made worse or better*; but it is [because] of pleasures and pains that men become bad, by pursuing and avoiding these—either ***the pleasures and pains they ought not or when they ought not or as they ought not, or by going wrong in one of the other similar ways that may be distinguished*. Hence men even define the virtues as certain states of impassivity and rest; not well, however, because they speak absolutely, and do not say '*as one ought*' and '*as one ought*

not' and 'when one ought or ought not', and the other things that may be added. We assume, then, that this kind of excellence tends to do what is best with regard to pleasures and pains, and vice does the contrary.

The following facts also may show us that virtue and vice are concerned with these same things. There being *three objects of choice* and *three of avoidance*, the **noble**, the **advantageous**, the **pleasant**, and their contraries, the **base**, the **injurious**, the **painful**, about all of these the good man tends to go right and the bad man to go wrong, and especially about pleasure; for this is common to the animals, and also it accompanies all objects of choice; for even the noble and the advantageous appear pleasant.

^{1105a}Again, it has grown up with us all from our infancy; this is why it is difficult to rub off this passion, engrained as it is in our life. And we measure even our actions—some of us more and others less—by the rule of pleasure and pain. For this reason, then, our whole inquiry must be about these; for *to feel delight and pain rightly or wrongly has no small effect on our actions*.

Again, it is *harder to fight with pleasure than with anger*, to use Heraclitus' phrase', but both art and virtue are always concerned with what is harder; for even the good is better when it is harder. ***Therefore, for this reason the whole concern of both virtue and of political science is with pleasures and pains; for the man who uses these well will be good, he who uses them badly, [will be] bad...***

Chapter 4 – Ethical Virtue Cannot be Accidental

The question might be asked: “what [do] we mean by saying that we must become just by doing just acts, and temperate by doing temperate acts?” [This is a problem because], if men do just and temperate acts, they *are* just and temperate, [and in the same way] if they do what is in accordance with the laws of grammar and of music, they *are* grammarians and musicians.

Or is this not true even of the arts? It is possible to do something that is in accordance with the laws of grammar, either *by chance* or at *the suggestion of another*. A man will be a grammarian, then, only when he has done something grammatical *and* done it grammatically; and this means *doing it in accordance with the grammatical knowledge in himself*.

Again, the case of the arts and that of the virtues are not similar; for the products of the arts have their goodness in themselves, so that it is enough that they should have a certain character, but if the acts that are in accordance with the virtues have themselves a certain character it does not follow that they are done justly or temperately. The agent also must be in a certain condition when he does them; in the first place he must have *knowledge*, secondly, he must *choose* the acts, and choose them for their own sakes, and thirdly his action *must proceed from a firm and unchangeable character*. These are not reckoned in as conditions of the possession of the arts, except the ^{1105b}bare knowledge; but as a condition of the possession of the virtues knowledge has little or no weight, while the other conditions count not for a little but for everything, i.e., the very conditions which result from often doing just and temperate acts.

*Actions, then, are called 'just' and 'temperate' when they are such as the just or the temperate man would do; but it is not the man who does these that is just and temperate, but the man who **also** does them as just and temperate men do them.* It is well said, then, that it is by doing just acts that the just man is produced, and by doing temperate acts the temperate man; without doing these no one would have even a prospect of becoming good.

But most people do not do these, but take refuge in theory and think they are being philosophers and will become good in this way, behaving somewhat like patients who listen attentively to their doctors, but do none of the things they are ordered to do. As the latter will not be made well in body by such a course of treatment, the former will not be made well in soul by such a course of philosophy.

Chapter 5 – Virtues are States of Character (*not Passions or Faculties*)

Next we must consider what virtue *is*. Since things that are found in the soul are of three kinds—*passions, faculties, states of character*, [excellence] must be one of these. By 'passions' I mean appetite, anger, fear, confidence, envy, joy, friendly feeling, hatred, longing, emulation, pity, and in general the feelings that are accompanied by pleasure or pain. By 'faculties' [I mean] the things [that make it possible to] feel these, e.g., of becoming angry or being pained or feeling pity. By 'states of character' [I mean] the things in virtue of which we stand well or badly with reference to the passions, e.g., with reference to anger we stand badly if we feel it violently or too weakly, and well if we feel it moderately; and similarly with reference to the other passions.

Now neither the virtues nor the vices are *passions*, because we are not called good or bad on the ground of our passions, but are so called on the ground of our virtues and our vices, and because we are neither praised nor blamed for our passions (for the man who feels fear or anger is not praised, nor is the man who simply feels anger blamed, but the man who feels it in a certain way),^{1106a} but for our virtues and our vices we are praised or blamed.

Again, we *feel* anger and fear without choice, but *the virtues are modes of choice* or involve choice. Further, in respect of the passions we are said to be moved, but in respect of the virtues and the vices we are said not to be moved but to be disposed in a particular way.

For these reasons also they are not faculties; for we are neither called good nor bad, nor praised nor blamed, for the simple capacity of feeling the passions; again, we have the faculties by nature, but we are not made good or bad by nature; we have spoken of this before. If, then, the virtues are neither passions nor faculties, all that remains is that they should be states of character...

Chapter 6 – Ethical Virtue is a Mean Relative to the Individual

We must, however, not only describe [excellence] as a state of character, but also say *what sort of state* it is. We may remark, then, that every virtue or excellence both brings into good condition the thing of which it is the excellence and makes the work of that thing be done well; e.g., the excellence of the eye makes both the eye and its work good; for it is by the excellence of the eye that we see well. Similarly the excellence of the horse makes a horse both good in-itself and good at running and at carrying its rider and at awaiting the attack of the enemy. Therefore, if this is true in every

case, *the virtue of man also will be the state of character which makes a man good and which makes him do his own work well.*

How this is to happen we have stated already, but it will be made plain also by the following consideration of the specific nature of virtue. In everything that is continuous and divisible it is possible to take more, less, or an equal amount, and that either in terms of the thing itself or relatively to us; and the equal is an intermediate between excess and defect. By the **intermediate in the object** I mean *that which is equidistant from each of the extremes*, which is one and the same for all men; by the **intermediate relatively to us** [I mean] *that which is neither too much nor too little*—and this is not one, nor the same for all. For instance, if ten is many and two is few, six is the intermediate, taken in terms of the object; for it exceeds and is exceeded by an equal amount; this is intermediate according to arithmetical proportion. But the intermediate relatively to us is not to be taken so; if ten pounds ¹¹⁰⁶are too much for a particular person to eat and two too little, it does not follow that the trainer will order six pounds; for this also is perhaps too much for the person who is to take it, or too little—too little for Milo, too much for the beginner in athletic exercises. The same is true of running and wrestling. Thus, a master of any art avoids excess and defect, but seeks the intermediate and chooses this—the intermediate not in the object *but relatively to us*.

If it is thus, then, that every art does its work well—by looking to the intermediate and judging its works by this standard ... and if, further, virtue is more exact and better than any art, as nature also is, then virtue must have the quality of aiming at the intermediate. I mean [ethical] virtue; for it is this that is concerned with passions and actions, and in these there is excess, defect, and the intermediate. For instance, both fear and confidence and appetite and anger and pity and in general pleasure and pain may be felt both too much and too little, and in both cases not well; but to feel them at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way, is what is both intermediate and best, and this is characteristic of virtue. Similarly with regard to actions also there is excess, defect, and the intermediate. Now virtue is concerned with passions and actions, in which excess is a form of failure, and so is defect, while the intermediate is praised and is a form of success; and being praised and being successful are both characteristics of virtue. Therefore, *virtue is a kind of mean*, since, as we have seen, it *aims at what is intermediate*.

Again, it is possible to fail in many ways (for evil belongs to the class of the unlimited, as the Pythagoreans conjectured, and good to that of the limited), while to succeed is possible only in one way (for which reason also one is easy and the other difficult—to miss the mark easy, to hit it difficult); for these reasons also, then, excess and defect are characteristic of vice, and the mean of virtue;

For men are good in but one way, but bad in many.

[Excellence], then, is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e. the mean relative to us, this being determined ^{1107a}by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it. Now *it is a mean between two vices*, that which depends on *excess* and that which depends on *defect*; and again, it is a mean because *the vices respectively fall short of or exceed what is right in both passions and actions*, while virtue both finds

and chooses that which is intermediate. Hence in respect of its substance and the definition which states its essence virtue is a mean, with regard to what is best and right [it is] an extreme.

But *not every action nor every passion admits of a mean*; for some have names that already imply badness, e.g., spite, shamelessness, envy, and in the case of actions adultery, theft, murder; for all of these and suchlike things imply by their names that they are themselves bad, and not the excesses or deficiencies of them. *It is not possible, then, ever to be right with regard to them*; one must always be wrong. Nor does goodness or badness with regard to such things depend on committing adultery with the right woman, at the right time, and in the right way, but simply to do any of them is to go wrong. It would be equally absurd, then, to expect that in unjust, cowardly, and voluptuous action there should be a mean, an excess, and a deficiency; for at that rate there would be a mean of excess and of deficiency, an excess of excess, and a deficiency of deficiency. But as there is no excess and deficiency of temperance and courage because what is intermediate is in a sense an extreme, so too of the actions we have mentioned there is no mean nor any excess and deficiency, but however they are done they are wrong; for in general there is neither a mean of excess and deficiency, nor excess and deficiency of a mean...

Chapter 8 – The Relationships between Means and Extremes

There are three kinds of disposition, then, two of them vices, involving excess and deficiency respectively, and one a virtue/[excellence], viz., the mean, and all are in a sense opposed to all; for the *extreme states are contrary both to the intermediate state and to each other*, and the intermediate to the extremes; as the equal is greater relatively to the less, less relatively to the greater, so the middle states are excessive relatively to the deficiencies, deficient relatively to the excesses, both in passions and in actions. For *the brave man appears rash relatively to the coward*, and *cowardly relatively to the rash man*; and similarly, the temperate man appears self-indulgent relatively to the insensible man, insensible relatively to the self-indulgent, and the liberal man prodigal relatively to the mean man, mean relatively to the prodigal. Hence also the people at the extremes push the intermediate man each over to the other, and the brave man is called rash by the coward, cowardly by the rash man, and correspondingly in the other cases.

These states being thus opposed to one another, the greatest contrariety is that of the extremes to each other, rather than to the intermediate; for these are further from each other than from the intermediate, as the great is further from the small and the small from the great than both are from the equal. Again, to the intermediate some extremes show a certain likeness, as that of rashness to courage and that of prodigality to liberality; but the extremes show the greatest unlikeness to each other; now contraries are defined as the things that are furthest from each other, so that things that are further apart are more contrary.

^{1109a}Τ To the mean in some cases the deficiency, in some the excess is more opposed; e.g., it is not rashness, which is an excess, but cowardice, which is a deficiency, that is more opposed to courage, and not insensibility, which is a deficiency, but self-indulgence, which is an excess, that is more opposed to temperance. This happens from two reasons, one being drawn from the thing itself; for because one extreme is nearer and liker to the intermediate, we oppose not this but rather its contrary to the intermediate. E.g., since rashness is thought liker and nearer to courage, and cowardice more unlike, we oppose rather the latter to courage; for things that are further from the intermediate are

thought more contrary to it. This, then, is one cause, drawn from the thing itself; another is drawn from ourselves; for the things to which we ourselves more naturally tend seem more contrary to the intermediate. For instance, we ourselves tend more naturally to pleasures, and hence are more easily carried away towards self-indulgence than towards propriety. We describe as contrary to the mean, then, rather the directions in which we more often go to great lengths; and therefore self-indulgence, which is an excess, is the more contrary to temperance.

Chapter 9

That [ethical] virtue is a mean, then, and in what sense it is so, and that it is a mean between two vices, the one involving excess, the other deficiency, and that it is such because its character is to aim at what is intermediate in passions and in actions, has been sufficiently stated. Hence, also, *it is no easy task to be good*. For in everything *it is no easy task to find the middle*, e.g., to find the middle of a circle is not for every one but for him who knows; so, too, any one can get angry—that is easy—or give or spend money; but to do this to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way, that is not for every one, nor is it easy; wherefore goodness is both rare and laudable and noble.

Hence he who aims at the intermediate must first depart from what is the more contrary to it, as Calypso advises:

*Hold the ship out beyond that surf and spray.*¹⁰⁸

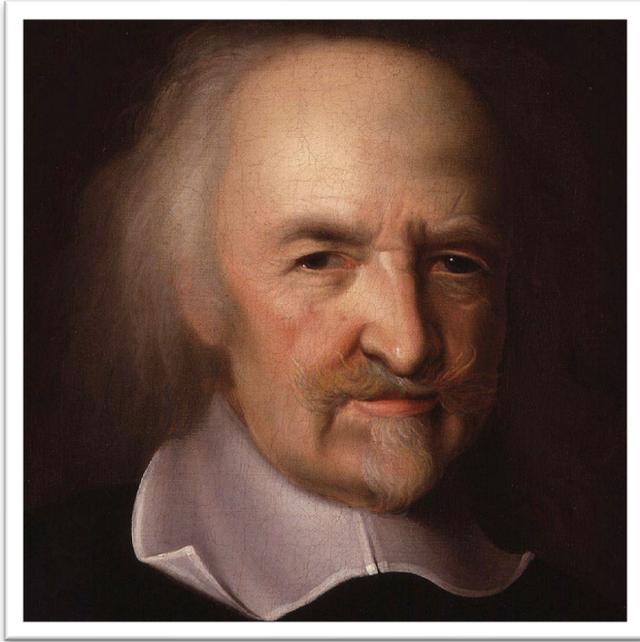
For of the extremes one is more erroneous, one less so; therefore, since to hit the mean is hard in the extreme, we must as a second best, as people say, take the least of the evils; and this will be done best in the way we describe. But we must consider the things towards which we ourselves also are easily carried away; for some of us tend to one thing, some to another; and this will be recognizable from the pleasure and the pain we feel. We must drag ourselves away to the contrary extreme; for we shall get into the intermediate state by drawing well away from error, as people do in straightening sticks that are bent.

Now in everything the *pleasant or pleasure is most to be guarded against*; for we do not judge it impartially. We ought, then, to feel towards pleasure as the elders of the people felt towards Helen, and in all circumstances repeat their saying; for if we dismiss pleasure thus, we are less likely to go astray. It is by doing this, then, (to sum the matter up) that we shall best be able to hit the mean.

But this is no doubt difficult, and especially in individual cases; for or is not easy to determine both how and with whom and on what provocation and how long one should be angry; for we too sometimes praise those who fall short and call them good-tempered, but sometimes we praise those who get angry and call them manly. The man, however, who deviates little from goodness is not blamed, whether he do so in the direction of the more or of the less, but only the man who deviates more widely; for he does not fail to be noticed. But up to what point and to what extent a man must deviate before he becomes blameworthy it is not easy to determine by reasoning, any more than anything else that is perceived by the senses; such things depend on particular facts, and the decision

¹⁰⁸ Odyssey, XII:216f.

rests with perception. So much, then, is plain, that the intermediate state is in all things to be praised, but that we must incline sometimes towards the excess, sometimes towards the deficiency; for so shall we most easily hit the mean and what is right.



LEVIATHAN:
*Or, The Matter, Form And Power of
a Commonwealth, Ecclesiastical and
Civil
(in part)*

By:
**Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury
(1651)**

*Modernization, additions, corrections, and
footnotes by Barry F. Vaughan¹⁰⁹*

CHAPTER XIII

**OF THE NATURAL CONDITION OF MANKIND, AS CONCERNING THEIR FELICITY,
AND MISERY**

Nature has made [humans] so equal—in the faculties of body and mind—that though there [is] found one [person] sometimes [physically] stronger, or [another] quicker [of] mind, yet when all is reckoned together, the difference between [humans] is not so considerable that one can claim to himself any benefit, to which another may not pretend [just] as well. For as to [physical] strength, [even] the weakest [is strong] enough to kill the strongest, either by secret [plans], or by [conspiring together] with others [who] are in the same danger [as] himself.

And as [far as mental faculties go], (*setting aside the arts grounded upon [verbal ability], especially Science—th[e] skill of proceeding [from] general, and infallible rules [to particular conclusions]—which very few have; [these are] not a native faculties born with us, nor [are they easily] attained [through] common human experience*), I find [an even] greater equality among [people] than [physical] strength. For prudence is nothing but experience; which equal time equally bestows on all men, in those things they equally apply themselves to. That which may perhaps make such equality incredible is [nothing] but a vain conceit of one's own wisdom, which almost all men think they have in a greater degree than the vulgar; that is, than all men but themselves and a few others whom by fame or for concurring with themselves, they approve. For such is the nature of men, that

¹⁰⁹ From the Project Gutenberg's [Leviathan](http://www.gutenberg.org), by Thomas Hobbes, www.gutenberg.org. For the full text visit the Project Gutenberg website. This edited version is intended for academic or personal use and may not be sold or used for profit. I have changed UK spellings to US spellings where appropriate, as well as made clarifications in modernization (noted with brackets) and have added explanatory footnotes.

howsoever they may acknowledge many others to be more witty, or more eloquent, or more learned; yet they will hardly believe there [are] many so wise as themselves: for they see their own wit at hand, and other men's at a distance. But this proves that men are in that point equal, than unequal. For there is not ordinarily a greater sign of the equal distribution of any thing, than that every man is contented with his share.

[Equality Causes Mistrust]

From this equality of ability arises equality of hope in attaining our ends. And therefore, if any two men desire the same thing, which they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their end, (which is principally their own conservation, and sometimes their delectation only) endeavor to destroy or subdue one another. And from hence it comes to pass that where an invader has no more to fear than another man's single power; if one plant[s], sow[s], build[s], or possess a convenient seat, others may probably be expected to come prepared with forces united, to dispossess, and deprive him, not only of the fruit of his labor, but also of his life, or liberty. And the invader again is in [similar] danger.

[Mistrust Causes War]

And from this [mistrust] of one another, there is no way for any man to secure himself so reasonable as anticipation; that is, by force or [strategy], to master the persons of all men he can, so long, [un]till he see no other power great enough to endanger him: and this is no more than his own conservation requires, and is generally allowed. Also, because there [are] some that taking pleasure in contemplating their own power in the acts of conquest, which they pursue farther than their security requires; if others, that otherwise would be glad to be at ease within modest bounds, should not by invasion increase their power, they would not be able, long time, by standing only on their defense, to subsist. And by consequence, such augmentation of dominion over men, being necessary to a man's conservation, it ought to be allowed him.

Again, men have no pleasure (but on the contrary a great deal of grief) in keeping company, where there is no power able to over-awe them all. For every man [expects] that his companion should value him at the same rate he sets upon himself: and upon all signs of contempt, or undervaluing, naturally endeavors, as far as he dares (which amongst them that have no common power, to keep them in quiet, is far enough to make them destroy each other,) to extort a greater value from his condemners, by damage; and from others, by the example. So in the nature of man we find three principal causes of quarrel: first, *competition*; second, *[mistrust]*; [and] third, *glory*.

The first makes men invade for *gain*; the second, for *safety*; and the third, for *reputation*. The first use *violence*, to make themselves masters of other men's persons, wives, children, and cattle. The second, to defend them, and the third for trifles as a word, a smile, a different opinion, and any other sign of undervalue, either direct in their persons, or by reflexing in their kindred, their friends, their nation, their profession, or their name.

[In The Absence of Society There Is Universal War]

Hereby it is manifest that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in

[submission], they are in that condition which is called **war**; and such a war, as is of *every man, against every man*. For **war** consists not in battle only—or the act of fighting—but in a [period] of time wherein *the will to contend by battle* is sufficiently known. And therefore, the notion of *time* is to be considered in the nature of war, [just] as it is in the nature of weather. For as the nature of foul weather lies not in a shower or two of rain but in an inclination thereto of many days together: so the nature of war, consists not in actual fighting; but *in the known disposition thereto*, during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary. All other time is **peace**.

[The Cost of War]

Whatsoever, therefore, is consequent to a time of war—where every man is enemy to every man—the same is consequent to the time wherein men live with [no] other security than what their own strength and their own invention shall furnish them with. In such [a] condition there is no place for *industry*; because the fruit thereof is uncertain; and consequently no *culture of the earth*; no *navigation*, nor use of the *commodities* that may be imported by sea; no *commodious building*; no *instruments of moving*, and removing such things as require much force; no *knowledge of the face of the earth*; no account of *time*; no *arts*; no *letters*; no *society*; and which is worst of all, *continual fear and danger of violent death*; and *the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short*.

It may seem strange to [those who have] not [carefully considered] these things, that nature should thus dissociate and [make] men apt to invade and destroy one another. And he may, therefore, not trusting to this inference—made from the passions—desire perhaps to have the same confirmed by experience. Let him, therefore, consider with[in] himself: when taking a journey, he arms himself and seeks to go well accompanied; when going to sleep, he locks his doors; when even in his [own] house he locks his chests; and [all] this when he knows there [are] laws, and public officers, armed, to revenge all injuries [that might] be done [to] him. What opinion [does] he [have] of his fellow subjects when he rides armed; [or] of his fellow citizens when he locks his doors; and of his children, and servants when he locks his chests? Does he not there as much accuse mankind by his actions, as I do by my words? But neither of us accuse man's nature in it. The desires, and other passions of man, are—in themselves—no sin. No[r] are the actions that proceed from those passions, [un]till they know a law that forbids them. [And un]till laws [are] made they cannot know, nor can any law be made, [un]till they have agreed upon the person that shall make it.¹¹⁰

It may be thought [that] there was never such a time nor condition of war [like] this; and I believe it was never generally so over all the world. But there are many places where [people] live so now. For the savage people in many places of America, except the government of small families, the concord whereof depends on natural lust, have no government at all, and live [now] in that brutish manner, as I said before. However, it may be [imagined] what manner of life [this] would be—where there were no common power to fear—by [examining] the manner of life which men that have formerly lived under a peaceful government, use to degenerate into, [that is], in a *civil war*. But [further suppose that] there had never been any time wherein particular men were in a condition of war one against another; yet in all times, kings and persons of sovereign authority—because of their independence—are in continual jealousies and in the state and posture of gladiators, having their weapons pointing and their eyes fixed on one another. That is, their forts, garrisons, and guns

¹¹⁰ Hobbes' point is that desires and actions, in themselves, are morally neutral. It is only in the presence of 'law' that an action or desire can be said to be 'good' or 'bad', 'right' or 'wrong'.

upon the frontiers of their kingdoms and continual spies upon their neighbors, *is* a posture of war. But because they uphold thereby, the industry of their subjects, there does not follow from it that misery which accompanies the liberty of particular men.

[In War, Nothing Is Unjust]

To this war of every man against every man, this also is consequent: that *nothing can be unjust*. The notions of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, ‘justice’ and ‘injustice’ have no place [there]. Where there is no common power, there is no law, where [there is] no law, [there is] no injustice. **Force** and **fraud**, are in war the two *cardinal virtues*. Justice, and injustice are [neither] faculties of the body or mind. If they were, they might be in a man that was alone in the world, as well as his senses, and passions. They are qualities that relate to men in society, not in solitude. It is consequent also to the same condition that there [is] no [sense of] propriety, no dominion, no *mine* and *yours* distinct; but only that to be every man’s that he can get, and [only] for [as] long as he can keep it. And [this is all there is] for the ill condition which man—by mere nature—is actually placed in; though [there is] a possibility to come out of it consisting partly in the passions [and] partly in his reason.

The passions that incline men to peace are **fear of death**, desire of such things as are necessary to **commodious living**, and **a hope** by industry to obtain them. And *reason* suggests convenient articles of peace, upon which men may be drawn to agreement. These articles, are [those] which otherwise are called the **Laws of Nature** whereof I shall speak more particularly, in the two following chapters.

CHAPTER XIV

OF THE FIRST AND SECOND NATURAL LAWS, AND OF CONTRACTS

Right Of Nature

The **RIGHT OF NATURE**, which writers commonly call *Jus Naturale*,¹¹¹ is the liberty each man has—to use his own power as he will himself—for the preservation of his own nature. [T]hat is to say, of his own life. [A]nd consequently, [he has the liberty] of doing anything which in his own judgment and reason he shall conceive to be the best means thereunto.

By **LIBERTY**, is understood—according to the proper signification of the word—*the absence of external impediments*: which impediments may oft[en] take away part of a man’s power to do what he would, but cannot hinder him from using the power left him, according as his judgment and reason shall dictate to him.

A LAW OF NATURE, (*Lex Naturalis*,) is a *precept*, or *general rule*, [discovered] by reason by which a man is forbidden to do that which is destructive of his life, or takes away the means of preserving the same; and to omit that by which he thinks it may be best preserved. For though they that speak of this subject use[d] to confound *jus*, and *lex*—right and law; yet they ought to be distinguished. [This is] because **RIGHT** consists in [the] liberty to do or to forbear; whereas **LAW** determines and binds to one of them: so that law and right, differ as much as obligation and

¹¹¹ *Lt.* “Natural Right”.

liberty; which in one and the same matter are inconsistent.

The First Law Of Nature

And because the [natural] condition of Man, (as has ben declared in the precedent chapter) is a condition of war of every one against every one in which everyone is governed by his own reason and there is nothing he can make use of—that may not be a help unto him—in preserving his life against his enemies, it follows, that in such a condition, *every man has a right to every thing*—even to one another’s body. And therefore, as long as this Natural Right of every man to everything endures, there can be no security [for anyone], ([however] strong or wise he [is],) of living out the time which nature ordinarily allows men to live.

And consequently, it is a precept, or *general rule of reason* "that every man, ought to endeavor peace, as far as he has hope of obtaining it; and when he cannot obtain it, that he may seek, and use all helps and advantages of war." The first branch of [this] rule contains the first and fundamental Law of Nature which is: "*seek peace, and follow it.*" The second [is] the sum of the **Right of Nature** which is, "*by all means we can, defend ourselves.*"

The Second Law Of Nature

From this fundamental Law of Nature, by which men are commanded to [seek] peace, is derived [the] **second law**: "*that a man be willing—when others are too—insofar [as possible] for peace and defense of himself he shall think it necessary, to lay down [the] right to all things, and be contented with [as] much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himself.*" For as long as every man holds this right, of doing anything he likes, all men [are] in the condition of war. But if other men will not lay down their right, as well as he, then there is no reason for anyone, to divest himself of his: for that [is] to expose himself [as] prey, (which no man is bound to) rather than to dispose himself to peace. This is that law of the Gospel; "Whatsoever you require that others should do to you, that do ye to them." And that law of all men, "*Quod tibi feiri non vis, alteri ne feceris*".¹¹²

To lay down a man’s right to anything, is to divest himself of the liberty, of hindering another of the benefit of his own right to the same. For he that renounces—or passes away his right—gives not to any other man a right which he [did not have] before; because there is nothing to which every man had not [a] right [to] by nature: but only stands out of his way, that he may enjoy his own original right, without hindrance from him; not without hindrance from another. So that the effect which returns to one man, by another man’s defect of right, is but so much diminution of impediments to the use of his own [original] right.

Renouncing a Right

[A] right is laid aside, either by simply *renouncing* it, or by *transferring* it to [someone else]. By simply **RENOUNCING** when he [does not care] to whom the benefit [accrues]. By **TRANSFERRING**; when he *intends* the benefit to [go to] some certain person, or persons. And when a man has in either manner abandoned or granted away his right, he [is] said to be **OBLIGED**, or **BOUND**, not to hinder those, to whom such right is granted—or abandoned—from the benefit of

¹¹² “do not do unto others what you do not want done to yourself”

it: and that he *ought*, and it his **DUTY**, not to make void that voluntary act of his own: and that such hindrance is **INJUSTICE**, and **INJURY**, as being *sine jure*;¹¹³ the right [formerly] being renounced, or transferred. So that injury, or injustice, in the controversies of the world, is somewhat like to that, which in the disputations of scholars is called ‘absurdity’. For as it is there called an absurdity to contradict what one maintained in the beginning: so in the world it is called ‘injustice’, and ‘injury’, voluntarily to undo that which from the beginning he had voluntarily done. The way by which a man either simply renounces, or transfers his right, is a declaration, or signification, by some voluntary and sufficient sign, or signs, that he [does] so renounce, or transfer—or has so renounced—or transferred the same, to him that accepts it. And these signs are either words only, or actions only, or (as it happens most often) both words *and* actions. And the same are the **BONDS** by which men are bound and obliged: bonds, that have their strength—not from their own nature—(for nothing is more easily broken than a man’s word,) but from fear of some evil consequence upon the rupture.

Not All Rights Are Alienable

Whenever a man transfers his right, or renounces it, it is either in consideration of some right reciprocally transferred to himself, or for some other good he hopes [to get]. For it is a voluntary act. And of the voluntary acts of every man, *the object is some good to himself*. And, therefore, *there [are] some rights which no man can be understood by any words, or other signs, to have abandoned, or transferred*. [For example,] a man cannot lay down the right of resisting [those] that assault him by force to take away his life. [This is] because he cannot be understood to aim, thereby, at any good [for] himself. The same may be said of *wounds*, and *chains*, and *imprisonment*. Because there is no [consequent] benefit to such patience as there is to the patience of suffering another to be wounded, or imprisoned. [And] also because a man cannot tell, when he sees men proceed against him by violence whether they intend his death or not. And lastly, the motive and end for which this renouncing and transferring or right is introduced is nothing [other than] *the security of a man’s person*, in his life, and in the means of preserving life, as not to be weary of it. And therefore, if a man by words—or other signs—*seem* to deprive himself of the end for which those signs were intended he is not to be understood as if he meant it, or that it was his will. [Rather], he was ignorant of how such words and actions were to be interpreted.

The mutual transferring of [a] right, is that which men call [a] **CONTRACT**.

There is difference, between transferring of right to the thing, and transferring, or translation, that is, delivery of the thing itself. For the thing may be delivered together with the translation of the right; as in buying and selling with money, or exchange of goods, or lands: it may be delivered [at] some [later] time.

Again, one of the contractors, may deliver the thing contracted for on his part, and leave the other to perform his part at some determinate time after, and in the mean time be trusted; and then the contract on his part, is called **PACT**, or **COVENANT**: or both parts may contract now, to perform hereafter: in which cases, he that is to perform in time to come, being trusted, his performance is called keeping of promise, or faith; and the failing of performance (if it be voluntary) violation of faith.

¹¹³ Lt., “without a right.”

When the transferring of right, is not mutual; but one of the parties transfers, in hope to gain thereby friendship, or service from another, or from his friends; or in hope to gain the reputation of charity, or magnanimity; or to deliver his mind from the pain of compassion; or in hope of reward in heaven; This is not contract, but **GIFT, FREE GIFT, GRACE**: which words signify one and the same thing.

Signs of contract are either *express*, or by *inference*. *Express*, are words spoken with understanding of what they signify; and such words are either of the time present, or past as: ‘I Give’, ‘I Grant’, ‘I Have Given’, ‘I Have Granted’, ‘I will That This Be Yours’: or of the future; as, ‘I will Give’, ‘I will Grant’; which words of the future, are called promise....

If a covenant [is] made, wherein neither of the parties perform presently, but trust one another; in the condition of mere nature, (which is a condition of war of every man against every man,) upon any reasonable suspicion, it is void; but if there [is] a common power set over them both, with right and force sufficient to compel performance; it is not void. For he that performs first, has no assurance the other will perform after; because the bonds of words are too weak to bridle men’s ambition, avarice, anger, and other passions, without the fear of some coercive power; which in the condition of mere nature, where all men are equal, and judges of the justness of their own fears cannot possibly be supposed. And therefore, he [that] performs first, [betrays] himself to his enemy [which is] contrary to the right (he can never abandon) of defending his life and means of living.

But in a *civil estate*, where there is a power set up to constrain those that would otherwise violate their faith, that fear is no more reasonable; and for that cause, he which by the covenant is to perform first, is obliged so to do.

The cause of fear, which makes such a covenant invalid, must be something arising after the covenant [was] made. [For example,] some new fact or other sign of the will not to perform; [otherwise] it cannot make the covenant void. For that which could not hinder a man from promising, ought not to be admitted as a hindrance *of* performing.

CHAPTER XV

OF OTHER LAWS OF NATURE

The Third Law Of Nature, Justice

From that Law of Nature, by which we are obliged to transfer to another, such rights, as being retained, hinder the peace of Mankind, there follows a third which is this: *that men perform their covenants made*. Without which, covenants are in vain, and [are] but empty words, and the right of all men to all things remaining, we are still in the condition of war.

And in this Law of Nature, consists the fountain and [origin] of **JUSTICE**. For where no covenant has preceded, there has no right been transferred, and every man has right to every thing; and consequently, no action can be unjust. But when a covenant is made, then to break it is unjust: and the definition of **INJUSTICE** is no other than the *not performance of covenant*. And whatever is

not *unjust*, is *just*.

But because covenants of mutual trust, where there is a fear of not performance on either part (as has been said in the former chapter,) are invalid; though the [origin] of justice [is] the making of covenants; yet injustice actually there can be none, [un]till the cause of such fear [is] taken away; which while men are in the natural condition of war, cannot be done. Therefore, before the names of 'just', and 'unjust' can have place, there must be some *coercive power*, to compel men equally to the performance of their covenants, by the terror of some punishment greater than the benefit they expect by the breach of their covenant; and to make good that propriety, which by mutual contract men acquire, in recompense [payment] of the universal right they abandon: and such power there is none before the erection of a Commonwealth. And this is also to be gathered out of the ordinary definition of justice in the schools: for they say, that "justice is the constant will of giving to every man his own." And therefore, where there is no own, that is, no propriety, there is no injustice; and where there is no *coercive power* erected, that is, where there is no Commonwealth, there is no propriety; all men having right to all things: therefore where there is no Commonwealth, there nothing is unjust. So that the nature of justice consists in keeping of valid covenants: but the *validity* of covenants begins not but with the constitution of a **Civil Power**, sufficient to compel men to keep them: and then it is also that propriety begins....

Whatsoever is done to a man, conformable to his own will signified to the doer, is no injury to him. For if he that doeth it, has not passed away his original right to do what he please, by some antecedent covenant, there is no breach of covenant; and therefore no Injury done him. And if he have; then his will to have it done being signified, is a release of that covenant; and so again there is no injury done him.

Justice Commutative, And Distributive

Justice of *actions*, is by writers divided into *Commutative*, and *Distributive*; and the former they say consists in proportion arithmetical; the later in proportion geometrical. *Commutative* therefore, they place in the equality of value of the things contracted for; and *distributive*, in the distribution of equal benefit, to men of equal merit. As if it were injustice to sell dearer than we buy; or to give more to a man than he merits. The value of [the] things contracted for, is measured by the appetite of the contractors: and therefore, the just value is that which they [are] contented to give. And *Merit* (besides that which is by covenant, where the performance on one part, merits the performance of the other part, and falls under justice Commutative, not Distributive,) is not due by justice; but is rewarded of grace only. And therefore, this distinction, in the sense wherein it used to be expounded, is not right. To speak properly, *commutative justice is the justice of a contractor; that is, a performance of covenant, in buying, and selling; hiring, and letting to hire; lending, and borrowing.*

And *distributive justice, the justice of an arbitrator; that is to say, the act of defining what is just.* Wherein, (being trusted by them that make him arbitrator,) if he perform his trust, he is said to distribute to every man his own: and his is indeed just distribution, and may be called (though improperly) distributive justice; but more properly equity—which also is a Law of Nature, as shall be shown in due place.

The Fourth Law Of Nature, Gratitude

As justice depends on antecedent covenant; so does gratitude depend on antecedent grace; that is to say, antecedent free-gift: and is the fourth Law of Nature; which may be conceived in this form, "*that a man which receives benefit from another of mere grace, endeavor that he which gives it, have no reasonable cause to repent him of his good will.*" For no man gives, but with intention of good to himself; because gift is voluntary; and of all voluntary acts, the object is to every man his own good; of which if men see they shall be frustrated, there will be no beginning of benevolence, or trust; nor consequently of mutual help; nor of reconciliation of one man to another; and therefore they are to remain still in the condition of war; which is contrary to the first and fundamental Law of Nature, which commands men to seek peace. The breach of this law is called 'ingratitude' and has the same relation to grace that injustice has to obligation by covenant....

The Sixteenth, Of Submission To Arbitration

And because, [al]though men [are] never so willing to observe these laws, there may nevertheless arise questions concerning a man's action; *first*, whether it were done, or not done; *secondly* (if done) whether against the law, or not against the law; the former whereof, is called a *question of fact*; the later a question of right; therefore unless the parties to the question, covenant mutually to stand to the sentence of another, they are as far from peace as ever. This other, to whose sentence they submit, is called an **ARBITRATOR**. And, therefore, it is of the Law of Nature, "*that they that are at controversy, submit their right to the judgment of an arbitrator.*"

The Seventeenth, No Man Is His Own Judge

And seeing every man is presumed to do all things in order to his own benefit, no man is a fit arbitrator in his own cause: and if he were never so fit; yet equity allowing to each party equal benefit, if one [is] admitted to be [a] Judge, the other is to be admitted also; [and] so the controversy, that is the cause of war remains, against the Law of Nature.

The Eighteenth, No Man To Be Judge, That Has In Him A Natural Cause Of Partiality

For the same reason no man in any cause ought to be received for arbitrator, to whom greater profit, or honor, or pleasure apparently arises out of the victory of one party, than of the other: for he has taken (though an unavoidable bribe, yet) a bribe; and no man can be obliged to trust him. And thus also, the controversy and the condition of war remains contrary to the Law of Nature.

The Nineteenth, Of Witness

And in a controversy of Fact, the Judge being to give no more credit to one, than to the other, (if there [are] no other Arguments) must give credit to a third; or to a third and fourth; or more: for else the question is undecided, and left to force, contrary to the Law of Nature.

These are the laws of nature, dictating peace, for a means of the conservation of men in multitudes; and which only concern the doctrine of Civil Society. There [are] other things tending to the destruction of particular men; as drunkenness, and all other parts of intemperance; which may

therefore also be reckoned amongst those things which the Law of Nature has forbidden; but are not necessary to be mentioned, nor are pertinent enough to this place.

And though this may seem too subtle a deduction of the Laws of Nature to be taken notice of by all men, whereof the most part are too busy in getting food, and the rest too negligent to understand; yet to leave all men inexcusable, they have ben contracted into one easy sum, intelligible even to the meanest capacity; and that is, "Do not that to another, which thou would not have done to thy self;" which shows him, that he has no more to do in learning the laws of nature, but, when weighing the actions of other men with his own, they seem too heavy, to put them into the other part of the balance, and his own into their place, that his own passions, and self-love, may add nothing to the weight; and then there is none of these laws of nature that will not appear unto him very reasonable.

The Laws of Nature oblige *in foro interno* ["in the inner court", or "personal opinion"]; that is to say, they bind to a desire they should take place: but *in foro externo* ["in the outer court", or "public opinion"]; that is, to the putting them in act, not always. For he that should be modest, and tractable, and perform all he promises, in such time, and place, where no man else should do so, should but make himself a prey to others, and procure his own certain ruin, contrary to the ground of all laws of nature, which tend to natures preservation. And again, he that shall observe the same laws towards him, observes them not himself, seeks not peace, but war; [and] consequently the destruction of his nature by violence.

And whatsoever laws bind *in foro interno* ["in the inner court", or "personal opinion"], may be broken, not only by a fact contrary to the law but also by a fact according to it, in case a man thinks it contrary. For though his action in this case accord[s with] the law; which where the obligation is *in foro interno* ["in the inner court", or "personal opinion"], is a breach.

The Laws Of Nature Are Eternal

The laws of nature are immutable and eternal, for injustice, ingratitude, arrogance, pride, iniquity, exception of persons, and the rest, can never be made lawful. For it can never be that war shall preserve life, and peace destroy it.

The same laws, because they oblige only to a desire, and endeavor, I mean an unfeigned and constant endeavor, are easy to be observed. For in that they require nothing but endeavor; he that endeavors their performance, fulfills them; and he that fulfills the law is just.

The science of these laws, is the true Moral Philosophy and the Science of them, is the true and only Moral Philosophy. For Moral Philosophy is nothing else but the Science of what is good, and evil, in the conversation, and Society of mankind. Good, and evil, are names that signify our appetites, and aversions; which in different tempers, customs, and doctrines of men, are different: and divers men, differ not only in their judgment, on the senses of what is pleasant, and unpleasant to the taste, smell, hearing, touch, and sight; but also of what is conformable, or disagreeable to reason, in the actions of common life. Nay, the same man, in divers times, differs from himself; and one time praises, that is, calls good, what another time he dispraises, and calls evil: from whence arise disputes, controversies, and at last war. And therefore, so long as man is in the condition of mere nature, (which is a condition of war,) as private appetite is the measure of good, and evil: and

consequently all men agree on this, that peace is good, and therefore also the way, or means of peace, which (as I have shown before) are justice, gratitude, modesty, equity, mercy, [and] the rest of the Laws of Nature, are good; that is to say, Moral Virtues; and their contrary vices, evil. Now the Science of Virtue and Vice, is Moral Philosophy; and therefore, the true doctrine of the Laws of Nature, is the true Moral Philosophy. But the writers of Moral Philosophy, though they acknowledge the same Virtues and Vices; yet not seeing wherein consisted their goodness; nor that they come to be praised, as the means of peaceable, sociable, and comfortable living; place them in a mediocrity of passions: as if not the cause, but the degree of daring, made fortitude; or not the cause, but the quantity of a gift, made liberality.

These dictates of reason men called by the name ‘laws’, but improperly: for they are but conclusions or theorems concerning what [conduces] to the conservation and defense of themselves; whereas law—properly [understood]—is the word of him that by right has command over others. But yet if we consider the same theorems as delivered in the word of God, that by right commands all things, then are they properly called *laws*.

CHAPTER XVII

OF THE CAUSES, GENERATION, AND DEFINITION OF A COMMONWEALTH

The final *cause, end, or design* of men, (who naturally love liberty, and Dominion over others,) in the introduction of that restraint upon themselves, (in which we see them live in Commonwealths,) is the foresight of their own preservation, and of a more contented life thereby; that is to say, of getting themselves out from that miserable condition of war, which is necessarily consequent (as has ben shown) to the natural passions of men, when there is no visible power to keep them in awe, and tie them by fear of punishment to the performance of their covenants, and observation of these laws of nature set down in the fourteenth and fifteenth chapters.

What Is Not To Be Had From The Law Of Nature

For the Laws of Nature (as justice, equity, modesty, mercy, and (in sum) *doing to others, as we would be done to,*) if themselves, without the terror of some power, to cause them to be observed, are contrary to our natural passions, that carry us to partiality, pride, revenge, and the like. And covenants, without the sword, are but words, and of no strength to secure a man at all. Therefore, notwithstanding the Laws of Nature, (which every one has then kept, when he has the will to keep them, when he can do it safely,) if there [is] no power erected, or not great enough for our security; every man will and may lawfully rely on his own strength and art, for caution against all other men. and in all places, where men have lived by small families, to rob and spoil one another, has ben a trade, and so far from being reputed against the Law of Nature, that the greater spoils they gained, the greater was their honor; and men observed no other laws therein, but the laws of honor; that is, to abstain from cruelty, leaving to men their lives, and instruments of husbandry. And as small families did then; so now do cities and kingdoms which are but greater families (for their own security) enlarge their dominions, upon all pretenses of danger, and fear of invasion, or assistance that may be given to invaders, endeavor as much as they can, to subdue, or weaken their neighbors, by open force, and secret arts, for want of other caution, justly; and are remembered for it in after ages with honor....

It is true, that certain living creatures, as bees, and ants, live sociably one with another, (which are therefore by Aristotle numbered amongst *political creatures*;) and yet have no other direction, than their particular judgments and appetites; nor speech, whereby one of them can signify to another, what he thinks expedient for the common benefit: and therefore, some man may perhaps desire to know, why Mankind cannot do the same. To which I answer,

Firstly, that men are continually in competition for honor and dignity, which these creatures are not; and consequently amongst men there arises on that ground, envy and hatred, and finally war; but amongst these not so.

Secondly, that amongst these creatures, the *common good* differed not from the *private*; and being by nature inclined to their private, they procure thereby the common benefit. But man, whose joy consisted in comparing himself with other men, can relish nothing but what is eminent.

Thirdly, that these creatures, having not (as man) the use of reason, do not see, nor think they see any fault, in the administration of their common business: whereas amongst men, there are very many, that think themselves wiser, and abler to govern the public, better than the rest; and these strive to reform and innovate, one this way, another that way; and thereby bring it into distraction and *civil war*.

Fourthly, that these creatures, though they have some use of voice, in making known to one another their desires, and other affections; yet they want that art of words, by which some men can represent to others, that which is good, in the likeness of evil; and evil, in the likeness of good; and augment, or diminish the apparent greatness of good and evil; discontenting men, and troubling their peace at their pleasure.

Fifthly, irrational creatures cannot distinguish between injury, and damage; and therefore as long as they [are] at ease, they are not offended with their fellows: whereas Man is then most troublesome, when he is most at ease: for then it is that he loves to show his wisdom, and control the actions of them that govern the Commonwealth.

Lastly, the agreement of these creatures is *natural*; that of men, is *by covenant only*, which is *artificial*: and therefore it is no wonder if there [is] some[thing] else required (besides covenant) to make their agreement constant and lasting; which is a common power to keep them in awe and to direct their actions to the common benefit.

The Generation Of A Commonwealth

The only way to erect such a Common Power, as may be able to defend them from the invasion of Foreigners, and the injuries of one another, and thereby to secure them in such sort, as that by their own industry, and by the fruits of the earth, they may nourish themselves and live contentedly; is, to confere all their power and strength upon *one man*, or upon one *assembly of men*, that may reduce all their wills, by plurality of voices, unto one will: which is as much as to say, to appoint one man, or assembly of men, to bear their person; and every one to own, and acknowledge himself to be author of whatsoever he that so bears their person, shall act, or cause to be acted, in those things

which concern the common peace and safety; and therein to submit their wills, every one to his will, and their Judgments, to his judgment. This is more than *consent*, or *concord*; it is a real *unity* of them all, in one and the same person, made by covenant of every man with every man, in such manner, as if every man should say to every man, "I authorize and give up my right of governing myself, to *this man*, or to this *assembly of men*, on this condition, that thou give up thy right to him, and authorize all his actions in like manner." This done, the multitude so united in one person, is called a **COMMONWEALTH**, in Latin **CIVITAS**. This is the generation of that great **LEVIATHAN**, or rather (to speak more reverently) of that *mortal* god, to which we owe under the immortal God, our peace and defense. For by this authority, given him by every particular man in the Commonwealth, he has the use of so much power and strength conferred on him, that by terror thereof, he is enabled to form the wills of them all, to peace at home, and mutual aid against their enemies abroad.

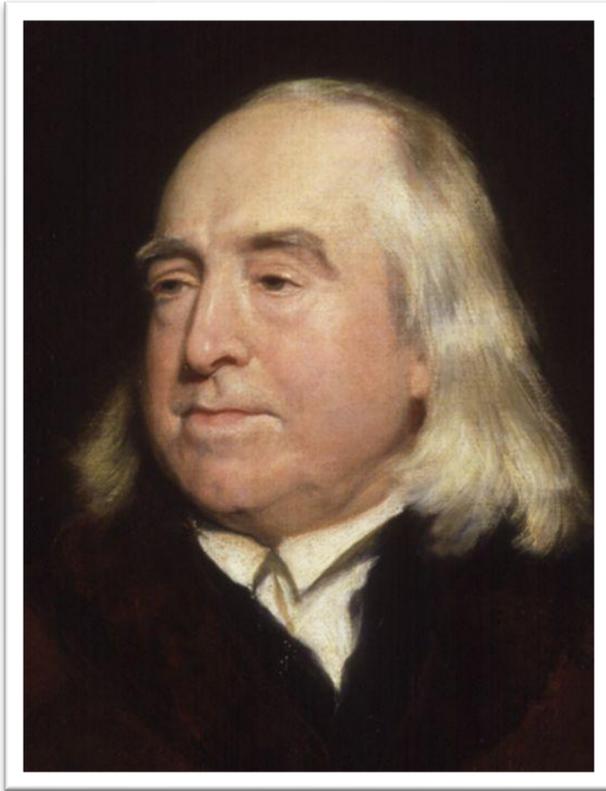
The Definition Of A Commonwealth

And in him consists the essence of the Commonwealth; which (to define it,) is "*one person, of whose acts a great multitude, by mutual covenants one with another, have made themselves every one the author, to the end he may use the strength and means of them all, as he shall think expedient, for their peace and common defense.*"

Sovereign

And he that carries this person, as called **SOVEREIGN**, and said to have *sovereign power*; and every one besides, his **SUBJECT**.

The attaining to this *sovereign power*, is by two ways. One, by natural force; as when a man makes his children, to submit themselves, and their children to his government, as being able to destroy them if they refuse, or by war subdues his enemies to his will, giving them their lives on that condition. The other is when men agree amongst themselves, to submit to some *man*, or *assembly of men*, voluntarily, on confidence to be protected by him against all others. This later, may be called a *Political Commonwealth*, or *Commonwealth by Institution*; and the former, a *Commonwealth by Acquisition*...



AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PRINCIPLES OF MORALS AND LEGISLATION *(in part)*

By:
Jeremy Bentham (1780)

Edited by and with additions and corrections by Barry F. Vaughan¹¹⁴

I. OF THE PRINCIPLE OF UTILITY

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 [subjugation], will serve but to demonstrate and confirm it. In words a man may pretend to abjure their empire: but in reality he will remain subject to it all the while. The **Principle of Utility**¹¹⁵ recognizes this subjection, and assumes it for the foundation of that system, the object of which is to rear the fabric of felicity by the hands of reason and of law. Systems [that] attempt to question it, deal in sounds instead of sense, in caprice instead of reason, in darkness instead of light.

¹¹⁴ This text of [An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation](http://www.econlib.org/library/Bentham/bnthPML.html), by Jeremy Bentham is from The Library of Economics and Liberty (<http://www.econlib.org/library/Bentham/bnthPML.html>) and is a public domain text. I have modernized punctuation and changed UK to US spellings where appropriate. I have also added explanatory footnotes (*original footnotes noted in brackets*).

¹¹⁵ [Author's note] To this denomination has of late been added, or substituted, *the greatest happiness* or *greatest felicity* principle: this for shortness, instead of saying at length that principle which states the greatest happiness of all those whose interest is in question, as being the right and proper, and only right and proper and universally desirable, end of human action: of human action in every situation, and in particular in that of a functionary or set of functionaries exercising the powers of Government. The word utility does not so clearly point to the ideas of pleasure and pain as the words happiness and felicity do: nor does it lead us to the consideration of the number, of the interests affected; to the number, as being the circumstance, which contributes, in the largest proportion, to the formation of the standard here in question; the standard of right and wrong, by which alone the propriety of human conduct, in every situation, can with propriety be tried. This want of a sufficiently manifest connection between the ideas of happiness and pleasure on the one hand, and the idea of utility on the other, I have every now and then found operating, and with but too much efficiency, as a bar to the acceptance, that might otherwise have been given, to this principle.

But enough of metaphor and declamation: it is not by such means that moral science is to be improved.

The *principle of utility* is the foundation of the present work: it will be proper, therefore, at the outset to give an explicit and determinate account of what is meant by it. By the principle¹¹⁶ of *utility* is meant *that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency 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.* I say of every action whatsoever, and therefore not only of every action of a private individual, but of every measure of government.

By ‘utility’ is meant *that property in any object, whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness, (all this in the present case comes to the same thing) or (what comes again to the same thing) to prevent the happening of mischief, pain, evil, or unhappiness to the party whose interest is considered: if that party be the community in general, then the happiness of the community: if a particular individual, then the happiness of that individual...*

IV. VALUE OF A LOT OF PLEASURE OR PAIN, HOW TO BE MEASURED

Pleasures then, and the avoidance of pains, are the *ends* that the legislator has in view; it behoove him, therefore, to understand their value. Pleasures and pains are the instruments he has to work with: it behooves him therefore to understand their force, which is again, in other words, their value.

To a person considered by himself, the value of a pleasure or pain considered by itself, will be greater or less, according to the four following circumstances:

1. its *intensity*
2. its *duration*
3. its *certainty* or uncertainty
4. its *propinquity* or remoteness.

These are the circumstances which are to be considered in estimating a pleasure or a pain considered each of them by itself. But when the value of any pleasure or pain is considered for the purpose of estimating the tendency of any act by which it is produced, there are two other circumstances to be taken into the account; these are,

5. Its *fecundity*, or the chance it has of being followed by sensations of the same kind: that is, pleasures, if it be a pleasure: pains, if it be a pain.

¹¹⁶ [Author’s note] The word ‘principle’ is derived from the Latin *principium*: which seems to be compounded of the two words *primus*, ‘first’, or ‘chief’, and *cipium* a termination which seems to be derived from *capio*, ‘to take’, as in *municipium*, *municipium*; to which are analogous, *auceps*, *forceps*, and others. It is a term of very vague and very extensive signification: it is applied to any thing which is conceived to serve as a foundation or beginning to any series of operations: in some cases, of physical operations; but of mental operations in the present case. The principle here in question may be taken for an act of the mind; a sentiment; a sentiment of approbation; a sentiment which, when applied to an action, approves of its utility, as that quality of it by which the measure of approbation or disapprobation bestowed upon it ought to be governed.

6. Its *purity*, or the chance it has of not being followed by sensations of the opposite kind: that is, pains, if it be a pleasure: pleasures, if it be a pain.

These two last, however, are in strictness scarcely to be deemed properties of the pleasure or the pain itself; they are not, therefore, in strictness to be taken into the account of the value of that pleasure or that pain. They are in strictness to be deemed properties only of the act, or other event, by which such pleasure or pain has been produced; and accordingly are only to be taken into the account of the tendency of such act or such event.

To a number of persons, with reference to each of whom to the value of a pleasure or a pain is considered, it will be greater or less, according to seven circumstances: to wit, the six preceding ones; *viz.*,

1. its intensity
2. its duration
3. its certainty or uncertainty
4. its propinquity or remoteness
5. its fecundity
6. its purity.

And one other; to wit:

7. Its *extent*; that is, *the number of persons* to whom it extends; or (in other words) who are affected by it.

To take an exact account, then, of the general tendency of any act, by which the interests of a community are affected, proceed as follows. Begin with any one person of those whose interests seem most immediately to be affected by it: and take an account,

1. Of the value of each distinguishable pleasure [that] appears to be produced by it in the first instance.
2. Of the value of each pain [that] appears to be produced by it in the first instance.
3. Of the value of each pleasure [that] appears to be produced by it after the first. This constitutes the fecundity of the first pleasure and the impurity of the first pain.
4. Of the value of each pain [that] appears to be produced by it after the first. This constitutes the fecundity of the first pain, and the impurity of the first pleasure.
5. Sum up all the values of all the pleasures on the one side, and those of all the pains on the other. The balance, if it [is] on the side of pleasure, will give the good tendency of the act upon the whole, with respect to the interests of that individual person; if on the side of pain, the bad tendency of it upon the whole.

6. Take an account of the number of persons whose interests appear to be concerned; and repeat the above process with respect to each. [Add] up the numbers expressive of the degrees of good tendency, which the act has, with respect to each individual, in regard to whom the tendency of it is good upon the whole: do this again with respect to each individual, in regard to whom the tendency of it is good upon the whole. [D]o this again with respect to each individual, in regard to whom the tendency of it is bad upon the whole. Take the balance which—if on the side of pleasure—will give the general good tendency of the act, with respect to the total number or community of individuals concerned; if on the side of pain, the general evil tendency with respect to the same community.

It is *not to be expected* that this process should be strictly pursued previously to every moral judgment, or to every legislative or judicial operation. It may, however, be always kept in view: and as near as the process actually pursued on these occasions approaches to it, so near will such process approach to the character of an exact one.

The same process is [also] applicable to pleasure and pain, in whatever shape they appear: and by whatever denomination they are distinguished: to pleasure, whether it be called good (which is properly the cause or instrument of pleasure) or profit (which is distant pleasure, or the cause or instrument of, distant pleasure,) or convenience, or advantage, benefit, emolument, happiness, and so forth: to pain, whether it be called evil, (which corresponds to good) or mischief, or inconvenience, or disadvantage, or loss, or unhappiness, and so forth.

Nor is this a novel and unwarranted—any more than it is a useless—theory. In all this there is nothing but what the practice of mankind, [wherever] they have a clear view of their own interest, is perfectly conformable to. An article of property, an estate in land, for instance, is valuable, on what account? On account of the pleasures of all kinds which it enables a man to produce, and what comes to the same thing the pains of all kinds which it enables him to avert. But the value of such an article of property is universally understood to rise or fall according to the length or shortness of the time which a man has in it: the certainty or uncertainty of its coming into possession: and the nearness or remoteness of the time at which, if at all, it is to come into possession. As to the intensity of the pleasures which a man may derive from it, this is never thought of, because it depends upon the use which each particular person may come to make of it; which cannot be estimated till the particular pleasures he may come to derive from it, or the particular pains he may come to exclude by means of it, are brought to view. For the same reason, neither does he think of the fecundity or purity of those pleasures.

Thus much for pleasure and pain, happiness and unhappiness, in general...

XVII. OF THE LIMITS OF THE PENAL BRANCH OF JURISPRUDENCE

What other agents then are there, which, at the same time that they are under the influence of man's direction, are susceptible of happiness. They are of two sorts: 1) Other human beings who are styled persons; 2) Other animals, which, on account of their interests having been neglected by the insensibility of the ancient jurists, stand degraded into the class of *things*.¹¹⁷ As to other human

¹¹⁷ [Author's note] Under the Gentoo [Hindu] and Mahometan [Muslim] religions, the interests of the rest of the animal creation seem to have met with some attention. Why have they not universally, with as much as those of human creatures, allowance made for the difference in point of sensibility? Because the laws that are have been the work of

beings, the art of directing their actions to the above end is what we mean, or at least the only thing which, upon the principle of utility, we *ought* to mean, by the art of government: which, in as far as the measures it displays itself in are of a permanent nature, is generally distinguished by the name of *legislation*: as it is by that of *administration*, when they are of a temporary nature, determined by the occurrences of the day.

mutual fear; a sentiment which the less rational animals have not had the same means as man has of turning to account. Why ought they not? No reason can be given. If the being eaten were all, there is very good reason why we should be suffered to eat such of them as we like to eat: we are the better for it, and they are never the worse. They have none of those long-protracted anticipations of future misery which we have. The death they suffer in our hands commonly is, and always may be, a speedier, and by that means a less painful one, than that which would await them in the inevitable course of nature. If the being killed were all, there is very good reason why we should be suffered to kill such as molest us: we should be the worse for their living, and they are never the worse for being dead. But is there any reason why we should be suffered to torment them? Not any that I can see. Are there any why we should not be suffered to torment them? Yes, several. See B. I. tit. [Cruelty to animals]. The day has been, I grieve to say in many places it is not yet past, in which the greater part of the species, under the denomination of slaves, have been treated by the law exactly upon the same footing as, in England for example, the inferior races of animals are still. The day may come, when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been [withheld] from them but by the hand of tyranny. The French have already discovered that the blackness of the skin is no reason why a human being should be abandoned without redress to the caprice of a tormentor. It may come one day to be recognized, that the number of the legs, the villosity of the skin, or the termination of the *os sacrum*, are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate. What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason, or, perhaps, the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day, or a week, or even a month, old. But suppose the case were otherwise, what would it avail? [T]he question is not, [“c]an they reason?”, nor, [“c]an they talk?”, but [“c]an they suffer?”



UTILITARIANISM (in part)

by:
JOHN STUART MILL (1863)

Edited by Barry F. Vaughan with additions, corrections, and explanatory footnotes.¹¹⁸

CHAPTER II.

WHAT UTILITARIANISM IS

A passing remark is all that needs be given to the ignorant blunder of supposing that those who stand up for utility as the test of right and wrong, use the term in that restricted and merely colloquial sense in which utility is opposed to pleasure. An apology is due to the philosophical opponents of Utilitarianism, for even the momentary appearance of confounding them with any one capable of so absurd a misconception; which is the more extraordinary, inasmuch as the contrary accusation, of referring everything to pleasure, and that too in its grossest form, is another of the common charges against Utilitarianism: and, as has been pointedly remarked by an able writer, the same sort of persons, and often the very same persons, denounce the theory "as impracticably dry when the word utility precedes the word pleasure, and as too practicably voluptuous when the word pleasure precedes the word utility." Those who know anything about the matter are aware that every writer, from Epicurus¹¹⁹ to Bentham¹²⁰, who maintained the *theory of utility*, meant by it, not something to be contradistinguished from pleasure, but pleasure itself, together with exemption from pain; and instead of opposing the useful to the agreeable or the ornamental, have always declared that the useful means these, among other things. Yet the common herd, including the herd of writers, not only in newspapers and periodicals, but in books of weight and pretension, are perpetually falling into this shallow mistake. Having caught up the word 'utilitarian', while knowing nothing whatever about it but its sound, they habitually express by it the rejection, or the neglect, of pleasure in some of its forms; of beauty, of ornament, or of amusement. Nor is the term thus ignorantly misapplied solely in disparagement, but occasionally in compliment; as though it implied superiority to frivolity

¹¹⁸ From Project Gutenberg's [Utilitarianism](http://www.gutenberg.org), by John Stuart Mill, www.gutenberg.org.

I have changed UK spellings to US spellings where appropriate, as well as added explanatory footnotes and emphases in italics. Original footnotes are noted in brackets. This text is intended for academic or personal use, and may not be sold or used for profit.

¹¹⁹ Epicurus (or *Epikouros* 341-270 BCE) was a Greek philosopher who developed the earliest version of Hedonism: the good is that which produces pleasure, the bad is that which produces pain. The ultimate state of human existence is *ataraxia*, or lack of disturbance. Though his name is often associated with Libertinism, or the continual pursuit of pleasure, Epicurus and his followers actually taught that pleasure is the absence of suffering and that to achieve this one must abstain from overindulgences of all kinds.

¹²⁰ Jeremy Bentham (1748 - 1832) was an English ethicist and political philosopher and reformer, mentor of J.S. Mill, and founder of modern Utilitarianism.

and the mere pleasures of the moment. And this perverted use is the only one in which the word is popularly known, and the one from which the new generation are acquiring their sole notion of its meaning. Those who introduced the word, but who had for many years discontinued it as a distinctive appellation, may well feel themselves called upon to resume it, if by doing so they can hope to contribute anything towards rescuing it from this utter degradation.¹²¹

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

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

When thus attacked, the Epicureans have always answered, that *it is not they, but their accusers*, who represent human nature in a degrading light; since the accusation supposes human beings to be capable of no pleasures *except* those of which swine are capable. If this supposition were true, the charge could not be gainsaid, but would then be no longer an imputation; for if the sources of pleasure were precisely the same to human beings and to swine, the rule of life which is good enough for the one would be good enough for the other. The comparison of the Epicurean life to that of beasts is felt as degrading, *precisely because* a beast's pleasures do not satisfy a human being's conceptions of happiness. Human beings have faculties *more elevated* than the animal appetites, and when once made conscious of them, do not regard anything as happiness which does not include their gratification. I do not, indeed, consider the Epicureans to have been by any means faultless in drawing out their scheme of consequences from the utilitarian principle. To do this in any sufficient manner, many Stoic¹²², as well as Christian elements require to be included. But there is no known Epicurean theory of life which does not assign to the pleasures of the intellect; of the

¹²¹ [Mill's original footnote] The author of this essay has reason for believing himself to be the first person who brought the word utilitarian into use. He did not invent it, but adopted it from a passing expression in Mr. Galt's Annals of the Parish. After using it as a designation for several years, he and others abandoned it from a growing dislike to anything resembling a badge or watchword of sectarian distinction. But as a name for one single opinion, not a set of opinions--to denote the recognition of utility as a standard, not any particular way of applying it—the term supplies a want in the language, and offers, in many cases, a convenient mode of avoiding tiresome circumlocution.

¹²² Stoicism is a Hellenistic philosophy founded by Zeno of Citium which sought to balance the competing views of Determinism and free will. Stoic philosophers sought to align the will with the objective structure of reality (often referred to as the *Logos*).

feelings and imagination, and of the moral sentiments, a much higher value as pleasures than to those of mere sensation. It must be admitted, however, that utilitarian writers in general have placed the superiority of mental over bodily pleasures chiefly in the greater *permanency, safety, uncostliness*, etc., of the former—that is, in their *circumstantial advantages* rather than in their intrinsic nature. And on all these points utilitarians have fully proved their case; but they might have taken the other, and, as it may be called, higher ground, with entire consistency. It is quite compatible with the principle of utility to recognize the fact, that some *kinds* of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others. It would be absurd that while, in estimating all other things, quality is considered as well as quantity, the estimation of pleasures should be supposed to depend on quantity alone.

If I am asked, what I mean by difference of *quality* in pleasures, or what makes one pleasure more valuable than another, merely as a pleasure, except its being greater in amount, there is but one possible answer. Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both *give a decided preference*, irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure. If one of the two is, by those who are competently acquainted with both, placed so far above the other that they prefer it, even though knowing it to be attended with a greater amount of discontent, and would not resign it for any quantity of the other pleasure which their nature is capable of, we are justified in ascribing to the preferred enjoyment a superiority in quality, so far outweighing quantity as to render it, in comparison, of small account.

Now it is an unquestionable fact that those who are equally acquainted with, and equally capable of appreciating and enjoying, *both, do give a most marked preference to the manner of existence which employs their higher faculties*. Few human creatures would consent to be changed into any of the lower animals, for a promise of the fullest allowance of a beast's pleasures; no intelligent human being would consent to be a fool, no instructed person would be an ignoramus, no person of feeling and conscience would be selfish and base, even though they should be persuaded that the fool, the dunce, or the rascal is better satisfied with his lot than they are with theirs. They would not resign what they possess more than he, for the most complete satisfaction of all the desires which they have in common with him. If they ever fancy they would, it is only in cases of unhappiness so extreme, that to escape from it they would exchange their lot for almost any other, however undesirable in their own eyes. A being of higher faculties requires more to make him happy, is capable probably of more acute suffering, and is certainly accessible to it at more points, than one of an inferior type; but in spite of these liabilities, he can never really wish to sink into what he feels to be a lower grade of existence. We may give what explanation we please of this unwillingness; we may attribute it to pride, a name which is given indiscriminately to some of the most and to some of the least estimable feelings of which mankind are capable; we may refer it to the love of liberty and personal independence, an appeal to which was with the Stoics one of the most effective means for the inculcation of it; to the love of power, or to the love of excitement, both of which do really enter into and contribute to it: but its most appropriate appellation is a sense of dignity, which all human beings possess in one form or other, and in some, though by no means in exact, proportion to their higher faculties, and which is so essential a part of the happiness of those in whom it is strong, that nothing which conflicts with it could be, otherwise than momentarily, an object of desire to them.

Whoever supposes that this preference takes place at a sacrifice of happiness—that the superior being, in anything like equal circumstances, is not happier than the inferior—confounds the two very

different ideas, of happiness, and content. It is indisputable that the being whose capacities of enjoyment are low, has the greatest chance of having them fully satisfied; and a highly-endowed being will always feel that any happiness which he can look for, as the world is constituted, is imperfect. But he can learn to bear its imperfections, if they are at all bearable; and they will not make him envy the being who is indeed unconscious of the imperfections, but only because he feels not at all the good which those imperfections qualify. *It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Sokrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.* And if the fool, or the pig, is of a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question. The other party to the comparison knows both sides.

It may be objected, that many who are capable of the higher pleasures, occasionally, under the influence of temptation, postpone them to the lower. But this is quite compatible with a full appreciation of the intrinsic superiority of the higher. Men often, from infirmity of character, make their election for the nearer good, though they know it to be the less valuable; and this no less when the choice is between two bodily pleasures, than when it is between bodily and mental. They pursue sensual indulgences to the injury of health, though perfectly aware that health is the greater good.

It may be further objected, that many who begin with youthful enthusiasm for everything noble, as they advance in years sink into indolence and selfishness. But I do not believe that those who undergo this very common change, voluntarily choose the lower description of pleasures in preference to the higher. I believe that before they devote themselves exclusively to the one, they have already become incapable of the other. Capacity for the nobler feelings is in most natures a very tender plant, easily killed, not only by hostile influences, but by mere want of sustenance; and in the majority of young persons it speedily dies away if the occupations to which their position in life has devoted them, and the society into which it has thrown them, are not favorable to keeping that higher capacity in exercise. Men lose their high aspirations as they lose their intellectual tastes, because they have not time or opportunity for indulging them; and they addict themselves to inferior pleasures, not because they deliberately prefer them, but because they are either the only ones to which they have access, or the only ones which they are any longer capable of enjoying. It may be questioned whether anyone who has remained equally susceptible to both classes of pleasures, ever knowingly and calmly preferred the lower; though many, in all ages, have broken down in an ineffectual attempt to combine both.

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

kind, apart from the question of intensity, to those of which the animal nature, disjoined from the higher faculties, is susceptible, they are entitled on this subject to the same regard.

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

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

Against this doctrine, however, arises another class of objectors, who say that happiness, in any form, cannot be the rational purpose of human life and action; because, in the first place, it is unattainable: and they contemptuously ask, *What right hast thou to be happy?* [This is] a question which Mr. Carlyle clenches by the addition, *What right, a short time ago, hadst thou even to be?* Next, they say, that men can do *without* happiness; that all noble human beings have felt this, and could not have become noble but by learning the lesson of *Entsagen*, or renunciation; which lesson, thoroughly learnt and submitted to, they affirm to be the beginning and necessary condition of all virtue.

The first of these objections would go to the root of the matter were it well founded; for if no happiness is to be had at all by human beings, the attainment of it cannot be the end of morality, or of any rational conduct. Though, even in that case, something might still be said for the utilitarian theory; since utility includes not solely the pursuit of happiness, but the prevention or mitigation of unhappiness; and if the former aim be chimerical, there will be all the greater scope and more imperative need for the latter, so long at least as mankind think fit to live, and do not take refuge in the simultaneous act of suicide recommended under certain conditions by Novalis.¹²³ When, however, it is thus positively asserted to be impossible that human life should be happy, the assertion, if not something like a verbal quibble, is at least an exaggeration. If by happiness be

¹²³ Novalis is the pseudonym of Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg (1772 - 1801), a poet and writer associated with the early Romantic movement in Germany.

meant a continuity of highly pleasurable excitement, it is evident enough that this is impossible. A state of exalted pleasure lasts only moments, or in some cases, and with some intermissions, hours or days, and is the occasional brilliant flash of enjoyment, not its permanent and steady flame. Of this the philosophers who have taught that happiness is the end of life were as fully aware as those who taunt them. The happiness which they meant was *not a life of rapture*, but moments of such, in an existence made up of few and transitory pains, many and various pleasures, with a decided predominance of the active over the passive, and having as the foundation of the whole, not to expect more from life than it is capable of bestowing. A life thus composed, to those who have been fortunate enough to obtain it, has always appeared worthy of the name of happiness. And such an existence is even now the lot of many, during some considerable portion of their lives. The present wretched education, and wretched social arrangements, are the only real hindrance to its being attainable by almost all.

The objectors perhaps may doubt whether human beings, if taught to consider happiness as the end of life, would be satisfied with such a moderate share of it. But great numbers of mankind have been satisfied with much less. The main constituents of a satisfied life appear to be two, either of which by itself is often found sufficient for the purpose: tranquility, and excitement. With much tranquility, many find that they can be content with very little pleasure: with much excitement, many can reconcile themselves to a considerable quantity of pain. There is assuredly no inherent impossibility in enabling even the mass of mankind to unite both; since the two are so far from being incompatible that they are in natural alliance, the prolongation of either being a preparation for, and exciting a wish for, the other. It is only those in whom indolence amounts to a vice, that do not desire excitement after an interval of repose; it is only those in whom the need of excitement is a disease, that feel the tranquility which follows excitement dull and insipid, instead of pleasurable in direct proportion to the excitement which preceded it. When people who are tolerably fortunate in their outward lot do not find in life sufficient enjoyment to make it valuable to them, the cause generally is, caring for nobody but themselves. To those who have neither public nor private affections, the excitements of life are much curtailed, and in any case dwindle in value as the time approaches when all selfish interests must be terminated by death: while those who leave after them objects of personal affection, and especially those who have also cultivated a fellow-feeling with the collective interests of mankind, retain as lively an interest in life on the eve of death as in the vigor of youth and health. Next to selfishness, the principal cause which makes life unsatisfactory, is want of mental cultivation. A cultivated mind—I do not mean that of a philosopher, but any mind to which the fountains of knowledge have been opened, and which has been taught, in any tolerable degree, to exercise its faculties—finds sources of inexhaustible interest in all that surrounds it; in the objects of nature, the achievements of art, the imaginations of poetry, the incidents of history, the ways of mankind past and present, and their prospects in the future. It is possible, indeed, to become indifferent to all this, and that too without having exhausted a thousandth part of it; but only when one has had from the beginning no moral or human interest in these things, and has sought in them only the gratification of curiosity.

Now there is absolutely no reason in the nature of things why an amount of mental culture sufficient to give an intelligent interest in these objects of contemplation, should not be the inheritance of every one born in a civilized country. As little is there an inherent necessity that any human being should be a selfish egotist, devoid of every feeling or care but those which center in his own miserable individuality. Something far superior to this is sufficiently common even now, to give

ample earnest of what the human species may be made. Genuine private affections, and a sincere interest in the public good, are possible, though in unequal degrees, to every rightly brought-up human being. In a world in which there is so much to interest, so much to enjoy, and so much also to correct and improve, every one who has this moderate amount of moral and intellectual requisites is capable of an existence which may be called enviable; and unless such a person, through bad laws, or subjection to the will of others, is denied the liberty to use the sources of happiness within his reach, he will not fail to find this enviable existence, if he escape the positive evils of life, the great sources of physical and mental suffering—such as indigence, disease, and the unkindness, worthlessness, or premature loss of objects of affection. The main stress of the problem lies, therefore, in the contest with these calamities, from which it is a rare good fortune entirely to escape; which, as things now are, cannot be obviated, and often cannot be in any material degree mitigated. Yet no one whose opinion deserves a moment's consideration can doubt that most of the great positive evils of the world are in themselves removable, and will, if human affairs continue to improve, be in the end reduced within narrow limits. Poverty, in any sense implying suffering, may be completely extinguished by the wisdom of society, combined with the good sense and providence of individuals. Even that most intractable of enemies, disease, may be indefinitely reduced in dimensions by good physical and moral education, and proper control of noxious influences; while the progress of science holds out a promise for the future of still more direct conquests over this detestable foe. And every advance in that direction relieves us from some, not only of the chances which cut short our own lives, but, what concerns us still more, which deprive us of those in whom our happiness is wrapped up. As for vicissitudes of fortune, and other disappointments connected with worldly circumstances, these are principally the effect either of gross imprudence, of ill-regulated desires, or of bad or imperfect social institutions.

All the grand sources, in short, of human suffering are in a great degree, many of them almost entirely, conquerable by human care and effort; and though their removal is grievously slow—though a long succession of generations will perish in the breach before the conquest is completed, and this world becomes all that, if will and knowledge were not wanting, it might easily be made—yet every mind sufficiently intelligent and generous to bear a part, however small and inconspicuous, in the endeavor, will draw a noble enjoyment from the contest itself, which he would not for any bribe in the form of selfish indulgence consent to be without.

And this leads to the true estimation of what is said by the objectors concerning the possibility, and the obligation, of learning to do without happiness. Unquestionably it is possible to do without happiness; it is done involuntarily by nineteen-twentieths of mankind, even in those parts of our present world which are least deep in barbarism; and it often has to be done voluntarily by the hero or the martyr, for the sake of something which he prizes more than his individual happiness. But this something, what is it, unless the happiness of others, or some of the requisites of happiness? It is noble to be capable of resigning entirely one's own portion of happiness, or chances of it: but, after all, this self-sacrifice must be for some *end*; it is not its own end; and if we are told that its end is not happiness, but virtue, which is better than happiness, I ask, would the sacrifice be made if the hero or martyr did not believe that it would earn for others immunity from similar sacrifices? Would it be made, if he thought that his renunciation of happiness for himself would produce no fruit for any of his fellow creatures, but to make their lot like his, and place them also in the condition of persons who have renounced happiness? All honor to those who can abnegate for themselves the personal enjoyment of life, when by such renunciation they contribute worthily to increase the amount of

happiness in the world; but he who does it, or professes to do it, for any other purpose, is no more deserving of admiration than the ascetic mounted on his pillar. He may be an inspiring proof of what men *can* do, but assuredly not an example of what they *should*.

Though it is only in a very imperfect state of the world's arrangements that any one can best serve the happiness of others by the absolute sacrifice of his own, yet so long as the world is in that imperfect state, I fully acknowledge that the readiness to make such a sacrifice is *the highest virtue which can be found in man*. I will add, that in this condition of the world, paradoxical as the assertion may be, the conscious ability to do without happiness gives the best prospect of realizing such happiness as is attainable. For nothing except that consciousness can raise a person above the chances of life, by making him feel that, let fate and fortune do their worst, they have not power to subdue him: which, once felt, frees him from excess of anxiety concerning the evils of life, and enables him, like many a Stoic in the worst times of the Roman Empire, to cultivate in tranquility the sources of satisfaction accessible to him, without concerning himself about the uncertainty of their duration, any more than about their inevitable end.

Meanwhile, let utilitarians never cease to claim the morality of self-devotion as a possession which belongs by as good a right to them, as either to the Stoic or to the Transcendentalist. The utilitarian morality does recognize in human beings the power of sacrificing their own greatest good for the good of others. It only refuses to admit that the sacrifice *is itself a good*. *A sacrifice which does not increase, or tend to increase, the sum total of happiness, it considers as wasted*. The only self-renunciation which it applauds, is devotion to the happiness, or to some of the means of happiness, of others; either of mankind collectively, or of individuals within the limits imposed by the collective interests of mankind.

I must again repeat, what the assailants of Utilitarianism seldom have the justice to acknowledge, that the happiness which forms the utilitarian standard of what is right in conduct, is not the agent's own happiness, *but that of all concerned*. As between his own happiness and that of others, Utilitarianism requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator. In the golden rule of Jesus of Nazareth, we read the complete spirit of the ethics of utility. To do as one would be done by, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, constitute the ideal perfection of utilitarian morality. As the means of making the nearest approach to this ideal, utility would enjoin, first, that laws and social arrangements should place the happiness, or (as speaking practically it may be called) the interest, of every individual, as nearly as possible in harmony with the interest of the whole; and secondly, that education and opinion, which have so vast a power over human character, should so use that power as to establish in the mind of every individual an indissoluble association between his own happiness and the good of the whole; especially between his own happiness and the practice of such modes of conduct, negative and positive, as regard for the universal happiness prescribes: so that not only he may be unable to conceive the possibility of happiness to himself, consistently with conduct opposed to the general good, but also that a direct impulse to promote the general good may be in every individual one of the habitual motives of action, and the sentiments connected therewith may fill a large and prominent place in every human being's sentient existence....

The objectors to Utilitarianism cannot always be charged with representing it in a discreditable light. On the contrary, those among them who entertain anything like a just idea of its disinterested

character, sometimes find fault with its standard as being too high for humanity. They say it is exacting too much to require that people shall always act from the inducement of promoting the general interests of society. But *this is to mistake the very meaning of a standard of morals, and to confound the rule of action with the motive of it*. It is the business of ethics to tell us what are our duties, or by what test we may know them; but no system of ethics requires that the sole motive of all we do shall be a feeling of duty; on the contrary, ninety-nine hundredths of all our actions are done from other motives, and rightly so done, if the rule of duty does not condemn them. It is the more unjust to Utilitarianism that this particular misapprehension should be made a ground of objection to it, inasmuch as utilitarian moralists have gone beyond almost all others in affirming that *the motive has nothing to do with the morality of the action*, though much with the worth of the agent. He who saves a fellow creature from drowning does what is morally right, whether his motive be duty, or the hope of being paid for his trouble: he who betrays the friend that trusts him, is guilty of a crime, even if his object be to serve another friend to whom he is under greater obligations.¹²⁴

But to speak only of actions done from the motive of duty, and in direct obedience to principle: it is a misapprehension of the utilitarian mode of thought, to conceive it as implying that people should fix their minds upon so wide a generality as the world, or society at large. The great majority of good actions are intended, not for the benefit of the world, but for that of individuals, of which the good of the world is made up; and the thoughts of the most virtuous man need not on these occasions travel beyond the particular persons concerned, except so far as is necessary to assure himself that in benefiting them he is not violating the rights—that is, the legitimate and authorized expectations—of any one else. The multiplication of happiness is, according to the utilitarian ethics, the object of virtue: the occasions on which any person (except one in a thousand) has it in his power to do this on an extended scale, in other words, to be a public benefactor, are but exceptional; and on these occasions alone is he called on to consider public utility; in every other case, private utility, the interest or happiness of some few persons, is all he has to attend to. Those alone the influence of whose actions extends to society in general, need concern themselves habitually about so large an object. In the case of abstinences indeed—of things which people forbear to do, from moral

¹²⁴ [Mill's original footnote] An opponent, whose intellectual and moral fairness it is a pleasure to acknowledge (the Rev. J. Llewellyn Davis), has objected to this passage, saying, "Surely the rightness or wrongness of saving a man from drowning does depend very much upon the motive with which it is done. Suppose that a tyrant, when his enemy jumped into the sea to escape from him, saved him from drowning simply in order that he might inflict upon him more exquisite tortures, would it tend to clearness to speak of that rescue as 'a morally right action?' Or suppose again, according to one of the stock illustrations of ethical inquiries, that a man betrayed a trust received from a friend, because the discharge of it would fatally injure that friend himself or some one belonging to him, would Utilitarianism compel one to call the betrayal 'a crime' as much as if it had been done from the meanest motive?"

I submit, that he who saves another from drowning in order to kill him by torture afterwards, does not differ only in motive from him who does the same thing from duty or benevolence; the act itself is different. The rescue of the man is, in the case supposed, only the necessary first step of an act far more atrocious than leaving him to drown would have been. Had Mr. Davis said, "The rightness or wrongness of saving a man from drowning does depend very much"—not upon the motive, but—"upon the *intention*" no utilitarian would have differed from him. Mr. Davis, by an oversight too common not to be quite venial, has in this case confounded the very different ideas of Motive and Intention. There is no point which utilitarian thinkers (and Bentham pre-eminently) have taken more pains to illustrate than this. The morality of the action depends entirely upon the intention—that is, upon what the agent *wills to do*. But the motive, that is, the feeling which makes him will so to do, when it makes no difference in the act, makes none in the morality: though it makes a great difference in our moral estimation of the agent, especially if it indicates a good or a bad habitual *disposition*—a bent of character from which useful, or from which hurtful actions are likely to arise.

considerations, though the consequences in the particular case might be beneficial—it would be unworthy of an intelligent agent not to be consciously aware that the action is of a class which, if practiced generally, would be generally injurious, and that this is the ground of the obligation to abstain from it. The amount of regard for the public interest implied in this recognition, is no greater than is demanded by every system of morals; for they all enjoin to abstain from whatever is manifestly pernicious to society.

The same considerations dispose of another reproach against the doctrine of utility, founded on a still grosser misconception of the purpose of a standard of morality, and of the very meaning of the words right and wrong. It is often affirmed that *Utilitarianism renders men cold and unsympathetic*; that it chills their moral feelings towards individuals; that it makes them regard only the dry and hard consideration of the consequences of actions, not taking into their moral estimate the qualities from which those actions emanate. If the assertion means that they do not allow their judgment respecting the rightness or wrongness of an action to be influenced by their opinion of the qualities of the person who does it, this is a complaint not against Utilitarianism, but *against having any standard of morality at all*; for certainly no known ethical standard decides an action to be good or bad because it is done by a good or a bad man, still less because done by an amiable, a brave, or a benevolent man or the contrary. These considerations are relevant, not to the estimation of actions, but of persons; and there is nothing in the utilitarian theory inconsistent with the fact that there are other things which interest us in persons besides the rightness and wrongness of their actions. The Stoics, indeed, with the paradoxical misuse of language which was part of their system, and by which they strove to raise themselves above all concern about anything but virtue, were fond of saying that he who has that has everything; that he, and only he, is rich, is beautiful, is a king. But no claim of this description is made for the virtuous man by the utilitarian doctrine. Utilitarians are quite aware that there are other desirable possessions and qualities besides virtue, and are perfectly willing to allow to all of them their full worth. They are also aware that a right action does not necessarily indicate a virtuous character, and that actions which are blamable often proceed from qualities entitled to praise. When this is apparent in any particular case, it modifies their estimation, not certainly of the act, but of the agent. I grant that they are, notwithstanding, of opinion, that in the long run the best proof of a good character is good actions; and resolutely refuse to consider any mental disposition as good, of which the predominant tendency is to produce bad conduct. This makes them unpopular with many people; but it is an unpopularity which they must share with every one who regards the distinction between right and wrong in a serious light; and the reproach is not one which a conscientious utilitarian need be anxious to repel...

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It may not be superfluous to notice a few more of the common misapprehensions of utilitarian ethics, even those which are so obvious and gross that it might appear impossible for any person of candor and intelligence to fall into them: since persons, even of considerable mental endowments, often give themselves so little trouble to understand the bearings of any opinion against which they entertain a prejudice, and men are in general so little conscious of this voluntary ignorance as a defect, that the vulgarest misunderstandings of ethical doctrines are continually met with in the deliberate writings of persons of the greatest pretensions both to high principle and to philosophy. We not uncommonly hear the doctrine of utility inveighed against as a *godless* doctrine. If it be necessary to say anything at all against so mere an assumption, we may say that the question

depends upon what idea we have formed of the moral character of the Deity. If it be a true belief that God desires, above all things, the happiness of his creatures, and that this was his purpose in their creation, utility is not only not a godless doctrine, but more profoundly religious than any other. If it be meant that Utilitarianism does not recognize the revealed will of God as the supreme law of morals, I answer, that an utilitarian who believes in the perfect goodness and wisdom of God, necessarily believes that whatever God has thought fit to reveal on the subject of morals, must fulfill the requirements of utility in a supreme degree. But others besides utilitarians have been of opinion that the Christian revelation was intended, and is fitted, to inform the hearts and minds of mankind with a spirit which should enable them to find for themselves what is right, and incline them to do it when found, rather than to tell them, except in a very general way, what it is: and that we need a doctrine of ethics, carefully followed out, to *interpret* to us the will of God. Whether this opinion is correct or not, it is superfluous here to discuss; since whatever aid religion, either natural or revealed, can afford to ethical investigation, is as open to the utilitarian moralist as to any other. He can use it as the testimony of God to the usefulness or hurtfulness of any given course of action, by as good a right as others can use it for the indication of a transcendental law, having no connection with usefulness or with happiness.

Again, Utility is often summarily stigmatized as an immoral doctrine by giving it the name of Expediency, and taking advantage of the popular use of that term to contrast it with Principle. But the Expedient, in the sense in which it is opposed to the Right, generally means that which is expedient for the particular *interest of the agent himself*: as when a minister sacrifices the interest of his country to keep himself in place. When it means anything better than this, it means that which is expedient for some immediate object, some temporary purpose, but which violates a rule whose observance is expedient in a much higher degree. The Expedient, in this sense, instead of being the same thing with the useful, is a branch of the hurtful. Thus, it would often be expedient, for the purpose of getting over some momentary embarrassment, or attaining some object immediately useful to ourselves or others, to tell a lie. But inasmuch as the cultivation in ourselves of a sensitive feeling on the subject of veracity, is one of the most useful, and the enfeeblement of that feeling one of the most hurtful, things to which our conduct can be instrumental; and inasmuch as any, even unintentional, deviation from truth, does that much towards weakening the trustworthiness of human assertion, which is not only the principal support of all present social well-being, but the insufficiency of which does more than any one thing that can be named to keep back civilization, virtue, everything on which human happiness on the largest scale depends; we feel that the violation, for a present advantage, of a rule of such transcendent expediency, is not expedient, and that he who, for the sake of a convenience to himself or to some other individual, does what depends on him to deprive mankind of the good, and inflict upon them the evil, involved in the greater or less reliance which they can place in each other's word, acts the part of one of their worst enemies. Yet that even this rule, sacred as it is, admits of possible exceptions, is acknowledged by all moralists; the chief of which is when the withholding of some fact (as of information from a male-factor, or of bad news from a person dangerously ill) would preserve some one (especially a person other than oneself) from great and unmerited evil, and when the withholding can only be effected by denial. But in order that the exception may not extend itself beyond the need, and may have the least possible effect in weakening reliance on veracity, it ought to be recognized, and, if possible, its limits defined; and if the principle of utility is good for anything, it must be good for weighing these conflicting utilities against one another, and marking out the region within which one or the other preponderates.

Again, defenders of utility often find themselves called upon to reply to such objections as this—that there is not time, previous to action, for calculating and weighing the effects of any line of conduct on the general happiness. This is exactly as if any one were to say that it is impossible to guide our conduct by Christianity, because there is not time, on every occasion on which anything has to be done, to read through the Old and New Testaments. The answer to the objection is, that there has been ample time, namely, the whole past duration of the human species. During all that time mankind have been learning by experience the tendencies of actions; on which experience all the prudence, as well as all the morality of life, is dependent. People talk as if the commencement of this course of experience had hitherto been put off, and as if, at the moment when some man feels tempted to meddle with the property or life of another, he had to begin considering for the first time whether murder and theft are injurious to human happiness. Even then I do not think that he would find the question very puzzling; but, at all events, the matter is now done to his hand.

It is truly a whimsical supposition, that if mankind were agreed in considering utility to be the test of morality, they would remain without any agreement as to what is useful, and would take no measures for having their notions on the subject taught to the young, and enforced by law and opinion. There is no difficulty in proving any ethical standard whatever to work ill, if we suppose universal idiocy to be conjoined with it, but on any hypothesis short of that, mankind must by this time have acquired positive beliefs as to the effects of some actions on their happiness; and the beliefs which have thus come down are the rules of morality for the multitude, and for the philosopher until he has succeeded in finding better. That philosophers might easily do this, even now, on many subjects; that the received code of ethics is by no means of divine right; and that mankind have still much to learn as to the effects of actions on the general happiness, I admit, or rather, earnestly maintain. The corollaries from the principle of utility, like the precepts of every practical art, admit of indefinite improvement, and, in a progressive state of the human mind, their improvement is perpetually going on.

But to consider the rules of morality as improvable, is one thing; to pass over the intermediate generalizations entirely, and endeavor to test each individual action directly by the first principle, is another. It is a strange notion that the acknowledgment of a first principle is inconsistent with the admission of secondary ones. To inform a traveller respecting the place of his ultimate destination, is not to forbid the use of landmarks and direction-posts on the way. The proposition that happiness is the end and aim of morality, does not mean that no road ought to be laid down to that goal, or that persons going thither should not be advised to take one direction rather than another. Men really ought to leave off talking a kind of nonsense on this subject, which they would neither talk nor listen to on other matters of practical concernment. Nobody argues that the art of navigation is not founded on astronomy, because sailors cannot wait to calculate the Nautical Almanac. Being rational creatures, they go to sea with it ready calculated; and all rational creatures go out upon the sea of life with their minds made up on the common questions of right and wrong, as well as on many of the far more difficult questions of wise and foolish. And this, as long as foresight is a human quality, it is to be presumed they will continue to do. Whatever we adopt as the fundamental principle of morality, we require subordinate principles to apply it by: the impossibility of doing without them, being common to all systems, can afford no argument against any one in particular: but gravely to argue as if no such secondary principles could be had, and as if mankind had remained

till now, and always must remain, without drawing any general conclusions from the experience of human life, is as high a pitch, I think, as absurdity has ever reached in philosophical controversy.

The remainder of the stock arguments against Utilitarianism mostly consist in laying to its charge the common infirmities of human nature, and the general difficulties which embarrass conscientious persons in shaping their course through life. We are told that an utilitarian will be apt to make his own particular case an exception to moral rules, and, when under temptation, will see an utility in the breach of a rule, greater than he will see in its observance. But is utility the only creed which is able to furnish us with excuses for evil doing, and means of cheating our own conscience? They are afforded in abundance by all doctrines which recognize as a fact in morals the existence of conflicting considerations; which all doctrines do, that have been believed by sane persons. It is not the fault of any creed, but of the complicated nature of human affairs, that rules of conduct cannot be so framed as to require no exceptions, and that hardly any kind of action can safely be laid down as either always obligatory or always condemnable. There is no ethical creed which does not temper the rigidity of its laws, by giving a certain latitude, under the moral responsibility of the agent, for accommodation to peculiarities of circumstances; and under every creed, at the opening thus made, self-deception and dishonest casuistry get in. There exists no moral system under which there do not arise unequivocal cases of conflicting obligation. These are the real difficulties, the knotty points both in the theory of ethics, and in the conscientious guidance of personal conduct. They are overcome practically with greater or with less success according to the intellect and virtue of the individual; but it can hardly be pretended that any one will be the less qualified for dealing with them, from possessing an ultimate standard to which conflicting rights and duties can be referred. If utility is the ultimate source of moral obligations, utility may be invoked to decide between them when their demands are incompatible. Though the application of the standard may be difficult, it is better than none at all: while in other systems, the moral laws all claiming independent authority, there is no common umpire entitled to interfere between them; their claims to precedence one over another rest on little better than sophistry, and unless determined, as they generally are, by the unacknowledged influence of considerations of utility, afford a free scope for the action of personal desires and partialities. We must remember that only in these cases of conflict between secondary principles is it requisite that first principles should be appealed to. There is no case of moral obligation in which some secondary principle is not involved; and if only one, there can seldom be any real doubt which one it is, in the mind of any person by whom the principle itself is recognized.



FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE METAPHYSICS OF MORALS (1785) (in part)

By:
IMMANUEL KANT (1724-1804)

Translated by: T.K. Abbott
Additions, corrections, and footnotes by Barry F. Vaughan¹²⁵

SECTION I

TRANSITION FROM THE COMMON RATIONAL KNOWLEDGE OF MORALITY TO THE PHILOSOPHICAL

*Nothing can possibly be conceived in the world, or even out of it, which can be called good, without qualification, except a **good will**.* Intelligence, wit, judgment, and the other talents of the mind, however they may be named, or courage, resolution, perseverance, as qualities of temperament, are undoubtedly good and desirable in many respects; but these gifts of nature may also become extremely bad and mischievous if the will which is to make use of them, and which, therefore, constitutes what is called character, is not good. It is the same with the gifts of fortune. Power, riches, honor, even health, and the general well-being and contentment with one's condition which is called *happiness*, inspire pride, and often presumption, if there is not a good will to correct the influence of these on the mind, and with this also to rectify the whole principle of acting and adapt it to its end. The sight of a being who is not adorned with a single feature of a pure and good will, enjoying unbroken prosperity, can never give pleasure to an impartial rational spectator. Thus a good will appears to constitute the indispensable condition even of being worthy of happiness.

There are even some qualities which are of service to this good will itself and may facilitate its action, yet which have no intrinsic unconditional value, but always presuppose a good will, and this qualifies the esteem that we justly have for them and does not permit us to regard them as absolutely good. Moderation in the affections and passions, self-control, and calm deliberation are not only good in many respects, but even seem to constitute part of the intrinsic worth of the person; but they are far from deserving to be called good without qualification, although they have been so unconditionally praised by the ancients. For without the principles of a good will, they may become

¹²⁵ This text is taken from Project Gutenberg's Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals, by Immanuel Kant, www.gutenberg.org.

I have also changed UK spellings to US spellings where appropriate, as well as made clarifications in translation noted with brackets and added explanatory footnotes and emphases in italics. This text is intended for academic or personal use and may not be sold or used for profit.

extremely bad, and the coolness of a villain not only makes him far more dangerous, but also directly makes him more abominable in our eyes than he would have been without it.

A good will is good not because of what it performs or effects, not by its aptness for the attainment of some proposed end, but simply by virtue of the volition; that is, it is good in itself, and considered by itself is to be esteemed much higher than all that can be brought about by it in favor of any inclination, nay even of the sum total of all inclinations. Even if it should happen that, owing to special disfavor of fortune, or the niggardly provision of a step-motherly nature, this will should wholly lack power to accomplish its purpose, if with its greatest efforts it should yet achieve nothing, and there should remain only the good will (not, to be sure, a mere wish, but the summoning of all means in our power), then, like a jewel, it would still shine by its own light, as a thing which has its whole value in itself. Its usefulness or fruitfulness can neither add nor take away anything from this value. It would be, as it were, only the setting to enable us to handle it the more conveniently in common commerce, or to attract to it the attention of those who are not yet connoisseurs, but not to recommend it to true connoisseurs, or to determine its value.

There is, however, something so strange in this idea of the absolute value of the mere will, in which no account is taken of its utility, that notwithstanding the thorough assent of even common reason to the idea, yet a suspicion must arise that it may perhaps really be the product of mere high-flown fancy, and that we may have misunderstood the purpose of nature in assigning reason as the governor of our will. Therefore, we will examine this idea from this point of view.

Reason is the Guide of the Will

In the physical constitution of an organized being, that is, a being adapted suitably to the purposes of life, we assume it as a fundamental principle that no organ for any purpose will be found but what is also the fittest and best adapted for that purpose. Now in a being which has reason and a will, if the proper object of nature were its conservation, its welfare, in a word, its happiness, then nature would have hit upon a very bad arrangement in selecting the reason of the creature to carry out this purpose. For all the actions which the creature has to perform with a view to this purpose, and the whole rule of its conduct, would be far more surely prescribed to it by instinct, and that end would have been attained thereby much more certainly than it ever can be by reason. Should reason have been communicated to this favored creature over and above, it must only have served it to contemplate the happy constitution of its nature, to admire it, to congratulate itself thereon, and to feel thankful for it to the beneficent cause, but not that it should subject its desires to that weak and delusive guidance and meddle bunglingly with the purpose of nature. In a word, nature would have taken care that reason should not break forth into practical exercise, nor have the presumption, with its weak insight, to think out for itself the plan of happiness, and of the means of attaining it. Nature would not only have taken on herself the choice of the ends, but also of the means, and with wise foresight would have entrusted both to instinct.

And, in fact, we find that the more a cultivated reason applies itself with deliberate purpose to the enjoyment of life and happiness, so much the more does the man fail of true satisfaction. And from this circumstance there arises in many, if they are candid enough to confess it, a certain degree of misology, that is, hatred of reason, especially in the case of those who are most experienced in the use of it, because after calculating all the advantages they derive, I do not say from the invention of

all the arts of common luxury, but even from the sciences (which seem to them to be after all only a luxury of the understanding), they find that they have, in fact, only brought more trouble on their shoulders, rather than gained in happiness; and they end by envying, rather than despising, the more common stamp of men who keep closer to the guidance of mere instinct and do not allow their reason much influence on their conduct. And this we must admit, that the judgment of those who would very much lower the lofty eulogies of the advantages which reason gives us in regard to the happiness and satisfaction of life, or who would even reduce them below zero, is by no means morose or ungrateful to the goodness with which the world is governed, but that there lies at the root of these judgments the idea that our existence has a different and far nobler end, for which, and not for happiness, reason is properly intended, and which must, therefore, be regarded as the supreme condition to which the private ends of man must, for the most part, be postponed.

For as reason is not competent to guide the will with certainty in regard to its objects and the satisfaction of all our wants (which it to some extent even multiplies), this being an end to which an implanted instinct would have led with much greater certainty; and since, nevertheless, reason is imparted to us as a practical faculty, i.e., as one which is to have influence on the will, therefore, admitting that nature generally in the distribution of her capacities has adapted the means to the end, its true destination must be to produce a will, not merely good as a means to something else, but good in itself, for which reason was absolutely necessary. This will then, though not indeed the sole and complete good, must be the supreme good and the condition of every other, even of the desire of happiness....

The First Propositions of Morality

*We have then to develop the notion of a will which deserves to be highly esteemed for itself and is good without a view to anything further, a notion which exists already in the sound natural understanding, requiring rather to be cleared up than to be taught, and which in estimating the value of our actions always takes the first place and constitutes the condition of all the rest. In order to do this, we will take the notion of **duty**, which includes that of a good will, although implying certain subjective restrictions and hindrances. These, however, far from concealing it, or rendering it unrecognizable, rather bring it out by contrast and make it shine forth so much the brighter....*

On the other hand, it is a duty to maintain one's life; and, in addition, everyone has also a direct inclination to do so. But on this account the of anxious care which most men take for it has no intrinsic worth, and their maxim has no moral import. They preserve their life as duty requires, no doubt, but not because duty requires. On the other hand, if adversity and hopeless sorrow have completely taken away the relish for life; if the unfortunate one, strong in mind, indignant at his fate rather than desponding or dejected, wishes for death, and yet preserves his life without loving it-not from inclination or fear, but from duty-then his maxim has a moral worth.

To be beneficent when we can is a duty; and besides this, there are many minds so sympathetically constituted that, without any other motive of vanity or self-interest, they find a pleasure in spreading joy around them and can take delight in the satisfaction of others so far as it is their own work. But I maintain that in such a case an action of this kind, however proper, however amiable it may be, has nevertheless no true moral worth, but is on a level with other inclinations, e.g., the inclination to honor, which, if it is happily directed to that which is in fact of public utility and accordant with duty

and consequently honorable, deserves praise and encouragement, but not esteem. For the maxim lacks the moral import, namely, that such actions be done from duty, not from inclination. Put the case that the mind of that philanthropist were clouded by sorrow of his own, extinguishing all sympathy with the lot of others, and that, while he still has the power to benefit others in distress, he is not touched by their trouble because he is absorbed with his own; and now suppose that he tears himself out of this dead insensibility, and performs the action without any inclination to it, but simply from duty, then first has his action its genuine moral worth. Further still; if nature has put little sympathy in the heart of this or that man; if he, supposed to be an upright man, is by temperament cold and indifferent to the sufferings of others, perhaps because in respect of his own he is provided with the special gift of patience and fortitude and supposes, or even requires, that others should have the same - and such a man would certainly not be the meanest product of nature - but if nature had not specially framed him for a philanthropist, would he not still find in himself a source from whence to give himself a far higher worth than that of a good-natured temperament could be? Unquestionably. *It is just in this that the moral worth of the character is brought out which is incomparably the highest of all, namely, that he is beneficent, **not from inclination, but from duty.***

To secure one's own happiness is a duty, at least indirectly; for discontent with one's condition, under a pressure of many anxieties and amidst unsatisfied wants, might easily become a great temptation to transgression of duty. But here again, without looking to duty, all men have already the strongest and most intimate inclination to happiness, because it is just in this idea that all inclinations are combined in one total. But the precept of happiness is often of such a sort that it greatly interferes with some inclinations, and yet a man cannot form any definite and certain conception of the sum of satisfaction of all of them which is called happiness. It is not then to be wondered at that a single inclination, definite both as to what it promises and as to the time within which it can be gratified, is often able to overcome such a fluctuating idea, and that a gouty patient, for instance, can choose to enjoy what he likes, and to suffer what he may, since, according to his calculation, on this occasion at least, he has not sacrificed the enjoyment of the present moment to a possibly mistaken expectation of a happiness which is supposed to be found in health. But even in this case, if the general desire for happiness did not influence his will, and supposing that in his particular case health was not a necessary element in this calculation, there yet remains in this, as in all other cases, this law, namely, that *he should promote his happiness not from inclination but from duty, and by this would his conduct first acquire true moral worth* [this is the **first proposition of morality**].

It is in this manner, undoubtedly, that we are to understand those passages of Scripture also in which we are commanded to love our neighbor, even our enemy. For love, as an affection, cannot be commanded, but beneficence for duty's sake may; even though we are not impelled to it by any inclination - nay, are even repelled by a natural and unconquerable aversion. This is practical love and not pathological—a love which is seated in the will, and not in the propensions of sense—in principles of action and not of tender sympathy; and it is this love alone which can be commanded.

The Second Propositions of Morality

The second proposition is: *That an action done from duty derives its moral worth, not from the purpose which is to be attained by it, but from the maxim by which it is determined, and therefore does not depend on the realization of the object of the action, but merely on the principle of volition*

by which the action has taken place, without regard to any object of desire. It is clear from what precedes that the purposes which we may have in view in our actions, or their effects regarded as ends and springs of the will, cannot give to actions any unconditional or moral worth. In what, then, can their worth lie, if it is not to consist in the will and in reference to its expected effect? It cannot lie anywhere but in the principle of the will without regard to the ends which can be attained by the action. For the will stands between its *a priori* principle, which is formal, and its *a posteriori* spring, which is material, as between two roads, and as it must be determined by something, it that it must be determined by the formal principle of volition when an action is done from duty, in which case every material principle has been withdrawn from it.

The Third Propositions of Morality

The third proposition, which is a consequence of the two preceding, I would express thus: *'Duty' is the necessity of acting from respect for the law. I may have inclination for an object as the effect of my proposed action, but I cannot have respect for it, just for this reason, that it is an effect and not an energy of will.* Similarly I cannot have respect for inclination, whether my own or another's; I can at most, if my own, approve it; if another's, sometimes even love it; i.e., look on it as favorable to my own interest. It is only what is connected with my will as a principle, by no means as an effect—what does not subserve my inclination, but overpowers it, or at least in case of choice excludes it from its calculation—in other words, simply the law of itself, which can be an object of respect, and hence a command. Now an action done from duty must wholly exclude the influence of inclination and with it every object of the will, so that nothing remains which can determine the will except objectively the law, and subjectively pure respect for this practical law, and consequently the maxim that I should follow this law even to the thwarting of all my inclinations.

Thus the moral worth of an action does not lie in the effect expected from it, nor in any principle of action which requires to borrow its motive from this expected effect. For all these effects—agreeableness of one's condition and even the promotion of the happiness of others—could have been also brought about by other causes, so that for this there would have been no need of the will of a rational being; whereas it is in this alone that the supreme and unconditional good can be found. The pre-eminent good which we call moral can therefore consist in nothing else than the conception of law in itself, which certainly is only possible in a rational being, in so far as this conception, and not the expected effect, determines the will. This is a good which is already present in the person who acts accordingly, and we have not to wait for it to appear first in the result.

The Ultimate Principle of Morality: The Categorical Imperative

But what sort of law can that be, the conception of which must determine the will, even without paying any regard to the effect expected from it, in order that this will may be called good absolutely and without qualification? As I have deprived the will of every impulse which could arise to it from obedience to any law, there remains nothing but the universal conformity of its actions to law in general, which alone is to serve the will as a principle, i.e., *I am never to act otherwise than so that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law.* Here, now, it is the simple conformity to law in general, without assuming any particular law applicable to certain actions, that serves the will as its principle and must so serve it, if duty is not to be a vain delusion and a chimerical notion. The common reason of men in its practical judgments perfectly coincides with this and always has in

view the principle here suggested. Let the question be, for example: May I when in distress make a promise with the intention not to keep it? I readily distinguish here between the two significations which the question may have: Whether it is prudent, or whether it is right, to make a false promise? The former may undoubtedly be the case. I see clearly indeed that it is not enough to extricate myself from a present difficulty by means of this subterfuge, but it must be well considered whether there may not hereafter spring from this lie much greater inconvenience than that from which I now free myself, and as, with all my supposed cunning, the consequences cannot be so easily foreseen but that credit once lost may be much more injurious to me than any mischief which I seek to avoid at present, it should be considered whether it would not be more prudent to act herein according to a universal maxim and to make it a habit to promise nothing except with the intention of keeping it. But it is soon clear to me that such a maxim will still only be based on the fear of consequences. Now it is a wholly different thing to be truthful from duty and to be so from apprehension of injurious consequences. In the first case, the very notion of the action already implies a law for me; in the second case, I must first look about elsewhere to see what results may be combined with it which would affect myself. For to deviate from the principle of duty is beyond all doubt wicked; but to be unfaithful to my maxim of prudence may often be very advantageous to me, although to abide by it is certainly safer. The shortest way, however, and an unerring one, to discover the answer to this question whether a lying promise is consistent with duty, is to ask myself, "Should I be content that my maxim (to extricate myself from difficulty by a false promise) should hold good as a universal law, for myself as well as for others? and should I be able to say to myself, "Every one may make a deceitful promise when he finds himself in a difficulty from which he cannot otherwise extricate himself?" Then I presently become aware that while I can will the lie, I can by no means will that lying should be a universal law. For with such a law there would be no promises at all, since it would be in vain to allege my intention in regard to my future actions to those who would not believe this allegation, or if they over hastily did so would pay me back in my own coin. Hence my maxim, as soon as it should be made a universal law, would necessarily destroy itself....

SECTION II

THE TRANSITION FROM POPULAR MORAL PHILOSOPHY TO THE METAPHYSIC OF MORALS

Morality Derived from Reason, not Empirical Observation

If we have hitherto drawn our notion of duty from the common use of our practical reason, it is by no means to be inferred that we have treated it as an empirical notion.¹²⁶ On the contrary, if we attend to the experience of men's conduct, we meet frequent and, as we ourselves allow, just complaints that one cannot find a single certain example of the disposition to act from pure duty. Although many things are done in conformity with what duty prescribes, it is nevertheless always doubtful whether they are done *strictly* from duty, so as to have a moral worth. Hence there have at all times been philosophers who have altogether denied that this disposition actually exists at all in human actions, and have ascribed everything to a more or less refined self-love (e.g., Ethical Egoism and Hedonism). Not that they have on that account questioned the soundness of the conception of morality; on the contrary, they spoke with sincere regret of the frailty and corruption of human

¹²⁶ By "empirical notion" Kant means an idea derived from sensory perception.

nature, which, though noble enough to take its rule an idea so worthy of respect, is yet weak to follow it and employs reason which ought to give it the law only for the purpose of providing for the interest of the inclinations, whether singly or at the best in the greatest possible harmony with one another....

When we add further that, unless we deny that the notion of morality has any truth or reference to any possible object, we must admit that its law must be valid, not merely for men but *for all rational creatures generally*, not merely under certain contingent conditions or with exceptions but with absolute necessity, then it is clear that *no experience could* enable us to infer even the possibility of such [uncontestable] laws. For with what right could we bring into unbounded respect as a universal precept for every rational nature that which perhaps holds only under the contingent conditions of humanity? Or how could laws of the determination of our will be regarded as laws of the determination of the will of rational beings generally, and for us only as such, if they were merely empirical and did not take their origin wholly *a priori* from pure but practical reason....

From what has been said, it is clear that all moral conceptions have their seat and origin completely *a priori* in the reason, and that, moreover, in the commonest reason just as truly as in that which is in the highest degree speculative; that they cannot be obtained by abstraction from any empirical, and therefore merely contingent, knowledge; that it is just this purity of their origin that makes them worthy to serve as our supreme practical principle, and that just in proportion as we add anything empirical, we detract from their genuine influence and from the absolute value of actions; that it is not only of the greatest necessity, in a purely speculative point of view, but is also of the greatest practical importance, to derive these notions and laws from pure reason, to present them pure and unmixed, and even to determine the compass of this practical or pure rational knowledge, i.e., to determine the whole faculty of pure practical reason; and, in doing so, we must not make its principles dependent on the particular nature of human reason, though in speculative philosophy this may be permitted, or may even at times be necessary; but since moral laws ought to hold good for *every rational creature*, we must derive them from *the general concept of a rational being*....

The Difference between Hypothetical and Categorical Imperatives

Everything in nature works according to laws. Rational beings alone have the faculty of acting according to the conception of laws—that is according to principles—i.e., have a *will*. Since the deduction of actions from principles requires *reason*, *the will is nothing but practical reason*. If reason infallibly determines the will, then the actions of such a being which are recognized as objectively necessary are subjectively necessary also, i.e., the will is a faculty to choose that only which reason independent of inclination recognizes as practically necessary, i.e., as good. But if reason of itself does not sufficiently determine the will, if the latter is subject also to subjective conditions (particular impulses) which do not always coincide with the objective conditions; in a word, if the will does not in itself completely accord with reason (which is actually the case with men), then the actions which objectively are recognized as necessary are subjectively contingent, and the determination of such a will according to objective laws is *obligation*, that is to say, the relation of the objective laws to a will that is not thoroughly good is conceived as the determination of the will of a rational being by principles of reason, but which the will from its nature does not of necessity follow.

The conception of an objective principle, in so far as it is obligatory for a will, is called a **command** (of reason), and *the formula of the command is called an imperative*.

All imperatives are expressed by the word 'ought' [or 'shall'], and thereby indicate the relation of an objective law of reason to a will, which from its subjective constitution is not necessarily determined by it (an obligation). They say that something would be good to do or to forbear, but they say it to a will which does not always do a thing because it is conceived to be good to do it. That is practically good, however, which determines the will by means of the conceptions of reason, and consequently not from subjective causes, but objectively, that is on principles which are valid for every rational being as such. It is distinguished from the pleasant, as that which influences the will only by means of sensation from merely subjective causes, valid only for the sense of this or that one, and not as a principle of reason, which holds for every one.

A perfectly good will would, therefore, be equally subject to objective laws (viz., laws of good), but could not be conceived as obliged thereby to act lawfully, because *of itself* from its subjective constitution it can only be determined by the conception of good. Therefore, no imperatives hold for the Divine will, or in general for a holy will; ought is here out of place, because the volition is already of itself necessarily in unison with the law. Therefore, *imperatives are only formulae to express the relation of objective laws of all volition to the subjective imperfection of the will of this or that rational being, e.g., the human will.*

*All imperatives command either **hypothetically** or **categorically**. The former represent the practical necessity of a possible action as means to something else that is willed (or at least which one might possibly will). The **categorical imperative** would be that which represented an action as necessary of itself without reference to another end, i.e., as objectively necessary.*

Since every practical law represents a possible action as good and, on this account, for a subject who is practically determinable by reason, necessary, all imperatives are formulae determining an action which is necessary according to the principle of a will good in some respects. If the action is good *only as a means to something else*, then the imperative is **hypothetical**; if it is *conceived as good in itself* and consequently as being necessarily the principle of a will which of itself conforms to reason, then it is **categorical**....

Accordingly the **hypothetical imperative** only says *that the action is good for some purpose*, possible or actual. In the first case it is a problematical, in the second an [asserted] practical principle. The categorical imperative which declares an action to be objectively necessary in itself, without reference to any purpose ... is valid as a [demonstrated] (i.e., practical) principle....

The First Formulation of the Categorical Imperative: *The Universal Law*

....There is, therefore, but one **categorical imperative**, namely, this: ***Act only on that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.*** Now if all imperatives of duty can be deduced from this one imperative as from their principle, then, although it should remain undecided what is called duty is not merely a vain notion, yet at least we shall be able to show what we understand by it and what this notion means....

Four Illustrations of the Universal Law

We will now enumerate a few duties, adopting the usual division of them into duties to ourselves and to others, and into perfect and imperfect.

1. A man reduced to despair by a series of misfortunes feels wearied of life, but is still so far in possession of his reason that he can ask himself whether it would not be contrary to his duty to himself to take his own life. Now he inquires whether the maxim of his action could become a universal law of nature. His maxim is: "From self-love I adopt it as a principle to shorten my life when its longer duration is likely to bring more evil than satisfaction." It is asked then simply whether this principle founded on self-love can become a universal law of nature. Now we see at once that a system of nature of which it should be a law to destroy life by means of the very feeling whose special nature it is to impel to the improvement of life would contradict itself and, therefore, could not exist as a system of nature; hence that maxim cannot possibly exist as a universal law of nature and, consequently, would be wholly inconsistent with the supreme principle of all duty.

2. Another finds himself forced by necessity to borrow money. He knows that he will not be able to repay it, but sees also that nothing will be lent to him unless he promises stoutly to repay it in a definite time. He desires to make this promise, but he has still so much conscience as to ask himself: "Is it not unlawful and inconsistent with duty to get out of a difficulty in this way?" Suppose however that he resolves to do so: then the maxim of his action would be expressed thus: "When I think myself in want of money, I will borrow money and promise to repay it, although I know that I never can do so." Now this principle of self-love or of one's own advantage may perhaps be consistent with my whole future welfare; but the question now is, "Is it right?" I change then the suggestion of self-love into a universal law, and state the question thus: "How would it be if my maxim were a universal law?" Then I see at once that it could never hold as a universal law of nature, but would necessarily contradict itself. For supposing it to be a universal law that everyone when he thinks himself in a difficulty should be able to promise whatever he pleases, with the purpose of not keeping his promise, the promise itself would become impossible, as well as the end that one might have in view in it, since no one would consider that anything was promised to him, but would ridicule all such statements as vain pretenses.

3. A third finds in himself a talent which with the help of some culture might make him a useful man in many respects. But he finds himself in comfortable circumstances and prefers to indulge in pleasure rather than to take pains in enlarging and improving his happy natural capacities. He asks, however, whether his maxim of neglect of his natural gifts, besides agreeing with his inclination to indulgence, agrees also with what is called duty. He sees then that a system of nature could indeed subsist with such a universal law although men (like the South Sea islanders) should let their talents rest and resolve to devote their lives merely to idleness, amusement, and propagation of their species- in a word, to enjoyment; but he cannot possibly will that this should be a universal law of nature, or be implanted in us as such by a natural instinct. For, as a rational being, he necessarily wills that his faculties be developed, since they serve him and have been given him, for all sorts of possible purposes.

4. A fourth, who is in prosperity, while he sees that others have to contend with great wretchedness and that he could help them, thinks: "What concern is it of mine? Let everyone be as happy as

Heaven pleases, or as he can make himself; I will take nothing from him nor even envy him, only I do not wish to contribute anything to his welfare or to his assistance in distress!" Now no doubt if such a mode of thinking were a universal law, the human race might very well subsist and doubtless even better than in a state in which everyone talks of sympathy and good-will, or even takes care occasionally to put it into practice, but, on the other side, also cheats when he can, betrays the rights of men, or otherwise violates them. But although it is possible that a universal law of nature might exist in accordance with that maxim, it is impossible to will that such a principle should have the universal validity of a law of nature. For a will which resolved this would contradict itself, inasmuch as many cases might occur in which one would have need of the love and sympathy of others, and in which, by such a law of nature, sprung from his own will, he would deprive himself of all hope of the aid he desires.

These are a few of the many actual duties, or at least what we regard as such, which obviously fall into two classes on the one principle that we have laid down. We must be able to will that a maxim of our action should be a universal law. This is the canon of the moral appreciation of the action generally. Some actions are of such a character that their maxim cannot without contradiction be even conceived as a universal law of nature, far from it being possible that we should will that it should be so. In others this intrinsic impossibility is not found, but still it is impossible to will that their maxim should be raised to the universality of a law of nature, since such a will would contradict itself. It is easily seen that the former violate strict or rigorous (inflexible) duty; the latter only laxer (meritorious) duty. Thus it has been completely shown how all duties depend as regards the nature of the obligation (not the object of the action) on the same principle.

The Second Formulation of the Categorical Imperative: *Rational Agents as Ends-In-Themselves*

The will is conceived as a faculty of determining oneself to action in accordance with the conception of certain laws. And *such a faculty can be found only in rational beings*. Now that which serves the will as the objective ground of its self-determination is the end, and, if this is assigned by reason alone, it must hold for all rational beings. On the other hand, that which merely contains the ground of possibility of the action of which the effect is the end, this is called the means. The subjective ground of the desire is the spring, the objective ground of the volition is the motive; hence the distinction between subjective ends which rest on springs, and *objective ends which depend on motives valid for every rational being*. Practical principles are formal when they abstract from all subjective ends; they are material when they assume these, and therefore particular springs of action. The ends which a rational being proposes to himself at pleasure as effects of his actions (material ends) are all only relative, for it is only their relation to the particular desires of the subject that gives them their worth, which therefore cannot furnish principles universal and necessary for all rational beings and for every volition, that is to say practical laws. Hence all these relative ends can give rise only to hypothetical imperatives.

Supposing, however, that there were something whose existence has in itself an absolute worth, something which, being an end in itself, could be a source of definite laws; then *in this and this alone* would lie the source of a possible categorical imperative, i.e., a practical law.

Now I say: *man and generally any rational being exists as an end in himself*, not merely as a means

to be arbitrarily used by this or that will, but in all his actions, whether they concern himself or other rational beings, must be always regarded at the same time as an end. All objects of the inclinations have only a conditional worth, for if the inclinations and the wants founded on them did not exist, then their object would be without value. But the inclinations, themselves being sources of want, are so far from having an absolute worth for which they should be desired that on the contrary it must be the universal wish of every rational being to be wholly free from them. Thus the worth of any object which is to be acquired by our action is always conditional. Beings whose existence depends not on our will but on nature's, have nevertheless, if they are irrational beings, only a relative value as means, and are therefore called things; rational beings, on the contrary, are called persons, because their very nature points them out as ends in themselves, that is as something which must not be used merely as means, and so far therefore restricts freedom of action (and is an object of respect). These, therefore, are not merely subjective ends whose existence has a worth for us as an effect of our action, but objective ends....

If then there is a supreme practical principle or, in respect of the human will, a categorical imperative, it must be one which, being drawn from the conception of that which is necessarily an end for everyone because it is an end in itself, constitutes an objective principle of will, and can therefore serve as a universal practical law. The foundation of this principle is: rational nature exists as an end in itself. Man necessarily conceives his own existence as being so; so far then this is a subjective principle of human actions. But every other rational being regards its existence similarly, just on the same rational principle that holds for me: so that it is at the same time an objective principle, from which as a supreme practical law all laws of the will must be capable of being deduced. Accordingly the **practical imperative** will be as follows: ***So act as to treat humanity, whether in [your] own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end [itself], never as means only.*** We will now inquire whether this can be practically carried out.

Four Illustrations

To abide by the previous examples: **Firstly**, under the head of necessary duty to oneself: He who contemplates suicide should ask himself whether his action can be consistent with the idea of humanity as an end in itself. If he destroys himself in order to escape from painful circumstances, he uses a person merely as a mean to maintain a tolerable condition up to the end of life. But a man is not a thing, that is to say, something which can be used merely as means, but must in all his actions be always considered as an end in himself. I cannot, therefore, dispose in any way of a man in my own person so as to mutilate him, to damage or kill him. (It belongs to ethics proper to define this principle more precisely, so as to avoid all misunderstanding, e. g., as to the amputation of the limbs in order to preserve myself, as to exposing my life to danger with a view to preserve it, etc. This question is therefore omitted here.)

Secondly, as regards necessary duties, or those of strict obligation, towards others: He who is thinking of making a lying promise to others will see at once that he would be using another man merely as a mean, without the latter containing at the same time the end in himself. For he whom I propose by such a promise to use for my own purposes cannot possibly assent to my mode of acting towards him and, therefore, cannot himself contain the end of this action. This violation of the principle of humanity in other men is more obvious if we take in examples of attacks on the freedom and property of others. For then it is clear that he who transgresses the rights of men intends to use

the person of others merely as a means, without considering that as rational beings they ought always to be esteemed also as ends, that is, as beings who must be capable of containing in themselves the end of the very same action.

Thirdly, as regards contingent (i.e., meritorious) duties to oneself: It is not enough that the action does not violate humanity in our own person as an end in itself, it must also harmonize with it. Now there are in humanity capacities of greater perfection, which belong to the end that nature has in view in regard to humanity in ourselves as the subject: to neglect these might perhaps be consistent with the maintenance of humanity as an end in itself, but not with the advancement of this end.

Fourthly, as regards meritorious duties towards others: The natural end which all men have is their own happiness. Now humanity might indeed subsist, although no one should contribute anything to the happiness of others, provided he did not intentionally withdraw anything from it; but after all this would only harmonize negatively not positively with humanity as an end in itself, if every one does not also endeavor, as far as in him lies, to forward the ends of others. For the ends of any subject which is an end in himself ought as far as possible to be my ends also, if that conception is to have its full effect with me.

The Third Formulation of the Categorical Imperative: *The Autonomy of the Will*

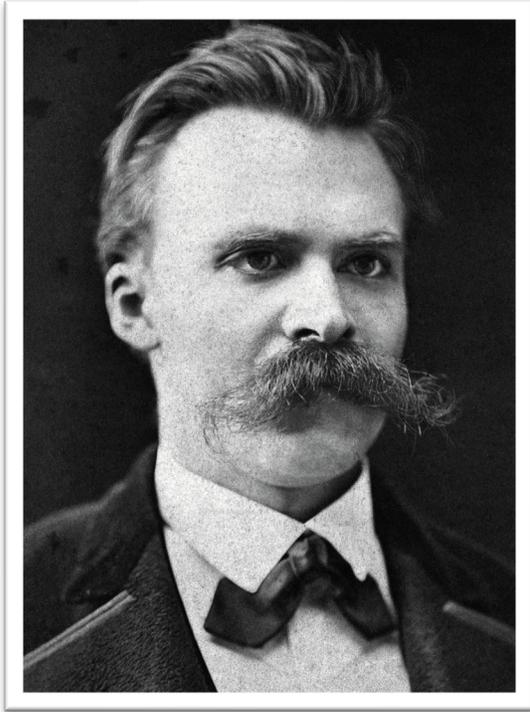
This principle, that humanity and generally every rational nature is an end in itself (which is the supreme limiting condition of every man's freedom of action), is not borrowed from experience, firstly, because it is universal, applying as it does to all rational beings whatever, and experience is not capable of determining anything about them; secondly, because it does not present humanity as an end to men (subjectively), that is as an object which men do of themselves actually adopt as an end; but as an objective end, which must as a law constitute the supreme limiting condition of all our subjective ends, let them be what we will; it must therefore spring from pure reason. In fact the objective principle of all practical legislation lies (according to the first principle) in the rule and its form of universality which makes it capable of being a law (say, e. g., a law of nature); but the subjective principle is in the end; now by the second principle the subject of all ends is each rational being, inasmuch as it is an end in itself. Hence follows **the third practical principle of the will**, which is the ultimate condition of its harmony with universal practical reason, viz.: *the idea of the will of every rational being as a universally legislative will.*

On this principle all maxims are rejected which are inconsistent with the will being itself universal legislator. Thus the will is not subject simply to the law, but so subject that it must be regarded as itself giving the law and, on this ground only, subject to the law (of which it can regard itself as the author)....

Thus the principle that every human will is a will which in all its maxims gives universal laws, provided it be otherwise justified, would be very well adapted to be the categorical imperative, in this respect, namely, that just because of the idea of universal legislation it is not based on interest, and therefore it alone among all possible imperatives can be unconditional. Or still better, converting the proposition, if there is a categorical imperative (i.e., a law for the will of every rational being), it can only command that everything be done from maxims of one's will regarded as a will which could at the same time will that it should itself give universal laws, for in that case only the practical

principle and the imperative which it obeys are unconditional, since they cannot be based on any interest.

Looking back now on all previous attempts to discover the principle of morality, we need not wonder why they all failed. It was seen that man was bound to laws by duty, but it was not observed that the laws to which he is subject are only those of his own giving, though at the same time they are universal, and that he is only bound to act in conformity with his own will; a will, however, which is designed by nature to give universal laws. For when one has conceived man only as subject to a law (no matter what), then this law required some interest, either by way of attraction or constraint, since it did not originate as a law from his own will, but this will was according to a law obliged by something else to act in a certain manner. Now by this necessary consequence all the labor spent in finding a supreme principle of duty was irrevocably lost. For men never elicited duty, but only a necessity of acting from a certain interest. Whether this interest was private or otherwise, in any case the imperative must be conditional and could not by any means be capable of being a moral command. I will therefore call this the principle of autonomy of the will, in contrast with every other which I accordingly reckon as heteronomy.



The Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic (1887) (in part)

By:
Friedrich Nietzsche

Translated by: Horace B. Samuel, M.A.
Additions, corrections, and footnotes by Barry F. Vaughan¹²⁷

FIRST ESSAY: “GOOD AND EVIL,” “GOOD AND BAD.”

2.

All honor, then, to the noble spirits who would fain dominate these historians of morality. But it is certainly a pity that they lack the historical sense itself, that they themselves are quite deserted by all the beneficent spirits of history. The whole train of their thought runs, as was always the way of old-fashioned philosophers, on thoroughly unhistorical lines: there is no doubt on this point. The crass ineptitude of their genealogy of morals is immediately apparent when the question arises of ascertaining the origin of the idea and judgment of ‘good’. “Man had originally,” so speaks their decree, “praised and called ‘good’ altruistic acts from the standpoint of those on whom they were conferred, that is, those to whom they were useful; subsequently the origin of this praise was forgotten, and altruistic acts, simply because, as a sheer matter of habit, they were praised as good, came also to be felt as good—as though they contained in themselves some intrinsic goodness.” The thing is obvious: this initial derivation contains already all the typical and idiosyncratic traits of the English psychologists—we have “utility,” “forgetting,” “habit,” and finally “error,” the whole assemblage forming the basis of a system of values, on which the higher man has up to the present prided himself as though it were a kind of privilege of man in general. This pride must be brought low, this system of values must lose its values: is that attained?

¹²⁷ From the Project Gutenberg’s *Genealogy of Morals*, by Friedrich Nietzsche, www.gutenberg.org. For the full text visit the Project Gutenberg website. This edited version is intended for academic or personal use and may not be sold or used for profit. I have changed UK spellings to US spellings where appropriate, as well as made clarifications in translation (noted with brackets). Footnotes, unless in italics, are the translator’s.

Now **the first argument** that comes ready to my hand is that the real homestead of the concept ‘good’ is sought and located in the wrong place: *the judgment ‘good’ did **not** originate among those to whom goodness was shown*. Much rather has it been the good themselves, that is, the aristocratic, the powerful, the high–stationed, the high–minded, who have felt that they themselves *were good*, and that their *actions were good*, that is to say of the first order, in contradistinction to all the low, the low–minded, the vulgar, and the plebeian.¹²⁸ It was out of this pathos of distance that they first arrogated the right to **create values** for their own profit, and to coin the names of such values: what had they to do with utility? The standpoint of utility is as alien and as inapplicable as it could possibly be, when we have to deal with so volcanic an effervescence of supreme values, creating and demarcating as they do a hierarchy within themselves: it is at this juncture that one arrives at an appreciation of the contrast to that tepid temperature, which is the presupposition on which every combination of worldly wisdom and every calculation of practical expediency is always based—and not for one occasional, not for one exceptional instance, but chronically. The pathos of nobility and distance, as I have said, the chronic and despotic *esprit de corps*¹²⁹ and fundamental instinct of a higher dominant race coming into association with a meaner race, an “under race,” *this is the origin of the antithesis of good and bad*. (The masters’ right of giving names goes so far that it is permissible to look upon language itself as the expression of the power of the masters: they say “this is that, and that,” they seal finally every object and every event with a sound, and thereby at the same time take possession of it.)

It is because of this origin that the word ‘good’ is far from having any necessary connection with altruistic acts, in accordance with the superstitious belief of these moral philosophers. On the contrary, *it is on the occasion of the decay of aristocratic values, that the antitheses between “egoistic” and “altruistic” presses more and more heavily on the human conscience*—it is, to use my own language, **the herd instinct** which finds in this antithesis an expression in many ways. And even then it takes a considerable time for this instinct to become sufficiently dominant, for the valuation to be inextricably dependent on this antithesis (as is the case in contemporary Europe); for to–day that prejudice is predominant, which, acting even now with all the intensity of an obsession and brain disease, holds that ‘moral’, ‘altruistic’, and “*désintéressé*”¹³⁰ are concepts of equal value.

3.

[**The second argument**], quite apart from the fact that this hypothesis as to the genesis of the value ‘good’ cannot be historically upheld, it suffers from *an inherent psychological contradiction*. The utility of altruistic conduct has presumably been the origin of its being praised, and this origin has become forgotten. But in what conceivable way is this forgetting possible! Has perchance the utility of such conduct ceased at some given moment? The contrary is the case. This utility has rather been experienced every day at all times, and is consequently a feature that obtains a new and regular emphasis with every fresh day; it follows that, so far from vanishing from the consciousness, so far indeed from being forgotten, it must necessarily become impressed on the consciousness with ever–increasing distinctness. How much more logical is that contrary theory (it is not the truer for that) which is represented, for instance, by Herbert Spencer,¹³¹ who places the concept ‘good’ as

¹²⁸ From the Latin, *pleb*. “Lower class”, “common person”, “person of no distinction.”

¹²⁹ French, literally, “spirit of the group”; the morale of a group.

¹³⁰ French, “selfless”, “disinterest.”

¹³¹ Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), philosopher and polymath who—after reading Darwin’s *Origin of Species*—coined the phrase “survival of the fittest”. Probably the most influential and popular thinker in the 19th Century English speaking world.

essentially similar to the concept ‘useful’, ‘purposive’, so that in the judgments ‘good’ and ‘bad’ mankind is simply summarizing and investing with a sanction its unforgotten and unforgettable experiences concerning the ‘useful–purposive’ and the ‘mischievous–non–purposive’. According to this theory, ‘good’ is the attribute of that which has previously shown itself useful; and so is able to claim to be considered “valuable in the highest degree,” “valuable in itself.” This method of explanation is also, as I have said, **wrong**, but at any rate the explanation itself is coherent, and psychologically tenable.

4.

The guide–post which first put me on the right track was this question—what is the true etymological significance of the various symbols¹³² for the idea ‘good’ which have been coined in the various languages? I then found that *they all led back to the same evolution of the same idea—that everywhere ‘aristocrat’, ‘noble’ (in the social sense), is the root idea, out of which have necessarily developed ‘good’ in the sense of “with aristocratic soul,” ‘noble’, in the sense of “with a soul of high caliber,” “with a privileged soul”—a development which invariably runs parallel with that other evolution by which “vulgar,” “plebeian,” “low,” are made to change finally into ‘bad’*. The most eloquent proof of this last contention is the German word “*schlecht*” itself: this word is identical with “*schlicht*”—(compare “*schlechtweg*” and “*schlechterdings*”)—which, originally and as yet without any sinister innuendo, simply denoted the plebeian man in contrast to the aristocratic man. It is at the sufficiently late period of the Thirty Years’ War¹³³ that this sense becomes changed to the sense now current.

From the standpoint of the Genealogy of Morals this discovery seems to be substantial: the lateness of it is to be attributed to the retarding influence exercised in the modern world by democratic prejudice in the sphere of all questions of origin. This extends, as will shortly be shown, even to the province of natural science and physiology, which, *prima facie*¹³⁴ is the most objective. The extent of the mischief which is caused by this prejudice (once it is free of all trammels except those of its own malice), particularly to Ethics and History, is shown by the notorious case of [Henry Thomas] Buckle:¹³⁵ it was in Buckle that that plebeianism of the modern spirit, which is of English origin, broke out once again from its malignant soil with all the violence of a slimy volcano, and with that salted, rampant, and vulgar eloquence with which up to the present time all volcanoes have spoken.

5.

With regard to our problem—which can justly be called an intimate problem—and which elects to appeal to only a limited number of ears: it is of no small interest to ascertain that in those words and roots which denote ‘good’ we catch glimpses of that arch–trait, on the strength of which the aristocrats feel themselves to be *beings of a higher order* than their fellows. Indeed, they call

¹³² Words.

¹³³ The “Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648) was a European religious conflict between Roman Catholic and Protestant states which began in the German “Holy Roman Empire” and then spread across Europe. Historians estimate nearly eight million people were killed or died due to famine caused by the generation-long war.

¹³⁴ Latin, “on face value”, “at first glance”.

¹³⁵ Henry Buckle (1821-1862), English historian who’s unfinished History of Civilization attempted to give a more scientific, and what we would call—’sociological’—account of historical phenomena. It was a massive work which received mixed reviews in its day and would be considered methodologically questionable and naïvely Eurocentric by today’s standards of History. Nietzsche’s objections rest in Buckle’s celebration of the movement toward democracy and political Liberalism as intellectually rooted progress.

themselves in perhaps the most frequent instances simply after their *superiority in power* (e.g. ‘the powerful’, ‘the lords’, ‘the commanders’), or after the most obvious sign of their superiority, as for example ‘the rich’, ‘the possessors’ (that is the meaning of *arya*; and the Iranian and Slav[ic] languages correspond. But they also call themselves after some characteristic idiosyncrasy; and this is the case which now concerns us.

They name themselves, for instance, ‘the truthful’: this is first done by the Greek nobility whose mouthpiece is found in Theognis, the Megarian poet.¹³⁶ The word ἐσθλος [*esthlos* - brave], which is coined for the purpose, signifies etymologically ‘one who is’, who has reality, who is real, who is true; and then with a subjective twist, the ‘true’, as the ‘truthful’: at this stage in the evolution of the idea, it becomes the motto and party cry of the nobility, and quite completes the transition to the meaning ‘noble’, so as to place outside the pale the lying, vulgar man, as Theognis conceives and portrays him—till finally the word after the decay of the nobility is left to delineate psychological noblesse, and becomes as it were ripe and mellow. In the word κακός [*kakos* - bad] as in δειλός [*deilos* - coward] (the plebeian in contrast to the ἀγαθός) [*agathos* - good] the cowardice is emphasized. This affords perhaps an inkling on what lines the etymological origin of the very ambiguous ἀγαθός [*agathos*] is to be investigated. In the Latin *malus* [bad] (which I place side by side with μέλας [*melas* - dark]) the vulgar man can be distinguished as the dark-colored, and above all as the black-haired (“*hic niger est*”)¹³⁷, as the pre-Aryan inhabitants of the Italian soil, whose complexion formed the clearest feature of distinction from the dominant blondes, namely, the Aryan conquering race: at any rate Gaelic has afforded me the exact analogue—*Fin* (for instance, in the name *Fin-Gal*),¹³⁸ the distinctive word of the nobility, finally—good, noble, clean, but originally the blonde-haired man in contrast to the dark black-haired aboriginals....

6.

Above all, there is no exception (though there are *opportunities* for exceptions) to this rule, that *the idea of political superiority always resolves itself into the idea of psychological superiority*, in those cases where the highest caste is at the same time the priestly caste, and in accordance with its general characteristics confers on itself the privilege of a title which alludes specifically to its priestly function. It is in these cases, for instance, that ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’ confront each other for the first time as badges of class distinction; here again there develops a ‘good’ and a ‘bad’ in a sense which has ceased to be merely social. Moreover, care should be taken not to take these ideas of ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’ too seriously, too broadly, or too symbolically: all the ideas of ancient man have, on the contrary, got to be understood in their initial stages, in a sense which is, to an almost inconceivable extent, crude, coarse, physical, and narrow, and above all essentially unsymbolical. The ‘clean man’ is originally only a man who washes himself, who abstains from certain foods which are conducive to skin diseases, who does not sleep with the unclean women of the lower classes, who has a horror of blood—not more, not much more! On the other hand, the very nature of a priestly aristocracy shows the reasons why just at such an early juncture there should ensue a really dangerous sharpening and intensification of opposed values: it is, in fact, through these opposed values that gulfs are cleft in the social plane, which a veritable Achilles of free thought would shudder to cross. There is from the outset a certain diseased taint in such sacerdotal aristocracies, and in the habits which prevail in such societies—habits which, averse as they are to action, constitute a compound of introspection and explosive emotionalism, as a result of which there

¹³⁶ Theognis of Megara, (active c. 550 BCE) was an Archaic lyric poet.

¹³⁷ Latin, “one with a dark heart”, a person with bad intension.

¹³⁸ In old Gaelic, ‘*fin*’ translates “white”, “fair”, “bright” and ‘*gal*’ translates “able”, “capable”, “strong”.

appears that introspective morbidity and neurasthenia, which adheres almost inevitably to all priests at all times: with regard, however, to the remedy which they themselves have invented for this disease—the philosopher has no option but to state, that it has proved itself in its effects a hundred times more dangerous than the disease, from which it should have been the deliverer. Humanity itself is still diseased from the effects of the naïvetés of this priestly cure. Take, for instance, certain kinds of diet ([e.g.,] abstention from flesh), fasts, sexual continence, flight into the wilderness consider too the whole metaphysic of the priests, with its war on the senses, its enervation, its hair-splitting; consider its self-hypnotism on the fakir and Brahman principles and that climax which we can understand only too well of an unusual satiety with its panacea of nothingness (or God: the demand for a *unio mystica* [mystical union] with God is the demand of the Buddhist for nothingness, Nirvana—and nothing else!). In sacerdotal societies every element is on a more dangerous scale, not merely cures and remedies, but also pride, revenge, cunning, exaltation, love, ambition, virtue, morbidity. Further, it can fairly be stated that it is on the soil of this essentially dangerous form of human society—the sacerdotal form—that man really becomes for the first time an interesting animal. It is in this form that the soul of man has in a higher sense attained depths and become evil—and those are the two fundamental forms of the superiority which up to the present man has exhibited over every other animal.

7.

The reader will have already surmised with what ease the priestly mode of valuation can branch off from the knightly aristocratic mode, and then develop into the very antithesis of the latter: special impetus is given to this opposition, by every occasion when the castes of the priests and warriors confront each other with mutual jealousy and cannot agree over the prize. The *knightly-aristocratic 'values' are based on a cult of the physical*, on a flowering, rich, and even effervescing healthiness, that goes considerably beyond what is necessary for maintaining life, on war, adventure, the chase, the dance, the tourney—on everything, in fact, which is contained in strong, free, and joyous action. The priestly-aristocratic mode of valuation is—we have seen—based on other hypotheses: it is bad enough for this class when it is a question of war! Yet the priests are, as is notorious, the worst enemies—why? *Because they are the weakest [enemies]. Their weakness causes their hate to expand into a monstrous and sinister shape, a shape which is most crafty and most poisonous.* The really great haters in the history of the world have always been priests, who are also the cleverest haters—in comparison with the cleverness of priestly revenge, every other piece of cleverness is practically negligible.

Human history would be too fatuous for anything were it not for the cleverness imported into it by the weak—take at once the most important instance. All the world's efforts against the “aristocrats,” the “mighty,” the “masters,” the “holders of power,” are negligible by comparison with what has been accomplished against those classes by the Jews—the Jews, that priestly nation which eventually realized that the one method of effecting satisfaction on its enemies and tyrants was by means of a *radical transvaluation of values*, which was at the same time an act of the cleverest revenge. Yet the method was only appropriate to a nation of priests, to a nation of the most jealously nursed priestly renegefulness. It was the Jews who, in opposition to the aristocratic equation (**good** = *aristocratic* = *beautiful* = *happy* = *loved by the gods*), dared with a terrifying logic to suggest the contrary equation, and indeed to maintain with the teeth of the most profound hatred (the hatred of weakness) this contrary equation, namely,

“the wretched are alone the good; the poor, the weak, the lowly, are alone the good; the suffering, the needy, the sick, the loathsome, are the only ones who are pious, the only ones who are blessed, for them alone is salvation—but you, on the other hand, you aristocrats, you men of power, you are to all eternity the evil, the horrible, the covetous, the insatiate, the godless; eternally also shall you be the unblessed, the cursed, the damned!”

We know who it was who reaped the heritage of this Jewish transvaluation. In the context of the monstrous and inordinately fateful initiative which the Jews have exhibited in connection with this most fundamental of all declarations of war, I remember the passage which came to my pen on another occasion¹³⁹—that it was, in fact, with the Jews that *the revolt of the slaves begins in the sphere of morals*; that revolt which has behind it a history of two millennia, and which at the present day has only moved out of our sight, because it—has achieved victory.

8.

But you [do not] understand this? You have no eyes for a force which has taken two thousand years to achieve victory? There is nothing [odd] in this: all lengthy processes are hard to see and to realize. But this is what took place: from the trunk of that tree of revenge and hate, Jewish hate—that most profound and sublime hate, which creates ideals and changes old values to new creations, the like of which has never been on earth—there grew a phenomenon which was equally incomparable, a new love, the most profound and sublime of all kinds of love: and from what other trunk could it have grown?

But beware of supposing that this love has soared on its upward growth, as in any way a real negation of that thirst for revenge, as an antithesis to the Jewish hate! No, the contrary is the truth! This love grew out of that hate, as its crown, as its triumphant crown, circling wider and wider amid the clarity and fullness of the sun, and pursuing in the very kingdom of light and height its goal of hatred, its victory, its spoil, its strategy, with the same intensity with which the roots of that tree of hate sank into everything which was deep and evil with increasing stability and increasing desire. This Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnate gospel of love, this “Redeemer” bringing salvation and victory to the poor, the sick, the sinful—was he not really temptation in its most sinister and irresistible form, temptation to take the tortuous path to those very Jewish values and those very Jewish ideals? Has not Israel really obtained the final goal of its sublime revenge, by the tortuous paths of this “Redeemer,” for all that he might pose as Israel’s adversary and Israel’s destroyer? Is it not due to the black magic of a really great policy of revenge, of a far-seeing, burrowing revenge, both acting and calculating with slowness, that Israel himself must repudiate before all the world the actual instrument of his own revenge and nail it to the cross, so that all the world—that is, all the enemies of Israel—could nibble without suspicion at this very bait? Could, moreover, any human mind with all its elaborate ingenuity invent a bait that was more truly dangerous? Anything that was even equivalent in the power of its seductive, intoxicating, defiling, and corrupting influence to that symbol of the holy cross, to that awful paradox of a “god on the cross,” to that mystery of the unthinkable, supreme, and utter horror of the self-crucifixion of a god for the salvation of man?

It is at least certain that *sub hoc signo*¹⁴⁰ Israel, with its revenge and transvaluation of all values, has up to the present always triumphed again over all other ideals, over all more aristocratic ideals....

¹³⁹ *Beyond Good and Evil*, Aph. 195

¹⁴⁰ Latin, “in this sign conquer.” This is supposedly the statement Constantine I heard in a dream before his victory over his rival emperor, Maxentius Augustus, at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge (312 CE). Early

10.

The revolt of the slaves in morals begins in the very *principle of resentment* becoming creative and giving birth to values—a resentment experienced by creatures who, deprived as they are of the proper outlet of action, are forced to find their compensation in an imaginary revenge. While every *aristocratic morality springs from a triumphant affirmation of its own demands*, the slave morality says “no” from the very outset to what is “outside itself,” “different from itself,” and “not itself”: and this “no” is its creative deed. This [outward look] of the valuing standpoint—this inevitable gravitation to the objective instead of back to the subjective—is typical of *resentment: the slave-morality requires as the condition of its existence an external and objective world*, to employ physiological terminology, it requires objective stimuli to be capable of action at all—its action is fundamentally a reaction.

The contrary is the case when we come to the aristocrat’s system of values: it acts and grows spontaneously, it merely seeks its antithesis in order to pronounce a more grateful and exultant “yes” to its own self—its negative conception, ‘low’, ‘vulgar’, ‘bad’, is merely a pale late-born foil in comparison with its positive and fundamental conception (saturated as it is with life and passion), of “we aristocrats, we good ones, we beautiful ones, we happy ones.” When the aristocratic morality goes astray and commits sacrilege on reality, this is limited to that particular sphere with which it is not sufficiently acquainted—a sphere, in fact, from the real knowledge of which it disdainfully defends itself. It misjudges, in some cases, the sphere which it despises, the sphere of the common vulgar man and the low people: on the other hand, due weight should be given to the consideration that in any case the mood of contempt, of disdain, of superciliousness,¹⁴¹ even on the supposition that it falsely portrays the object of its contempt, will always be far removed from that degree of falsity which will always characterize the attacks—in effigy, of course—of the vindictive hatred and revengefulness of the weak in onslaughts on their enemies. In point of fact, there is in contempt too strong an admixture of nonchalance, of casualness, of boredom, of impatience, even of personal exultation, for it to be capable of distorting its victim into a real caricature or a real monstrosity.

Attention again should be paid to the almost benevolent nuances which, for instance, the Greek nobility imports into all the words by which it distinguishes the common people from itself; note how continuously a kind of pity, care, and consideration imparts its honeyed flavor, until at last almost all the words which are applied to the vulgar man survive finally as expressions for ‘unhappy’, ‘worthy of pity’.... The ‘well-born’ simply felt themselves the ‘happy’; they did not have to manufacture their happiness artificially through looking at their enemies, or in cases to talk and lie themselves into happiness (as is the custom with all resentful men); and similarly, complete men as they were, exuberant with strength, and consequently necessarily energetic, they were too wise to dissociate happiness from action—*activity becomes in their minds necessarily counted as happiness* ... all in sharp contrast to the ‘happiness’ of the weak and the oppressed, with their festering venom and malignity, among whom happiness appears essentially as a narcotic, a deadening, a quietude, a peace, a “Sabbath,” an enervation of the mind and relaxation of the limbs,—in short, a purely passive phenomenon.

While the aristocratic man lived in confidence and openness with himself (*gennaios*, “noble-born,” emphasizes the nuance “sincere,” and perhaps also “naive”), the resentful man, on the other hand, is neither sincere nor naive, nor honest and candid with himself. His soul squints; his mind

Christian historians often pointed to this as the moment of transformation from a pagan to Christian Roman Empire.

¹⁴¹ An air of superiority.

loves hidden crannies, tortuous paths and back-doors, everything secret appeals to him as his world, his safety, his balm; he is past master in silence, in not forgetting, in waiting, in provisional self-depreciation and self-abasement. A race of such resentful men will of necessity eventually prove more prudent than any aristocratic race, it will honor prudence on quite a distinct scale, as, in fact, a paramount condition of existence, while prudence among aristocratic men is apt to be tinged with a delicate flavor of luxury and refinement; so among them it plays nothing like so integral a part as that complete certainty of function of the governing unconscious instincts, or as indeed a certain lack of prudence, such as a vehement and valiant charge, whether against danger or the enemy, or as those ecstatic bursts of rage, love, reverence, gratitude, by which at all times noble souls have recognized each other. When the resentment of the aristocratic man manifests itself, it fulfills and exhausts itself in an immediate reaction, and consequently instills no venom: on the other hand, it never manifests itself at all in countless instances, when in the case of the feeble and weak it would be inevitable.

An inability to take seriously for any length of time their enemies, their disasters, their misdeeds—that is the sign of the full strong natures who possess a [excess] of molding plastic force, that heals completely and produces forgetfulness. A good example of this in the modern world is Mirabeau,¹⁴² who had no memory for any insults and meannesses which were practiced on him, and who was only incapable of forgiving because he forgot. Such a man indeed shakes off with a shrug many a worm which would have buried itself in another; it is only in characters like these that we see the possibility (*supposing, of course, that there is such a possibility in the world*) of the real “love of one’s enemies.” What respect for his enemies is found, forsooth, in an aristocratic man—and such a reverence is already a bridge to love! He insists on having his enemy to himself as his distinction. He tolerates no other enemy but a man in whose character there is nothing to despise and much to honor! On the other hand, imagine the “enemy” as the resentful man conceives him—and it is here exactly that we see his work, his creativeness; he has conceived “the evil enemy,” the “evil one,” and indeed that is the root idea from which he now evolves as a contrasting and corresponding figure a “good one,” himself—his very self!

11

The method of this man is quite contrary to that of the aristocratic man, who conceives the root idea ‘good’ spontaneously and straight away, that is to say, out of himself, and from that material then creates for himself a concept of ‘bad’! This ‘bad’ of aristocratic origin and that “evil” out of the cauldron of unsatisfied hatred—the former an imitation, an “extra,” an additional nuance; the latter, on the other hand, the original, the beginning, the essential act in the conception of a slave-morality—these two words ‘bad’ and ‘evil’, how great a difference do they mark, in spite of the fact that they have an identical contrary in the idea ‘good’. But the idea ‘good’ is not the same: much rather let the question be asked, “Who is really evil according to the meaning of the morality of resentment?” In all sternness let it be answered thus: *just the good man of the other morality, just the aristocrat, the powerful one, the one who rules*, who is distorted by the venomous eye of resentfulness, into a new color, a new signification, a new appearance.

This particular point we would be the last to deny: the man who learned to know those ‘good’ ones only as enemies, learned at the same time not to know them only as “evil enemies” and the same men who inter pares were kept so rigorously in bounds through convention, respect,

¹⁴² Probably a reference to Honore Gabriel Riqueti, Comte de Mirabeau (1749-1791), a nobleman who was an early voice of the French Revolution and argued for a moderate reconfiguration of the French nation into a constitutional monarchy based on the British model.

custom, and gratitude, though much more through mutual vigilance and jealousy inter pares, these men who in their relations with each other find so many new ways of manifesting consideration, self-control, delicacy, loyalty, pride, and friendship, these men are in reference to what is outside their circle (where the foreign element, a foreign country, begins), not much better than beasts of prey, which have been let loose. They enjoy there freedom from all social control, they feel that in the wilderness they can give vent with impunity to that tension which is produced by enclosure and imprisonment in the peace of society, they revert to the innocence of the beast-of-prey conscience, like jubilant monsters, who perhaps come from a ghastly bout of murder, arson, rape, and torture, with bravado and a moral equanimity, as though merely some wild student's prank had been played, perfectly convinced that the poets have now an ample theme to sing and celebrate. *It is impossible not to recognize at the core of all these aristocratic races the beast of prey*; the magnificent blonde brute, avidly rampant for spoil and victory; this hidden core needed an outlet from time to time, the beast must get loose again, must return into the wilderness—the Roman, Arabic, German, and Japanese nobility, the Homeric heroes, the Scandinavian Vikings, are all alike in this need. It is the aristocratic races who have left the idea “barbarian” on all the tracks in which they have marched; nay, a consciousness of this very barbarianism, and even a pride in it, manifests itself even in their highest civilization ...

This audacity of aristocratic races, mad, absurd, and spasmodic as may be its expression; the incalculable and fantastic nature of their enterprises, Pericles sets in special relief and glory the ῥαθυμία [*rathumia* – “relaxation”] of the Athenians, their nonchalance and contempt for safety, body, life, and comfort, their awful joy and intense delight in all destruction, in all the ecstasies of victory and cruelty, all these features become crystallized, for those who suffered thereby in the picture of the “barbarian,” of the “evil enemy,” perhaps of the “Goth” and of the “Vandal.” The profound, icy mistrust which the German provokes, as soon as he arrives at power—even at the present time—is always still an aftermath of that inextinguishable horror with which for whole centuries Europe has regarded the wrath of the blonde Teuton beast (*although between the old Germans and ourselves there exists scarcely a psychological, let alone a physical, relationship*).

I have once called attention to the embarrassment of Hesiod,¹⁴³ when he conceived the series of social ages, and endeavored to express them in gold, silver, and bronze. He could only dispose of the contradiction, with which he was confronted, by the Homeric world, an age magnificent indeed, but at the same time so awful and so violent, by making two ages out of one, which he henceforth placed one behind each other—first, the age of the heroes and demigods, as that world had remained in the memories of the aristocratic families, who found therein their own ancestors; secondly, the bronze age, as that corresponding age appeared to the descendants of the oppressed, spoiled, ill-treated, exiled, enslaved; namely, as an age of bronze, as I have said, hard, cold, terrible, without feelings and without conscience, crushing everything, and bespattering everything with blood.

Granted the truth of the theory now believed to be true, that the very essence of all civilization is to train out of man, the beast of prey, a tame and civilized animal, a domesticated animal, it follows indubitably that we must regard as the real tools of civilization all those instincts of reaction and resentment, by the help of which the aristocratic races, together with their ideals, were finally degraded and overpowered; though that has not yet come to be synonymous with saying that the bearers of those tools also represented the civilization. It is rather the contrary that is not only probable—nay, it is palpable today; these bearers of vindictive instincts that have to be bottled up, these descendants of all European and non-European slavery, especially of the pre-Aryan

¹⁴³ Hesiod (active c. 750-650 BCE), Archaic Greek author of *Theogony* (“Birth of the Gods”) which is the Greek creation myth, and second most important poet after Homer.

population—these people, I say, represent the decline of humanity! These “tools of civilization” are a disgrace to humanity, and constitute in reality more of an argument against civilization, more of a reason why civilization should be suspected. One may be perfectly justified in being always afraid of the blonde beast that lies at the core of all aristocratic races, and in being on one’s guard: but who would not a hundred times prefer to be afraid, when one at the same time admires, than to be immune from fear, at the cost of being perpetually obsessed with the loathsome spectacle of the distorted, the dwarfed, the stunted, the envenomed? And is that not our fate? What produces today our repulsion towards “man”—for we suffer from “man,” there is no doubt about it....

13.

But let us come back to it; the problem of another origin of ‘the good’—of the good, as the resentful man has thought it out—demands its solution.

It is not surprising that the lambs should bear a grudge against the great birds of prey, but that is no reason for blaming the great birds of prey for taking the little lambs. And when the lambs say among themselves, “These birds of prey are evil, and he who is as far removed from being a bird of prey, who is rather its opposite, a lamb—is he not good?” Then there is nothing to cavil at in the setting up of this ideal, though it may also be that the birds of prey will regard it a little sneeringly, and perchance say to themselves, “We bear no grudge against them, these good lambs, we even like them: nothing is tastier than a tender lamb.”

To require of strength that it should not express itself as strength, that it should not be a wish to overpower, a wish to overthrow, a wish to become master, a thirst for enemies and antagonisms and triumphs, is just as absurd as to require of weakness that it should express itself as strength. A quantum of force is just such a quantum of movement, will, action—rather it is nothing else than just those very phenomena of moving, willing, acting, and can only appear otherwise in the misleading errors of language (and the fundamental fallacies of reason which have become petrified therein), which understands, and understands wrongly, all working as conditioned by a worker, by a “subject.” And just exactly as the people separate the lightning from its flash, and interpret the latter as a thing done, as the working of a subject which is called lightning, so also does the popular morality separate strength from the expression of strength, as though behind the strong man there existed some indifferent neutral substratum, which enjoyed a caprice and option as to whether or not it should express strength. But there is no such substratum, there is no “being” behind doing, working, becoming; “the doer” is a mere appendage to the action. The action is everything. In point of fact, the people duplicate the doing, when they make the lightning lighten, that is a “doing–doing”: they make the same phenomenon first a cause, and then, secondly, the effect of that cause. The scientists fail to improve matters when they say, “Force moves, force causes,” and so on. Our whole science is still, in spite of all its coldness, of all its freedom from passion, a dupe of the tricks of language, and has never succeeded in getting rid of that superstitious changeling “the subject”....

What wonder, if the suppressed and stealthily simmering passions of revenge and hatred exploit for their own advantage this belief, and indeed hold no belief with a more steadfast enthusiasm than this: “the strong has the option of being weak, and the bird of prey of being a lamb.” Thereby do they win for themselves the right of attributing to the birds of prey the responsibility for being birds of prey: when the oppressed, down–trodden, and overpowered say to themselves with the vindictive guile of weakness:

“Let us be otherwise than the evil, namely, **good**; and good is everyone who does not oppress, who hurts no one, who does not attack, who does not pay back, who hands over revenge to God,

who holds himself, as we do, in hiding; who goes out of the way of evil, and demands, in short, little from life; like ourselves the patient, the meek, the just.”

Yet all this, in its cold and unprejudiced interpretation, means nothing more than “once for all, the weak are weak; it is good to do nothing for which we are not strong enough”; but this dismal state of affairs, this prudence of the lowest order, which even insects possess (which in a great danger are fain to sham death so as to avoid doing “too much”), has, thanks to the counterfeiting and self-deception of weakness, come to masquerade in the pomp of an ascetic, mute, and expectant virtue, just as though the very weakness of the weak—that is, forsooth, its being, its working, its whole unique inevitable inseparable reality—were a voluntary result, something wished, chosen, a deed, an act of merit. This kind of man finds the belief in a neutral, free-choosing “subject” necessary from an instinct of self-preservation, of self-assertion, in which every lie is fain to sanctify itself. The subject (or, to use popular language, the *soul*) has perhaps proved itself the best dogma in the world simply because it rendered possible to the horde of mortal, weak, and oppressed individuals of every kind, that most sublime specimen of self-deception, the interpretation of weakness as freedom, of being this, or being that, as merit....

16.

Let us come to a conclusion. The two opposing values, “good and bad,” “good and evil,” have fought a dreadful, thousand-year fight in the world, and though indubitably the second value has been for a long time in the preponderance, there are not wanting places where the fortune of the fight is still undecided. It can almost be said that in the meanwhile the fight reaches a higher and higher level, and that in the meanwhile it has become more and more intense, and always more and more psychological; so that nowadays there is perhaps no more decisive mark of the higher nature, of the more psychological nature, than to be in that sense self-contradictory, and to be actually still a battleground for those two opposites.

The symbol of this fight, written in a writing which has remained worthy of perusal throughout the course of history up to the present time, is called “Rome against Judea, Judea against Rome.” Hitherto there has been no greater event than that fight, the putting of that question, that deadly antagonism. Rome found in the Jew the incarnation of the unnatural, as though it were its diametrically opposed monstrosity, and in Rome the Jew was held to be convicted of hatred of the whole human race: and rightly so, in so far as it is right to link the well-being and the future of the human race to the unconditional mastery of the aristocratic values, of the Roman values.

What, conversely, did the Jews feel against Rome? One can surmise it from a thousand symptoms, but it is sufficient to carry one’s mind back to the Johannian Apocalypse, that most obscene of all the written outbursts, which has revenge on its conscience. (One should also appraise at its full value the profound logic of the Christian instinct, when over this very book of hate it wrote the name of the Disciple of Love, that self-same disciple to whom it attributed that impassioned and ecstatic Gospel—therein lurks a portion of truth, however much literary forging may have been necessary for this purpose.) The Romans were the strong and aristocratic; a nation stronger and more aristocratic has never existed in the world, has never even been dreamed of; every relic of them, every inscription enraptures, granted that one can divine what it is that writes the inscription. The Jews, conversely, were that priestly nation of resentment par excellence, possessed by a unique genius for popular morals: just compare with the Jews the nations with analogous gifts, such as the Chinese or the Germans, so as to realize afterwards what is first rate, and what is fifth rate.

Which of them has been provisionally victorious, Rome or Judea? But there is not a shadow of doubt; just consider to whom in Rome itself nowadays you bow down, as though before the quintessence of all the highest values—and not only in Rome, but almost over half the world, everywhere where man has been tamed or is about to be tamed—to three Jews, as we know, and one Jewess (to Jesus of Nazareth, to Peter the fisher, to Paul the tent-maker, and to the mother of the aforesaid Jesus, named Mary). This is very remarkable: Rome is undoubtedly defeated.

At any rate there took place in the Renaissance a brilliantly sinister revival of the classical ideal, of the aristocratic valuation of all things: Rome herself, like a man waking up from a trance, stirred beneath the burden of the new Judaized Rome that had been built over her, which presented the appearance of an ecumenical synagogue and was called the “Church”: but immediately Judea triumphed again, thanks to that fundamentally popular (German and English) movement of revenge, which is called the Reformation, and taking also into account its inevitable corollary, the restoration of the Church—the restoration also of the ancient graveyard peace of classical Rome.

Judea proved yet once more victorious over the classical ideal in the French Revolution, and in a sense which was even more crucial and even more profound: the last political aristocracy that existed in Europe, that of the French seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, broke into pieces beneath the instincts of a resentful populace—never had the world heard a greater jubilation, a more uproarious enthusiasm: indeed, there took place in the midst of it the most monstrous and unexpected phenomenon; the ancient ideal itself swept before the eyes and conscience of humanity with all its life and with unheard-of splendor, and in opposition to resentment’s lying war-cry of the prerogative of the most, in opposition to the will to lowliness, abasement, and equalization, the will to a retrogression and twilight of humanity, there rang out once again, stronger, simpler, more penetrating than ever, the terrible and enchanting counter-war cry of the prerogative of the few! Like a final signpost to other ways, there appeared Napoleon, the most unique and violent anachronism that ever existed, and in him the incarnate problem of the aristocratic ideal in itself—consider well what a problem it is: Napoleon, that synthesis of Monster and Superman.