

INTRODUCTION TO ETHICS

READING SELECTIONS

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PHILOSOPHY 105

THE MEANING OF LIFE

TOLSTOY'S *CONFESSION*

Count Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) was the author of *War and Peace* (1869) and *Anna Karenina* (1878), which are widely regarded as masterpieces of world literature. Tolstoy's *Confession* (1882) describes his own emotional crisis and the solace he found in Christianity. This selection is from the David Patterson translation (Norton, 1983), pp. 25-32, 40-43, 56-61, 66-68.

. . . In spite of the fact that during these 15 years I regarded writing as a trivial endeavor I continued to write. I had already tasted the temptations of authorship, the temptations of enormous monetary rewards, and applause for worthless work and I gave myself up to it as it means of improving my material situation and as a way of stifling any questions in my soul concerning the meaning of my life and of life in general.

As I wrote I taught what to me was the only truth: that we must live for whatever is best for ourselves and our family.

And so I lived. But five years ago something very strange began to happen to me. At first I began having moments of bewilderment when my life would come to a halt, as if I did not know how to live or what to do; I would lose presence of mind and fall into a state of depression. But this passed, and I continued to live as before. Then the moments of bewilderment recurred more frequently, and they always took the same form. Whenever my life came to a halt, the questions would arise: Why? And what next?

At first I thought these were pointless and irrelevant questions. I thought that the answers to them were well known and if I should ever want to resolve them it would not be too hard for me; it was just that I could not be bothered with it now, but if I should take it upon myself, then I would find the answers. But the questions began to come up more and more frequently, and their demands to be answered became more and more urgent. And like points [of ink] concentrated into one spot, these questions without answers came together to form a single black stain.

It happened with me as it happens with everyone who contracts a fatal internal disease. At first there were the insignificant symptoms of an ailment, which the patient ignores; then these symptoms recur more and more frequently, until they merge into one continuous duration of suffering. The suffering increases, and before he can turn around the patient discovers what he already knew: the thing he had taken for a mere indisposition is in fact the most important thing on earth to him, is in fact death.

This is exactly what happened to me. I realized that this was not an incidental ailment but something very serious, and that if the same questions should continue to recur, I would have to answer them. And I tried to answer them. The questions seemed to be such foolish, simple, childish questions. But as soon as I laid my hands on them and tried to resolve them, I was immediately convinced, first of all, that they were not childish and foolish questions but the most vital and profound questions in life, and, secondly, that no matter how much I pondered them there was no way I could resolve them. Before I could be occupied with my Samara estate, with the education of my son, or with the writing of books, I had to know why I was doing these things. As long as I do not know the reason why, I cannot do anything. In the middle of my concern with the household, which at the time kept me quite busy, a question would suddenly come into my head: "Very well, you will have 6,000 desyatins¹ in the Samara province, as well as 300 horses; what then?" And I was completely taken aback and did not know what else to think. As soon as I started to think about the education of my children, I would ask myself, "Why?" Or I would reflect on how the people might attain prosperity, and I would suddenly ask myself, "What concern is it of mine?" Or in

¹ One desyatin is equal to 2.7 acres.

the middle of thinking about the fame that my works were bringing me, I would say to myself, "Very well, you will be more famous than Gogol, Pushkin, Shakespeare, Moliere, more famous than all the writers in the world--so what?"

And I could find absolutely no reply.

My life came to a stop. I could breathe, eat, drink, and sleep; indeed, I could not help but breathe, eat, drink, and sleep. But there was no life in me because I had no desires whose satisfaction I would have found reasonable. If I wanted something, I knew beforehand that it did not matter whether or not I got it.

If a fairy had come and offered to fill my every wish, I would not have known what to wish for. If in moments of intoxication, I should have not desires but the habits of old desires, in moments of sobriety I knew that it was all a delusion, that I really desired nothing. I did not even want to discover truth anymore because I had guessed what it was. The truth was that life is meaningless.

It was as though I had lived a little, wandered a little, until I came to the precipice, and I clearly saw that there was nothing ahead except ruin. And there was no stopping, no turning back, no closing my eyes so I would not see that there was nothing ahead except the deception of life and of happiness and the reality of suffering and death, of complete annihilation.

I grew sick of life; some irresistible force was leading me to somehow get rid of it. It was not that I wanted to kill myself. The force that was leading me away from life was more powerful, more absolute, more all-encompassing than any desire. With all my strength I struggled to get away from life. The thought of suicide came to me as naturally then as the thought of improving life had come to me before. This thought was such a temptation that I had to use cunning against myself in order not to go through with it too hastily. I did not want to be in a hurry only because I wanted to use all my strength to untangle my thoughts. If I could not get them untangled, I told myself, I could always go ahead with it. And there I was, a fortunate man, carrying a rope from my room, where I was alone every night as I undressed, so that I would not hang myself from the beam between the closets. And I quit going hunting with a gun, so that I would not be too easily tempted to rid myself of life. I myself did not know what I wanted. I was afraid of life, I struggled to get rid of it, and yet I hoped for something from it.

And this was happening to me at a time when from all indications I should have been considered a completely happy man; this was when I was not yet fifty years old. I had a good, loving, and beloved wife, fine children, and a large estate that was growing and expanding without any effort on my part. More than ever before I was respected by friends and acquaintances, praised by strangers, and I could claim a certain renown without really deluding myself. Moreover, I was not physically and mentally unhealthy; on the contrary, I enjoyed a physical and mental vigor such as I had rarely encountered among others my age. Physically, I could keep up with the peasants working in the fields; mentally, I could work eight and ten hours at a stretch without suffering any aftereffects from the strain. And in such a state of affairs I came to a point where I could not live; and even though I feared death, I had to employ ruses against myself to keep from committing suicide.

I described my spiritual condition to myself in this way: my life is some kind of stupid and evil practical joke that someone is playing on me. In spite of the fact that I did not acknowledge the existence of any "Someone" who might have created me, the notion that someone brought me into the world as a stupid and evil joke seemed to be the most natural way to describe my condition.

I could not help imagining that somewhere there was someone who is now amusing himself, laughing at me and at the way I had lived for thirty or forty years, studying, developing, growing in body and soul; laughing at how I had now completely matured intellectually and had reached that summit from which life reveals itself only to stand there like an utter fool, clearly seeing that there is nothing in life, that there never was and never will be. "And it makes him laugh . . ."

But whether or not there actually was someone laughing at me did not make it any easier for me. I could not attach a rational meaning to a single act in my entire life. The only thing that amazed me was how I had failed to realize this in the very beginning. All this had been common knowledge for so long. If not today, then tomorrow sickness and death will come (indeed, they were already approaching) to everyone, to me, and nothing will remain except the stench and the worms. My deeds, whatever they may be, will be forgotten sooner or later and I myself will be no more. Why, then, do anything? How can anyone fail to

see this and live? That's what is amazing! It is possible to live only as long as life intoxicates us; once we are sober we cannot help seeing that it is all a delusion, a stupid delusion! Nor is there anything funny or witty about it; it is only cruel and stupid.

There is an old Eastern fable about a traveler who was taken by surprise in the steppes² by a raging wild beast. Trying to save himself from the beast, the traveler jumps into a dried-up well; but at the bottom of the well he sees a dragon with its jaws open wide, waiting to devour him. The unhappy man does not dare climb out for fear of being killed by the wild beast, and he does not dare jump to the bottom of the well for fear of being devoured by the dragon. So he grabs hold of a branch of a wild bush growing in the crevices of the well and clings to it. His arms grow weak, and he feels that soon he must fall prey to the death that awaits him on either side. Yet he still holds on and while he is clinging to the branch he looks up to see two mice, one black and one white, evenly working their way around the branch of the bush he is hanging from, gnawing on it. Soon the bush will give way and break off, and he will fall into the jaws of the dragon. The traveler sees this and knows that he will surely die. But while he is still hanging there he looks around and sees some drops of honey on the leaves of the bush, and he stretches out his tongue and licks them. Thus I cling to the branch of life, knowing that inevitably the dragon of death is waiting, ready to tear me to pieces; and I cannot understand why this torment has befallen me. I try to suck the honey that once consoled me, but the honey is no longer sweet. Day and night the black mouse and the white mouse gnaw at the branch to which I cling. I clearly see the dragon, and the honey has lost all its sweetness. I see only the inescapable dragon and the mice, and I cannot turn my eyes from them. This is no fairy tale but truth, irrefutable and understood by all.

The former delusion of the happiness of life that had concealed from me the horror of the dragon no longer deceives me. No matter how much I tell myself that I cannot understand the meaning of life, that I should live without thinking about it, I cannot do this because I have done it for too long already. Now I cannot help seeing the days and nights rushing toward me and leading me to death. I see only this, and this alone is truth. Everything else is a lie.

² A large area of unforested grassland.

The two drops of honey which more than anything else had diverted my eyes from the cruel truth were my love for my family and my writing, which I referred to as art; yet this honey had lost its sweetness for me.

“My family . . . ,” I said to myself. But my family, my wife and children, are people too. They are subject to the same conditions as I: they must either live in the lie or face the terrible truth. Why should they live? Why should I love them? Why care for them, bring them up, and watch over them? So that they can sink into the despair that eats away at me, or to turn them over to stupidity? If I love them, then I cannot hide the truth from them. Every step they take in knowledge leads them to this truth. And this truth is death.

“Art, literature . . . ?” Under the influence of success and praise from others I had persuaded myself for a long time that this was something that may be done in spite of the approaching death that will annihilate everything—myself, my works, and the memory of them. But I soon saw that this, too, was a delusion. It became clear to me that art is an ornamentation of life, something that lures us into life. But life had lost its charm for me, so how was I to charm others? As long as I was not living my own life but the life of another that was carrying me along on its crest, as long as I believed that life had a meaning, even though I could not express it, the reflection of every kind of life through literature and the arts gave me pleasure; I enjoyed looking at life in the mirror of art. But when I began to search for the meaning of life, when I began to feel the need to live, this mirror became either tormenting or unnecessary, superfluous and ludicrous. It was no longer possible for me to be consoled by what I saw in the mirror, for I could see that my situation was stupid and despairing. It was good for me to rejoice when in the depths of my soul I believed that my life had meaning. Then this play of lights and shades, the play of the comical, the tragic, the moving, the beautiful and the terrible elements in life had comforted me. But when I saw that life was meaningless and terrible the play in the mirror could no longer amuse me. No matter how sweet the honey, it could not be sweet to me, for I saw the dragon and the mice gnawing away at my support. . . .

In my search for answers to the question of life I felt exactly as a man who is lost in a forest.

I came to a clearing, climbed a tree, and had a clear view of the endless space around me. But I could see that there was no house and that there could be no house. I went into the thick of the forest, into the darkness, but again I could see no house--only darkness.

Thus I wandered about in the forest of human knowledge. On one side of me were the clearings of mathematical and experimental sciences, revealing to me sharp horizons; but in no direction could I see a house. On the other side of me was the darkness of the speculative sciences, where every step I took plunged me deeper into darkness, and I was finally convinced that there could be no way out.

When I gave myself over to the bright light of knowledge, I was only diverting my eyes from the question. However clear and tempting the horizons that opened up to me might have been, however tempting it was to sink into the infinity of this knowledge, I soon realized that the clearer this knowledge was, the less I needed it, the less it answered my question.

"Well," I said to myself, "I know everything that science wants so much to know, but this path will not lead me to an answer to the question of the meaning of my life." In the realm of speculative science I saw that in spite of--or rather precisely because of--the fact that this knowledge was designed to answer my question, there could be no answer other than the one I had given myself. What is the meaning of my life? It has none. Or: What will come of my life? Nothing. Or: Why does everything that is exist, and why do I exist? Because it exists.

From one branch of human knowledge I received an endless number of precise answers to questions I had not asked, answers concerning the chemical composition of the stars, the movement of the sun toward the constellation Hercules, the origin of the species and of man, the forms of infinitely small atoms, and the vibration of infinitely small and imponderable particles of ether. But the answer given by this branch of knowledge to my question about the meaning of my life was only this: you are what you call your life; you are a temporary, random conglomeration of particles. The thing that you have been led to refer to as your life is simply the mutual interaction and alteration of these particles. This conglomeration will continue for a certain period of time; then the interaction of these particles will come to a halt, and the thing you call your life will come to an end and with it all your questions. You are a little lump of something randomly

stuck together. The lump decomposes. The decomposition of this lump is known as your life. The lump falls apart, and thus the decomposition ends, as do all your questions. Thus the clear side of knowledge replies, and if it strictly follows its own principles, there is no more to be said.

It turns out, however, that such an answer does not constitute a reply to the question. I must know the meaning of my life, but to say that it is a particle of infinity not only fails to give it any meaning but destroys all possible meaning.

The experimental, exact side of knowledge may strike some vague agreement with the speculative side, saying that the meaning of life lies in development and in the contributions made to this development. But given the inaccuracy and obscurity of such remark, it cannot be regarded as an answer.

Whenever it holds strictly to its own principles and answering the question, the speculative side of knowledge has always come up with the same reply down through the centuries: the universe is something that is infinite and incomprehensible. Human life is an inscrutable part of this inscrutable "whole." Again I put aside all the agreements made between speculative and experimental knowledge that constitute the whole ballast of the semi-sciences, the so called judicial, political, and historical sciences. In these sciences we are once again led to a false concept of development and perfection, with the only difference being that in one area we have the development of everything and in the other the development of people. The falsehood is the same in both cases: development and perfection can have no purpose in infinity, no direction, and therefore can give no answer to my question. . . .

For a long time I lived in this state of madness which, if not in word then in deed, is especially pronounced among the most liberal and most learned of men. I do not know whether it was due to the strange sort of instinctive love I had for the working people that I was compelled to understand them and to see that they were not as stupid as we think; or whether it was my sincere conviction that I knew nothing better to do than to hang myself that led me to realize this: if I wanted to live and to understand the meaning of life I had to seek this meaning not among those who have lost it and want to destroy themselves but among the millions of people, living and dead who created life and took upon themselves the burden of their lives as well as our own. So I looked around at the huge masses of

simple people, living and dead, who were neither learned nor wealthy, and I saw something quite different. I saw that all of these millions of people who have lived and still live did not fall into my category, with only a few rare exceptions. I could not regard them as people who did not understand the question because they themselves put the question with unusual clarity and answered it. Nor could I regard them as Epicureans, since their lives are marked more by deprivation and suffering than by pleasure. And even less could I regard them as people who carried on a meaningless life in an irrational manner since they could explain every act their lives, even death itself. And they looked upon killing oneself as the greatest of evils. It turned out that all of humanity had some kind of knowledge of the meaning of life which I had overlooked and held in contempt. It followed that rational knowledge does not give meaning to life, that it excludes life; the meaning that millions of people give to life is based on some kind of knowledge that is despised and considered false.

As presented by the learned and wise, rational knowledge denies the meaning of life, but the huge masses of people acknowledge meaning through an irrational knowledge. And this irrational knowledge is faith, the one thing that I could not accept. This involves the God who is both one and three, the creation in six days, devils, angels and everything else that I could not accept without taking leave of my senses.

My position was terrible. I knew that I could find nothing in the way of rational knowledge except a denial of life; and in faith I could find nothing except a denial of reason, and this was even more impossible than a denial of life. According to rational knowledge, it followed that life is evil, and people know it. They do not have to live, yet they have lived and do live, just as I myself have lived, even though I had known for a long time that life is meaningless and evil. According to faith, it followed that in order to understand the meaning of life I would have to turn away from reason, the very thing for which meaning was necessary.

I ran into a contradiction from which there were only two ways out: either the thing that I had referred to as reason was not as rational as I had thought, or the thing that I took to be irrational was not as irrational as I had thought. And I began to examine the course of arguments that had come of my rational knowledge.

As I looked more closely at this course, I found it to be entirely correct. The conclusion that life is nothing was unavoidable; but I detected a mistake. The mistake was that my thinking did not correspond to the question I had raised. The question was: Why should I live? Or: Is there anything real and imperishable that will come of my illusory and perishable life? Or: What kind of meaning can my finite existence have in this infinite universe? In order to answer this question, I studied life.

It was obvious that the resolution of all the possible questions of life could not satisfy me because my question, no matter how simple it may seem at first glance, entails a demand to explain the finite by means of the infinite and the infinite by means of the finite.

I asked, "What is the meaning of my life beyond space, time, and causation?" And I answered, "What is the meaning of my life within space, time and causation?" After a long time spent in the labor of thought, it followed that I could reply only that my life had no meaning at all.

Throughout my reasoning I was constantly comparing the finite to the finite and the infinite to the infinite; indeed, I could not do otherwise. Thus I concluded and had to conclude that force is force, matter is matter, will is will, infinity is infinity, nothing is nothing; and I could not get beyond that.

It was something similar to what happens in mathematics when we are trying to figure out how to solve an equation and all we can get is an identity. The method for solving the equation is correct, but all we get for an answer is $a = a$, or $x = x$, or $0 = 0$. The same thing was happening with my reasoning in regard to the question concerning the significance of my life. The answers that all the sciences give to this question are only identities.

And in reality a strictly rational knowledge begins, in the manner of Descartes, with an absolute doubt of everything.³ Strictly rational knowledge casts aside any knowledge based on faith and reconstructs everything anew according to the laws

³ Rene Descartes (1596-1650) is sometimes said to be the father of modern philosophy. He begins one of his most famous works, the *Meditations on First Philosophy*, by doubting everything, and then discovering what he is rationally justified in feeling certain about.

of reason and experiment; it can give no answer to the question of life other than the one I had received--an indefinite one. It seemed to me only at first that knowledge gave a positive answer, the answer of Schopenhauer: life has no meaning, it is an evil. But as I looked into the matter I realized that this is not a positive answer and that only my emotions had taken it to be so. Strictly expressed, as it is expressed by the Brahmins,⁴ by Solomon, and by Schopenhauer, the answer is only a vague one or an identity; $0 = 0$, life that presents itself to me as nothing is nothing. Thus philosophical knowledge denies nothing but merely replies that it cannot decide this question and from its point of view any resolution remains indefinite.

Having understood this, I realized that I could not search for an answer to my question in rational knowledge. The answer given by rational knowledge is merely an indication that an answer can be obtained only by formulating the question differently, that is, only when the relationship between the finite and the infinite is introduced into the question. I also realized that no matter how irrational and unattractive the answers given by faith, they have the advantage of bringing to every reply a relationship between the finite and the infinite, without which there can be no reply. However I may put the question of how I am to live, the answer is: according to the law of God. Is there anything real that will come of my life? Eternal torment or eternal happiness. What meaning is there which is not destroyed by death? Union with the infinite God, paradise.

Thus in addition to rational knowledge, which before had seemed to be the only knowledge, I was inevitably led to recognize a different type of knowledge, an irrational type, which all of humanity had: faith, which provides us with the possibility of living. As far as I was concerned, faith was as irrational as ever, but I could not fail to recognize that it alone provides humanity with an answer to the question of life, thus making it possible to live.

Rational knowledge led me to the conclusion that life is meaningless; my life came to a halt, and I wanted to do away with myself. As I looked around at people, I saw that they were living, and I was convinced that they knew the meaning of life. Then I turned and looked at myself; as long as I knew the meaning of life, I lived.

⁴ Brahmins are Hindus of the highest caste, traditionally assigned to the priesthood.

As it was with others, so it was with me: my faith provided me with the meaning of life and the possibility of living.

Upon a further examination of the people in other countries, of my contemporaries, and of those who have passed away, I saw the same thing. Wherever there is life, there is faith; since the origin of mankind faith has made it possible for us to live, and the main characteristics of faith are everywhere and always the same.

No matter what answers a given faith might provide for us, every answer of faith gives infinite meaning to the finite existence of man, meaning that is not destroyed by suffering, deprivation, and death. Therefore, the meaning of life and the possibility of living may be found in faith alone. I realized that the essential significance of faith lies not only in the “manifestation of things unseen” and so on, or in revelation (this is simply a description of one of the signs of faith); nor is it simply the relation between man and God (faith must first be determined and then God, not the other way around), or agreeing with what one has been told, even though this is what it is most often understood to be. Faith is the knowledge of the meaning of human life, whereby the individual does not destroy himself but lives. Faith is the force of life. If a man lives, then he must have faith in something. If he did not believe that he had something he must live for, then he would not live. If he fails to see and understand the illusory nature of the finite, then he believes in the finite; if he understands the illusory nature of the finite, then he must believe in the infinite. Without faith it is impossible to live. . . .

In order for all humankind to live, to sustain life and instill it with meaning, these millions must all have a different, more genuine concept of faith. Indeed, it was not that Solomon, Schopenhauer, and I did not kill ourselves that convinced me of the existence of faith but that these millions have lived and continue to live, carrying the Solomons and me on the waves of their lives.

And I began to come closer to the believers from among the poor, the simple, the uneducated folk, from among the pilgrims, the monks, the Raskolniks,⁵ the

⁵ Raskolniks were dissenters from the Russian Orthodox Church and members of any one of several groups, including the Doukhobars and the Khlysty, which arose

peasants. The beliefs of those from among the people, like those of the pretentious believers from our class, were Christian. Here too there was much superstition mixed in with the truths of Christianity, but with this difference: the superstitions of the believers from our class were utterly unnecessary to them, played no role in their lives, and were only a kind of epicurean diversion, while the superstitions of the believers from the laboring people were entwined with their lives to such a degree that their lives could not be conceived without them: their superstitions were a necessary condition for their lives. The whole life of the believers from our class was in opposition to their faith, while the whole life of the believers from the working people was a confirmation of that meaning of life which was the substance of their faith. So I began to examine the life and the teachings of these people, and the closer I looked, the more I was convinced that theirs was the true faith, that their faith was indispensable to them and that this faith alone provided them with the meaning and possibility of life. Contrary to what I saw among the people of our class, where life was possible without faith and scarcely one in a thousand was a believer, among these people there was scarcely one in a thousand who was not a believer. Contrary to what I saw among the people of our class, where a lifetime is passed in idleness, amusement, and dissatisfaction with life, these People spent their lives at hard labor and were less dissatisfied with life than the wealthy. Contrary to the people of our class who resist and are unhappy with the hardship and suffering of their lot, these people endure sickness and tribulation without question or resistance—peacefully, and in the firm conviction that this is as it should be, cannot be otherwise, and is good. Contrary to the fact that the greater our intellect, the less we understand the meaning of life and the more we see some kind of evil joke in our suffering and death, these people live, suffer, and draw near to death peacefully and, more often than not, joyfully. Contrary to peaceful death--death without horror and despair, which is the rarest exception in our class--it is the tormenting, unyielding, and sorrowful death that is the rarest exception among the people. And these people, who are deprived of everything that for Solomon and me constituted the only good in life, yet who nonetheless enjoy the greatest happiness, form the overwhelming majority of mankind. I looked further still around myself. I

as a result of the schism of the seventeenth century in protest against liturgical reforms; they are sometimes referred to as Old Believers.

examined the lives of the great masses of people who have lived in the past and live today. Among those who have understood the meaning of life, who know how to live and die, I saw not two or three or ten, but hundreds, thousands, millions. And all of them, infinitely varied in their customs, intellects, educations, and positions and in complete contrast to my ignorance, knew the meaning of life and death, labored in peace, endured suffering and hardship, lived and died, and saw in this not vanity but good.

I grew to love these people. The more I learned about the lives of those living and dead about whom I had read and heard, the more I love them and the easier it became for me to live. I lived this way for about two years and a profound transformation came over me, one that had been brewing in me for a long time and whose elements had always been a part of me. The life of our class, of the wealthy and the learned, was not only repulsive to me but had lost all meaning. The sum of our action and thinking, of our science and art, all of it struck me as the overindulgences of a spoiled child. I realized that meaning was not to be sought here. The actions of the laboring people, of those who create life, began to appear to me as the one true way. I realized that the meaning provided by this life was truth, and I embraced it.

LEIBNIZ ON THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Gottfried Wilhelm (von) Leibniz (1646-1716) was a German logician, mathematician and philosopher. The selections here are from *Theodicy* (1710) (complete title: *Essays of Theodicy on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil*) (E.M. Huggard translation) and *The Monadology* (1714) (Latta translation).

From *Theodicy*, Appendices

OBJECTION I

Whoever does not choose the best course is lacking either in power, or knowledge, or goodness.

God did not choose the best course in creating this world.

Therefore God was lacking in power, or knowledge, or goodness.

ANSWER

I deny the minor, that is to say, the second premise of this syllogism, and the opponent proves it by this.

PROSYLLOGISM

Whoever makes things in which there is evil, and which could have been made without any evil, or need not have been made at all, does not choose the best course.

God made a world wherein there is evil; a world, I say, which could have been made without any evil or which need not have been made at all.

Therefore God did not choose the best course.

ANSWER

I admit the minor of this prosyllogism: for one must confess that there is evil in this world which God has made, and that it would have been possible to make a world without evil or even not to create any world, since its creation depended upon the free will of God. But I deny the major, that is, the first of the two premises of the prosyllogism, and I might content myself with asking for its proof. In order, however, to give a clearer exposition of the matter, I would justify this denial by pointing out that the best course is not always that one which tends towards avoiding evil, since it is possible that the evil may be accompanied by a greater good. For example, the general of an army will prefer a great victory with a slight wound to a state of affairs without wound and without victory. I have proved this in further detail in this work by pointing out, through instances taken from mathematics and elsewhere, that an imperfection in the part may be required for a greater perfection in the whole. I have followed therein the opinion of St. Augustine, who said a hundred times that God permitted evil in order to derive from it a good, that is to say, a greater good; and Thomas Aquinas says (in libr. 2, *Sent. Dist.* 32, qu. 1, art. 1) that the permission of evil tends towards the good of the universe. I have shown that among older writers the fall of Adam was termed *felix culpa*, a fortunate sin, because it had been expiated with immense benefit by the incarnation of the Son of God: for he gave to the universe something more noble than anything there would otherwise have been amongst

created beings. For the better understanding of the matter I added, following the example of many good authors, that it was consistent with order and the general good for God to grant to certain of his creatures the opportunity to exercise their freedom, even when he foresaw that they would turn to evil: for God could easily correct the evil, and it was not fitting that in order to prevent sin he should always act in an extraordinary way. It will therefore sufficiently refute the objection to show that a world with evil may be better than a world without evil. But I have gone still further in the work, and have even shown that this universe must be indeed better than every other possible universe.

From *The Monadology*

31. Our reasonings are grounded upon two great principles, that of contradiction, in virtue of which we judge false that which involves a contradiction, and true that which is opposed or contradictory to the false.

32. And that of sufficient reason, in virtue of which we hold that there can be no fact real or existing, no statement true, unless there be a sufficient reason, why it should be so and not otherwise, although these reasons usually cannot be known by us.

33. There are also two kinds of truths, those of reasoning and those of fact. Truths of reasoning are necessary and their opposite is impossible: truths of fact are contingent and their opposite is possible. When a truth is necessary, its reason can be found by analysis, resolving it into more simple ideas and truths, until we come to those which are primary.

34. It is thus that in Mathematics speculative Theorems and practical Canons are reduced by analysis to Definitions, Axioms and Postulates.

35. In short, there are simple ideas, of which no definition can be given; there are also axioms and postulates, in a word, primary principles, which cannot be proved, and indeed have no need of proof; and these are identical propositions, whose opposite involves an express contradiction.

36. But there must also be a sufficient reason for contingent truths or truths of fact, that is to say, for the sequence or connection of the things which are dispersed throughout the universe of created beings, in which the analyzing into particular reasons might go on into endless detail, because of the immense

variety of things in nature and the infinite division of bodies. There is an infinity of present and past forms and motions which go to make up the efficient cause of my present writing; and there is an infinity of minute tendencies and dispositions of my soul, which go to make its final cause.

37. And as all this detail again involves other prior or more detailed contingent things, each of which still needs a similar analysis to yield its reason, we are no further forward: and the sufficient or final reason must be outside of the sequence or series of particular contingent things, however infinite this series may be.

38. Thus the final reason of things must be in a necessary substance, in which the variety of particular changes exists only eminently, as in its source; and this substance we call God.

39. Now as this substance is a sufficient reason of all this variety of particulars, which are also connected together throughout; there is only one God, and this God is sufficient.

40. We may also hold that this supreme substance, which is unique, universal and necessary, nothing outside of it being independent of it — this substance, which is a pure sequence of possible being, must be illimitable and must contain as much reality as is possible.

41. Whence it follows that God is absolutely perfect; for perfection is nothing but the amount of positive reality, in the strict sense, leaving out of account the limits or bounds in things which are limited. And where there are no bounds, that is to say in God, perfection is absolutely infinite.

42. It follows also that created beings derive their perfections from the influence of God, but that their imperfections come from their own nature, which is incapable of being without limits. For it is in this that they differ from God. An instance of this original imperfection of created beings may be seen in the natural inertia of bodies.

43. It is farther true that in God there is not only the source of existences but also that of essences, in so far as they are real, that is to say, the source of what is real in the possible. For the understanding of God is the region of eternal truths or of the ideas on which they depend, and without Him there would be nothing real in

the possibilities of things, and not only would there be nothing in existence, but nothing would even be possible.

44. For if there is a reality in essences or possibilities, or rather in eternal truths, this reality must needs be founded in something existing and actual, and consequently in the existence of the necessary Being, in whom essence involves existence, or in whom to be possible is to be actual.

45. Thus God alone (or the necessary Being) has this prerogative that He must necessarily exist, if He is possible. And as nothing can interfere with the possibility of that which involves no limits, no negation and consequently no contradiction, this [His possibility] is sufficient of itself to make known the existence of God a priori. We have thus proved it, through the reality of eternal truths. But a little while ago we proved it also a posteriori, since there exist contingent beings, which can have their final or sufficient reason only in the necessary Being, which has the reason of its existence in itself.

46. We must not, however, imagine, as some do, that eternal truths, being dependent on God, are arbitrary and depend on His will, as Descartes, and afterwards M. Poiret, appear to have held. That is true only of contingent truths, of which the principle is fitness or choice of the best, whereas necessary truths depend solely on His understanding and are its inner object. . . .

53. Now, as in the Ideas of God there is an infinite number of possible universes, and as only one of them can be actual, there must be a sufficient reason for the choice of God, which leads Him to decide upon one rather than another.

54. And this reason can be found only in the fitness, or in the degrees of perfection, that these worlds possess, since each possible thing has the right to aspire to existence in proportion to the amount of perfection it contains in germ.

55. Thus the actual existence of the best that wisdom makes known to God is due to this, that His goodness makes Him choose it, and His power makes Him produce it. . . .

58. And by this means there is obtained as great variety as possible, along with the greatest possible order; that is to say, it is the way to get as much perfection as possible.

CAMUS ON ABSURDITY

Albert Camus (1913-1960) was born and educated in Algeria. In 1940, shortly before the German invasion, he moved to Paris where he became active in the French Resistance. His most important literary works include *The Stranger* (1942), a novel, and *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), a philosophical work on the meaning of life.⁶ This selection is from the Justin O'Brien translation (Knopf, 1955), 3, 6, 8-9, 51-55.

There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. . . .

A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity. All healthy men having thought of their own suicide, it can be seen, without further explanation, that there is a direct connection between this feeling and the longing for death.

The subject of this essay is precisely this relationship between the absurd and suicide, the exact degree to which suicide is a solution to the absurd. The principle can be established that for a man who does not cheat, what he believes to be true must determine his action. Belief in the absurdity of existence must then dictate his conduct. It is legitimate to wonder, clearly and without false pathos, whether a conclusion of this importance requires forsaking as rapidly as possible an incomprehensible condition. . . .

Hitherto, and it has not been wasted effort, people have played on words and pretended to believe that refusing to grant a meaning to life necessarily leads to declaring that it is not worth living. In truth, there is no necessary common

⁶ In Greek mythology, King Sisyphus was sentenced by Zeus to punishment in the underworld for tricking the gods. His punishment was to roll a boulder to the top of a steep hill, a boulder that was enchanted so as to slip away from him and roll down every time before reaching the top.

measure between these two judgments. One merely has to refuse to be misled by the confusions, divorces, and inconsistencies previously pointed out. One must brush everything aside and go straight to the real problem. One kills oneself because life is not worth living, that is certainly a truth--yet an unfruitful one because it is a truism. But does that insult to existence, that flat denial in which it is plunged, come from the fact that it has no meaning? Does its absurdity require one to escape it through hope or suicide--this is what must be clarified, hunted down, and elucidated while brushing aside all the rest. Does the Absurd dictate death? . . .

I don't know whether this world has a meaning that transcends it. But I know that I do not know that meaning and that it is impossible for me just now to know it. What can a meaning outside my condition mean to me? I can understand only in human terms. What I touch, what resists me--that is what I understand. And these two certainties--my appetite for the absolute and for unity and the impossibility of reducing this world to a rational and reasonable principle--I also know that I cannot reconcile them. What other truth can I admit without lying, without bringing in a hope that I lack and which means nothing within the limits of my condition?

If I were a tree among trees, a cat among animals, this life would have a meaning, or rather this problem would not arise, for I should belong to this world. I should *be* this world to which I am now opposed by my whole consciousness and my whole insistence upon familiarity. This ridiculous reason is what sets me in opposition to all creation. I cannot cross it out with the stroke of the pen. What I believe to be true I must therefore preserve. What seems to me so obvious, even against me, I must support. And what constitutes the basis of that conflict, of that break between the world and my mind, but the awareness of it? If therefore I want to preserve it, I can through a constant awareness, ever revived, ever alert. This is what, for the moment, I must remember. At this moment the absurd, so obvious and yet so hard to win, returns to a man's life and finds its home there. At this moment, too, the mind can leave the arid, dried-up path of lucid effort. That path now emerges in daily life. It encounters the world of the anonymous impersonal pronoun "one", but henceforth man enters in with his revolt and his lucidity. He has forgotten how to hope. This hell of the present is his Kingdom at last. All problems recover their sharp edge. Abstract evidence retreats before the

poetry of forms and colors. Spiritual conflicts become embodied and returned to the abject and magnificent shelter of man's heart. None of them is settled. But all are transfigured. Is one going to die, escape by the leap, rebuild a mansion of ideas and forms to one's own scale? Is one, on the contrary, going to take up the heart-rending and marvelous wager of the absurd? Let's make a final effort in this regard and draw all our conclusions. The body, affection, creation, action, human nobility will then resume their places in this mad world. At last man will again find there the wine of the absurd and the bread of indifference on which he feeds his greatness.

Let us insist again on the method: it is a matter of persisting. At a certain point on his path the absurd man is tempted. History is not lacking in either religions or prophets, even without gods. He is asked to leap. All he can reply is that he doesn't fully understand, that it is not obvious. Indeed, he does not want to do anything but what he fully understands. He is assured that this is the sin of pride, but he does not understand the notion of sin; that perhaps hell is in store, but he has not enough imagination to visualize that strange future; that he is losing immortal life, but that seems to him an idle consideration. An attempt is made to get him to admit his guilt. He feels innocent. To tell the truth, that is all he feels--his irreparable innocence. This is what allows him everything. Hence, what he demands of himself is to live solely with what he knows, to accommodate himself to what is, and to bring in nothing that is not certain. He is told that nothing is. But this at least is a certainty. And it is with this that he is concerned: he wants to find out if it is possible to live *without appeal*.

* * *

Now I can broach the notion of suicide. It has already been felt what solution might be given. At this point the problem is reversed. It was previously a question of finding out whether or not life had to have a meaning to be lived. It now becomes clear, on the contrary, that it will be lived all the better if it has no meaning. Living an experience, a particular fate, is accepting it fully. Now, no one will live this fate, knowing it to be absurd, unless he does everything to keep before him that absurd brought to light by consciousness. Negating one of the terms of the opposition on which he lives amounts to escaping it. To abolish conscious revolt is to elude the problem. The theme of permanent revolution is

thus carried into individual experience. Living is keeping the absurd alive. Keeping it alive is, above all, contemplating it. Unlike Eurydice,⁷ the absurd dies only when we turn away from it. One of the only coherent philosophical positions is thus revolt. It is a constant confrontation between man and his own obscurity. It is an insistence upon an impossible transparency. It challenges the world anew every second. Just as danger provided man the unique opportunity of seizing awareness, so metaphysical revolt extends awareness to the whole of experience. It is that constant presence of man in his own eyes. It is not aspiration, for it is devoid of hope. That revolt is the certainty of a crushing fate, without the resignation that ought to accompany it.

This is where it is seen to what a degree absurd experience is remote from suicide. It may be thought that suicide follows revolt--but wrongly. For it does not represent the logical outcome of revolt. It is just the contrary by the consent it presupposes. Suicide, like the leap, is acceptance at its extreme. Everything is over and man returns to his essential history. His future, his unique and dreadful future--he sees and rushes toward it. In its way, suicide settles the absurd. It engulfs the absurd in the same death. But I know that in order to keep alive, the absurd cannot be settled. It escapes suicide to the extent that it is simultaneously awareness and rejection of death. It is, at the extreme limit of the condemned man's last thought, that shoelace that despite everything he sees a few yards away, on the very brink of his dizzying fall. The contrary of suicide, in fact, is the man condemned to death.

That revolt gives life its value. Spread out over the whole length of life, it restores its majesty to that life. To a man devoid of blinders, there is no finer sight than that of the intelligence at grips with a reality that transcends it. The site of human pride is unequalled. No disparagement is of any use. That discipline that the mind imposes on itself, that will conjured up out of nothing, that face-to-face struggle have something exceptional about them. To impoverish that reality whose inhumanity constitutes man's majesty is tantamount to impoverishing him

⁷ In Greek mythology, Orpheus traveled to the land of the dead to bring back his beloved Eurydice but lost her forever when he looked back at her before the end of their journey, violating the condition for her escape set down by Hades, the ruler of the underworld.

himself. I understand then why the doctrines that explain everything to me also debilitate me at the same time. They relieve me of the weight of my own life, and yet I must carry it alone. At this juncture, I cannot conceive that a skeptical metaphysics can be joined to an ethics of renunciation.

Consciousness and revolt, these rejections are the contrary of renunciation. Everything that is indomitable and passionate in a human heart quickens them, on the contrary, with its own life. It is essential to die unreconciled and not of one's own free will. Suicide is a repudiation. The absurd man can only drain everything to the bitter end, and deplete himself. The absurd is his extreme tension, which he maintains constantly by solitary effort, for he knows that in that consciousness and in that day-to-day revolt he gives proof of his only truth, which is defiance. This is a first consequence.

SARTRE ON EXISTENTIALISM

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) was a French philosopher, playwright, novelist, screenwriter, political activist, biographer, and literary critic. His work *Being and Nothingness* (1943) is a major statement of existentialist philosophy. The selection here is from a lecture he gave in 1946, translated by Philip Maret, "Existentialism is a Humanism."

What, then, is this that we call existentialism? . . . The question is only complicated because there are two kinds of existentialists. There are, on the one hand, the Christians, amongst whom I shall name Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel, both professed Catholics; and on the other the existential atheists, amongst whom we must place Heidegger as well as the French existentialists and myself. What they have in common is simply the fact that they believe that *existence* comes before *essence* – or, if you will, that we must begin from the subjective. What exactly do we mean by that?

If one considers an article of manufacture as, for example, a book or a paper-knife – one sees that it has been made by an artisan who had a conception of it; and he has paid attention, equally, to the conception of a paper-knife and to the pre-existent technique of production which is a part of that conception and is, at bottom, a formula. Thus the paper-knife is at the same time an article producible in a certain manner and one which, on the other hand, serves a definite purpose, for one cannot suppose that a man would produce a paper-knife without knowing

what it was for. Let us say, then, of the paperknife that its essence – that is to say the sum of the formulae and the qualities which made its production and its definition possible – precedes its existence. The presence of such-and-such a paper-knife or book is thus determined before my eyes. Here, then, we are viewing the world from a technical standpoint, and we can say that production precedes existence.

When we think of God as the creator, we are thinking of him, most of the time, as a supernal artisan. Whatever doctrine we may be considering, whether it be a doctrine like that of Descartes, or of Leibnitz himself, we always imply that the will follows, more or less, from the understanding or at least accompanies it, so that when God creates he knows precisely what he is creating. Thus, the conception of man in the mind of God is comparable to that of the paper-knife in the mind of the artisan: God makes man according to a procedure and a conception, exactly as the artisan manufactures a paper-knife, following a definition and a formula. Thus each individual man is the realization of a certain conception which dwells in the divine understanding. In the philosophic atheism of the eighteenth century, the notion of God is suppressed, but not, for all that, the idea that essence is prior to existence; something of that idea we still find everywhere, in Diderot, in Voltaire and even in Kant. Man possesses a human nature; that “human nature,” which is the conception of human being, is found in every man; which means that each man is a particular example of a universal conception, the conception of Man. In Kant, this universality goes so far that the wild man of the woods, man in the state of nature and the bourgeois are all contained in the same definition and have the same fundamental qualities. Here again, the essence of man precedes that historic existence which we confront in experience.

Atheistic existentialism, of which I am a representative, declares with greater consistency that if God does not exist there is at least one being whose existence comes before its essence, a being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it. That being is man or, as Heidegger has it, the human reality. What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he

conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills, and as he conceives himself after already existing – as he wills to be after that leap towards existence. Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism. And this is what people call its “subjectivity,” using the word as a reproach against us. But what do we mean to say by this, but that man is of a greater dignity than a stone or a table? For we mean to say that man primarily exists – that man is, before all else, something which propels itself towards a future and is aware that it is doing so. Man is, indeed, a project which possesses a subjective life, instead of being a kind of moss, or a fungus or a cauliflower. Before that projection of the self, nothing exists; not even in the heaven of intelligence: man will only attain existence when he is what he purposes to be. Not, however, what he may wish to be. For what we usually understand by wishing or willing is a conscious decision taken – much more often than not – after we have made ourselves what we are. I may wish to join a party, to write a book or to marry – but in such a case what is usually called my will is probably a manifestation of a prior and more spontaneous decision. If, however, it is true that existence is prior to essence, man is responsible for what he is. Thus, the first effect of existentialism is that it puts every man in possession of himself as he is, and places the entire responsibility for his existence squarely upon his own shoulders. And, when we say that man is responsible for himself, we do not mean that he is responsible only for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men. The word “subjectivism” is to be understood in two senses, and our adversaries play upon only one of them. Subjectivism means, on the one hand, the freedom of the individual subject and, on the other, that man cannot pass beyond human subjectivity. It is the latter which is the deeper meaning of existentialism. When we say that man chooses himself, we do mean that every one of us must choose himself; but by that we also mean that in choosing for himself he chooses for all men. For in effect, of all the actions a man may take in order to create himself as he wills to be, there is not one which is not creative, at the same time, of an image of man such as he believes he ought to be. To choose between this or that is at the same time to affirm the value of that which is chosen; for we are unable ever to choose the worse. What we choose is always the better; and nothing can be better for us unless it is better for all. If, moreover, existence precedes essence and we will to exist at the same time as we fashion our image, that image is valid for all and for the entire epoch in which we find ourselves. Our responsibility is thus much greater than we had supposed, for it concerns mankind as a whole. If I am a worker, for instance, I may choose to join a Christian rather than a

Communist trade union. And if, by that membership, I choose to signify that resignation is, after all, the attitude that best becomes a man, that man's kingdom is not upon this earth, I do not commit myself alone to that view. Resignation is my will for everyone, and my action is, in consequence, a commitment on behalf of all mankind. Or if, to take a more personal case, I decide to marry and to have children, even though this decision proceeds simply from my situation, from my passion or my desire, I am thereby committing not only myself, but humanity as a whole, to the practice of monogamy. I am thus responsible for myself and for all men, and I am creating a certain image of man as I would have him to be. In fashioning myself I fashion man.

NAGEL ON THE MEANING OF LIFE

Thomas Nagel (1937-) is a contemporary American philosopher who has taught for many years at New York University. His most influential works include *The Possibility of Altruism* (1970) and "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" (1974). This selection is from his book *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 211-221.

. . . Let me start with the problem of birth--the problem of what attitude to take toward the fact that we exist at all. This is less familiar than the problems of death and the meaning of life, but its form is similar. From the objective standpoint two things, neither of them easy to assimilate, strike me about my own birth: its extreme contingency and its unimportance. (The same can be said of anyone's birth; and if it is someone I care about, many of the same difficulties will arise as a result.) Let me discuss these two points in turn, contingency first.

Subjectively, we begin by taking our existence for granted: it is a given of the most basic kind. When in childhood each of us first learns of the contingency of his existence, even the simple fact that it depends on his parents having met, the result is a lessening of his unreflectively secure footing in the world. We are here by luck, not by right or by necessity.

Rudimentary biology reveals how extreme the situation is. My existence depends on the birth of a particular organism that could have developed only from a particular sperm and egg, which in turn could have been produced only by the particular organisms that produce them, and so forth. In view of the typical sperm count, there was very little chance of my being born given the situation

that obtained an hour before I was conceived, let alone a million years before, unless everything that happens in the world is determined with absolute rigidity--which appears not to be the case. The natural delusion of my own inevitability collides with the objective fact that *who* exists and has existed is radically contingent, my own existence in particular being one of the most inessential things in the world. Almost every possible person has not been born and never will be, and it is sheer accident that I am one of the few who actually made it.

The subjective effects of this information are complex: it is not just a sobering thought. There is amazement and relief, plus the giddiness or retrospective alarm that comes from learning about a very close call only after the risk is past. There can also be a taste of survivor's syndrome, guilt toward all those others who will never be born. Yet at the same time, the sense of subjective inevitability doesn't completely disappear; these indisputable objective facts about myself provoke emotional incredulity. I can imagine having died at the age of five, but it is not easy to grasp in full consciousness the fact that the history of the universe might have run its course without my ever putting in an appearance *at all*. When I do get my mind properly around this idea, it produces a sinking feeling which reveals that a powerful but unnoticed support has been removed from my world.

My own existence looms large at the center of my prereflective world picture, since this life is the source and avenue for my understanding of everything else. It is unnerving to be led through it to the discovery that it is totally inessential--one of the least "basic" things in the world. A world without me at any point in its history seems like a world with a crucial piece missing, a world that has suddenly lost its moorings. If you concentrate hard on the thought that you might never have been--the distinct possibility of your eternal and complete absence from this world--I believe you too will find that this perfectly clear and straightforward truth produces a positively uncanny sensation.

There is a solipsistic tendency at work here, which attaches curiously enough to the objective rather than to the subjective viewpoint--like the solipsism of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*.⁸ The objective standpoint, which considers everything

⁸ *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922) was written by Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), an Austrian philosopher who taught at the University of Cambridge in England.

sub specie aeternitatis,⁹ easily slips into regarding itself as the condition of the world or the frame of all existence, rather than as an aspect of a particular individual within the world.

If I forget who I am, I can imagine TN [Thomas Nagel, the writer of this piece] never having existed without a qualm; but there is a risk of doing this only halfway, by imagining my world without TN in it--the objective self being held in reserve, so to speak. To fully imagine the world without me, I have to get rid of the objective self as well, and this begins to feel like getting rid of the world itself rather than of something in it. It is as if there were a natural illusion that the world is not completely detachable from my conception of it.

The appeal of this illusion is mysterious. I know perfectly well that the world is not essentially my world: it is not a necessary truth that it can be or could ever have been referred to or thought about by me. Just as the room I am now in, which I can refer to as this room, might never have borne the relation to me that makes that reference possible--because I might never have been in it--so it is with this world and everything about it. The fact that I must exist in it to think that it might not have contained me does not make the possibility any less real. Even if some of the respects in which the world can be objectively described are essential to it, I as a particular possessor of the objective view am not, and I can think of the world in abstraction from my connection with it.

But even if we firmly reject the solipsistic assumption as a mistake, a pale version of it remains. Although the world is not essentially my world, the objective recognition of my contingency has to coexist in my head with a total picture whose subject *is* inescapably me. The person whose contingency I recognize is the epicenter not just of the world as it looks from here, but of my entire worldview. To suppose that he should never have existed is to suppose that my world should never have existed.

This makes it seem as if the existence of my world depends on the existence of something in it. But of course that is not the case. The real me is not merely part of *my* world. The person who I am is a contingent bit of a world that is not just mine. So my world depends for its existence on me, I depend for my existence on

⁹ From the viewpoint of eternity.

TN, and TN depends on *the world* and is inessential to it. This is another of the discomforts of being someone in particular: my world depends for its existence on his birth, even though he also appears in it as a character. It is eerie to see oneself and one's entire world in this way as a natural product.

The second thing that emerges from an objective view of my birth is its unimportance. While importance and unimportance will be more thoroughly discussed in the following section, let me say a bit about it here.

Setting aside broader questions about the value of human existence as such, when we look at the world from a general vantage point it seems not to matter who exists. My own existence or that of any other particular person is entirely gratuitous. There may be some reason for my continued existence now that I am here, but there is absolutely no reason why I should have come into existence in the first place. If I hadn't, the world would have been none the worse; I certainly wouldn't have been *missed*! There may be a few people like Mozart and Einstein whose nonexistence would have been a real loss, but for the most part there is no reason why anyone in particular should exist. We might go further and say there is no reason why human beings and their form of life should ever have existed; if they hadn't, it would not have been necessary to invent them--in any case there might have been other types of beings instead. But the problem I'm talking about here doesn't depend on that wider claim. Let us suppose that the world would be a less interesting and valuable place if there were no people in it. The narrower claim is that objectively it doesn't matter which *particular* persons have come into existence.

This collides with the view we naturally take from within the world. Subjectively we feel that we and those we love belong here--that nothing could undermine our right of admission to the universe. Whatever others may think, the last thing we expect is that *we* may come to see the world in a way that drains our birth of value. But as objectivity increases, detachment sets in and the existence from which all our concerns and motives and justifications begin becomes a matter of indifference. Anyone else would have done as well as you and I. And because nearly everything that matters to each of us depends on actually existing lives, what matters is firmly rooted in something whose nonexistence wouldn't have mattered in the least.

The obvious reply is that something can matter even if it didn't matter in advance whether it would exist and wouldn't have mattered if it hadn't: however gratuitous its original appearance, once it exists it brings its own value with it and its survival and well-being become important.

There is something in this. When we look at the actual world, even the particular trees in it appear to have a value that is not cancelled by their intersubstitutability or their gratuitousness. But it isn't enough to reconcile the two standpoints. From an external view of the universe, which abstracts from our own position in it, it still wouldn't have mattered if we had never existed--and that is not something we can simply accept from the standpoint of real life. It forces on us a kind of double vision and loss of confidence which is developed more fully in doubts about the meaning of life. It is easy to have these thoughts about someone else, and they are not disturbing when we abstract from who in particular we are. But when we bring them back home they cannot be assimilated. Neither as objective self nor as TN can I comfortably think of myself as utterly inessential.

There is a recognizable human desire to find our existence significant no matter how cosmic a view we take, and a consequent discomfort with the partial disengagement that objectivity induces. But perhaps these are mistakes, both intellectual and emotional. Perhaps we are just too demanding, and confer too much authority on the objective standpoint by permitting its lack of independent concern for our existence to support a judgment of insignificance. Perhaps the detachment of the objective self is empty, because justifications come to an end within life and if it makes no sense to seek them outside it we cannot be disappointed by the failure to find them there. Perhaps, as Williams¹⁰ claims, the view *sub specie aeternitatis* is a very poor view of human life, and we should start and end in the middle of things. Or perhaps there is something to be said on both sides.

2. Meaning

¹⁰ Bernard Williams (1929-2003), an English philosopher who taught at the University of Cambridge.

In seeing ourselves from outside we find it difficult to take our lives seriously. This loss of conviction, and the attempt to regain it, is the problem of the meaning of life.

I should say at the outset that some people are more susceptible to this problem than others, and even those who are susceptible to it vary over time in the degree to which it grips them. Clearly there are temperamental and circumstantial factors at work. Still, it is a genuine problem which we cannot ignore. The capacity for transcendence brings with it a liability to alienation, and the wish to escape this condition and to find a larger meaning can lead to even greater absurdity. Yet we can't abandon the external standpoint because it is our own. The aim of reaching some kind of harmony with the universe is part of the aim of living in harmony with ourselves.

To the subjective view, the conditions that determine whether life makes sense are simply given, as part of the package. They are determined by the possibilities of good and evil, happiness and unhappiness, achievement and failure, love and isolation that come with being human, and more specifically with being the particular person you are in the particular social and historical setting in which you find yourself. From inside no justification can coherently be sought for trying to live a good and meaningful life by those standards; and if it were needed, it couldn't be found.

Serious problems about the meaning of a life can arise entirely within it, and these should be distinguished from the completely general philosophical problem of the meaning of life, which arises from the threat of objective detachment. A life may be absurd, and felt to be absurd, because it is permeated by trivia or dominated by a neurotic obsession or by the constant need to react to external threats, pressures, or controls. A life in which human possibilities for autonomy and development are largely unrealized and untested will seem deficient in meaning; someone faced with such a life may lack the significant will to live as a purely internal matter, not because of any objective detachment. But all these forms of meaninglessness are compatible with the possibility of meaning, had things gone differently.

The philosophical problem is not the same, for it threatens human life even at its objective best with objective meaninglessness, and with absurdity if it cannot stop

taking itself seriously. This problem is the emotional counterpart of that sense of arbitrariness which the objective self feels at being someone in particular.

Each of us finds himself with a life to lead. While we have a certain amount of control over it, the basic conditions of success and failure, our basic motives and needs, and the social circumstances that define our possibilities are simply given. Shortly after birth we have to start running just to keep from falling down, and there is only limited choice as to what will matter to us. We worry about a bad haircut or a bad review, we try to improve our income, our character, and our sensitivity to other people's feelings, we raise children, watch Johnny Carson, argue about Alfred Hitchcock or Chairman Mao, worry about getting promoted, getting pregnant, or becoming impotent--in short we lead highly specific lives within the parameters of our place, time, species, and culture. What could be more natural?

Yet there is a point of view from which none of it seems to matter. When you look at your struggles as if from a great height, in abstraction from the engagement you have with this life because it is yours--perhaps even in abstraction from your identification with the human race--you may feel a certain sympathy for the poor beggar, a pale pleasure in his triumphs and a mild concern for his disappointments. And of course given that this person exists, there is little he can do but keep going till he dies, and try to accomplish something by the standards internal to his form of life. But it wouldn't matter all that much if he failed, and it would matter perhaps even less if he didn't exist at all. The clash of standpoints is not absolute, but the disparity is very great.

This kind of detachment is certainly possible for us, but the question is whether *it* matters. What am I doing out there, pretending to be a visitor from outer space--looking at my life from a great height in abstraction from the fact that it is mine, or that I am human and a member of this culture? How can the unimportance of my life from that point of view have any importance for *me*? Perhaps the problem is a purely philosophical artifact, and not real.

I'll return to this objection later, but first let me pose another: Even if the problem can't be dismissed as unreal, it may have a simple solution. Is it so certain that the attitudes really conflict as they appear to? Since the two judgments arise from different perspectives, why isn't their content appropriately relativized to

those perspectives, rendering the conflict illusory? If that were true, it would be no more problematic that the course of my life should matter from inside but not from outside than that a large mouse should be a small animal, or that something should look round from one direction and oval from another.

I do not believe this solution is available, logical as it may seem. The trouble is that the two attitudes have to coexist in a single person who is actually leading the life toward which he is simultaneously engaged and detached. This person does not occupy a third standpoint from which he can make two judgments about his life. If all he had were to relativize judgments, they would leave him with no attitude toward his life at all--only information about the appropriate attitude from two points of view, neither of which was his. But in fact he occupies both of the conflicting points of view and his attitudes derive from them both.

The real problem is with the external point of view, which cannot remain a mere spectator once the self has expanded to accommodate it. It has to join in with the rest and lead this life from which it is disengaged. As a result the person becomes in significant part detached from what he is doing. The objective self is dragged along by the unavoidable engagement of the whole person in the living of a life whose form it recognizes as arbitrary. It generates a demand for justification which it at the same time guarantees to be unsatisfiable, because the only available justification depends on the view from inside. . . .

Several routes might be attempted out of this impasse. I don't believe there is a way out, though there are adjustments we can make to live with the conflict. But it is worth considering what would be required to eliminate it entirely. I'll discuss two proposals which try to meet the problem head-on and one which tries to dissolve it.

The first solution to consider is the most Draconian: to deny the claims of the subjective view, withdraw from the specifics of individual human life as much as possible, minimize the area of one's local contact with the world and concentrate on the universal. Contemplation, meditation, withdrawal from the demands of the body and of society, abandonment of exclusive personal ties and worldly ambition--all this gives the objective standpoint less to be disengaged from, less to regard as vain. I gather this response is recommended by certain traditions, though I don't know enough to be sure that it isn't a caricature: the loss of self in

the individual sense is thought to be required by the revelations of an impersonal view, which takes precedence over the view from here. And apparently it is possible for some individuals to achieve this withering away of the ego, so that personal life continues only as a vehicle for the transcendent self, not as an end in itself.

I cannot speak from experience, but this seems to me a high price to pay for spiritual harmony. The amputation of so much of oneself to secure the unequivocal affirmation of the rest seems a waste of consciousness. I would rather lead an absurd life engaged in the particular than a seamless transcendental life immersed in the universal. Perhaps those who have tried both would laugh inscrutably at this preference. It reflects the belief that the absurdity of human life is not such a bad thing. There are limits to what we should be prepared to do to escape it--apart from the point that some of these cures may be more absurd than the disease.

The second solution is the opposite of the first--a denial of the objective unimportance of our lives, which will justify full engagement from the objective standpoint. While this response to detachment has some merit, the truth in it is not enough to resolve the conflict.

As I argued in chapter 8, an impersonal perspective doesn't necessarily lead to nihilism. It may fail to discover *independent* reasons to care about what objectively concerns us, but much that is of value and significance in the world can be understood directly only from within the perspective of a particular form of life, and this can be recognized from an external standpoint. The fact that the point of something can't be understood from the objective standpoint alone doesn't mean it must be regarded objectively as pointless, any more than the fact that the value of music is not directly comprehensible to someone deaf from birth means he has to judge it worthless. His knowledge of its value must depend on others. And the objective standpoint can recognize the authority of particular points of view with regard to worth as it can with regard to essentially perspectival facts. This includes recognizing the worth of what is a value only to a particular creature--who may be oneself. We might say that absolute value is revealed to the objective view through the evidence available to particular perspectives, including one's own. So even if there is no externally appreciable

reason for the existence of any particular form of life, including my own, at least some of the values, positive and negative, that are defined by reference to it can be externally acknowledged. Playing in a Little League baseball game, making pancakes, or applying a coat of nail polish are perfectly good things to do. Their value is not necessarily cancelled by the fact that they lack external justification.

This is not enough, however, to harmonize the two standpoints, because it doesn't warrant a particular objective interest in the individual life that happens to be mine, or even in the general form of human life of which it is an instance. These things have been handed to me and they demand my full attention. But to the external view, many different actual and possible subjective values must be acknowledged. Those arising within my life may evoke sympathy, but that is not the same as true objective engagement. My life is one of countless many, in a civilization that is also not unique, and my natural devotion to it is quite out of proportion to the importance I can reasonably accord it from the outside.

From there I can accord it no more importance than it merits in a global view which includes all possible forms of life and their value on an equal footing. It is true that my life is the one among all these that I am in the best position to devote attention to, and it could be argued that the traditional principle of division of labor warrants my concentrating on it in the usual way as the best method of contributing to the cosmic pool. But while there is something in this, it should not be exaggerated. The argument would not really justify us in engaging fully with our personal aims from an objective standpoint, and such engagement as it warranted would be on sufferance from an objective concern for the whole of which we were a part. This is at best a method of partial reconciliation between inner and outer views: we can try to avoid assigning ourselves a personal importance grotesquely out of line with our objective value, but we can't realistically hope to close the gap completely. So while the acknowledgement of objective worth inside human life may make the conflict of standpoints less extreme it doesn't eliminate it.

A third candidate solution I want to discuss can be thought of as an argument that the problem is unreal. The objection is that to identify with the objective self and find its detachment disturbing is to forget who you are. There is something deranged in looking at one's existence from so far outside that one can ask why it

matters. If we were actually detached spirits about to be thrown into the world by embodiment in a particular creature whose form of life had so far been only externally observed by us, it would be different: we might well feel a threat of impending captivity. But it isn't like that. We are first of all and essentially individual human beings. Our objectivity is simply a development of our humanity and doesn't allow us to break free of it. It must serve our humanity and to the extent that it does not we can forget about it.

The point here is to force withdrawal of the external demand which gives rise to the problem. This is a natural and in some ways appealing response, but as a conclusive argument it will not work. Objectivity is not content to remain a servant of the individual perspective and its values. It has a life of its own and an aspiration for transcendence that will not be quieted in response to the call to reassume our true identity. This shows itself not only in the permanent disaffection from individual life that is the sense of the absurd, but in the demands for objective justification which we sometimes *can* meet as in the development of ethics. The external standpoint plays an important positive role in human motivation as well as a negative one, and the two cannot be separated. Both depend on the independence of the external view and the pressure it puts us under to bring it into our lives. The sense of the absurd is just a perception of the limits of this effort, reached when we ascend higher on the transcendental ladder than our merely human individuality can follow, even with the help of considerable readjustment. The objective self is a vital part of us, and to ignore its quasi-independent operation is to be cut off from one's self as much as if one were to abandon one's subjective individuality. There is no escape from alienation or conflict of one kind or another.

In sum, I believe there is no credible way of eliminating the inner conflict.

PLEASURE

T'AO CH'IEN, "SUBSTANCE, SHADOW, AND SPIRIT"

T'ao Ch'ien (365?–427) was a Chinese poet. This poem is from *The Poetry of T'ao Ch'ien*, translated by James Robert (1970).

SUBSTANCE, SHADOW, AND SPIRIT

Noble or base, wise or stupid, none but cling tenaciously to life. This is a great delusion. I have put in the strongest terms the complaints of Substance and Shadow and then, to resolve the matter, have made Spirit the spokesman for naturalness. Those who share my tastes will all get at what I am driving at.

I

SUBSTANCE TO SHADOW

Earth and heaven endure forever,
Streams and mountains never change.
Plants observe a constant rhythm,
Withered by frost, by dew restored.
But man, most sentient being of all,
In this is not their equal.
He is present here in the world today,
Then leaves abruptly, to return no more.
No one marks there's one man less—
Not even friends and family think of him;
The things that he once used are all that's left
To catch their eye and move them to grief.
I have no way to transcend change,
That it must be, I no longer doubt.
I hope you will take my advice:
When wine is offered, don't refuse.

II

SHADOW TO SUBSTANCE

No use discussing immortality
When just to keep alive is hard enough.
Of course I want to roam in paradise
But it's a long way there and the road is lost.
In all the time since I met up with you
We never differed in our grief and joy.
In shade we may have parted for a time,
But sunshine always brings us close again.
Still this union cannot last forever—
Together we will vanish into darkness.
The body goes; that fame should also end
Is a thought that makes me burn inside.
Do good, and your love will outlive you,
Surely this is worth your every effort.
While it is true, wine may dissolve care
That is not so good a way as this.

III

SPIRIT'S SOLUTION

The great Potter cannot intervene—
All creation thrives of itself.
That man ranks with earth and heaven
Is it not because of me?
Though we belong to different orders,

Being alive, I am joined to you,
Bound together for good or ill
I cannot refuse to tell you what I know:
The Three August Ones were great saints
But where are they living today?
P'eng-tsu lasted a long time
He still had to go before he was ready.
Die old or die young, the death is the same.
Wise or stupid, there is no difference.
Drunk every day you may forget,
But won't it shorten your life span?
Doing good is always a joyous thing
But no one has to praise you for it.
Too much thinking harms my life;
Just surrender to the cycle of things,
Give yourself to the waves of the Great Change
Neither happy nor yet afraid.
And when it is time to go, then simply go
Without any unnecessary fuss.

BROYLES ON COMRADERY IN WAR

William Broyles, Jr. (1944-) is an American screenwriter who served with the Marines in Vietnam. This passage is from a 1984 *Esquire* article, "Why Men Love War."

The enduring emotion of war, when everything else has faded, is comradeship. A comrade in war is a man you can trust with anything, because you trust him with

your life. "It is," Philip Caputo wrote in *A Rumor of War* "unlike marriage, a bond that cannot be broken by a word, by boredom or divorce, or by anything other than death." Despite its extreme right-wing image, war is the only utopian experience most of us ever have. Individual possessions and advantage count for nothing: the group is everything. What you have is shared with your friends. It isn't a particularly selective process, but a love that needs no reasons, that transcends race and personality and education--all those things that would make a difference in peace. It is, simply, brotherly love.

What made this love so intense was that it had no limits, not even death. John Wheeler in *Touched with Fire* quotes the Congressional Medal of Honor citation of Hector Santiago-Colon: "Due to the heavy volume of enemy fire and exploding grenades around them, a North Vietnamese soldier was able to crawl, undetected, to their position. Suddenly, the enemy soldier lobbed a hand grenade into SP4 Santiago-Colon's foxhole. Realizing that there was no time to throw the grenade out of his position, SP4 Santiago-Colon retrieved the grenade, tucked it into his stomach, and turning away from his comrades, and absorbed the full impact of the blast." This is classic heroism, the final evidence of how much comrades can depend on each other. What went through Santiago-Colon's mind for that split second when he could just as easily have dived to safety? It had to be this: my comrades are more important than my most valuable possession--my own life.

EPICURUS ON THE GOOD LIFE

Epicurus (341-270 BCE) was a Greek philosopher who defended a view of the good life known as "epicureanism" or, now more commonly, "hedonism." This selection is a translation of his "Letter to Menoeceus."

Epicurus to Menoeceus, greeting.

Let no young man delay the study of philosophy, and let no old man become weary of it: for it is never too early nor too late to care for the well-being of the soul. The man who says that the season for this study has not yet come or is already passed is like the man who says it is too early or too late for happiness. Therefore, both the young and the old should study philosophy, the former so that as he grows old he may still retain the happiness of youth in his pleasant memories of the past, the latter so that although he is old he may at the same

time be young by virtue of his fearlessness of the future. We must therefore study the means of securing happiness, since if we have it we have everything, but if we lack it we do everything in order to gain it.

Practice and study without ceasing that which I was always teaching you, being assured that these are the first principles of the good life. After accepting god as the immortal and blessed being depicted by popular opinion, do not ascribe to him anything in addition that is alien to immortality or foreign to blessedness, but rather believe about him whatever can uphold his blessed immortality. The gods do indeed exist, for our perception of them is clear; but they are not such as the crowd imagines them to be, for most men do not retain the picture of the gods that they first received. It is not the man who destroys the gods of popular belief who is impious, but he who describes the gods in the terms accepted by the many. For the opinions of the many about the gods are not perceptions but false suppositions. According to these popular suppositions, the gods send great evils to the wicked, great blessings [to the righteous], for they, being always well disposed to their own virtues, approve those who are like themselves, regarding as foreign all that is different.

Accustom yourself to the belief that death is of no concern to us, since all good and evil lie in sensation and sensation ends with death. Therefore the true belief that death is nothing to us makes a mortal life happy, not by adding to it an infinite time, but by taking away the desire for immortality. For there is no reason why the man who is thoroughly assured that there is nothing to fear in death should find anything to fear in life. So, too, he is foolish who says that he fears death, not because it will be painful when it comes, but because the anticipation of it is painful; for that which is no burden when it is present gives pain to no purpose when it is anticipated. Death, the most dreaded of evils, is therefore of no concern to us; for while we exist death is not present, and when death is present we no longer exist. It is therefore nothing either to the living or to the dead since it is not present to the living, and the dead no longer are.

But men in general sometimes flee death as the greatest of evils, sometimes [long for it] as a relief from [the evils] of life. [The wise man neither renounces life] nor fears its end; for living does not offend him, nor does he suppose that not to live is in any way evil. As he does not choose the food that is most in quantity but

that which is most pleasant, so he does not seek the enjoyment of the longest life but of the happiest.

He who advises the young man to live well, the old man to die well, is foolish, not only because life is desirable, but also because the art of living well and the art of dying well are one. Yet much worse is he who says that it is well not to have been born, but once born, be swift to pass through Hades' gates.¹¹ If a man says this and really believes it, why does he not depart from life? Certainly the means are at hand for doing so if this really be his firm conviction. If he says it in mockery, he is regarded as a fool among those who do not accept his teaching.

Remember that the future is neither ours nor wholly not ours, so that we may neither count on it as sure to come nor abandon hope of it as certain not to be.

You must consider that of the desires some are natural, some are vain, and of those that are natural, some are necessary, others only natural. Of the necessary desires, some are necessary for happiness, some for the ease of the body, some for life itself. The man who has perfect knowledge of this will know how to make his every choice or rejection tend toward gaining health of body and peace [of mind], since this is the final end of the blessed life. For to gain this end, namely freedom from pain and fear, we do everything. When once this condition is reached, all the storm of the soul is stilled, since the creature need make no move in search of anything that is lacking, nor seek after anything else to make complete the welfare of the soul and the body. For we only feel the lack of pleasure when from its absence we suffer pain: [but when we do not suffer pain] we no longer are in need of pleasure. For this reason we say that pleasure is the beginning and the end of the blessed life. We recognize pleasure as the first and natural good; starting from pleasure we accept or reject: and we return to this as we judge every good thing, trusting this feeling of pleasure as our guide.

For the very reason that pleasure is the chief and the natural good, we do not choose every pleasure, but there are times when we pass by pleasures if they are outweighed by the hardships that follow; and many pains we think better than pleasures when a greater pleasure will come to us once we have undergone the

¹¹ In Greek mythology, Hades is the god of the underworld and his name also refers to the land of the dead.

long-continued pains. Every pleasure is a good since it has a nature akin to ours; nevertheless, not every pleasure is to be chosen. Just so, every pain is an evil, yet not every pain is of a nature to be avoided on all occasions. By measuring and by looking at advantages and disadvantages, it is proper to decide all these things; for under certain circumstances we treat the good as evil, and again, the evil as good.

We regard self-sufficiency as a great good, not so that we may enjoy only a few things, but so that, if we do not have many, we may be satisfied with the few, being firmly persuaded that they take the greatest pleasure in luxury who regard it as least needed, and that everything that is natural is easily provided, while vain pleasures are hard to obtain. Indeed, simple sauces bring a pleasure equal to that of lavish banquets if once the pain due to need is removed; and bread and water give the greatest pleasure when one who is in need consumes them. To be accustomed to simple and plain living is conducive to health and makes a man ready for the necessary tasks of life. It also makes us more ready for the enjoyment of luxury if at intervals we chance to meet with it, and it renders us fearless against fortune.

When we say that pleasure is the end, we do not mean the pleasure of the profligate or that which depends on physical enjoyment--as some think who do not understand our teachings, disagree with them, or give them an evil interpretation--but by pleasure we mean the state wherein the body is free from pain and the mind from anxiety. Neither continual drinking and dancing, nor sexual love, nor the enjoyment of fish and whatever else the luxurious table offers brings about the pleasant life; rather, it is produced by the reason which is sober, which examines the motive for every choice and rejection, and which drives away all those opinions through which the greatest tumult lays hold of the mind.

Of all this the beginning and the chief good is prudence. For this reason prudence is more precious than philosophy itself. All the other virtues spring from it. It teaches that it is not possible to live pleasantly without at the same time living prudently, nobly, and justly, [nor to live prudently, nobly and justly] without living pleasantly; for the virtues have grown up in close union with the pleasant life, and the pleasant life cannot be separated from the virtues. . . .

NOZICK'S EXPERIENCE MACHINE

Robert Nozick (1938-2002) was a twentieth century American philosopher. This selection is from *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (1974), pp. 42-45.

The Experience Machine

There are also substantial puzzles when we ask what matters other than how *people's* experiences feel "from the inside." Suppose there were an experience machine that would give you any experience you desired. Superduper neuropsychologists could stimulate your brain so that you would think and feel you were writing a great novel, or making a friend, or reading an interesting book. All the time you would be floating in a tank, with electrodes attached to your brain. Should you plug into this machine for life, preprogramming your life's experiences? If you are worried about missing out on desirable experiences, we can suppose that business enterprises have researched thoroughly the lives of many others. You can pick and choose from their large library or smorgasbord of such experiences, selecting your life's experiences for, say, the next two years. After two years have passed, you will have ten minutes or ten hours out of the tank, to select the experiences of your next two years. Of course, while in the tank you won't know that you're there; you'll think it's all actually happening. Others can also plug in to have the experiences they want, so there's no need to stay unplugged to serve them. (Ignore problems such as who will service the machines if everyone plugs in.) Would you plug in? *What else can matter to us, other than how our lives feel from the inside?* Nor should you refrain because of the few moments of distress between the moment you've decided and the moment you're plugged. What's a few moments of distress compared to a lifetime of bliss (if that's what you choose), and why feel any distress at all if your decision is the best one?

What does matter to us in addition to our experiences? First, we want to *do* certain things, and not just have the experience of doing them. In the case of certain experiences, it is only because first we want to do the actions that we want the experiences of doing them or thinking we've done them. (But *why* do we want to do the activities rather than merely to experience them?) A second reason for not plugging in is that we want to *be* a certain way, to be a certain sort of person. Someone floating in a tank is an indeterminate blob. There is no answer to the question of what a person is like who has long been in the tank. Is

he courageous, kind, intelligent, witty, loving? It's not merely that it's difficult to tell; there's no way he is. Plugging into the machine is a kind of suicide. It will seem to some, trapped by a picture, that nothing about what we are like can matter except as it gets reflected in our experiences. But should it be surprising that what *we are* is important to us? Why should we be concerned only with how our time is filled, but not with what we are?

Thirdly, plugging into an experience machine limits us to a man-made reality, to a world no deeper or more important than that which people can construct. There is no *actual* contact with any deeper reality, though the experience of it can be simulated. Many persons desire to leave themselves open to such contact and to a plumbing of deeper significance.¹² This clarifies the intensity of the conflict over psychoactive drugs, which some view as mere local experience machines, and others view as avenues to a deeper reality; what some view as equivalent to surrender to the experience machine, others view as following one of the reasons not to surrender!

We learn that something matters to us in addition to experience by imagining an experience machine and then realizing that we would not use it. We can continue to imagine a sequence of machines each designed to fill lacks suggested for the earlier machines. For example, since the experience machine doesn't meet our desire to be a certain way, imagine a transformation machine which transforms us into whatever sort of person we'd like to be (compatible with our staying us). Surely one would not use the transformation machine to become as one would wish, and thereupon plug into the experience machine!¹³ So something matters

¹² [Nozick's note] Traditional religious views differ on the point of contact with a transcendent reality. Some say that contact yields eternal bliss or Nirvana, but they have not distinguished this sufficiently from merely a very long run on the experience machine. Others think it is intrinsically desirable to do the will of a higher being which created us all, though presumably no one would think this if we discovered we had been created as an object of amusement by some superpowerful child from another galaxy or dimension. Still others imagine an eventual merging with a higher reality, leaving unclear its desirability, or where that emerging leaves *us*.

¹³ [Nozick's note] Some wouldn't use the transformation machine at all; it seems like cheating. But the one-time use of the transformation machine would not

in addition to one's experiences *and* what one is like. Nor is the reason merely that one's experiences are unconnected with what one is like. For the experience machine might be limited to provide only experiences possible to the sort of person plugged in. Is it that we want to make a difference in the world? Consider then the result machine, which produces in the world any result you would produce and injects your vector input into any joint activity. We shall not pursue here the fascinating details of these or other machines. What is most disturbing about them is their living of our lives for us. Is it misguided to search for *particular* additional functions beyond the competence of machines to do for us? Perhaps what we desire is to live (an active verb) ourselves, in contact with reality. (And this, machines cannot do *for* us.) Without elaborating on the implications of this, which I believe connect surprisingly with issues about free will and causal accounts of knowledge, we need merely note the intricacy of the question of what matters *for people* other than their experiences. . . .

BENTHAM ON THE PRINCIPLE OF UTILITY

Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), an English philosopher, jurist, and social reformer, was the first to defend utilitarianism as a general theory of law and morals. This selection is from *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789).

Chapter I: Of the Principle of Utility

remove all challenges; there would still be obstacles for the new us to overcome, a new plateau from which to strive even higher. And is this plateau any the less earned or deserved than that provided by genetic endowment and early childhood environment? But if the transformation machine could be used indefinitely often, so that we could accomplish anything by pushing a button to transform ourselves into someone who could do it easily, there would remain no limits we need to strain against or try to transcend. Would there be anything left to do? Do some theological views place God outside of time because an omniscient omnipotent being couldn't fill up his days?

I. Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think: every effort we can make to throw off our subjection, will serve but to demonstrate and confirm it. 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 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 which attempt to question it, deal in sounds instead of sense, in caprice instead of reason, in darkness instead of light.

But enough of metaphor and declamation: it is not by such means that moral science is to be improved.

II. 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 principle 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.

III. 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. The interest of the community is one of the most general expressions that can occur in the phraseology of morals: no wonder that the meaning of it is often lost. When it has a meaning, it is this. The community is a fictitious body, composed of the individual persons who are considered as constituting as it were its members. The interest of the community then is, what is it?— the sum of the interests of the several members who compose it.

V. It is in vain to talk of the interest of the community, without understanding what is the interest of the individual. A thing is said to promote the interest, or to be for the interest, of an individual, when it tends to add to the sum total of his pleasures: or, what comes to the same thing, to diminish the sum total of his pains.

VI. An action then may be said to be conformable to the principle of utility, or, for shortness sake, to utility, (meaning with respect to the community at large) when the tendency it has to augment the happiness of the community is greater than any it has to diminish it.

VII. A measure of government (which is but a particular kind of action, performed by a particular person or persons) may be said to be conformable to or dictated by the principle of utility, when in like manner the tendency which it has to augment the happiness of the community is greater than any which it has to diminish it.

VIII. When an action, or in particular a measure of government, is supposed by a man to be conformable to the principle of utility, it may be convenient, for the purposes of discourse, to imagine a kind of law or dictate, called a law or dictate of utility: and to speak of the action in question, as being conformable to such law or dictate.

IX. A man may be said to be a partisan of the principle of utility, when the approbation or disapprobation he annexes to any action, or to any measure, is determined by and proportioned to the tendency which he conceives it to have to augment or to diminish the happiness of the community: or in other words, to its conformity or unconformity to the laws or dictates of utility.

X. Of an action that is conformable to the principle of utility one may always say either that it is one that ought to be done, or at least that it is not one that ought not to be done. One may say also, that it is right it should be done; at least that it is not wrong it should be done: that it is a right action; at least that it is not a wrong action. When thus interpreted, the words ought, and right and wrong and others of that stamp, have a meaning: when otherwise, they have none. . . .

Chapter IV: The Value of a Lot of Pleasure of Pain, How to be Measured

I. Pleasures then, and the avoidance of pains, are the ends that the legislator has in view; it behooves 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.

II. 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.

III. 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,

1. 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.
2. 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.

IV. 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:

1. Its extent; that is, the number of persons to whom it extends; or (in other words) who are affected by it.

V. 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 which appears to be produced by it in the first instance.
2. Of the value of each pain which appears to be produced by it in the first instance.
3. Of the value of each pleasure which 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 which 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 be 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. Sum 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: do 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.

VI. 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 a process approach to the character of an exact one.

VII. The same process is alike 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.

VIII. 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, wheresoever 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. We come now to consider the several particular kinds of pain and pleasure.

MILL ON THE HIGHER PLEASURES

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) was an English philosopher, social reformer, and Member of Parliament. His father, the English economist and historian James Mill (1773-1836), was a friend and disciple of Jeremy Bentham. This selection is from Mill's *Utilitarianism* (1863).

Chapter 2: 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 Epicurus to Bentham, 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 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.

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 Stoic, as well as Christian elements require to be included. But there is no known Epicurean theory of life which does not assign to the pleasures of the intellect, of the feelings and imagination, and of the moral sentiments, a much higher value as pleasures than to those of mere sensation. It must be admitted, however, that utilitarian writers in general have placed the superiority of mental over bodily pleasures chiefly in the greater permanency, safety, uncostliness, etc., of the former--that is, in their circumstantial advantages rather than in their intrinsic nature. And on all these points utilitarians have fully proved their case; but they might have taken the other, and, as it may be called, higher ground, with entire consistency. It is quite compatible with the principle of utility to recognize the fact, that some kinds of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others. It would be absurd that while, in estimating all other things, quality is considered as well as quantity, the estimation of pleasures should be supposed to depend on quantity alone.

If I am asked, what I mean by difference of quality in pleasures, or what makes one pleasure more valuable than another, merely as a pleasure, except its being greater in amount, there is but one possible answer. Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a decided preference, irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure. If one of the two is, by those who are competently acquainted with both, placed so far above the other that they prefer it, even though knowing it to be attended with a greater amount of discontent, and would not resign it for any quantity of the other pleasure which their nature is capable of, we are justified in ascribing to the preferred enjoyment a superiority in quality, so far outweighing quantity as to render it, in comparison, of small account.

Now it is an unquestionable fact that those who are equally acquainted with, and equally capable of appreciating and enjoying, both, do give a most marked preference to the manner of existence which employs their higher faculties. Few human creatures would consent to be changed into any of the lower animals, for a promise of the fullest allowance of a beast's pleasures; no intelligent human being would consent to be a fool, no instructed person would be an ignoramus, no person of feeling and conscience would be selfish and base, even though they should be persuaded that the fool, the dunce, or the rascal is better satisfied with his lot than they are with theirs. They would not resign what they possess more

than he for the most complete satisfaction of all the desires which they have in common with him. If they ever fancy they would, it is only in cases of unhappiness so extreme, that to escape from it they would exchange their lot for almost any other, however undesirable in their own eyes. A being of higher faculties requires more to make him happy, is capable probably of more acute suffering, and certainly accessible to it at more points, than one of an inferior type; but in spite of these liabilities, he can never really wish to sink into what he feels to be a lower grade of existence. We may give what explanation we please of this unwillingness; we may attribute it to pride, a name which is given indiscriminately to some of the most and to some of the least estimable feelings of which mankind are capable: we may refer it to the love of liberty and personal independence, an appeal to which was with the Stoics one of the most effective means for the inculcation of it; to the love of power, or to the love of excitement, both of which do really enter into and contribute to it: but its most appropriate appellation is a sense of dignity, which all human beings possess in one form or other, and in some, though by no means in exact, proportion to their higher faculties, and which is so essential a part of the happiness of those in whom it is strong, that nothing which conflicts with it could be, otherwise than momentarily, an object of desire to them.

Whoever supposes that this preference takes place at a sacrifice of happiness--that the superior being, in anything like equal circumstances, is not happier than the inferior--confounds the two very different ideas, of happiness, and content. It is indisputable that the being whose capacities of enjoyment are low, has the greatest chance of having them fully satisfied; and a highly endowed being will always feel that any happiness which he can look for, as the world is constituted, is imperfect. But he can learn to bear its imperfections, if they are at all bearable; and they will not make him envy the being who is indeed unconscious of the imperfections, but only because he feels not at all the good which those imperfections qualify. It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question. The other party to the comparison knows both sides.

It may be objected, that many who are capable of the higher pleasures, occasionally, under the influence of temptation, postpone them to the lower. But this is quite compatible with a full appreciation of the intrinsic superiority of the higher. Men often, from infirmity of character, make their election for the nearer

good, though they know it to be the less valuable; and this no less when the choice is between two bodily pleasures, than when it is between bodily and mental. They pursue sensual indulgences to the injury of health, though perfectly aware that health is the greater good.

It may be further objected, that many who begin with youthful enthusiasm for everything noble, as they advance in years sink into indolence and selfishness. But I do not believe that those who undergo this very common change, voluntarily choose the lower description of pleasures in preference to the higher. I believe that before they devote themselves exclusively to the one, they have already become incapable of the other. Capacity for the nobler feelings is in most natures a very tender plant, easily killed, not only by hostile influences, but by mere want of sustenance; and in the majority of young persons it speedily dies away if the occupations to which their position in life has devoted them, and the society into which it has thrown them, are not favorable to keeping that higher capacity in exercise. Men lose their high aspirations as they lose their intellectual tastes, because they have not time or opportunity for indulging them; and they addict themselves to inferior pleasures, not because they deliberately prefer them, but because they are either the only ones to which they have access, or the only ones which they are any longer capable of enjoying. It may be questioned whether 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 intensest of two pleasurable sensations, except the general suffrage of those who are familiar with both? Neither pains nor pleasures are homogeneous, and pain is always heterogeneous with pleasure. What is there to decide whether a particular pleasure is worth purchasing at the cost of a particular pain, except the feelings and judgment of the experienced? When, therefore, those feelings and judgment declare the

pleasures derived from the higher faculties to be preferable in kind, apart from the question of intensity, to those of which the animal nature, disjoined from the higher faculties, is susceptible, they are entitled on this subject to the same regard.

MILL ON INDIVIDUALITY

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) was an English philosopher, social reformer, and Member of Parliament. His father, the English economist and historian James Mill (1773-1836), was a friend and disciple of Jeremy Bentham. This selection is from Mill's *On Liberty* (1859).

[Epigraph]

The grand, leading principle, towards which every argument unfolded in these pages directly converges, is the absolute and essential importance of human development in its richest diversity.—Wilhelm Von Humboldt: *Sphere and Duties of Government*.

Chapter III, Of Individuality, As One of the Elements of Well-Being

. . . As it is useful that while mankind are imperfect there should be different opinions, so is it that there should be different experiments of living; that free scope should be given to varieties of character, short of injury to others; and that the worth of different modes of life should be proved practically, when any one thinks fit to try them. It is desirable, in short, that in things which do not primarily concern others, individuality should assert itself. Where, not the person's own character, but the traditions or customs of other people are the rule of conduct, there is wanting one of the principal ingredients of human happiness, and quite the chief ingredient of individual and social progress.

In maintaining this principle, the greatest difficulty to be encountered does not lie in the appreciation of means towards an acknowledged end, but in the indifference of persons in general to the end itself. If it were felt that the free development of individuality is one of the leading essentials of well-being; that it is not only a co-ordinate element with all that is designated by the terms civilization, instruction, education, culture, but is itself a necessary part and condition of all those things; there would be no danger that liberty should be under-valued, and the adjustment of the boundaries between it and social control

would present no extraordinary difficulty. But the evil is, that individual spontaneity is hardly recognized by the common modes of thinking, as having any intrinsic worth, or deserving any regard on its own account. The majority, being satisfied with the ways of mankind as they now are (for it is they who make them what they are), cannot comprehend why those ways should not be good enough for everybody; and what is more, spontaneity forms no part of the ideal of the majority of moral and social reformers, but is rather looked on with jealousy, as a troublesome and perhaps rebellious obstruction to the general acceptance of what these reformers, in their own judgment, think would be best for mankind. Few persons, out of Germany, even comprehend the meaning of the doctrine which Wilhelm von Humboldt, so eminent both as a *savant* and as a politician, made the text of a treatise—that "the end of man, or that which is prescribed by the eternal or immutable dictates of reason, and not suggested by vague and transient desires, is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole;" that, therefore, the object "towards which every human being must ceaselessly direct his efforts, and on which especially those who design to influence their fellow-men must ever keep their eyes, is the individuality of power and development;" that for this there are two requisites, "freedom, and a variety of situations;" and that from the union of these arise "individual vigor and manifold diversity," which combine themselves in "originality."¹⁴

Little, however, as people are accustomed to a doctrine like that of Von Humboldt, and surprising as it may be to them to find so high a value attached to individuality, the question, one must nevertheless think, can only be one of degree. No one's idea of excellence in conduct is that people should do absolutely nothing but copy one another. No one would assert that people ought not to put into their mode of life, and into the conduct of their concerns, any impress whatever of their own judgment, or of their own individual character. On the other hand, it would be absurd to pretend that people ought to live as if nothing whatever had been known in the world before they came into it; as if experience had as yet done nothing towards showing that one mode of existence, or of conduct, is preferable to another. Nobody denies that people should be so taught and trained in youth, as to know and benefit by the ascertained results of human experience. But it is the privilege and proper condition of a human being, arrived

¹⁴ [Mill's note] *The Sphere and Duties of Government*, from the German of Baron Wilhelm von Humboldt, pp. 11-13.

at the maturity of his faculties, to use and interpret experience in his own way. It is for him to find out what part of recorded experience is properly applicable to his own circumstances and character. The traditions and customs of other people are, to a certain extent, evidence of what their experience has taught *them*; presumptive evidence, and as such, have a claim to his deference: but, in the first place, their experience may be too narrow; or they may not have interpreted it rightly. Secondly, their interpretation of experience may be correct, but unsuitable to him. Customs are made for customary circumstances, and customary characters: and his circumstances or his character may be uncustomary. Thirdly, though the customs be both good as customs, and suitable to him, yet to conform to custom, merely *as* custom, does not educate or develop in him any of the qualities which are the distinctive endowment of a human being. The human faculties of perception, judgment, discriminative feeling, mental activity, and even moral preference, are exercised only in making a choice. He who does anything because it is the custom, makes no choice. He gains no practice either in discerning or in desiring what is best. The mental and moral, like the muscular powers, are improved only by being used. The faculties are called into no exercise by doing a thing merely because others do it, no more than by believing a thing only because others believe it. If the grounds of an opinion are not conclusive to the person's own reason, his reason cannot be strengthened, but is likely to be weakened by his adopting it: and if the inducements to an act are not such as are consentaneous to his own feelings and character (where affection, or the rights of others, are not concerned), it is so much done towards rendering his feelings and character inert and torpid, instead of active and energetic.

He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation. He who chooses his plan for himself, employs all his faculties. He must use observation to see, reasoning and judgment to foresee, activity to gather materials for decision, discrimination to decide, and when he has decided, firmness and self-control to hold to his deliberate decision. And these qualities he requires and exercises exactly in proportion as the part of his conduct which he determines according to his own judgment and feelings is a large one. It is possible that he might be guided in some good path, and kept out of harm's way, without any of these things. But what will be his comparative worth as a human being? It really is of importance, not only what men do, but also what manner of men they are that do it. Among the works of man, which human life is rightly employed in perfecting

and beautifying, the first in importance surely is man himself. Supposing it were possible to get houses built, corn grown, battles fought, causes tried, and even churches erected and prayers said, by machinery—by automatons in human form—it would be a considerable loss to exchange for these automatons even the men and women who at present inhabit the more civilized parts of the world, and who assuredly are but starved specimens of what nature can and will produce. Human nature is not a machine to be built after a model, and set to do exactly the work prescribed for it, but a tree, which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing.

...

In some early states of society, these forces might be, and were, too much ahead of the power which society then possessed of disciplining and controlling them. There has been a time when the element of spontaneity and individuality was in excess, and the social principle had a hard struggle with it. The difficulty then was, to induce men of strong bodies or minds to pay obedience to any rules which required them to control their impulses. To overcome this difficulty, law and discipline, like the Popes struggling against the Emperors, asserted a power over the whole man, claiming to control all his life in order to control his character—which society had not found any other sufficient means of binding. But society has now fairly got the better of individuality; and the danger which threatens human nature is not the excess, but the deficiency, of personal impulses and preferences. Things are vastly changed, since the passions of those who were strong by station or by personal endowment were in a state of habitual rebellion against laws and ordinances, and required to be rigorously chained up to enable the persons within their reach to enjoy any particle of security. In our times, from the highest class of society down to the lowest, everyone lives as under the eye of a hostile and dreaded censorship. Not only in what concerns others, but in what concerns only themselves, the individual, or the family, do not ask themselves—what do I prefer? or, what would suit my character and disposition? or, what would allow the best and highest in me to have fair-play, and enable it to grow and thrive? They ask themselves, what is suitable to my position? what is usually done by persons of my station and pecuniary circumstances? or (worse still) what is usually done by persons of a station and circumstances superior to mine? I do not mean that they choose what is customary, in preference to what suits their own inclination. It does not occur to them to have any inclination, except for what is customary. Thus the mind itself is bowed to the yoke: even in what people do for pleasure, conformity is the first thing thought of; they live in crowds; they

exercise choice only among things commonly done: peculiarity of taste, eccentricity of conduct, are shunned equally with crimes: until by dint of not following their own nature, they have no nature to follow: their human capacities are withered and starved: they become incapable of any strong wishes or native pleasures, and are generally without either opinions or feelings of home growth, or properly their own. Now is this, or is it not, the desirable condition of human nature?

It is so, on the Calvinistic theory. According to that, the one great offence of man is Self-will. All the good of which humanity is capable, is comprised in Obedience. You have no choice; thus you must do, and no otherwise: "whatever is not a duty, is a sin." Human nature being radically corrupt, there is no redemption for any one until human nature is killed within him. To one holding this theory of life, crushing out any of the human faculties, capacities, and susceptibilities, is no evil: man needs no capacity, but that of surrendering himself to the will of God: and if he uses any of his faculties for any other purpose but to do that supposed will more effectually, he is better without them. That is the theory of Calvinism; and it is held, in a mitigated form, by many who do not consider themselves Calvinists; the mitigation consisting in giving a less ascetic interpretation to the alleged will of God; asserting it to be his will that mankind should gratify some of their inclinations; of course not in the manner they themselves prefer, but in the way of obedience, that is, in a way prescribed to them by authority; and, therefore, by the necessary conditions of the case, the same for all.

In some such insidious form there is at present a strong tendency to this narrow theory of life, and to the pinched and hidebound type of human character which it patronizes. Many persons, no doubt, sincerely think that human beings thus cramped and dwarfed, are as their Maker designed them to be; just as many have thought that trees are a much finer thing when clipped into pollards, or cut out into figures of animals, than as nature made them. But if it be any part of religion to believe that man was made by a good being, it is more consistent with that faith to believe, that this Being gave all human faculties that they might be cultivated and unfolded, not rooted out and consumed, and that he takes delight in every nearer approach made by his creatures to the ideal conception embodied in them, every increase in any of their capabilities of comprehension, of action, or of enjoyment. There is a different type of human excellence from the Calvinistic; a conception of humanity as having its nature bestowed on it for other purposes than merely to be abnegated. "Pagan self-assertion" is one of the elements of

human worth, as well as "Christian self-denial."¹⁵ There is a Greek ideal of self-development, which the Platonic and Christian ideal of self-government blends with, but does not supersede. It may be better to be a John Knox than an Alcibiades, but it is better to be a Pericles than either; nor would a Pericles, if we had one in these days, be without anything good which belonged to John Knox.

It is not by wearing down into uniformity all that is individual in themselves, but by cultivating it and calling it forth, within the limits imposed by the rights and interests of others, that human beings become a noble and beautiful object of contemplation; and as the works partake the character of those who do them, by the same process human life also becomes rich, diversified, and animating, furnishing more abundant aliment to high thoughts and elevating feelings, and strengthening the tie which binds every individual to the race, by making the race infinitely better worth belonging to. In proportion to the development of his individuality, each person becomes more valuable to himself, and is therefore capable of being more valuable to others. There is a greater fulness of life about his own existence, and when there is more life in the units there is more in the mass which is composed of them. As much compression as is necessary to prevent the stronger specimens of human nature from encroaching on the rights of others, cannot be dispensed with; but for this there is ample compensation even in the point of view of human development. The means of development which the individual loses by being prevented from gratifying his inclinations to the injury of others, are chiefly obtained at the expense of the development of other people. And even to himself there is a full equivalent in the better development of the social part of his nature, rendered possible by the restraint put upon the selfish part. To be held to rigid rules of justice for the sake of others, develops the feelings and capacities which have the good of others for their object. But to be restrained in things not affecting their good, by their mere displeasure, develops nothing valuable, except such force of character as may unfold itself in resisting the restraint. If acquiesced in, it dulls and blunts the whole nature. To give any fair-play to the nature of each, it is essential that different persons should be allowed to lead different lives. In proportion as this latitude has been exercised in any age, has that age been noteworthy to posterity. Even despotism does not produce its worst effects, so long as Individuality exists under it; and whatever crushes individuality is despotism, by whatever name it

¹⁵ [Mill's note] Sterling's *Essays*.

may be called, and whether it professes to be enforcing the will of God or the injunctions of men.

Having said that Individuality is the same thing with development, and that it is only the cultivation of individuality which produces, or can produce, well-developed human beings, I might here close the argument: for what more or better can be said of any condition of human affairs, than that it brings human beings themselves nearer to the best thing they can be? or what worse can be said of any obstruction to good, than that it prevents this? Doubtless, however, these considerations will not suffice to convince those who most need convincing; and it is necessary further to show, that these developed human beings are of some use to the undeveloped—to point out to those who do not desire liberty, and would not avail themselves of it, that they may be in some intelligible manner rewarded for allowing other people to make use of it without hindrance. . . .

DIGNITY AND RATIONALITY

PLATO ON VIRTUE AND THE HEALTH OF THE SOUL

Plato (c. 428-348 BCE) was an Athenian philosopher. A student and friend of Socrates (c. 469-399 BCE), Plato presented his philosophy in the form of written dialogues with Socrates as the central character. Plato's early dialogues are thought to represent the views of the historical Socrates, but in Plato's later dialogues, including *Republic*, the character of Socrates is thought to present Plato's own views. The following is a selection from Plato's *Republic* (c. 380 BCE), the G.M.A. Grube translation, revised by C.D.C. Reeve (1992). The selection from Book II is from Grube/Reeve pp. 33-37 (357a-362a). The selection from Book IV is from Grube/Reeve pp. 117-121 (441c-445d).

BOOK II

[S:] When I said this, I thought I had done with the discussion, but it turned out to have been only a prelude. Glaucon showed his characteristic courage on this occasion too and refused to accept Thrasymachus' abandonment of the argument.

[G:] Socrates, he said, do you want to seem to have persuaded us that it is better in every way to be just than unjust, or do you want truly to convince us of this?

[S:] I want truly to convince you, I said, if I can.

[G:] Well, then, you certainly aren't doing what you want. Tell me, do you think there is a kind of good we welcome, not because we desire what comes from it, but because we welcome it for its own sake-- joy, for example, and all the harmless pleasures that have no results beyond the joy of having them?

[S:] Certainly, I think there are such things.

[G:] And is there a kind of good we like for its own sake and also for the sake of what comes from it-- knowing, for example, and seeing and being healthy? We welcome such things, I suppose on both counts.

[S:] Yes.

[G:] And do you also see a third kind of good, such as physical training, medical treatment when sick, medicine itself, and the other ways of making money? We'd say that these are onerous but beneficial to us, and we wouldn't choose them for their own sakes, but for the sake of the rewards and other things that come from them.

[S:] There is also this third kind. But what of it?

[G:] Where do you put justice?

[S:] I myself put it among the finest goods, as something to be valued by anyone who is going to be blessed with happiness, both because of itself and because of what comes from it.

[G:] That isn't most people's opinion. They'd say that justice belongs to the onerous kind, and is to be practiced for the sake of the rewards and popularity that come from a reputation for justice, but is to be avoided because of itself as something burdensome.

[S:] I know that's the general opinion. Thrasyarchus faulted justice on these grounds a moment ago and praised injustice, but it seems that I'm a slow learner.

[G:] Come, then, and listen to me as well, and see whether you still have that problem, for I think that Thrasyarchus gave up before he had to, charmed by you

as if he were a snake. But I'm not yet satisfied by the argument on either side. I want to know what justice and injustice are and what power each itself has when it's by itself in the soul. I want to leave out of account their rewards and what comes from each of them. So, if you agree, I'll renew the argument of Thrasymachus. First, I'll state what kind of thing people consider justice to be and what its origins are. Second, I'll argue that all who practice it do so unwillingly, as something necessary, not as something good. Third, I'll argue that they have good reason to act as they do, for the life of an unjust person is, they say, much better than that of a just one.

It isn't, Socrates, that I believe any of that myself. I'm perplexed, indeed, and my ears are deafened listening to Thrasymachus and countless others. But I've yet to hear anyone defend justice in the way I want, proving that it is better than injustice. I want to hear it praised *by itself*. Therefore, I'm going to speak at length in praise of the unjust life, and in doing so I'll show you the way I want to hear you praising justice and denouncing injustice. But see whether you want me to do that or not.

[S:] I want that most of all. Indeed, what subject could someone with any understanding enjoy discussing more often?

[G:] Excellent. Then let's discuss the first subject I mentioned--what justice is and what its origins are.

They say that to do injustice is naturally good and to suffer injustice bad, but that the badness of suffering it so far exceeds the goodness of doing it that those who have done and suffered injustice and tasted both, but who lack the power to do it and avoid suffering it, decide that it is profitable to come to an agreement with each other neither to do injustice nor to suffer it. As a result they begin to make laws and covenants, and what the law commands they call lawful and just. This, they say, is the origin and essence of justice. It is intermediate between the best and the worst. The best is to do injustice without paying the penalty; the worst is to suffer it without being able to take revenge. Justice is a mean between these two extremes. People value it not as a good but because they are too weak to do injustice with impunity. Someone who has the power to do this, however, and is a true man wouldn't make an agreement with anyone not to do injustice in order

not to suffer. For him that would be madness. This is the nature of justice, according to the argument, Socrates, and these are its natural origins.

We can see most clearly that those who practice justice do it unwillingly and because they lack the power to do injustice, if in our thoughts we grant to a just and an unjust person the freedom to do whatever they like. We can then follow both of them and see where their desires would lead. And we'll catch the just person red-handed traveling the same road as the unjust. The reason for this is the desire to outdo others and get more and more. This is what anyone's nature naturally pursues as good, but nature is forced by law into the perversion of treating fairness with respect.

The freedom I mentioned would be most easily realized if both people had the power they say the ancestor of Gyges of Lydia possessed. The story goes that he was a shepherd in the service of the ruler of Lydia. There was a violent thunderstorm, and an earthquake broke open the ground and created a chasm at the place where he was tending his sheep. Seeing this, he was filled with amazement and went down into it. And there, in addition to many other wonders of which we're told, he saw a hollow bronze horse. There were windowlike openings in it, and, peeping in, he saw a corpse, which seemed to be of more than human size, wearing nothing but a gold ring on its finger. He took the ring and came out of the chasm. He wore the ring at the usual monthly meeting that reported to the king on the state of the flocks. And as he was sitting among the others, he happened to turn the setting of the ring towards himself to the inside of his hand. When he did this, he became invisible to those sitting near him, and they went on talking as if he had gone. He wondered at this, and, fingering the ring, he turned the setting outwards again and became visible. So he experimented with the ring to test whether it indeed had this power--and it did. If he turned the setting inward, he became invisible; if he turned it outward, he became visible again. When he realized this, he at once arranged to become one of the messengers sent to report to the king. And when he arrived there, he seduced the king's wife, attacked the king with her help, killed him, and took over the kingdom.

Let's suppose, then, that there were two such rings, one worn by a just and the other by an unjust person. Now, no one, it seems, would be so incorruptible that

he would stay on the path of justice or stay away from other people's property, when he could take whatever he wanted from the marketplace with impunity, go into people's houses and have sex with anyone he wished, kill or release from prison anyone he wished, and do all the other things that would make him like a god among humans. Rather his actions would be in no way different from those of an unjust person, and both would follow the same path. This, some would say, is a great proof that one is never just willingly but only when compelled to be. No one believes justice to be a good when it is kept in private, since, wherever either person thinks he can do injustice with impunity, he does it. Indeed, every man believes that injustice is far more profitable to himself than justice. And any exponent of this argument will say he's right, for someone who didn't want to do injustice, given this sort of opportunity, and who didn't touch other people's property would be thought wretched and stupid by everyone aware of the situation, though, of course, they praise him in public, deceiving each other for fear of suffering injustice. So much for my second topic.

As for the choice between the lives we're discussing, we'll be able to make a correct judgment about that only if we separate the most just and the most unjust. Otherwise we won't be able to do it. Here's the separation I have in mind. We'll subtract nothing from the injustice of an unjust person and nothing from the justice of a just one, but we'll take each to be complete in his own way of life. First, therefore, we must suppose that an unjust person will act as clever craftsmen do: A first-rate captain or doctor, for example, knows the difference between what his craft can and can't do. He attempts the first but lets the second go by, and if he happens to slip, he can put things right. In the same way, an unjust person's successful attempts at injustice must remain undetected, if he is to be fully unjust. Anyone who is caught should be thought inept, for the extreme of injustice is to be believed to be just without being just. And our completely unjust person must be given complete injustice; nothing may be subtracted from it. We must allow that, while doing the greatest injustice, he has nonetheless provided himself with the greatest reputation for justice. If he happens to make a slip he must be able to put it right. If any of his unjust activities should be discovered, he must be able to speak persuasively or to use force. And if force is needed, he must have the help of courage and strength and of the substantial wealth and friends with which he has provided himself.

Having hypothesized such a person, let's now in our argument put beside him a just man, who is simple and noble and who, as Aeschylus says, doesn't want to be believed to be good but to be so. We must take away his reputation, for a reputation for justice would bring him honor and rewards, so that it wouldn't be clear whether he is just for the sake of justice itself or for the sake of those honors and rewards. We must strip them of everything except justice and make his situation the opposite of an unjust person's. Though he does no injustice, he must have the greatest reputation for it, so that his justice may be tested full-strength and not diluted by wrongdoing and what comes from it. Let him stay like that unchanged until he dies--just, but all his life believed to be unjust. In this way, both will reach the extremes, the one of justice and the other of injustice, and we'll be able to judge which of them is happier.

[S:] Whew! Glaucon, I said, how vigorously you've scoured each of the men for our competition, just as you would a pair of statues for an art competition.

[G:] I do the best I can, he replied. . . .

Book IV

[S:] Well, then, we've now made our difficult way through a sea of argument. We are pretty much agreed that the same number and the same kinds of classes are in the city are also in the soul of each individual.

[G:] That's true.

[S:] Therefore, it necessarily follows that the individual is wise in the same way and in the same part of himself as the city.

[G:] That's right.

[S:] And isn't the individual courageous in the same way and in the same part of himself as the city? And isn't everything else that has to do with virtue the same in both?

[G:] Necessarily.

[S:] Moreover, Glaucon, I suppose we'll say that a man is just in the same way as a city.

[G:] That too is entirely necessary.

[S:] And we surely haven't forgotten that the city was just because each of the three classes in it was doing its own work.

[G:] I don't think we could forget that.

[S:] Then we must also remember that each one of us in whom each part is doing its own work will himself be just and do his own.

[G:] Of course, we must.

[S:] Therefore isn't it appropriate for the rational part to rule, since it is really wise and exercises foresight on behalf of the whole soul, and for the spirited part to obey it and be its ally?

[G:] It certainly is.

[S:] And isn't it, as we were saying, a mixture of music and poetry, on the one hand, and physical training, on the other, that makes the two parts harmonious, stretching and nurturing the rational part with fine words and learning, relaxing the other part through soothing stories, and making it gentle by means of harmony and rhythm?

[G:] That's precisely it.

[S:] And these two, having been nurtured in this way, and having truly learned their own roles and been educated in them, will govern the appetitive part, which is the largest part in each person's soul and is by nature most insatiable for money. They'll watch over it to see that it isn't filled with the so-called pleasures of the body and that it doesn't become so big and strong that it no longer does its own work but attempts to enslave and rule over the classes it isn't fitted to rule, thereby overturning everyone's whole life.

[G:] That's right.

[S:] Then, wouldn't these two parts also do the finest job of guarding the whole soul and body against external enemies--reason by planning, spirit by fighting, following its leader, and carrying out the leader's decisions through its courage?

[G:] Yes, that's true.

[S:] And it is because of the spirited part, I suppose, that we call a single individual courageous, namely, when it preserves through pains and pleasures the declarations of reason about what is to be feared and what isn't.

[G:] That's right.

[S:] And we'll call him wise because of that small part of himself that rules in him and makes those declarations and has within it the knowledge of what is advantageous for each part and for the whole soul, which is the community of all three parts.

[G:] Absolutely.

[S:] And isn't he moderate because of the friendly and harmonious relations between these same parts, namely, when the ruler and the ruled believe in common that the rational part should rule and don't engage in civil war against it?

[G:] Moderation is surely nothing other than that, both in the city and in the individual.

[S:] And, of course, a person will be just because of what we've so often mentioned, and in that way.

[G:] Necessarily.

[S:] Well, then, is the justice in us at all indistinct? Does it seem to be something different from what we found in the city?

[G:] It doesn't seem so to me.

[S:] If there are still any doubts in our soul about this, we could dispel them altogether by appealing to ordinary cases.

[G:] Which ones?

[S:] For example, if we had to come to an agreement about whether someone similar in nature in training to our city had embezzled a deposit of gold or silver that he had accepted, who do you think would consider him to have done it rather than someone who isn't like him?

[G:] No one.

[S:] And would he have anything to do with temple robberies, thefts, betrayals of friends in private life or of cities in public life?

[G:] No, nothing.

[S:] And he'd be in no way untrustworthy in keeping an oath or other agreement.

[G:] How could he be?

[S:] And adultery, disrespect for parents, and neglect of the gods would be more in keeping with every other kind of character than his.

[G:] With every one.

[S:] And isn't the cause of all this that every part within him does its own work, whether it's ruling or being ruled?

[G:] Yes, that and nothing else.

[S:] Then, are you still looking for justice to be something other than this power, the one that produces men in cities of the sort we've described?

[G:] No, I certainly am not.

[S:] Then the dream we had has been completely fulfilled--our suspicion that, with the help of some god, we had hit upon the origin and pattern of justice right at the beginning in the founding of our city.

[G:] Absolutely.

[S:] Indeed, Glaucon, the principle that it is right for someone who is by nature a cobbler to practice cobblery and nothing else, for the carpenter to practice carpentry, and the same for the others is a sort of image of justice--that's why it's beneficial.

[G:] Apparently.

[S:] And in truth justice is, it seems, something of this sort. However, it isn't concerned with someone's doing his own externally, but with what is inside him, and what is truly himself and his own. One who is just does not allow any part of himself to do the work of another part or allow the various classes within him to meddle with each other. He regulates well what is really his own and rules himself. He puts himself in order, is his own friend, and harmonizes the three

parts of himself like three limiting notes in a musical scale--high, low, and middle. He binds together those parts and any others there may be in between, and from having been many things he becomes entirely one, moderate and harmonious. Only then does he act. And when he does anything, whether acquiring wealth, taking care of his body, engaging in politics, or in private contracts--in all of these, he believes that the action is just and fine that preserves this inner harmony and helps achieve it, and calls it so, and regards as wisdom the knowledge that oversees such actions. And he believes that the action that destroys this harmony is unjust, and calls it so, and regards the belief that oversees it as ignorance.

[G:] That's absolutely true, Socrates.

[S:] well, if we claim to have found the just man, the just city, and what the justice is that is in them, I don't suppose that will seem to be telling a complete falsehood.

[G:] No, we certainly won't.

[S:] Shall we claim it, then?

[G:] We shall.

[S:] So be it. Now, I suppose we must look for injustice.

[G:] Clearly.

[S:] Surely, it must be a kind of civil war between the three parts, a meddling and doing of another's work, a rebellion by some part against the whole soul in order to rule it inappropriately.

The rebellious part is by nature suited to be a slave, while the other part is not a slave but belongs to the ruling class. We'll say something like that, I suppose, and that the turmoil and straying of these parts are injustice, licentiousness, cowardice, ignorance, and, in a word, the whole of vice.

[G:] That's what they are.

[S:] So, if justice and injustice are really clear enough to us, then acting justly, acting unjustly, and doing injustice are also clear.

[G:] How so?

[S:] Because just and unjust actions are no different for the soul than healthy and unhealthy things are for the body.

[G:] In what way?

[S:] Healthy things produce health, unhealthy ones disease.

[G:] Yes.

[S:] And don't just actions produce justice in the soul and unjust ones injustice?

[G:] Necessarily.

[S:] To produce health is to establish the components of the body and a natural relation of control and being controlled, one by another, while to produce disease is to establish a relation of ruling and being ruled contrary to nature.

[G:] That's right.

[S:] Then, isn't to produce justice to establish the parts of the soul in a natural relation of control, one by another, while to produce injustice is to establish a relation of ruling and being ruled contrary to nature?

[G:] Precisely.

[S:] Virtue seems, then, to be a kind of health, fine condition, and well-being of the soul, while vice is disease, shameful condition, and weakness.

[G:] That's true.

[S:] And don't fine ways of living lead one to the possession of virtue, shameful ones to vice?

[G:] Necessarily.

[S:] So it now remains, it seems, to inquire whether it is more profitable to act justly, live in a fine way, and be just, whether one is known to be so or not, or to act unjustly and be unjust, provided that one doesn't pay the penalty and become better as a result of punishment.

[G:] But, Socrates, this inquiry looks ridiculous to me now that justice and injustice have been shown to be as we have described. Even if one has every kind of food and drink, lots of money, and every sort of power to rule, life is thought to be not

worth living when the body's nature is ruined. So even if someone can do whatever he wishes, except what will free him from vice and injustice and make him acquire justice and virtue, how can it be worth living when his soul--the very thing by which he lives--is ruined and in turmoil?

[S:] Yes, it is ridiculous.

ARISTOTLE ON THE GOOD LIFE

Aristotle (384-322 BCE) was a Greek philosopher and a student of Plato, as Plato was a student of Socrates. The following selection is from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Terence Irwin (Hackett, 3rd ed.).

BOOK I CHAPTER 7

But let us return once again to the good we are looking for, and consider just what it could be. For it is apparently one thing in one action or craft, and another thing in another; for it is one thing in medicine, another in generalship, and so on for the rest. What, then, is the good of each action or craft? Surely it is that for the sake of which the other things are done. In medicine this is health, in generalship, victory, in house building, a house, in another case something else, but in every action and decision it is the end, since it is for the sake of the end that everyone does the other actions. And so, if there is some end of everything achievable in action, the good achievable in action will be this end, but if there are more ends than one, it will be these ends.

Our argument, then, has followed a different route to reach the same conclusion. But we must try to make this still more perspicuous. Since there are apparently many ends, and we choose some of them (for instance, wealth, flutes, and, in general, instruments) because of something else, it is clear that not all ends are complete. But the best good is apparently something complete. And so, if only one end is complete, what we are looking for will be this end, but if more ends than one are complete, it will be the most complete of these.

Now we say that an end pursued in its own right is more complete than an end pursued because of something else, and that an end that is never choiceworthy

because of something else is more complete than ends that are choiceworthy both in their own right and because of this end. Hence an end that is always choiceworthy in its own right, never because of something else, is complete without qualification.

Now happiness, more than anything else, seems complete without qualification. For this we choose always because of itself, never because of something else. But honor, pleasure, understanding, and every virtue we choose because of themselves also--since we would choose each of them even if it had no further result--but we also choose them for the sake of happiness, supposing that through them we shall be happy. Happiness, however, no one ever chooses for their sake, or for the sake of anything else at all.

The same conclusion also appears to follow from self-sufficiency. For the complete good seems to be self-sufficient. But what we count as sufficient is not what suffices for a solitary person by himself, living an isolated life, but what suffices also for parents, children, wife, and in general for friends and fellow citizens, since a human being is a naturally political animal. (Here, however, we must impose some limit; for if we extend the good to parents' parents and children's children and to friends of friends, we should go on without limit; but we must examine this another time.) But we take what is self-sufficient to be whatever all by itself makes a life choiceworthy and lacking nothing; and that is what we think happiness does.

Moreover, we think happiness is most choiceworthy of all goods, since it is not counted as one good among many. If it were counted as one among many, then, clearly, we think it would be more choiceworthy if the smallest of goods were added; for the good that is added becomes an extra quantity of goods, and the larger of two goods is always more choiceworthy. Happiness, then, is apparently something complete and self-sufficient, since it is the end of the things achievable in action.

But presumably the remark that the best good is happiness is apparently something generally agreed, and we still feel the need of a clearer statement of what the best good is. Perhaps, then, we shall find this if we first grasp the function of a human being. For just as the good, i.e., doing well, for a flautist, a sculptor, and every craftsman, and, in general, for whatever has a function and

characteristic action, seems to depend on its function, the same seems to be true for a human being, if a human being has some function.

Then do the carpenter and the leatherworker have their function and actions, but has a human being no function? Is he by nature idle, without any function? Or, just as eye, hand, foot, and, in general, every bodily part apparently has its function, may we will likewise ascribe to a human being some function apart from all of these?

What, then, could this be? For living is apparently shared with plants, but what we are looking for is the special function of a human being; hence we should set aside the life of nutrition and growth. The next life in order is some sort of life of sense perception; but this too is apparently shared with horse, ox, and every animal.

The remaining possibility, then, is some sort of life of action of the part of the soul that has reason. One part of it has reason as obeying reason; the other has it as itself having reason and thinking. Moreover, life is also spoken of in two ways as capacity and as activity, and we must take a human being's special function to be life as activity, since this seems to be called life more fully. We have found, then, that the human function is activity of the soul in accord with reason or requiring reason.

Now we say that the function of a kind of thing, such as a harpist, is the same in kind as the function of an excellent individual of the kind, such as an excellent harpist. And the same is true without qualification in every case, if we add to the function of the superior achievement in accord with the virtue; for the function of a harpist is to play the harp, and the function of a good harpist is to play it well. Moreover, we take the human function to be a certain kind of life, and take this activity to be activity and actions of the soul that involve reason; hence the function of the excellent man is to do this well and finally.

Now each function is completed well by being completed in accord with the virtue proper to that the kind of thing. And so the human good proves to be activity of the soul in accord with virtue, and indeed in accord with the best and most complete virtue, if there are more virtues than one, and, further, in a complete

life--for one swallow does not make a spring, nor does one day, nor, similarly, does one day or a short time make us blessed and happy. . . .

BOOK X
CHAPTER 7

If happiness is activity in accordance with virtue, it is reasonable for it to be in accord with the supreme virtue, which will be the virtue of the best thing. The best is understanding, or whatever else seems to be the natural ruler and leader, and to understand what is fine and divine, by being itself either divine or the most divine element in us. Hence complete happiness will be its activity in accord with the proper virtue; and it has been said that this activity is an activity of study.

This seems to agree with what has been said before, and also with the truth.

For this activity is supreme, since understanding is the supreme element in us, and the objects of understanding are the supreme objects of knowledge.

Further, it is the most continuous activity, since we are more capable of continuous study than any continuous action.

Besides, we think pleasure must be mixed into happiness; and it is agreed that the activity in accord with wisdom is the pleasantest of the activities in accord with virtue. Certainly, philosophy seems to have remarkably pure and firm pleasures, and it is reasonable that those who have knowledge spend their lives more pleasantly than those who seek it.

Moreover, the self-sufficiency that is spoken of will be found in study most of all. Admittedly the wise person, no less than the just person, and the other virtuous people, needs the good things that are necessary for life. Once these are adequately supplied, however, the just person still needs other people as partners and recipients of his just actions; and the same is true of the temperate person, the brave person, and each of the others. But the wise person is able, and more able the wiser he is, to study even by himself. Though, presumably, he does it better with colleagues, even so he is more self-sufficient than any other virtuous person.

Besides, study would seem to be liked because of itself alone, since it has no result beyond having studied. But from the virtues concerned with action we gain, to a greater or lesser extent, something beyond the action itself.

Besides, happiness seems to be found in leisure; for we deny ourselves leisure so that we can be at leisure, and fight wars so that we can be at peace. Now the virtues that are concerned with action have their activity in politics or war, and actions in these areas seem to deny us leisure. This seems completely true for actions in war, since no one chooses to fight a war, and no one prepares for it, for the sake of fighting a war--for someone would have to be a complete murderer if he made his friends his enemies in order to have battles and killings. But the actions of the politician also deny us leisure; apart from political activities in themselves, those actions seek positions of power and honors, or at any rate they seek happiness for the politician himself and for his fellow citizens, which is something different from political science itself, and clearly is sought on the assumption that it is different.

Hence among actions in accord with the virtues those in politics and war are preeminently fine and great; but they require trouble, aim at some further end, and are choiceworthy for something other than themselves. But the activity of understanding, it seems, is superior and excellent because it is the activity of study, aims at no end apart from itself, and has its own proper pleasure, which increases the activity. Further, self-sufficiency, leisure, unwearied activity (as far as is possible for a human being), and any other feature ascribed to the blessed person, are evidently in accord with this activity. Hence a human being's complete happiness will be this activity, if it receives a complete span of life, since nothing incomplete is proper to happiness.

Such a life would be superior to the human level. For someone will live it not insofar as he is a human being, but insofar as he has some divine element in him. And the activity of this divine element is as much superior to the activity in accord with the rest of virtue as this element is superior to the compound. Hence if understanding is something divine in comparison with a human being, so also will the life in accord with understanding be divine in comparison with human life. We ought not to follow those who exhort us to "think human, since you are human", or "think mortal, since you are mortal." Rather, as far as we can, we ought to be pro-immortal, and go to all lengths to live a life in accord with our supreme

element; for however much this element may lack in bulk, by much more it surpasses everything in power and value.

Moreover, this supreme element seems to be the person, if the controlling and better element is the person. It would be absurd, then, if he were to choose not his own life, but something else's. And what we have said previously will also apply now. For what is proper to each thing's nature is supremely best and pleasantest for it; and hence for a human being the life in accord with understanding will be supremely best and pleasantest, if understanding, most of all, is the human being. This life, then, will also be happiest.

EPICTETUS ON ATTAINING PEACE OF MIND

Epictetus (55-135 CE) was a Greek Stoic philosopher. Born a slave, he acquired a passion for philosophy in his youth and began to teach philosophy after obtaining his freedom. Like Socrates, he did not write his teachings down. They were written down by his student Arrian and collected in two works, *Discourses* and *Manual*, (also known as *Encheiridion* or *Handbook*). The following selections are from Sharon Lebell, *The Art of Living: The Classic Manual on Virtue, Happiness, and Effectiveness* (1995), which contains a contemporary statement of passages from Epictetus's *Manual*.

Know What You Can Control and What You Can't

Happiness and freedom begin with a clear understanding of one principle: Some things are within our control, and some things are not. It is only after you've faced up to this fundamental rule and learned to distinguish between what you can and can't control that inner tranquility and outer effectiveness become possible.

Within our control are our own opinions, aspirations, desires, and the things that repel us. These areas are quite rightly our concern, because they are directly subject to our influence. We always have a choice about the contents and character of our inner lives.

Outside our control, however, are such things as what kind of body we have, whether we're born into wealth or strike it rich, how we are regarded by others,

and our status in society. We must remember that those things are externals and are therefore not our concern. Trying to control or to change what we can't only results in torment.

Remember: The things within our control are naturally at our disposal, free from any restraint or hindrance; but those things outside our power are weak, dependent, or determined by the whims and actions of others. Remember, too, that if you think that you have free reign over things that are naturally beyond your control or if you attempt to adopt the affairs of others as your own, your pursuits will be thwarted and you will become a frustrated, anxious, and fault-finding person.

Stick with Your Own Business

Keep your attention focused entirely on what is truly your own concern, and be clear that belongs to others is their business and none of yours. If you do this, you will be impervious to coercion and no one can ever hold you back. You will be truly free and effective, for your efforts will be put to good use and won't be foolishly squandered finding fault with or opposing others.

In knowing and attending to what actually concerns you, you cannot be made to do anything against your will; others can't hurt you, you don't incur enemies or suffer harm. If you aim to live by such principles, remember that it won't be easy: you must give up some things entirely, and postpone others for now. You may well have to forego wealth and power if you want to assure the attainment of happiness and freedom.

Desire Demands Its Own Attainment

Our desires and aversions are mercurial rulers. They demand to be pleased. Desire commands us to run off and get what we want. Aversion insists that we must avoid the things that repel us.

Typically, when we don't get what we want, we are disappointed, and when we get what we don't want, we are distressed.

If, then, you avoid only those undesirable things that are contrary to your natural well-being and are within your control, you won't ever incur anything you truly don't want. However, if you try to avoid inevitabilities such as sickness, death, or misfortune, over which you have no real control, you will make yourself and others around you suffer.

Desire and aversion, though powerful, are but habits. And we can train ourselves to have better habits. Restrain the habit of being repelled by all those things that aren't within your control, and focus instead on combating things within your power that are not good for you.

Do your best to rein in your desire. For if you desire something that isn't within your own control, disappointment will surely follow; meanwhile, you will be neglecting the very things that are within your control that are worthy of desire.

Of course, there are times when for practical reasons you must go after one thing or shun another, but do so with grace, finesse, and flexibility.

No Shame, No Blame

It is our feelings about things that torment us rather than the things themselves, it follows that blaming others is silly. Therefore, when we suffer setbacks, disturbances, or grief, let us never place the blame on others, but on our own attitudes.

Small-minded people habitually reproach others for their own misfortunes. Average people reproach themselves. Those who are dedicated to a life of wisdom understand that the impulse to blame something or someone is foolishness, that there is nothing to be gained in blaming, whether it be others or oneself.

One of the signs of the dawning of moral progress is the gradual extinguishing of blame. We see the futility of finger-pointing. The more we examine our attitudes and work on ourselves, the less we are apt to be swept up by stormy emotional reactions in which we seek easy explanations for unbidden events.

Things simply are what they are. Other people think what they will think; it is of no concern to us. No Shame. No Blame.

Create Your Own Merit

Never depend on the admiration of others. There is no strength in it. Personal merit cannot be derived from an external source. It is not to be found in your personal associations, nor can it be found in the regard of other people. It is a fact of life that other people, even people who love you, will not necessarily agree with your ideas, understand you, or share your enthusiasms. Grow up! Who cares what other people think about you!

Create your *own* merit.

Personal merit cannot be achieved through our associations with people of excellence. You have been given your own work to do. Get to it right now, do your best at it, and don't be concerned with who is watching you.

Do your own useful work without regard to the honor or admiration your efforts might win from others. There is no such thing as vicarious merit.

Other people's triumphs and excellences belong to them. Likewise, your possessions may have excellence, but you yourself don't derive excellence from them.

Think about it: What is really your own? The use you make of the ideas, resources, and opportunities that come your way. Do you have books? Read them. Learn from them. Apply their wisdom. Do you have specialized knowledge? Put it to its full and good use. Do you have tools? Get them out and build or repair things with them. Do you have a good idea? Follow up and follow through on it. Make the most of what you've got, what is actually yours.

You can be justifiably happy with yourself and at ease when you've harmonized your actions with nature by recognizing what is truly your own.

Accept Events As They Occur

Don't demand or expect that events happen as you would wish them to. Accept events as they actually happen. That way peace is possible.

The Good Life Is the Life of Inner Serenity

The surest sign of the higher life is serenity. Moral progress results in freedom from inner turmoil. You can stop fretting about this and that.

If you seek the higher life, refrain from such common patterns of thinking as these: "If I don't work harder, I'll never earn a decent living, no one will recognize me, I'll be a nobody," or "If I don't criticize my employee, he'll take advantage of my good will."

It's much better to die of hunger unhindered by grief and fear than to live affluently beset with worry, dread, suspicion, and unchecked desire.

Begin at once a program of self-mastery. But start modestly, with the little things that bother you. Has your child spilled something? Have you misplaced your wallet? Say to yourself, "Coping calmly with this inconvenience is the price I pay for my inner serenity, for freedom from perturbation; you don't get something for nothing."

When you call your child, prepare that she may not respond to you, or if she does, she might not do what you want her to do. Under these circumstances, it doesn't help your child for you to become agitated. It should not be in her power to cause you any disturbance.

Conform Your Wishes to Reality

For good or for ill, life and nature are governed by laws that we can't change. The quicker we accept this, the more tranquil we can be. You would be foolish to wish that your children or your spouse would live forever. They are mortal, just as you are, and the law of mortality is completely out of your hands.

Similarly, it is foolish to wish that an employee, relative, or friend be without fault. This is wishing to control things that you can't truly control.

It is within our control not to be disappointed by our desires if we deal with them according to facts rather than being swept away by them.

We are ultimately controlled by that which bestows what we seek or removes what we don't want. If it's freedom you seek, then wish nothing and shun nothing that depends on others, or you will always be a helpless slave.

Understand what freedom really is and how it is achieved. Freedom isn't the right or ability to do whatever you please. Freedom comes from understanding the limits of our own power and the natural limits set in place by divine providence. By accepting life's limits and inevitabilities and working with them rather than fighting them, we become free. If, on the other hand, we succumb to our passing desires for things that aren't in our control, freedom is lost.

Approach Life As a Banquet

Think of your life as if it were a banquet where you would behave graciously. When dishes are passed to you, extend your hand and help yourself to a moderate portion. If a dish should pass you by, enjoy what is already on your plate. Or if the dish hasn't been passed to you yet, patiently wait your turn.

Carry over the same attitude of polite restraint and gratitude to your children, spouse, career, and finances. There is no need to yearn, envy, and grab. You will get your rightful portion when it is your time.

Diogenes and Heraclitus were impeccable models of living by such principles rather than by raw impulses. Make it your quest to imitate their worthy example.

Make the Will of Nature Your Own

Learn the will of nature. Study it, pay attention to it, and then make it your own.

The will of nature is revealed to us through everyday experiences common to all people. For example, if a neighbor's child breaks a bowl, or some similar thing, we readily say, "These things happen." When your own bowl breaks, you should respond in the same way as when another person's bowl breaks.

Carry this understanding over to matters of greater emotional import and worldly consequence. Has the child or spouse or other dear one of another person died? Under such circumstances, there was no one who would not say, "Such is the cycle of life. Death happens. Some things are inevitable."

But if our own child or dearly beloved dies, we tend to cry out, "Woe is me! How miserable I am!"

Remember how you feel when you hear the same thing concerning other people. Transfer that feeling to your current circumstances. Learn to accept events, even death, with intelligence.

Clearly Define the Person You Want to Be

Who exactly do you want to be? What kind of person do you want to be? What are your personal ideals? Whom do you admire? What are their special traits that you would make your own?

It's time to stop being vague. If you wish to be an extraordinary person, if you wish to be wise, then you should explicitly identify the kind of person you aspire to become. If you have a daybook, write down who you're trying to be, so that you can refer to this self-definition. Precisely describe the demeanor you want to adopt so that you may preserve it when you are by yourself or with other people.

KANT ON OUR DUTIES TO OURSELVES

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was a German philosopher. His two most influential works are *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) and *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785). The first reading selection here is from the *Groundwork* (Abbott translation, 1889); the second is from Kant's *Lectures on Ethics* (Infield translation, 1980) assembled from notes taken by Kant's students.

From *The Groundwork* Second Formulation of the Categorical Imperative

The will is conceived as a faculty of determining oneself to action in accordance with the conception of certain laws. And such a faculty can be found only in rational beings. Now that which serves the will as the objective ground of its self-determination is the end, and if this is assigned by reason alone, it must hold for all rational beings. On the other hand, that which merely contains the ground of possibility of the action of which the effect is the end, this is called the means. The subjective ground of the desire is the spring, the objective ground of the volition is the motive; hence the distinction between subjective ends which rest on springs, and objective ends which depend on motives valid for every rational being. Practical principles are formal when they abstract from all subjective ends, they are material when they assume these, and therefore particular springs of action. The ends which a rational being proposes to himself at pleasure as effects of his actions (material ends) are all only relative, for it is only their relation to the particular desires of the subject that gives them their worth, which therefore cannot furnish principles universal and necessary for all rational beings and for every volition, that is to say practical laws. Hence all these relative ends can give rise only to hypothetical imperatives.

Supposing, however, that there were something whose existence has in itself an absolute worth, something which, being an end in itself, could be a source of definite laws, then in this and this alone would lie the source of a possible categorical imperative, i.e. a practical law.

Now I say: man and generally any rational being exists as an end in himself, not merely as a means to be arbitrarily used by this or that will, but in all his actions, whether they concern himself or other rational beings, must be always regarded at the same time as an end. All objects of the inclinations have only a conditional worth, for if the inclinations and the wants founded on them did not exist, then their object would be without value. But the inclinations themselves being sources of want, are so far from having an absolute worth for which they should be desired, that on the contrary it must be the universal wish of every rational being to be wholly free from them. Thus the worth of any object which is to be acquired by our action is always conditional. Beings whose existence depends not on our will but on nature's, have nevertheless, if they are irrational beings, only a relative value as means, and are therefore called things; rational beings, on the contrary, are called persons, because their very nature points them out as ends in themselves, that is as something which must not be used merely as means, and so

far therefore restricts freedom of action (and is an object of respect). These, therefore, are not merely subjective ends whose existence has a worth for us as an effect of our action, but objective ends, that is things whose existence is an end in itself: an end moreover for which no other can be substituted, which they should subserve merely as means, for otherwise nothing whatever would possess absolute worth; but if all worth were conditioned and therefore contingent, then there would be no supreme practical principle of reason whatever.

If then there is a supreme practical principle or, in respect of the human will, a categorical imperative, it must be one which, being drawn from the conception of that which is necessarily an end for every one 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 thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as means only.

We will now inquire whether this can be practically carried out.

To abide by the previous examples:

Firstly, under the head of necessary duty to oneself: He who contemplates suicide should ask himself whether his action can be consistent with the idea of humanity as an end in itself. If he destroys himself in order to escape from painful circumstances, he uses a person merely as a mean to maintain a tolerable condition up to the end of life. But a man is not a thing, that is to say, something which can be used merely as means, but must in all his actions be always considered as an end in himself. I cannot, therefore, dispose in any way of a man in my own person so as to mutilate him, to damage or kill him. (It belongs to ethics proper to define this principle more precisely so as to avoid all misunderstanding, e.g. as to the amputation of the limbs in order to preserve

myself; as to exposing my life to danger with a view to preserve it, etc. This question is therefore omitted here.)

Secondly, as regards necessary duties, or those of strict obligation, towards others; he who is thinking of making a lying promise to others will see at once that he would be using another man merely as a means, 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 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 (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. . . .

From *Lectures on Ethics*
Duties to Oneself

We have dealt at length with questions appertaining to natural religion, and we now proceed to deal similarly with essential morality and with our proper duties towards everything in the world. First amongst these duties is the duty we owe to our own selves.

My duty towards myself cannot be treated juridically; the law touches only our relations with other men; I have no legal obligations towards myself; and whatever I do to myself I do to a consenting party; I cannot commit an act of injustice against myself. What we have to discuss is the use we make of liberty in respect of ourselves. . . .

Far from ranking lowest in the scale of precedence, our duties towards ourselves are of primary importance and should have pride of place; for (deferring for the moment the definition of what constitutes this duty) it is obvious that nothing can be expected from a man who dishonors his own person. He who transgresses against himself loses his humanity and becomes incapable of doing his duty towards his fellows. A man who performed his duty to others badly, who lacked generosity, kindness and sympathy, but who nevertheless did his duty to himself by leading a proper life, might yet possess a certain inner worth; but he who has transgressed his duty towards himself, can have no inner worth whatever. The same man who fails in his duty to himself loses worth absolutely; while a man who fails in his duty to others loses worth only relatively. It follows that the prior condition of our duty to others is our duty to ourselves; we can fulfill the former only insofar as we first fulfill the latter.

Let us illustrate our meaning by a few examples of failure in one's duty to oneself. A drunkard does no harm to another, and if he has a strong constitution he does no harm to himself, yet he is an object of contempt. . . .

We must also be worthy of our humanity; whatsoever makes us unworthy of it makes us unfit for anything, and we cease to be men. Moreover, if a man offer his body for profit for the sport of others--if, for instance, he agrees in return for a few pints of beer to be knocked about--he throws himself away, and the perpetrators who pay him for it are acting as vilely as he. Neither can we without destroying our person abandon ourselves to others in order to satisfy their desires, even though it be done to save parents and friends from death; still less can this be done for money. If done in order to satisfy one's own desires, it is very

immodest and immoral, but yet not so unnatural; but if it be done for money, or for some other reason, a person allows himself to be treated as a thing, and so throws away the worth of his humanity. It is the same with vices of the flesh (*crimina carnis*), which for that reason are not spoken of. They do no damage to anyone, but dishonor and degrade a man's own person; they are an offense against the dignity of humanity in one's own person.

The most serious offense against the duty one owes to oneself is suicide. But why should suicide be so abominable? It is no answer to say "because God forbids it." Suicide is not an abomination because God has forbidden it; it is forbidden by God because it is abominable. If it were the other way about, suicide would not be abominable if it were not forbidden; and I should not know why God had forbidden it, if it were not abominable in itself. The ground, therefore, for regarding suicide and other transgressions as abominable and punishable must not be found in the divine will, but in their inherent heinousness. Suicide is an abomination because it implies the abuse of man's freedom of action; he uses his freedom to destroy himself. His freedom should be employed to enable him to live as a person. He is free to dispose as he pleases of things appertaining to his person, but not of his person; he may not use his freedom against himself. . . .

Man is free to dispose of his condition but not of his person; he himself is an end and not a means; all else in the world is a value only as a means, but man is a person and not a thing and therefore not a means. It is absurd that a reasonable being, an end for the sake of which all else is a means, should use himself as a means. It is true that a person can serve as a means for others (e.g., by his work), but only in a way whereby he does not cease to be a person and an end. Whoever acts in such a way that he cannot be an end, uses himself as a means and treats his person as a thing. Man is not free to dispose of his person as a means; and in what follows we shall have more to say on this score.

The duties we owe to ourselves do not depend on the relation of the action to the ends of happiness. If they did, they would depend on our inclinations and so be governed by rules of prudence. Such rules are not moral, since they indicate only the necessity of the means for the satisfaction of inclinations, and cannot therefore bind us. The basis of such obligation is not to be found in the advantages we reap from doing our duty towards ourselves, but in the worth of our humanity. This principle does not allow us an unlimited freedom in respect of

our own persons. It insists that we must reverence humanity in our own person, because apart from this man becomes an object of contempt, worthless in the eyes of his fellows and worthless in himself. Such faultiness is absolute.

Our duties towards ourselves constitute the supreme condition and the principle of all morality; for moral worth is the worth of the person as such; our capacities have a value only in regard to the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Socrates lived in a state of wretchedness; his circumstances were worthless; but though his circumstances were so ill-conditioned, yet he himself was of the highest value. Even though we sacrifice all life's amenities we can make up for their loss and sustain approval by maintaining the worth of our humanity. We may have lost everything else, and yet still retain our inherent worth. Only if our worth as human beings is intact can we perform our other duties; for it is the foundation stone of all other duties. A man who has destroyed and cast away his personality, has no intrinsic worth, and can no longer perform any manner of duty.

Let us next consider the basis of the principle of all self-regarding duties.

Freedom is, on the one hand, that faculty which gives unlimited usefulness to all other faculties. It is the highest order of life, which serves as the foundation of all perfections and is their necessary condition. . . . Therefore the proper use of freedom is the supreme rule. What then is the condition under which freedom is restricted? . . . The supreme rule is that in all the actions which affect himself a person should so conduct himself that every exercise of his power is compatible with the fullest employment of them.

Let us illustrate our meaning by examples. If I have drunk too much I am incapable of using my freedom and my powers. Again, if I kill myself, I use my powers to deprive myself of the faculty of using them. That freedom, the principle of the highest order of life, should annul itself and advocate the use of itself conflicts with the fullest use of freedom. But freedom can only be in harmony with itself under certain conditions; otherwise it comes into collision with itself. . . . The principle of all duties is that the use of freedom must be in keeping with the essential ends of humanity. Thus, for instance, a human being is not entitled to sell his limbs for money, even if he were offered ten thousand thalers for a single finger. If he were so entitled, he could sell all his limbs. We can dispose of things

which have no freedom but not of a being which has free will. A man who sells himself makes himself a thing and, as he has jettisoned his person, it is open to anyone to deal with him as he pleases.

ASIAN PHILOSOPHY AND THE RENUNCIATION OF DESIRE

ARJUNA'S QUANDARY

The Bhagavad Gita (literally, "The Song of God") is part of a longer epic poem entitled the *Mahabharata*. Thought to have been written in the 2nd century BCE (but possibly as early as the 5th century BCE), its place in Hinduism is similar to the Gospels in Christianity. This passage describes an exchange between Prince Arjuna and the god Krishna about whether Arjuna should lead his troops into battle.

The Prince looked on the array, and in both armies he recognized fathers and grandfathers, teachers, uncles, sons, brothers, grandsons, fathers-in-law, dear friends, and many familiar faces. When Kunti's son saw all those ranks of kinsman he was filled with deep compassion, and he spoke despairingly as follows:

ARJUNA:

Krishna, Krishna,
Now as I look on
These my kinsman
Arrayed for battle,
My limbs are weakened,
My mouth is parching,
My body trembles,
My hair stands upright,
My skin seems burning,
The bow Gandiva
Slips from my hand,
My brain is whirling
Round and round,
I can stand no longer:
Krishna, I see such

Omens of evil!
What can we hope from
This killing of kinsmen?
What do I want with
Victory, empire,
Or their enjoyment?
Oh Govinda,
How can I care for
Power or pleasure,
My own life, even,
When all these others,
Teachers, fathers,
Grandfathers, uncles,
Sons and brothers,
Husbands of sisters,
Grandsons and cousins,
For whose sake only
I could enjoy them
Stand here ready
To risk blood and wealth
In war against us?

Knower of all things,
Though they should slay me
How could I harm them?
I cannot wish it:
Never, never,
Not though it won me
The throne of the three worlds;
How much the less for
Earthly lordship!

Krishna, hearing
The prayers of all men,
Tell me how can
We hope to be happy
Slaying the sons

Of Dhritarashtra?
Evil they may be,
Worst of the wicked,
Yet if we kill them
Our sin is greater.
How could we dare spill
The blood that unites us?
Where is joy in
The killing of kinsmen?

Fowl their hearts are
With greed, and blinded:
They see no evil
In breaking of blood-bonds,
See no sin
In treason to comrades.
But we, clear-sighted,
Scanning the ruin
Of families scattered,
Should we not shun
This crime, O Krishna?

We know what fate falls
On families broken:
The rites are forgotten,
Vice rots the remnant
Defiling the women,
And from their corruption
Comes mixing of castes:
The curse of confusion
Degrades the victims
And damns the destroyers.

The rice and the water
No longer are offered;
The ancestors also
Must fall dishonored

From home in heaven.
Such is the crime
Of the killers of kinsman:
The ancient, the sacred,
Is broken, forgotten.
Such is the doom
Of the lost, without caste-rites:
Darkness and doubting
And hell forever.

What is the crime
I am planning, O Krishna?
Murder most hateful,
Murder of brothers!
Am I indeed
So greedy for greatness?

Rather than this
Let the evil children
Of Dhritarashtra
Come with their weapons
Against me in battle:
I shall not struggle,
I shall not strike them.
Now let them kill me,
That will be better.

SANJAYA (the narrator):

Having spoken thus, Arjuna threw aside his arrows and his bow in the midst of the battlefield. He sat down on the seat of the chariot, and his heart was overcome with sorrow. Then his eyes filled with tears, and his heart grieved and was bewildered with pity. And Sri Krishna spoke to him.

SRI KRISHNA:

Arjuna, is this hour of battle the time for scruples and fancies? Are they worthy of you, who seek enlightenment? Any brave man who merely hopes for fame or heaven would despise them. What is this weakness? It is beneath you. Is it for

nothing men call you the foe-consumer? Shake off this cowardice, Arjuna. Stand up.

ARJUNA:

Bhisma and Drona are noble and ancient, worthy of the deepest reverence. How can I greet them with arrows, in battle? If I kill them, how can I ever enjoy my wealth, or any other pleasure? It will be cursed with bloodguilt. I would much rather spare them and eat the bread of a beggar.

Which will be worse, to win this war or to lose it? I scarcely know. Even the sons of Dhritarashtra stand in the enemy ranks. If we kill them, none of us will wish to live.

Is this real compassion that I feel or only a delusion? My mind gropes about in darkness. I cannot see where my duty lies. Krishna, I beg you, tell me frankly and clearly what I ought to do. I am your disciple. I put myself into your hands. Show me the way.

Not this world's kingdom,
Supreme, unchallenged,
No, nor the throne
Of the gods in heaven,
Could ease this sorrow
That numbs my senses!

SANJAYA:

When Arjuna, the foe-consuming, the never-slothful, had spoken thus to Govinda, ruler of the senses, he added, "I will not fight," and was silent. . . .

ARJUNA:

But, Krishna, if you consider knowledge of Brahman superior to any sort of action, why are you telling me to do these terrible deeds? Your statements seem to contradict each other. They confuse my mind. Tell me one definite way of reaching the highest good. I want to learn the truth about renunciation and non-attachment. What is the difference between these two principles?

KRISHNA:

The sages tell us that renunciation means the complete giving-up of all actions which are motivated by desire. And they say that non-attachment means abandonment of the fruits of action. Some philosophers declare that all kinds of action should be given up, because action always contains a certain measure of evil. Others say that acts of sacrifice, almsgiving and austerity should not be given up. Now you shall hear the truth of this matter.

Acts of sacrifice, almsgiving and austerity should not be given up: Their performance is necessary. For sacrifice, almsgiving and austerity are a means of purification to those who rightly understand them. But even these acts must be performed without attachment or regard for their fruits. Such is my final and considered judgment.

Renunciation is said to be of three kinds. If a man, in his ignorance, renounces those actions which the scriptures ordain, his renunciation is inspired by *tamas*. If he abstains from any action merely because it is disagreeable, or because he fears it will cause him bodily pain, his renunciation is inspired by *rajas*. He will not obtain any spiritual benefit from such renunciation. But when a man performs an action which is sanctioned by the scriptures, and does it for duty's sake only, renouncing all attachment and desire for its fruits, then his renunciation is inspired by *sattwa*.

When a man is endowed with discrimination and illuminated by knowledge of the Atman, all his doubts are dispelled. He does not shrink from doing what is disagreeable to him, nor does he long to do what is agreeable. No human being can give up action altogether, but he who gives up the fruits of action is said to be non-attached.

LAO TZU ON THE WAY OF NATURE

Lao Tzu (literally "Old Master") was an ancient Chinese philosopher and writer. Some historians believe he lived in the 6th century BCE, and was a contemporary of Confucius; others believe he lived later, in the 4th century BCE. He is traditionally regarded as the author of the *Tao Te Ching*, a foundational text of Taoism, but the authorship of this text is also debated. The following selections are from a translation of the *Tao Te Ching*.

I

The way that can be spoken of
Is not the constant way;
The name that can be named
Is not the constant name.
The nameless was the beginning of heaven and earth;
The named was the mother of the myriad creatures.
Hence always rid yourself of desires in order to observe its secrets;
But always allow yourself to have desires in order to observe its manifestations.
The two are the same
But diverge in name as they issue forth.
Being the same they're called mysteries,
Mystery upon mystery –
The gateway of the manifold secrets.

II

The whole world recognizes the beautiful as the beautiful,
Yet this is only the ugly;
The whole world recognizes the good as the good,
Yet this is only the bad.
Thus Something and Nothing produce each other;
The difficult and the easy complement each other;
The long and the short offset each other;
The high and the low incline towards each other;
Note and sound harmonize with each other;
Before and after follow each other.
Therefore the sage keeps to the deed that consists in taking no action
And practices the teaching that uses no words.
The myriad creatures rise from it yet it claims no authority;
It gives them life yet claims no possession;
It benefits them yet exacts no gratitude;
It accomplishes its task yet lays claim to no merit.
It is because it lays claim to no merit
That its merit never deserts it.

XXV

There is a thing confusedly formed,
Born before heaven and earth.
Silent and void
It stands alone and does not change,
Goes round and does not weary.
It is capable of being the mother of the world.
I know not its name
So I style it "the way."
I give it the makeshift name of "the great."
Being great, it is further described as receding,
Receding, it is described as far away,
Being far away, it is described as turning back.
Hence the way is great; heaven is great; earth is great; and the king is also great.
Within the realm there are four things that are great, and the King counts as one.
Man models himself on earth,
Earth on heaven,
Heaven on the way,
And the way on that which is naturally so.

XXXVII

The way never acts yet nothing is left undone.
Should lords and princes be able to hold fast to it,
The myriad creatures will be transformed of their own accord.
After they are transformed, should desire raise its head,
I shall press it down with the weight of the nameless uncarved block.
The nameless uncarved block is but freedom from desire,
And if I cease to desire and remain still,
The empire will be at peace of its own accord.

XXXVIII

A man of the highest virtue does not keep to virtue and that is why he has virtue.
A man of the lowest virtue never strays from virtue and that is why he is without
virtue.
The former never acts yet leaves nothing undone.
The latter acts but things are left undone.
A man of the highest benevolence acts, but from no ulterior motive.
A man of the highest rectitude acts, but from ulterior motive.

A man most conversant in the rites acts, but when no one responds rolls up his sleeves and resorts to persuasion by force.
Hence when the way was lost there was virtue;
When virtue was lost there was benevolence;
When rectitude was lost there were the rites.
The rites are the wearing thin of loyalty and good faith and the beginning of disorder;
For knowledge is the flowery embellishment of the way and the beginning of folly.
Hence the man of large mind abides in the thick not in the thin,
In the fruit not in the flower.
Therefore he discards one and takes that the other.

LXIII

Do that which consists in taking no action;
Pursue that which is not meddlesome;
Savor that which has no flavor.
Make the small big and the few many;
Do good to him who has done you an injury.
Lay plans for the accomplishment of the difficult before it becomes difficult;
Make something big by starting with it when small.
Difficult things in the world must needs have their beginning in the easy;
Big things must needs have their beginnings in the small.
Therefore it is because the sage never attempts to be great that he succeeds in becoming great.
One who makes promises rashly rarely keeps good faith;
One who is in the habit of considering things easy meets with frequent difficulties.
Therefore even the sage treats somethings is difficult.
That is why in the end no difficulties can get the better of him.

CONFUCIUS ON CUSTOM AND CHARACTER

Confucius (551-479 BCE) was a Chinese philosopher and politician. The following selections are from *The Analects*, a collection of aphorisms attributed to Confucius but compiled many years after his death.

Book I

2. Yu Tzu said, "It is rare for a man whose character is such that he is good as a son and obedient as a young man to have the inclination to transgress against his superiors; it is unheard of for one who has no such inclination to be inclined to start a rebellion. The gentleman devotes his efforts to the roots, for once the roots are established, the Way will grow therefrom. Being good as a son and obedient as a young man is, perhaps, the root of a man's character.

12. Yu Tzu said, "Of the things brought about by the rites, harmony is the most valuable. Of the ways of the Former Kings, this is the most beautiful, and is followed alike in matters great and small, yet this will not always work: to aim always at harmony without regulating it by the rites simply because one knows only about harmony will not, in fact, work."

Book II

3. The Master said, "Guide them by edicts, keep them in line with punishments, and the common people will stay out of trouble but will have no sense of shame. Guide them by virtue, keep them in line with the rites, and they will, besides having a sense of shame, reform themselves."

5. Meng Yi Tzu Asked about being filial. The master answered, "Never fail to comply." Fan Ch'ih was driving. The master told him about the interview, saying, "Meng-sun asked me about being filial. I answered, 'Never fail to comply.'" Fan Ch'ih asked, "What does that mean?" The Master said, "When your parents are alive, comply with the rites in serving them; when they die, comply with the rites in burying them; comply with the rites in sacrificing to them."

6. Meng Wu Po asked about being filial. The Master said, "Give your father and mother no cause for anxiety other than illness."

7. Tzu-yu asked about being filial. The Master said, "Nowadays for a man to be filial means no more than that he is able to provide his parents with food. Even hounds and horses are, in some way, provided with food. If a man shows no reverence, where is the difference?"

19. Duke Ai asked, "What must I do before the common people will look up to me?" Confucius answered, "Raise the straight and set them over the crooked and

the common people will look up to you. Raise the crooked and set them over the straight and the common people will not look up to you.”

Book XII

1. Yen Yuan asked about benevolence. The Master said, “To return to the observance of the rites through overcoming the self constitutes benevolence. If for a single day a man could return to the observance of the rites through overcoming himself, then the whole Empire would consider benevolence to be his. However, the practice of benevolence depends on oneself alone, and not on others.” Yen Yuan said, “I should like you to list the items.” The Master said, “Do not look unless it is in accordance with the rites; do not listen unless it is in accordance with the rites; do not speak unless it is in accordance with the rites; do not move unless it is in accordance with the rites.” Yen Yuan said, “Though I am not quick, I shall direct my efforts towards what you have said.”

2. Chung-kung asked about benevolence. The Master said, “When abroad behave as though you were receiving an important guest. When employing the services of the common people behave as though you were officiating at an important sacrifice. Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire. In this way you will be free from ill will whether in a state or in a noble family.” Chung-kung said, “Though I am not quick, I shall direct my efforts toward what you have said.”

19. Chi K’ang Tzu asked Confucius about government, saying, “What would you think if, in order to move closer to those who possessed the Way, I were to kill those who do not follow the Way?” Confucius answered, “In administering your government, what need is there for you to kill? Just desire the good yourself and the common people will be good. The virtue of the gentleman is like the wind; the virtue of the small man is like grass. Let the wind blow over the grass and it is sure to bend.”

Book XIV

34. Someone said, “‘Repay an injury with a good turn.’ What do you think of this saying?” The Master said, “What, then, do you repay a good turn with? You repay an injury with straightness, but you repay a good turn with a good turn.”

Book XV

9. The Master said, “For gentlemen of purpose and men of benevolence while it is inconceivable that they should seek to stay alive at the expense of benevolence, it may happen that they have to accept death in order to have benevolence accomplished.”

24. Tzu-kung asked, “Is there a single word which can be a guide to conduct throughout one's life?” The Master said, “It is perhaps the word *shu*. Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire.”

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS OF BUDDHISM

Siddhartha Gautama (who lived in the 6th or 5th or 4th century BCE), also known as Gautama Buddha or simply the Buddha, was a spiritual teacher who first taught the Four Noble Truths. Initially they were passed down orally and were first written down only hundreds of years after the Buddha's death. One version is reproduced below. Also reproduced here is the Buddhist No-Soul Theory from the “Hinayana” Buddhist scriptures.

Synopsis of the Truth

Thus I have heard. Once when the Lord was staying at Benares in the Isipatana deer park, he addressed the almsmen as follows: It was here in this very deer park at Benares that the Truth-finder, *Arahat* all-enlightened, set a-rolling The Supreme Wheel of the Doctrine --which shall not be turned back from its onward course by recluse or *brahmin*, God or Mara or Brahma or by anyone in the universe--the announcement of the Four Noble Truths, the teaching, declaration, and establishment of those Four Truths, with their unfolding, exposition, and manifestation.

What are these four? – The announcement, teaching . . . and the manifestation of the Noble Truth of suffering – of the origin of suffering –of the cessation of suffering – of the path that leads to the cessation of suffering.

Follow, almsmen, Sariputta and Moggallana and be guided by them; they are wise helpers unto their fellows in the higher life. . . . Sariputta is able to announce, teach . . . and manifest the Four Noble Truth in all their details.

Having thus spoken, the Blessed One arose and went into his own cell.

The Lord had not been gone long when the reverent Sariputta preceded to the exposition of the Truth-finders Four Noble Truths, as follows:

What, reverend sirs, is the Noble Truth of suffering?—Birth is a suffering; decay is a suffering; death is a suffering; grief and lamentation, pain, misery and tribulation are sufferings; it is a suffering not to get what is desired;--in brief all the factors of the fivefold grip on existence are suffering.

Birth is, for living creatures of each several class, the being born or produced, the issue, the arising or re-arising, the appearance of the impressions, the growth of faculties.

Decay, for living creatures of each several class, is the decay and decaying, loss of teeth, gray hair, wrinkles, a dwindling term of life, sere [withered] faculties.

Death, for living creatures of each several class, is the passage and passing hence, the dissolution, disappearance, dying, death, decease, the dissolution of the impressions, the discarding of the dead body.

Grief is the grief, grieving, and grievousness, the inward grief and inward anguish of anyone who suffers under some misfortune or is in the grip of some type of suffering.

Lamentation is the lament and lamentation, the wailing and the lamenting of anyone who suffers under some misfortune or is in the grip of some type of suffering.

Pain is any bodily suffering or bodily evil, and suffering bred of bodily contact, any evil feeling.

Misery is mental suffering, any evil feeling of the mind.

Tribulation is the tribulation of heart and mind, the state to which tribulation brings them, in anyone who suffers under some misfortune or is in the grip of some type of suffering.

There remains not to get what is desired. In creatures subject to birth--or decay--or death--or grief and lamentation, pain, misery, and tribulation--the desire arises not to be subject thereto but to escape them. But escape is not to be won merely by desiring it; and failure to win it is another suffering.

What are in brief all the factors of the fivefold grip on existence which are sufferings? They are: the factors of form, feeling, perception, impressions, and consciousness.

The foregoing, sirs, constitutes the Noble Truth of suffering.

What now is the Noble Truth of the origin of suffering? It is any craving that makes for rebirth and is tied up with passion's delights and culls satisfaction now here now there--such as the craving for sensual pleasure, the craving for continuing existence, and the craving for annihilation.

Next, what is the Noble Truth of the cessation of suffering? It is the utter and passionless cessation of this same craving--the abandonment and rejection of craving, deliverance from craving, and aversion from craving.

Lastly, what is the Noble Truth of the Path that leads to the cessation of suffering? It is just the Noble Eightfold Path, consisting of right outlook, right resolves, right speech, right acts, right livelihood, right endeavor, right mindfulness, and right rapture of concentration.

Right outlook is to know suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path that leads to the cessation of suffering.

Right resolves are the resolve to renounce the world and to do no hurt or harm.

Right speech is to abstain from lies and slander, from reviling, and from tattle.

Right acts are to abstain from taking life, from stealing, and from lechery.

Right livelihood is that by which the disciple of the Noble one supports himself, to the exclusion of wrong modes of livelihood.

Right endeavor is when an almsmen brings his will to bear, puts forth endeavor and energy, struggles and strives with all his heart, to stop bad and wrong qualities which have not yet arisen from ever arising, to foster good qualities which have not yet arisen, and, finally, to establish, clarify, multiply, enlarge, develop, and perfect those good qualities which are there already.

Right mindfulness is when realizing what the body is--what feelings are--what the heart is--what the mental states are--an almsman dwells ardent, alert, and mindful, in freedom from the wants and discontents attendant on any of these things.

Right rapture of concentration is when, divested of lusts and divested of wrong dispositions, an almsman develops and dwells in the first ecstasy with all its zest and satisfaction, a state bereft of aloofness and not divorced from observation and reflection. By laying to rest observation and reflection, he develops and dwells in inward serenity, in the focusing of heart, in the zest and satisfaction of the second ecstasy, which is divorced from observation and reflection and is bereft of concentration--passing on to the third and fourth ecstasies.

This, sir, constitutes the Noble Truth of the Path that leads to the cessation of suffering.

The Theory of the No-Soul [or Self]

The body, monks, is soulless. If the body, monks, were the soul, this body would not be subject to sickness, and it would be possible in the case of the body to say, "Let my body be thus, let my body not be thus." Now, because the body is soulless, monks, therefore the body is subject to sickness, and it is not possible in the case of the body to say, "Let my body be thus, let my body not be thus."

Feeling is soulless . . . perception is soulless . . . the aggregates are soulless. . . .

Consciousness is soulless. For if consciousness were the soul, this consciousness would not be subject to sickness, and it would be possible in the case of consciousness to say, "Let my consciousness be thus, let my consciousness not be thus."

Now, because consciousness is soulless, therefore consciousness is subject to sickness, and it is not possible in the case of consciousness to say, "Let my consciousness be thus, let my consciousness not be thus."

What think you, monks, is the body permanent or impermanent?

Impermanent, Lord.

But is the impermanent painful or pleasant?

Painful, Lord.

But is it fitting to consider what is impermanent, painful, and subject to change as "This is mine, this am I, this is my soul"?

No indeed, Lord.

Therefore in truth , monks, whatever body, past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, low or eminent, near or far, is to be looked on by him who duly and rightly understands as "all this body is not mine, not this am I, not mine is the soul."

Thus perceiving, monks, the learned noble disciple feels *loathing* for the body, for feeling, for perception, for the aggregates, for consciousness. Feeling disgust he becomes free from passion, through freedom from passion he is emancipated, and in the emancipated one arises the knowledge of his emancipation. He understands that destroyed is rebirth, the religious life has been led, done is what was to be done, there is naught [for him] beyond this world.

NIETZSCHE CONTRA CHRISTIANITY

NIETZSCHE ON MORALITY AND HUMAN EXCELLENCE

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) was a German philosopher, culture critic, and Latin and Greek scholar. These selections are from *Beyond Good and*

Evil (1886, Zimmern translation, 1906) and *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887, Samuel translation).

From *Beyond Good and Evil*

Part Nine: What is Noble?

257. EVERY elevation of the type "man," has hitherto been the work of an aristocratic society and so it will always be--a society believing in a long scale of gradations of rank and differences of worth among human beings, and requiring slavery in some form or other. Without the PATHOS OF DISTANCE, such as grows out of the incarnated difference of classes, out of the constant out-looking and down-looking of the ruling caste on subordinates and instruments, and out of their equally constant practice of obeying and commanding, of keeping down and keeping at a distance--that other more mysterious pathos could never have arisen, the longing for an ever new widening of distance within the soul itself, the formation of ever higher, rarer, further, more extended, more comprehensive states, in short, just the elevation of the type "man," the continued "self-surmounting of man," to use a moral formula in a supermoral sense. To be sure, one must not resign oneself to any humanitarian illusions about the history of the origin of an aristocratic society (that is to say, of the preliminary condition for the elevation of the type "man"): the truth is hard. Let us acknowledge unprejudicedly how every higher civilization hitherto has ORIGINATED! Men with a still natural nature, barbarians in every terrible sense of the word, men of prey, still in possession of unbroken strength of will and desire for power, threw themselves upon weaker, more moral, more peaceful races (perhaps trading or cattle-rearing communities), or upon old mellow civilizations in which the final vital force was flickering out in brilliant fireworks of wit and depravity. At the commencement, the noble caste was always the barbarian caste: their superiority did not consist first of all in their physical, but in their psychical power--they were more COMPLETE men (which at every point also implies the same as "more complete beasts").

258. Corruption--as the indication that anarchy threatens to break out among the instincts, and that the foundation of the emotions, called "life," is convulsed--is something radically different according to the organization in which it manifests itself. When, for instance, an aristocracy like that of France at the beginning of the

Revolution, flung away its privileges with sublime disgust and sacrificed itself to an excess of its moral sentiments, it was corruption:--it was really only the closing act of the corruption which had existed for centuries, by virtue of which that aristocracy had abdicated step by step its lordly prerogatives and lowered itself to a FUNCTION of royalty (in the end even to its decoration and parade-dress). The essential thing, however, in a good and healthy aristocracy is that it should not regard itself as a function either of the kingship or the commonwealth, but as the SIGNIFICANCE and highest justification thereof--that it should therefore accept with a good conscience the sacrifice of a legion of individuals, who, FOR ITS SAKE, must be suppressed and reduced to imperfect men, to slaves and instruments. Its fundamental belief must be precisely that society is NOT allowed to exist for its own sake, but only as a foundation and scaffolding, by means of which a select class of beings may be able to elevate themselves to their higher duties, and in general to a higher EXISTENCE: like those sun-seeking climbing plants in Java--they are called Sipo Matador,--which encircle an oak so long and so often with their arms, until at last, high above it, but supported by it, they can unfold their tops in the open light, and exhibit their happiness.

259. To refrain mutually from injury, from violence, from exploitation, and put one's will on a par with that of others: this may result in a certain rough sense in good conduct among individuals when the necessary conditions are given (namely, the actual similarity of the individuals in amount of force and degree of worth, and their co-relation within one organization). As soon, however, as one wished to take this principle more generally, and if possible even as the FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF SOCIETY, it would immediately disclose what it really is--namely, a Will to the DENIAL of life, a principle of dissolution and decay. Here one must think profoundly to the very basis and resist all sentimental weakness: life itself is ESSENTIALLY appropriation, injury, conquest of the strange and weak, suppression, severity, obtrusion of peculiar forms, incorporation, and at the least, putting it mildest, exploitation;--but why should one for ever use precisely these words on which for ages a disparaging purpose has been stamped? Even the organization within which, as was previously supposed, the individuals treat each other as equal--it takes place in every healthy aristocracy--must itself, if it be a living and not a dying organization, do all that towards other bodies, which the individuals within it refrain from doing to each other it will have

to be the incarnated Will to Power, it will endeavor to grow, to gain ground, attract to itself and acquire ascendancy--not owing to any morality or immorality, but because it LIVES, and because life IS precisely Will to Power. On no point, however, is the ordinary consciousness of Europeans more unwilling to be corrected than on this matter, people now rave everywhere, even under the guise of science, about coming conditions of society in which "the exploiting character" is to be absent--that sounds to my ears as if they promised to invent a mode of life which should refrain from all organic functions. "Exploitation" does not belong to a depraved, or imperfect and primitive society it belongs to the nature of the living being as a primary organic function, it is a consequence of the intrinsic Will to Power, which is precisely the Will to Life--Granting that as a theory this is a novelty--as a reality it is the FUNDAMENTAL FACT of all history let us be so far honest towards ourselves!

260. In a tour through the many finer and coarser moralities which have hitherto prevailed or still prevail on the earth, I found certain traits recurring regularly together, and connected with one another, until finally two primary types revealed themselves to me, and a radical distinction was brought to light. There is MASTER-MORALITY and SLAVE-MORALITY,--I would at once add, however, that in all higher and mixed civilizations, there are also attempts at the reconciliation of the two moralities, but one finds still oftener the confusion and mutual misunderstanding of them, indeed sometimes their close juxtaposition--even in the same man, within one soul. The distinctions of moral values have either originated in a ruling caste, pleasantly conscious of being different from the ruled--or among the ruled class, the slaves and dependents of all sorts. In the first case, when it is the rulers who determine the conception "good," it is the exalted, proud disposition which is regarded as the distinguishing feature, and that which determines the order of rank. The noble type of man separates from himself the beings in whom the opposite of this exalted, proud disposition displays itself he despises them. Let it at once be noted that in this first kind of morality the antithesis "good" and "bad" means practically the same as "noble" and "despicable",--the antithesis "good" and "EVIL" is of a different origin. The cowardly, the timid, the insignificant, and those thinking merely of narrow utility are despised; moreover, also, the distrustful, with their constrained glances, the self-abasing, the dog-like kind of men who let themselves be abused, the

mendicant flatterers, and above all the liars:--it is a fundamental belief of all aristocrats that the common people are untruthful. "We truthful ones"--the nobility in ancient Greece called themselves. It is obvious that everywhere the designations of moral value were at first applied to MEN; and were only derivatively and at a later period applied to ACTIONS; it is a gross mistake, therefore, when historians of morals start with questions like, "Why have sympathetic actions been praised?" The noble type of man regards HIMSELF as a determiner of values; he does not require to be approved of; he passes the judgment: "What is injurious to me is injurious in itself;" he knows that it is he himself only who confers honor on things; he is a CREATOR OF VALUES. He honors whatever he recognizes in himself: such morality equals self-glorification. In the foreground there is the feeling of plenitude, of power, which seeks to overflow, the happiness of high tension, the consciousness of a wealth which would fain give and bestow:--the noble man also helps the unfortunate, but not--or scarcely--out of pity, but rather from an impulse generated by the super-abundance of power. The noble man honors in himself the powerful one, him also who has power over himself, who knows how to speak and how to keep silence, who takes pleasure in subjecting himself to severity and hardness, and has reverence for all that is severe and hard. "Wotan placed a hard heart in my breast," says an old Scandinavian Saga: it is thus rightly expressed from the soul of a proud Viking. Such a type of man is even proud of not being made for sympathy; the hero of the Saga therefore adds warningly: "He who has not a hard heart when young, will never have one." The noble and brave who think thus are the furthest removed from the morality which sees precisely in sympathy, or in acting for the good of others, or in DESINTERESSEMENT, the characteristic of the moral; faith in oneself, pride in oneself, a radical enmity and irony towards "selflessness," belong as definitely to noble morality, as do a careless scorn and precaution in presence of sympathy and the "warm heart."—It is the powerful who KNOW how to honour, it is their art, their domain for invention. The profound reverence for age and for tradition--all law rests on this double reverence,--the belief and prejudice in favor of ancestors and unfavorable to newcomers, is typical in the morality of the powerful; and if, reversely, men of "modern ideas" believe almost instinctively in "progress" and the "future," and are more and more lacking in respect for old age, the ignoble origin of these "ideas" has complacently betrayed itself thereby. A morality of the ruling class, however, is more especially foreign and irritating to

present-day taste in the sternness of its principle that one has duties only to one's equals; that one may act towards beings of a lower rank, towards all that is foreign, just as seems good to one, or "as the heart desires," and in any case "beyond good and evil": it is here that sympathy and similar sentiments can have a place. The ability and obligation to exercise prolonged gratitude and prolonged revenge--both only within the circle of equals,--artfulness in retaliation, RAFFINEMENT of the idea in friendship, a certain necessity to have enemies (as outlets for the emotions of envy, quarrelsomeness, arrogance--in fact, in order to be a good FRIEND): all these are typical characteristics of the noble morality, which, as has been pointed out, is not the morality of "modern ideas," and is therefore at present difficult to realize, and also to unearth and disclose.--It is otherwise with the second type of morality, SLAVE-MORALITY. Supposing that the abused, the oppressed, the suffering, the unemancipated, the weary, and those uncertain of themselves should moralize, what will be the common element in their moral estimates?

Probably a pessimistic suspicion with regard to the entire situation of man will find expression, perhaps a condemnation of man, together with his situation. The slave has an unfavorable eye for the virtues of the powerful; he has a skepticism and distrust, a REFINEMENT of distrust of everything "good" that is there honored--he would fain persuade himself that the very happiness there is not genuine. On the other hand, THOSE qualities which serve to alleviate the existence of sufferers are brought into prominence and flooded with light; it is here that sympathy, the kind, helping hand, the warm heart, patience, diligence, humility, and friendliness attain to honor; for here these are the most useful qualities, and almost the only means of supporting the burden of existence. Slave-morality is essentially the morality of utility.

Here is the seat of the origin of the famous antithesis "good" and "evil":--power and dangerousness are assumed to reside in the evil, a certain dreadfulness, subtlety, and strength, which do not admit of being despised. According to slave-morality, therefore, the "evil" man arouses fear; according to master-morality, it is precisely the "good" man who arouses fear and seeks to arouse it, while the bad man is regarded as the despicable being. The contrast attains its maximum when, in accordance with the logical consequences of slave-morality, a shade of depreciation--it may be slight and well-intentioned--at last attaches itself to the

"good" man of this morality; because, according to the servile mode of thought, the good man must in any case be the SAFE man: he is good-natured, easily deceived, perhaps a little stupid, *un bonhomme*. Everywhere that slave-morality gains the ascendancy, language shows a tendency to approximate the significations of the words "good" and "stupid."--A last fundamental difference: the desire for FREEDOM, the instinct for happiness and the refinements of the feeling of liberty belong as necessarily to slave-morals and morality, as artifice and enthusiasm in reverence and devotion are the regular symptoms of an aristocratic mode of thinking and estimating.--Hence we can understand without further detail why love AS A PASSION--it is our European specialty--must absolutely be of noble origin; as is well known, its invention is due to the Provençal poet-cavaliers, those brilliant, ingenious men of the "gai saber," to whom Europe owes so much, and almost owes itself.

From *On the Genealogy of Morals*

First Essay: "Good and Evil," "Good and Bad"

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 careful 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. 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 revengefulness. 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 occasion (*Beyond Good and Evil*, Aph. 195)—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. . . .

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 volte-face 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, 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" (compare δειλο, δειλαιοι, πονηρός, μοχθηρός]; the latter two names really denoting the vulgar man as labor-slave and beast of burden)—and how, conversely, "bad," "low," "unhappy" have never ceased to ring in the Greek ear with a tone in which "unhappy" is the predominant note: this is a heritage of the old noble aristocratic morality, which remains true to itself even in contempt (let philologists remember the sense in which οἰζυρός, ἄνολβος, τλήμων, δυστυχεῖν, ξυμφορά used to be employed). 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 (that is the etymology of εὖ πράττειν)—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 (γενναῖος, "noble-born," emphasizes the nuance "sincere," and perhaps also "naïf"), the resentful man, on the other hand, is neither sincere nor naïf, nor honest and candid with himself. His soul *squints*; his mind 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 fulfils 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 superfluity of molding plastic force, that heals completely and produces forgetfulness: a good example of this in the modern world is Mirabeau, 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, but who is distorted by the venomous eye of resentfulness, into a new color, a new signification, a new appearance.

ST. PAUL ON THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Paul the Apostle (5-64 CE) (also known as Saul of Tarsus) founded several churches in the first century after the crucifixion of Jesus and his letters to some of the early Christian churches were eventually incorporated into the New Testament. The following passage is from Paul's letter to the Romans, New Jerusalem Bible translation.

ROMANS 12

I urge you, then, brothers, remembering the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, dedicated and acceptable to God; that is the kind of worship for you, as sensible people. Do not model your behavior on the contemporary world, but let the renewing of your minds transform you, so that you may discern for yourselves what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and mature. And through the grace that I have been given, I say this to every one of you: never

pride yourself on being better than you really are, but think of yourself dispassionately, recognizing that God has given to each one his measure of faith. Just as each of us has various parts in one body, and the parts do not all have the same function: in the same way, all of us though there are so many of us, make up one body in Christ, and as different parts we are all joined to one another. Then since the gifts that we have differ according to the grace that was given to each of us: if it is a gift of prophecy, we should prophesy as much as our faith tells us; if it is a gift of practical service, let us devote ourselves to serving; if it is teaching, to teaching; if it is encouraging, to encouraging. When you give, you should give generously from the heart; if you are put in charge, you must be conscientious; if you do works of mercy, let it be because you enjoy doing them. Let love be without any pretense. Avoid what is evil; stick to what is good. In brotherly love let your feelings of deep affection for one another come to expression and regard others as more important than yourself. In the service of the Lord, work not halfheartedly but with conscientiousness and an eager spirit. Be joyful in hope, persevere in hardship; keep praying regularly; share with any of God's holy people who are in need; look for opportunities to be hospitable. Bless your persecutors; never cursed them, bless them. Rejoice with others when they rejoice, and be sad with those in sorrow. Give the same consideration to all others alike. Pay no regard to social standing, but meet humble people on their own terms. *Do not congratulate yourself on your own wisdom.* Never pay back evil with evil, *but bear in mind the ideals that all regard with respect.* As much as possible, and to the utmost of your ability, be at peace with everyone. Never try to get revenge: leave that, my dear friends, to the Retribution. As scripture says: *Vengeance is mine--I will pay them back*, the Lord promises. And more: *If your enemy is hungry, give him something to eat; if thirsty, something to drink. By this you will be heaping red hot coals on his head.* Do not be mastered by evil, but master evil with good.

PRAYER OF ST. FRANCIS

Saint Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) was an Italian Catholic friar, deacon and preacher who founded several holy orders. Although the following prayer is commonly attributed to him, scholars doubt that he composed it, partly because 1912 is the year of its first known appearance.

Lord, make me a channel of thy peace--that where there is hatred, I may bring love--that where there is wrong, I may bring the spirit of forgiveness--that where there is discord, I may bring harmony--that where there is error, I may bring truth--

-that where there is doubt, I may bring faith--that where there is despair, I may bring hope--that where there are shadows, I may bring light--that where there is sadness, I may bring joy. Lord, grant that I may seek rather to comfort than to be comforted--to understand, than to be understood--to love, than to be loved. For it is by self-forgetting that one finds. It is by forgiving that one is forgiven. It is by dying that one awakens to Eternal Life. Amen.