

# VIRTUE ETHICS

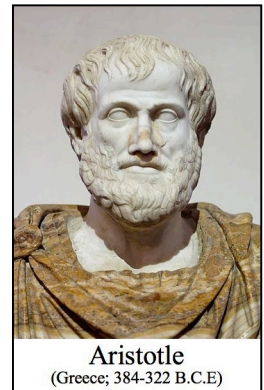
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“BY NATURE, ALL HUMAN BEINGS DESIRE TO KNOW.”

— Aristotle (384-322 BCE), *Metaphysics*

## [45] ARISTOTLE’S VIRTUES

At the age of seventeen, Aristotle (384-322 BCE) traveled from northern Greece to Athens where he hoped to study at Plato’s famous Academy. He must have liked what he found, since he stayed for nineteen years, eventually becoming one of the teachers. He left the Academy and Athens when Plato died in 347, but returned in 335 to open his own school at the Lyceum (a gymnasium and garden located near the temple of Apollo Lyceus). Aristotle is reported to have written dialogues after the manner of Plato, as well as the extensive lecture notes that he used in the classroom, and ancient readers of his dialogues claim that he was an exceptionally gifted writer. Unfortunately none of these dialogues survived many centuries past his death, and all that we have had available of Aristotle’s writings (at least for the last two thousand years or so) are his lecture notes. Some of these notes are highly polished, while others are rough and rather schematic, and much of their ordering was introduced later by ancient editors. But regardless of their literary merit, their philosophical and scientific importance is unsurpassed, and has affected the nature and growth of the western intellectual world in untold ways. Aristotle was a great scholar, scientist, and teacher, a giant of the past whose thoughts still move as a living force among us.



Two separate sets of his lecture notes on ethics have survived — the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Eudemian Ethics*. The former is the more developed and important of the two; it has been widely read throughout the centuries, and is still a common text in undergraduate curricula around the world. Like so much of what Aristotle wrote, it is the first systematic discussion of ethics in recorded history. Much of interest is discussed in the ten books comprising the *Nicomachean Ethics*: the good, virtue and vice, justice, friendship, weakness of the will, pleasure and happiness. Perhaps it is because human nature has changed so little in the last twenty-five centuries that Aristotle’s observations in moral psychology still sound wholly familiar. In the following, I will outline a few themes from Books I and II of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

## ETHICS AS THE SCIENCE OF HUMAN FLOURISHING

Science, according to Aristotle, is a systematic body of true beliefs, and all knowledge, in order to be knowledge, must be part of some science or other. To know something (for example, that water freezes at 0° Celsius) is not merely to entertain a true belief, but also to know *why* it is true; only then does one have *episteme* (the Greek word typically translated as “knowledge” but more accurately as “scientific knowledge”).

Aristotle viewed all of human knowledge as divided into three kinds of science: theoretical, practical, and productive. The productive sciences are those concerned with making something (such as the science of making pots, or of farming, or of writing poetry). The practical sciences concern how we are to behave among ourselves (two prominent examples here are political science and ethics). The theoretical sciences are concerned neither with production, nor with human action, but rather with *truth*, and Aristotle believed that the vast majority of science was theoretical, which he further divided into three parts: mathematics, natural science, and theology. But we must leave these divisions and return to the science of ethics.

Ethics is the systematic study of how humans ought to behave. The standard meaning of the Greek word *ethika*, as found in the title of Aristotle's work, is "matters to do with character" — and we find in reading the *Ethics* that much of it is indeed devoted to character and the ways in which a character might be virtuous or vicious.

*Arete* and *eudaimonia* are two other Greek words whose translation merits some discussion. *Arete* is typically translated as "virtue," but it is often better translated as "excellence." For instance, one can speak meaningfully of a knife having *arete*, but a "virtuous knife" sounds distinctly odd in English; what is meant here is that the knife is *excellent*, that it performs its function well. So when Aristotle speaks of human virtue, remember that he has human excellence in mind. Finally, *eudaimonia* is typically translated as happiness, but this translation can also be misleading since the English word 'happiness' is sometimes understood to refer to a mere state of mind — and *eudaimonia* is never merely that. A more accurate translation of *eudaimonia* would be "human flourishing." When Aristotle considers the meaning of happiness, he is really considering what it means to flourish, to be successful in one's life.

### PRECISION IN ETHICS

Insofar as humans should make themselves excellent and to flourish, ethics is the science of human flourishing. And what exactly should we expect from this science of human flourishing? Guidance, but not with mathematical precision. As Aristotle famously points out,

precision is not to be sought for alike in all discussions.... It is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits; it is equally foolish to accept probable reasoning from a mathematician and to demand from a rhetorician scientific proofs. [Bk. 1, ch. 3]

That we lack mathematical precision in ethics does not make it all a matter of opinion, without hopes of becoming a science (that is, a well-ordered body of knowledge). Consider the analogy of cabinet-making and framing a house. Expert cabinet-making might require keeping your measurements to the nearest  $1/32^{\text{nd}}$  of an inch, but expert framing does not demand such precision; the nearest  $1/4$  inch is all that is needed or desired. Being more precise will not result in a better house, and striving for such accuracy is not the mark of an expert craftsman, but rather of one who misunderstands his craft. Just as we can build a fine house without measuring each wall stud to the nearest  $1/32^{\text{nd}}$  of an inch, we can construct a perfectly useable science of morality, even though we lack the precision of a geometric proof.

### DIFFERENT WAYS OF DESIRING THE GOOD

Aristotle begins his discussion of ethics with the observation that "every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim" [Bk. I, ch. 1]. In other words, the good is what we desire, and what we desire is a wide variety of products and activities. Insofar as we desire them, they are good in some sense: If we desire them for their own sake, then they are **final goods**; if we desire them for the sake of obtaining something else, then they are **instrumental goods**.

What Aristotle calls the **highest good** is that which we desire for its own sake, and never for the sake of another. As it turns out, there is such a highest good, and we all agree that it is called *eudaimonia* (happiness, flourishing): "both the general run of men and people of superior refinement say that it is happiness, and identify living well and doing well with being happy" [Bk. I, ch. 4].

But what is happiness? Here we find great disagreement. Some say pleasure, others honor, and still others knowledge [ch. 5]. Determining the nature of happiness occupies a major portion of the *Ethics* — but then this topic is no small matter. Aristotle is asking here perhaps the most important question of our lives, a question with several forms but one subject: What is the successful human life? What is the good life? How ought I to live?

## HAPPINESS, FUNCTION, AND VIRTUE

The *final good* is chosen for its own sake and is self-sufficient (it doesn't need or desire anything else), and it turns out that *happiness* is both of these [ch. 7]; but what, exactly, is the *nature* of happiness? If we ask what it means for "a flute-player, a sculptor, or an artist" to flourish or be successful, we find that in answering this we must first answer what it is that flute-players, sculptors, and artists are supposed to do — that is, we must first know what their function is. For them to be successful, they need to be able to perform their function well. So, before we can determine what counts as our happiness or flourishing, we must first determine our function — and not the function of this man or that woman, but the function common to *all* humans.

The **function** (Greek: *ergon*) of a thing is whatever that thing alone can do, or that it can do best. The function of humans, therefore, will need to be an activity natural to humans that either isn't found in other kinds of beings at all or, if found, does not occur to the same degree as it does in humans.

Aristotle works through his standard list of functions for living things (what he calls "souls" in his treatise, *On the Soul*), namely, nutrition and growth, perception, and reason. It is with this last activity that Aristotle feels he has found something unique to human beings. "The function of man is an activity of soul which follows or implies a rational principle" [Bk. I, ch. 7]. What Aristotle seems to mean by this is that our function is to order our lives according to reason.

Having located the human function, Aristotle concludes that human happiness consists in performing this function *well*, that is, to do it in an excellent or virtuous manner. Thus, human good is "an activity of soul in accordance with virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete" [ch. 7]; and again, "happiness is an activity of soul in accordance with perfect virtue" [ch. 13].

## VIRTUE AND THE PARTS OF THE SOUL

Once Aristotle finds that virtue concerns the functioning of the soul, he turns to consider the soul's nature and finds that it has two parts or principles,

Virtue	Excellence in:	Acquired:	Aiming at:	Requiring:	Examples
Moral (character)	practical sphere	habit	intelligent conduct	<i>phronesis</i>	liberality, temperance
Intellectual	theoretical sphere	learning	discovering truth	experience and time	<i>sophia</i> , <i>phronesis</i>

one rational and the other irrational. The irrational part is itself divided in two: the *nutritive* part concerns the body's nutrition and growth, and the *appetitive* part concerns our desires. These two irrational parts differ also in that the appetitive part is susceptible to the influence of reason, "in so far as it listens to and obeys it" [ch. 13]. This suggests that reason plays two different roles in our lives, one practical and the other theoretical. *Practical reason* guides our appetites and emotions with correct principles of action, while *theoretical reason* works on its own, seeking truth.

Human virtue is to attain excellence in both the practical and the theoretical areas of reason's influence, and so we have two different sorts of virtue: **moral virtue** (or virtue of character), which concerns the influence of reason over the appetitive part of the soul, and **intellectual virtue**, which concerns the actions of the rational part of the soul insofar as it seeks truth. There are two intellectual virtues mentioned here — wisdom (*sophia*) and prudence (*phronesis*) — and several more moral virtues (liberality and temperance are two examples that he provides in chapter thirteen).

How do we acquire these virtues, once we decide this is the path of human flourishing? Aristotle turns to this question at the beginning of Book Two:

Intellectual virtue in the main owes both its birth and its growth to teaching (for which reason it requires experience and time), while moral virtue comes about as a result of habit, whence also its name (*ethike*) is one that is formed by a slight variation from the word *ethos* (habit). From this it is also plain that none of the moral virtues arises in us by nature; for nothing that exists by nature can form a habit contrary to its nature. For instance, the stone which by nature moves downwards cannot be habituated to move upwards, not even if one tries to train it by throwing it up ten thousand times; nor can fire be habituated to move downwards, nor can anything else that by nature behaves in one way be trained to behave in another. Neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature do the virtues arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit.

## MORAL VIRTUE: HABITUALLY NAVIGATING BETWEEN SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS

The woman or man of moral virtue becomes virtuous through practice, by acting virtuously. But performing these actions is not sufficient for being virtuous. Aristotle notes that a person of virtue must also **perform the action in the right way**: she must *know* that it is the virtuous thing to do (it can't be only coincidentally virtuous), she must choose the action for its own sake (and not as a means to some other end, such as glory, honor, pleasure, or wealth), and she must choose and act "from a firm and unchangeable character" (i.e., her virtuous actions must become habitual) [Bk. II, ch. 4]. Moral virtue, it turns out, is neither a passion nor a faculty, but rather a *state of character* (a disposition, the way that a person behaves habitually) [ch. 5]; in particular, moral virtue is that state of character which aims at the *intermediate* or *mean* between excess and deficiency [chs. 5-6].

One of the many trials of Odysseus during his return home from the Trojan War involved steering his ship between Scylla and Charybdis (traditionally understood as the Straits of Messina, between Sicily and the Italian peninsula). Scylla was a six-headed monster that ate sailors who ventured too close, while Charybdis was a huge mouth that gulped water, creating ship-devouring whirlpools. Steering a course between these two dangers was not easy, and Aristotle viewed the moral life as involving the same sort of challenge.

In nearly all that we do and in the way that we are, our actions and passions can suffer from either the **vice of deficiency** or the **vice of excess**. For instance, with respect to the passions of boldness and fear: if we follow boldness too much and fear too little, then we suffer the vice of being rash; if, on the other hand, we follow boldness too little and fear too much, we suffer the vice of being cowardly. The virtuous person aims for the intermediate between these two, which Aristotle calls *courage*. With respect to the desire to amuse others, *wittiness* is the virtue, while the vice of excess is buffoonery, and the vice of deficiency, boorishness. Aristotle offers a handful of other examples in Books 3 and 4.

Aristotle also notes that some actions and passions have no mean or intermediate state, and so are always bad — for example, spite, envy, adultery, theft, or murder [ch. 6].

Finally, Aristotle points out that it is rarely easy to determine the proper mean, and thus to be good:

That moral virtue is a mean...has been sufficiently stated. Hence also it is no easy task to be good. For in everything it is no easy task to find the middle, e.g. to find the middle of a circle is not for every one but for him who knows; so, too, any one can get angry — that is easy — or give or spend money; but to do this to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way, that is not for every one, nor is it easy; wherefore goodness is both rare and laudable and noble. [Bk. II, ch. 9]

Ethics does not enjoy the same level of precision as does physics or mathematics (as noted above). Nor is the mean the same with every person or in every situation. One cannot know in advance what the proper action or response will be, and therefore it is impossible to write a rule book of moral behavior, that we need simply consult. Determining the mean is an art of judgment, and doing this well requires practice and experience — it requires the practical wisdom (*phronesis*) that only experience can confer.

To help us out, Aristotle offers **three rules of thumb** (Bk. II, ch. 9). First, avoid that extreme which is furthest from the mean (in other words, pursue the lesser of the two evils). Second, pay attention to that extreme to which you are most attracted, and drag yourself in the opposite direction. Finally, always be on your guard against the pleasurable. While there is certainly nothing wrong with pleasure, we typically fail to judge actions impartially when pleasure is at stake, because pleasure is something toward which we all are naturally inclined, and so the risk of error is always higher here.

## THE SUCCESSFUL LIFE

The successful life is the virtuous life, and the virtuous life is where we excel at being human, and what distinguishes us as human is the rational part of our souls. We have seen that this rational part of the soul — reason — is both practical and theoretical: *practical* insofar as it restrains our appetites and guides our conduct, and *theoretical* insofar as it participates in the theoretical sciences (seeking truth regardless of practical application). Because the

theoretical use of reason is the most pure use (since it is reason operating all alone, and not mixing with the appetites), the most flourishing life of all is one devoted to the intellectual virtues — a life, in other words, devoted to learning. This may not strike the average college student as a point of comfort — that what they are doing right now is the best that any human could ever hope for — but that's how Aristotle viewed the matter.

## READING

### *NICOMACHEAN ETHICS* (SELECTION)

Aristotle

*Aristotle (384-322 BCE) was born in Stagira in northern Greece (Macedon), the son of a physician. He traveled to Athens to study at Plato's Academy at the age of seventeen, and then stayed on to teach, remaining until Plato's death in 347.*

*Aristotle left Athens for a few years, and then around 343 began a three-year stint tutoring the thirteen-year-old son of King Phillip II of Macedon (this son would later be known as "Alexander the Great"). In 335, Aristotle returned to Athens and founded his own school, the Lyceum. By the end of his life, Aristotle had written a wide-ranging body of text that served as the intellectual foundation for much of the European tradition. He was an excellent scientist for his time — with a focus on biology — and a careful philosopher. His major ethical writing, the *Nicomachean Ethics* (named after his son Nicomachus), remains as one of the most influential texts on moral theory in the western world. As with all of his remaining writings, this text consists of lecture notes that Aristotle used while teaching in the Lyceum. What follows is an abridgment of the first two books of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (as translated from the Greek by W. D. Ross, with modifications).*

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#### BOOK I CHAPTER 1

EVERY art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim. But a certain difference is found among ends; some are activities, others are products apart from the activities that produce them. Where there are ends apart from the actions, it is the nature of the products to be better than the activities. Now, as there are many actions, arts, and sciences, their ends

also are many; the end of the medical art is health, that of shipbuilding a vessel, that of strategy victory, that of economics wealth. But where such arts fall under a single capacity — as bridle-making and the other arts concerned with the equipment of horses fall under the art of riding, and this and every military action under strategy, in the same way other arts fall under yet others — in all of these, the ends of the master arts are to be preferred to all the subordinate ends; for it is for the sake of the former that the latter are pursued. It makes no difference whether the activities themselves are the ends of the actions, or something else apart from the activities, as in the case of the sciences just mentioned.

#### CHAPTER 2

If, then, there is some end of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake (everything else being desired for the sake of this), and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (for at that rate the process would go on to infinity, so that our desire would be empty and vain), clearly this must be the good and the chief good. Will not the knowledge of it, then, have a great influence on life? Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what is right? If so, we must try, in outline at least, to determine what it is, and of which of the sciences or capacities it is the object. [...]

#### CHAPTER 3

Our discussion will be adequate if it has as much clearness as the subject-matter admits of, for precision is not to be sought for alike in all discussions, any more than in all the products of the crafts. Now fine and just

# UTILITARIAN ETHICS

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“ASK YOURSELF WHETHER YOU ARE HAPPY,  
AND YOU CEASE TO BE SO.”

– John Stuart Mill (1806-1873)

## [46] THE GREATEST HAPPINESS PRINCIPLE

Suppose you're visiting a friend at his cabin retreat up in the mountains. It's January, with lots of snow on the ground, and you have an hour to yourself while your friend buys supplies in town some twenty miles down the valley. The snow is blowing hard enough to keep you inside, and there's not much to do there – no TV, no internet, the hot tub's out of order, and all the books are written in either Greek or Sanskrit. But you do notice a couple of CD's lying by the CD player. You walk over to glance at the titles: one is a Barry Manilow album, the other is Shostakovich's 3rd Symphony. Barry Manilow is one of your favorite recording artists, while you despise Shostakovich as a noisy and disoriented Russian composer. You would rather poke out your eyes with a sharp stick than listen to an hour of Shostakovich. So: Which should you play?

Is there even a question to be asked here? Isn't it obvious that you ought to listen to Barry Manilow? That is what will give you the most pleasure, and so that's who you should play. And if in the end you decide to play the Shostakovich instead, it will be in pursuit of yet some other pleasure: Perhaps you are impressed that your friend – whose musical taste you deeply respect – has this particular CD; or you might want to be able to discuss the music with your friend when he returns; and so on. But in each of these cases, it is apparent that you will do whatever you think will maximize your happiness (at least in the short term, preferably in the long term).

Utilitarianism is no different from this kind of reasoning, except that it adds **impartiality**, claiming that my happiness is of no greater or lesser importance than the happiness of anyone else. So utilitarianism, we might say as a first approximation, is no different from simple prudential reasoning, altered by the impartiality principle.<sup>1</sup>

### Allocating Scarce Resources

A common example of utilitarianism in action is where some third party needs to allocate scarce resources among a group of individuals, none of whom have a special claim to that resource. How should it be divided? The rule nearly always followed is the utilitarian principle of maximizing the overall happiness. Take kidneys, for example. Most of us are born with two, but sometimes we need a replacement, and life on a hemodialysis machine lasts only so long. Since the first kidney transplant in 1954, over 100,000 have been performed, with a current success rate of 93 percent (in comparison, there have been about 6,000 liver transplants with a success rate of 75 percent, and 8,000 heart transplants with a success rate of 82 percent).

Kidneys for transplantation come either from the recently deceased or from living donors. You need only one kidney to lead a healthy life, and so people are allowed to give (and in some countries, to sell) one of their kidneys. Even still, there are not nearly enough kidneys to meet the demand. At any given time in the United States, 36,000

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<sup>1</sup> Impartiality comes in many varieties. I might adopt an attitude of impartiality towards myself and my best friend, or towards all of my friends (while privileging myself above them all), or towards myself and my family, or all my neighbors, and so on. Utilitarianism requires that this impartiality extend to all sentient creation.

people are in need of a kidney, with only 10,000 available.<sup>2</sup> Given the limited resources, how does the medical community (or we as the larger society) decide how to parcel out those kidneys? This allocation effectively decides who lives and who dies. Should they be distributed on a “first come, first serve” basis? (But what if the person at the top of the list is 95 years old with a failing heart and Alzheimer’s, and the person at the bottom of the list is an otherwise healthy five year old?) Does it matter if the recipient has to care for dependents at home? Does it matter if the recipient is popular or well liked in the community? Devising a good allocation scheme is far from easy, but one principle that nearly always finds its way into such a scheme is the utilitarian principle: Everything else being equal, allocate the kidneys in such a way as to maximize overall well-being. Put them where they will bring about the most good. This is a principle that makes good sense to many people.

### UTILITARIANISM AS EMPIRICAL

**Jeremy Bentham** viewed moral theory as an empirical project: simply look about you, and see what it is that human beings find good and bad. What you’ll discover, Bentham claims, is that humans desire pleasure and abhor pain. As he wrote in his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789):

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.

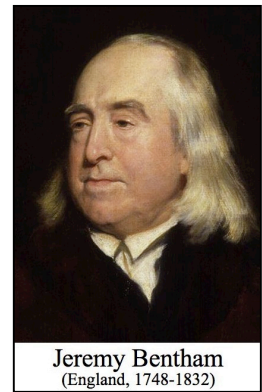
We evaluate actions in terms of the amount of pain or pleasure that they produce, and each pain and pleasure is evaluated in terms of the following criteria: “its intensity, its duration, its certainty or uncertainty, its propinquity or remoteness, its fecundity, its purity, and its extent — that is, the number of persons ... who are affected by it.” In more general terms, Bentham explained utilitarianism as follows:

By the Principle of Utility is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question; or what is the same thing in other words, to promote or to oppose that happiness.

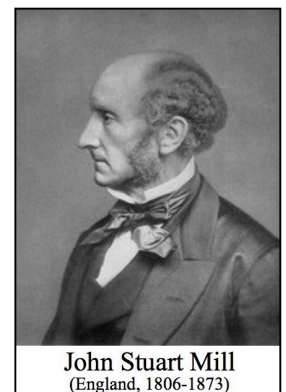
### THE RIGHT AND THE GOOD

Utilitarianism is a **consequentialist** moral theory in that it decides the moral worth of an action solely on the basis of its consequences. Motives, intentions, the character of the agent — none of this ultimately matters in morally evaluating an action. A world filled with virtuous people acting always with good intentions will likely be a better world (insofar as it contains more of what is good); but such virtue and such intentions are worthy or desirable only so far as they increase this good — according to utilitarianism.

The general goal of consequentialist theories is to maximize the good; but what is this good that we are to maximize? Bentham believed that the good was pleasure, and in this regard he was closely followed by **John Stuart Mill** (1806-1873), whose father was a good friend of Bentham’s, and who became the leading advocate of utilitarianism in the generation following Bentham. In Mill’s short work entitled *Utilitarianism* (1861) we find one of the clearest and ablest discussions of utilitarianism, and it is this text that we will be considering in what follows.



Jeremy Bentham  
(England, 1748-1832)



John Stuart Mill  
(England, 1806-1873)

<sup>2</sup> This is not for lack of kidneys, but of willing donors. Less than one percent of those who die in the United States donate their organs. While many of these aren’t suitable organ donors, of the roughly 23,000 who die each year from brain death (and thus typically have healthy organs to donate), only 4,000 donate their organs.

Mill based utilitarianism on what he called the **greatest happiness principle (GHP)**: the right action among the alternatives open to us is the action that results in the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. This happiness was good in and of itself, something desired by all, and therefore our **final good**; every other good is only an **instrumental good**, as a means to happiness.

Both Mill and Bentham often write about maximizing happiness, but what they mean by happiness is always something very definite, namely, **pleasure and the absence of pain**. So utilitarianism is a form of **hedonism** (from the Greek word *hêdonê*, which means “pleasure”). The good is pleasure, which ultimately is just a certain kind of psychological state. Our actions will cause various people to experience pleasures and pains, and morally right actions are simply whichever will maximize pleasures and minimize pains, however that is managed.

Other utilitarians have wished to remain neutral as to what it is that humans actually want, and so they view the good simply as the satisfaction of one’s preferences: thus, an action is right insofar as it satisfies as many preferences as possible. These are the two most common conceptions of the good among utilitarians: pleasure and preference-satisfaction. In reading Mill, one can detect both of these understandings of the good. In particular, when Mill distinguishes between different kinds of pleasure, he seems to be basing his argument on the satisfaction of different preferences (see below).

### MAXIMIZING THE NET GOOD, OVER THE LONG HAUL, FOR EVERYONE

A few possible ambiguities surrounding utilitarianism should be addressed immediately. One concerns “maximizing the good.” Presumably we want to maximize not the *total* good, but rather the balance of good over bad, or the *net* good. For instance, in running a business, the goal is not to maximize the total income but rather to maximize the profit (the net income). It’s obviously better to have \$500,000 in income and \$100,000 in expenses (for a net profit of \$400,000) than to have \$1 million in income and \$1 million in expenses (with no net profit).

This sort of consequentialism is intuitively plausible as a moral foundation. Consider Leibniz’s God creating the best of all possible worlds: presumably such a world will have the greatest balance of good over evil, since God is the source of the good, and would not allow more evil than necessary. Insofar as we want to do the right thing, it seems that we would want to emulate such God-like behavior and strive to increase the good and lessen the evil in the world.

Utilitarians also have the long view in mind when they speak of maximizing the net good. Actions that bring about a great deal of pleasure in the short run but which lead to considerable misery in the long run (say, addicting yourself to heroin) are not endorsed by utilitarians. Just how long a view the utilitarian should take, of course, is a question needing discussion (we will come back to this when we consider the problem of calculating the likely consequences of our actions).

Finally, utilitarianism does not place any special weight on the pleasures and pains of the agent. The greatest happiness principle refers not to the happiness of any one individual, but rather to the happiness of all humans — and, where possible, “to the whole sentient creation” (that is, to all creatures with the ability to experience pleasure and pain). This incorporates the “impartiality” criterion that is central to most ethical systems. Here, what we treat impartially are the pleasures and pains of each individual. Because Mill’s utilitarianism views the good as pleasure, we classify it as a kind of **hedonism**. But there are two broad kinds of hedonism: *private (egoistic)* and *social*. The first merely enjoins us to maximize our own pleasure while the second enjoins us to maximize the sum-total of everyone’s pleasure. The impartiality of Mill’s hedonism marks it as social.

### ACT VS RULE UTILITARIANISM

More recent moral theorists have distinguished between two different kinds of utilitarianism: act utilitarianism and rule utilitarianism. Mill does not distinguish between these two forms in his writing, and different passages suggest different interpretations (the difference probably wasn’t clear in his own mind).

*Act utilitarianism* is thought to be the “pure” utilitarian position, where each act is considered on its own merits. For any particular act, if performing it will maximize the good, then it should be performed; otherwise not. Act



utilitarianism may lead to certain theoretical problems (such as urging us not to keep private promises), for which reason some ethicists have promoted a modified version of utilitarianism called “rule utilitarianism.”

With *rule utilitarianism*, the item of moral evaluation isn't the individual act, but rather the rule it follows: if following a certain rule (instead of some other rule) maximizes the good, then that rule should be followed, even if it would turn out, with some instances, that happiness could be maximized by breaking the rule. This means, for instance, that certain applications of the rule might fail to maximize the good, but because that *kind* of act normally does maximize the good, then it is always right to so act. This form of utilitarianism has the advantage of being easier for human beings to follow: we have to evaluate only rules, rather than individual acts. It also has the advantage of avoiding certain problems of act utilitarianism, such as committing unjust (yet happiness-maximizing) acts. It has the intuitive disadvantage, however, of occasionally requiring us to perform acts even when doing so will fail to maximize the good.

## SOME MISUNDERSTANDINGS THAT MILL ADDRESSES

### Utilitarianism is a Swine's Morality

Critics of utilitarianism have claimed that it is simply a kind of hedonism, equating what is morally good with the sensation of pleasure — and that this is no better than what swine pursue, lying about in the mud and swilling at the trough. The gist of this criticism is that Mill has misunderstood human nature: he believes that we desire only to “eat, drink, fornicate, and snore” (to quote one critic), when in fact we desire far more.

In responding to this criticism, Mill agrees that we desire far more than bodily pleasures, but chides the critics for assuming that this is the *only* kind of pleasure. Mill notes that there are *intellectual* as well as bodily pleasures, and that the former are even more desirable than the latter. What Mill seems to be claiming here is not that these are distinct *feelings*, but rather that we have *intellectual faculties* that want to be gratified and which then result in a “higher” kind of pleasure.

Mill gives us two arguments for the preferability of these higher pleasures. First, intellectual pleasures afford greater “permanency, safety, uncostliness.” Second, some kinds of pleasure are simply more desirable and more valuable than others, and these pleasures can be so ranked. How do we know this? We appeal to the “*Millian judge*,” someone who has known both kinds of pleasure: the objective means for ranking these pleasures according to their desirability is to ask such a judge which is preferable. And the answer, from those who have known both bodily and intellectual pleasures, is that the latter is far more desirable.

### Utilitarianism is “Too Low a Calling” for Humans

Here the complaint is that utilitarianism doesn't ask enough of us. All it asks is that we do what makes us happy — but it seems as though we will do that anyway. Morality ought to be more challenging, it ought to encourage us to lead “better” lives, and utilitarianism does not seem to do this.

Mill replies that “in the golden rule of Jesus of Nazareth, we read the complete spirit of the ethics of utility.” What he apparently means by this is that the **impartiality** built into the Golden Rule (namely, that we should treat others as we would want them to treat us) is also included in the Greatest Happiness Principle. And indeed it is. The GHP does not instruct me to maximize my own happiness, but rather to maximize the overall happiness of all “sentient creation” (that is, all beings capable of feeling pleasure or pain). That means that I might often be required to sacrifice my own happiness (perhaps even my own life) so as to maximize the total happiness. What is more, utilitarianism offers suggestions for promoting *compliance* with this impartiality requirement (in the sanctions mentioned above).

# DEONTOLOGICAL ETHICS

**“FROM THE CROOKED TIMBER OF HUMANITY,  
NOTHING WHOLLY STRAIGHT CAN BE MADE.”**

– Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

## [47] DUTY AND THE GOOD WILL

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) wrote prolifically on a wide range of subjects, most famously on epistemology and the limits of human reason in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). But he is also well known for his moral philosophy, and here he wants to explain the feeling that many of us have that certain actions are required or prohibited of us *absolutely*, unconditionally, without exception. For instance, many people feel that they are absolutely prohibited from torturing or killing innocent human beings *no matter what*, even if the whole world depended upon it.

Now, what could be the *source* of such an unyielding sense of obligation? It does not appear to be our desire for some consequence of our action or omission, for we find the action or omission to be right or wrong *in itself*, independent of the consequences. I simply see that it is wrong to take innocent life, and I avoid it not because I fear going to jail, nor because I fear public criticism, nor because I am merely disinclined to kill the innocent, but because it is morally wrong.

One might think this obligation is nothing more than a strong, emotion-laden inclination resulting from previous conditioning and perhaps our biological nature. But Kant suggests it has instead to do with the nature of *reason* itself, that reason is the source of this obligation and feeling of duty.

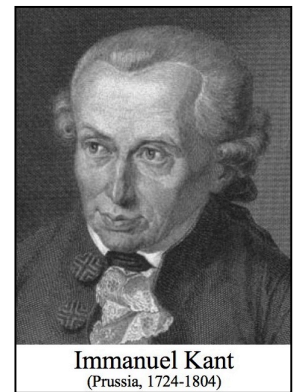
Kant discovers in our reason a moral principle called the Categorical Imperative, which he uses to discover more specific, lower-level moral laws or *duties* (also called “categorical imperatives” or “moral imperatives” or “imperatives of duty”), and it becomes our self-imposed duty to follow these moral laws. Kant also discovered a logical difference between two different kinds of duties — what he calls perfect and imperfect duties — and this difference is also of moral and social importance, for perfect duties appear to be the necessary conditions for human existence within any society, while imperfect duties are the necessary conditions for human existence within any society that is worth having (or “is desirable”).

### INTENTIONS, NOT CONSEQUENCES

Kant’s ethics emphasizes the motives and intentions of a person’s actions rather than the consequences, and the will that chooses to follow one motive rather than another. This will, for Kant, is the capacity found in human beings for acting from a principle. As Kant writes:

Everything in nature works according to law. Only a rational being has the capacity of acting according to the conception of laws, that is, according to principles. This capacity is will. [Ak. 4: 412]

Insofar as the human being guides her actions according to some maxim or principle, rather than according to some whim or inclination — in other words, when an action is motivated by some principle — then the human being is acting as a *person*, possessing dignity and worth that goes far beyond that of a mere biological creature. Only hu-



man beings are capable of moral good because only they have **reason** (the ability to conceive of alternative possibilities) and **freedom** (the ability to choose and act on these possibilities); but unless they use this reason and freedom, these human beings are not living up to their calling as persons, and are not much better off than cattle. Kant characterizes this point quite nicely in a passage from his *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797):

In the system of nature, a human being is a being of slight importance and shares with the rest of animals, as offspring of the earth, an ordinary value. Although a human being has, in his understanding, something more than they and can set himself ends, even this gives him only an *extrinsic* value for his usefulness; that is to say, it gives one man a higher value than another, that is, a *price* as of a commodity in exchange with these animals as things....

But a human being regarded as a *person*, that is, as the subject of a morally practical reason, is exalted above any price; for as a person he is not to be valued merely as a means to the ends of others or even to his own ends, but as an end in itself, that is, he possesses a dignity (an absolute inner worth) by which he exacts *respect* for himself from all other rational beings in the world. [Ak. 6: 434-5, Gregor translation (Latin phrases omitted)]

What confers worth upon us is the exercising of our wills, our acting according to some maxim or principle. This elevates us above the cattle that chew their cud as a matter of mere inclination. Furthermore, when our action is based on the *right* maxim or principle, then the will is *morally good*. To act from inclination, on the other hand, is not to act with one's will at all — here the will is simply idling. This concept of the will is central to Kant's theory.

### WHAT IS THE SOURCE OF VALUE?

As Aristotle noted over two thousand years ago in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, a *good* is anything that we value, and there are many goods and several ways that we value these goods. Some goods are valued only as a *means* to some other good: the former we call *instrumental goods*, the latter *final goods*. For instance, many view physical exercise as merely an instrumental good: something you do willingly, but only because it leads to physical health, which is a *final good* (something valued for its own sake). There are many final goods, such as health, honor, and education, but these we also value instrumentally, because they serve as a means to happiness, which appears to be the highest of our final goods, since it is something always desired for its own sake, and never for the sake of something else. Happiness is thus considered the ultimate reason for all human action — Aristotle, Kant, Mill, and pretty much everyone else all agree on this.

Final and instrumental value both concern the *way* that we value something. Having decided this, however, we might still ask about the *source* of the value. Whatever is the source of value we call *intrinsically* valuable, while everything else of value will be valuable only so far as it is related to the source of value in the right way (and so is valuable only *extrinsically*). For Kant, the good will is the source of value, and happiness has value only if it is associated with the good will. Similarly, anything that a good will desires will be thought to have value simply because the good will desires it.

Mill and other utilitarians view happiness as the source of value, as well as having final value. Kant realized that all human beings desire happiness, and that we desire it for itself; but Kant also believed that happiness, apart from a good will, was without moral value. If happiness were the source of value, then it wouldn't matter how we obtained it, but as the common saying goes, "the end does not justify the means," or at least not always, and some instances of happiness strike nearly everyone as not merely void of value, but positively bad. Imagine, for instance, some happy, wealthy fellow who amassed his fortunes by exploiting children in slavery-like conditions in his sweatshop. Kant claims that such happiness will always strike an impartial observer as being without value.

Kant begins section one of the *Foundations* with his memorable claim that "nothing in the world ... can possibly be conceived which could be called good without qualification except a good will." The good will has **intrinsic value** ("has absolute value," "is good in itself"), and all other value is derived from this source, and so is **extrinsic**. *Happiness* cannot have intrinsic value, for while we are all naturally inclined to seek happiness, Kant notes that we

do not consider as good those who enjoy happiness at the expense of others.<sup>3</sup> Kant's main concern is not with "what makes me happy" but rather with "what makes me worthy of happiness" — and having a good will seems necessary for a person to be considered worthy of happiness. For John Stuart Mill, *happiness* is the source of value, the end-in-itself. For Kant, *persons* are the source of value. A corollary of this: for Mill, we might sacrifice people so as to maximize happiness; for Kant, we would instead sacrifice happiness for the sake of persons.

### MOTIVATIONS FOR ACTING: INCLINATION AND DUTY

According to Kant, an action can be motivated in either of two ways: *inclination* (which includes our sensuous or animal desires) and *duty* (the voice of reason). An inclination can be either where we desire some *consequence* of the action (Kant calls these *non-immediate* inclinations), or where we desire the action itself (Kant calls these *immediate* inclinations). When an action is motivated by duty, however, the agent will perform the action even if the consequences are not desired and the action itself is repugnant. The "call of duty" is the feeling that you must act *not* because of some desired or feared consequence, nor because you want to so act, but because it is right and you must do it. Even if the world were to be destroyed tomorrow, you would feel obliged to honor this duty. The most compelling examples are of duties *not* to act in certain ways, such as the duty not to torture children — recall Alyosha Karamazov, who would not torture a child even if it were to bring about universal happiness for the rest of humanity.

This notion of duty is built into the word 'deontological', the stem of which comes from the Greek 'deon' [= that which is binding or needful] or 'dein' [= to bind]. Similarly, 'obligation' comes from the Latin 'ob' [= in the way of; towards or against] and 'ligare' [= to bind]. We speak of being "duty bound," for instance. Duty and obligation are closely related concepts, and are central in Kant's deontological ethics.

### THE GOOD WILL IS A WILL ACTING FROM DUTY

To have a good will means that one acts from duty. Reason, which is the same for everyone, determines those actions we have a duty to perform; if we then choose those actions because we see that they are our duty, then we are acting from a good will. Our will is considered good simply because of its motivations; the consequences of our actions are irrelevant to the will's value. To say that the good will has intrinsic value is to say that it is good in itself, independent of all else and any possible consequences its actions might have — its value does not depend on it being a means to another good, such as happiness. The utilitarian judges the rightness of actions solely on the basis of their consequences, and often the motive for acting will be a desire for those consequences. This is morally backwards, for Kant, who believes that the action will have moral value only if it was *motivated* by duty.

### ACTIONS IN CONFORMITY WITH DUTY AND ACTIONS MOTIVATED BY DUTY

Kant offers five illustrations of this three-fold distinction of motive (non-immediate inclination, immediate inclination, and duty): (1) the honest grocer, (2) preserving one's life, (3) helping others where one can, (4) assuring one's own happiness, (5) loving neighbors and enemies.

Let's consider the honest grocer example. Imagine a grocer who treats all of his customers fairly and does not take advantage of those he could, such as young children or the feeble-minded. Clearly such honesty is in *conformity* with the grocer's duty (we'll investigate *why* it is later). But the motivation behind such action might not be duty itself, but instead some inclination. Suppose the grocer's honesty is motivated by a desire for its good consequences (such as continued patronage of his store). To do something out of a desire for the consequences is to act from a non-immediate inclination. Here the grocer is being honest not because he sees that it is his duty, but because he desires the rewards of honesty (or fears the penalties of dishonesty).

<sup>3</sup> It is hard not to think here of that often-quoted passage from the Christian scriptures, I Corinthians 13, where the author writes: "If I have all the eloquence of men or of angels, but speak without love, I am simply a gong booming or a cymbal clashing... (etc)." Here love (Greek: *agape*) is seen in a way analogous to Kant's good will.

Other actions conform to duty, but are done from some “*immediate*” *inclination*, such as where the grocer has a natural affection for his customers. Suppose he has an agreeable nature that rejoices in helping others, and that cheating a customer would be the farthest thing from his mind. Here the honest behavior is itself desired. Whenever an action (or omission) is motivated by a desire or abhorrence of the action itself (as opposed to any consequences of the action), then the action is motivated by an “immediate inclination.”

Finally, some actions both conform to duty and are motivated by duty. If the grocer’s honesty is motivated by the realization that honest behavior is his duty, then his action *now* has moral value. The good will is the source of value, and it is defined as a will that acts from duty; so only such actions have any value.

## [48] DUTY AND IMPERATIVES

Kant defines a good will as one that is motivated by duty; but how do we decide what our duty is? Here Kant points us to those imperatives that bind us categorically or absolutely, and Kant argues that these imperatives bind us categorically because of their logical form and because we value humanity intrinsically (as potentially expressing a good will). So we will first consider what categorical imperatives are, and then examine their logical form (as displayed in the first formulation of the Categorical Imperative) and how they are related to humanity as the source of value (in the second formulation of the Categorical Imperative).

### HYPOTHETICAL AND CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVES

An imperative is simply a *command*, and Kant distinguishes between two general kinds: hypothetical (of which there are imperatives of skill and imperatives of prudence) and categorical. Only the latter are absolutely binding. Hypothetical imperatives all have the logical form: “If you want E, then do A!”, where E is some particular end or goal, and A is some action: with imperatives of skill, the thing wanted might be any goal at all, while an imperative of prudence always posits happiness as the goal – a goal apparently shared by all humans. Categorical imperatives, on the other hand, simply have the form: “Do A!”

Kant wants to explain and account for our “sense of duty,” which is similar to the voice of conscience commanding us to do (or *not* do) something. What is the nature of this command? Is it hypothetical? Seemingly not, since it binds us absolutely. Hypothetical imperatives bind us insofar as we desire the end of the action, while categorical imperatives bind us without regard to the consequences.

Most of the imperatives that we hear in life are hypothetical, although they are often uttered *as if* they were categorical (that is to say, their true logical form is hypothetical, although their surface or apparent form is categorical). For instance, a mother might command her child: “Eat your peas!” It looks as though the mother is issuing a categorical command, and yet no one would mistake this as a moral utterance; it would be a strange world in which children had a moral duty to eat their peas. Rather, the true form of her command is hypothetical, and she has simply left off the antecedent part: she’s really saying something like this: “If you want to have any dessert, then eat your peas!” or “If you want to leave the table, then eat your peas!” or “If you want to be healthy, then eat your peas!” and so on.

Hypothetical imperatives are not absolutely binding because they always assume some desired end, and so the command can be avoided simply by rejecting that end. The child can always reply to her mother: “I don’t need to eat those peas because I don’t care for any dessert” (or “... because I don’t care if you beat me” or “... because I don’t care about my physical health”). The example of the peas is an imperative of skill: these always refer to an end that you might *possibly* want, and thus are commanded to act in a way that will not foreclose your ability to obtain that end. But because the end is always contingent, the command is contingent as well.

Categorical imperatives are imperatives of morality and have the form: “Do A.” An action is required in and of itself, regardless of any possible ends. It is this species of command that Kant is trying to identify and explain with his moral theory.

### MORALITY AND RELIGION

Many people base – or at least believe that they base – their moral views upon their religious views. A typical notion is that we are to act morally because of what might happen after we die: if we act immorally (i.e., if we sin) then we will roast in hell eternally; if we act morally (i.e., do God’s bidding) we will gain entrance to heaven and its eternal rewards. But to base morality on religion like this is to make the commands of morality all *hypothetical*, having the general form: “If you want to get to heaven (or avoid hell), then do A!” This turns morality into little more than a kind of prudential reasoning, and because Kant believes that all true moral claims are categorical, he rejects this sort of religious foundation. Nor does his rejection seem entirely implausible. After all, how many of us refrain from murdering others, or torturing children, or littering, simply because we fear that not doing so might jeopardize our afterlife? Don’t we believe that it’s wrong to torture children *regardless of the consequences*?

### THE BASIS OF MORAL OBLIGATION

To what extent do these hypothetical and categorical imperatives *bind* us, that is, oblige us? Imperatives of skill have little binding power since we need merely say that we don’t desire the end. Imperatives of prudence would appear to be more binding, since everyone desires happiness; but the path to happiness may be different for people, and so the imperative may simply be wrong. Imperatives of morality, on the other hand, bind us completely – and this accords well with how we feel about duty.

Similarly, why hypothetical imperatives bind us is transparently clear: insofar as we desire the end, then we are bound to perform the necessary means. Thus imperatives of skill are tautologically true: you want whatever means are necessary to some desired end. Imperatives of prudence are also tautological, as long as you really know what means *are* necessary for happiness – but generally these are more like *counsels* than *commands*: “doing X will *tend* towards happiness.” Both of these imperatives are based on some *desire*: if you desire something, then you must do whatever is necessary to obtain it, and the obligatory force of the imperative depends on that action being a necessary means to the satisfaction of the desire.

Imperatives of morality are *not* based on the desire for some end, and the ultimate source of their hold upon us is that they arise from the reason within each one of us. Reason discovers moral laws within itself just as it discovers physical laws within the world, and so it is to these that we must now turn.

### RESPECT FOR THE LAW

To act from duty means to act out of respect for the moral law. Here the “moral law” is seen as analogous to a “physical law”: it is a rule of action that all humans are to follow. These rules are called categorical imperatives, or imperatives of morality or duty, and they are generated by what Kant calls *the* Categorical Imperative, which reads (in its first formulation):

***“Act only on that maxim that I can consistently will to become a universal law”***

This is a rule for telling us how to make rules of action (a rule for rule making). At its heart is the prohibition against making a moral exception of oneself (there is to be “no double-standard” – one for me and another for everyone else). To understand this criterion we need to understand its parts, namely, what maxims and universal laws are, and what is involved in “consistently willing” something.

A maxim is a subjective action-guide, a principle for guiding my actions in particular situations. For example:

“I shall treat other humans as mere means to my own happiness.”

“I shall lie whenever it is convenient to me.”

“I shall help others when I can without serious risk to myself.”

“I shall steal any library books that I really need.”

A universal law, on the other hand, is an *objective* action-guide, that is, a principle for guiding *everyone's* actions. For example:

“Everyone shall treat other humans as mere means to their own happiness.”

“Everyone shall lie whenever it is convenient to them.”

“Everyone shall help others if it involves no serious risk to themselves.”

“Everyone shall steal any library books that they really need.”

It turns out that there are two applicable senses of “willing consistently” that a maxim be made into a universal law, and these two senses distinguish what Kant calls perfect and imperfect duties. With perfect (or “strict”) duties, the opposite maxim is *logically impossible* (i.e., self-contradictory) when universalized (see the second example, below). With imperfect (or “meritorious”) duties, the opposite maxim *can* be universalized, but I cannot *want* to universalize it (see the fourth example, below). In other words, some maxims – when universalized – result in a law that becomes self-defeating (these are *logically* inconsistent, and the opposite maxim is for us a perfect duty). Other maxims *can* be universalized, but result in a situation that we do not really want (thus result in a contradiction in our will, showing that the opposite maxim is for us an imperfect duty).

If it was from duty that I did not steal the book, then what motivated my honesty in the matter was my recognition that the *maxim* governing such an action could not be consistently willed to be a *law* (a rule governing everyone's actions, including my own).

### KANT'S EXAMPLES OF PERFECT AND IMPERFECT DUTIES

Because there are duties to oneself as well as duties to others, and because there are perfect as well as imperfect duties, Kant offers us four sample duties: a perfect duty to the self, a perfect duty to others, an imperfect duty to the self, and an imperfect duty to others. There are, of course, many other duties that fall into these four categories.

#### (1) Perfect duty to self: “From self-love end your life if it minimizes pain”

Kant believes that I have a perfect duty not to commit suicide, because I cannot universalize the opposite maxim. This “law” of ending one's life out of self-love is inconsistent with itself; it cannot be universalized because the same principle of behavior (self-love) cannot, in a rational system, lead to diametrically opposed behaviors (viz., the furtherance of one's life and the destruction of one's life). This makes sense primarily when the moral world is considered as analogous with the physical world, where the same natural law cannot issue in opposite behaviors. Think of moral laws as natural human instincts: Here we have an instinct for survival (“self-love”), and it would be contradictory that this same instinct also desire its opposite. This does *not*, however, prohibit all suicide (such as killing oneself to help another: the morality of this would require further inquiry); it only prohibits suicide motivated by self-love.

#### (2) Perfect duty to others: “Make false promises when convenient”

I have a perfect duty not to make false promises, because I *cannot* universalize the opposite maxim. Universalization is not possible because it is logically inconsistent with the very institution of promise-making.

Kant is *not* saying here that I must not give false promises because *eventually* the institution of promise-keeping would be undermined, and that I do not want such an institution (this would result in a merely prudential, or hypothetical imperative). Rather, the universalization of the maxim results *immediately* in a logical contradiction.

#### (3) Imperfect duty to self: “Let your talents rust if you are content”

I have an imperfect duty to develop my talents, because I *cannot will* to universalize the opposite maxim. This law is inconsistent with my will. We can *universalize* this maxim (making idleness even an *instinct* in us), but we cannot *will* that it be so universalized, for our ends are often changing, and we always desire the means necessary to attain the end. In the future, my ends may be such that I will have required the cultivation of those very talents that I

am now neglecting. So there is a contradiction in my will: I will that I *do not* cultivate my talents and I will that I *do* cultivate my talents (in order to attain possible future ends).

**(4) Imperfect duty to others: “Let all people fend for themselves”**

I have an imperfect duty to help others in need, because I *cannot will* to universalize the opposite maxim. This cannot be universalized because no matter how well off I may be now, there is always the possibility that I will some day be in need of help. Because I will then desire the aid of others, I cannot *also* desire that no one ever give aid. This would involve a contradiction in my will.

**THREE FORMULATIONS – ONE IMPERATIVE**

This one Categorical Imperative is meant as a *principle* or *formula* from which is to be derived all the commands of morality (the laws that practical reason gives for guiding our actions). So it is really a second-order rule of action, from which we derive our first-order rules (e.g., of promise keeping, or of benevolence). Kant also gives us three separate formulations of this imperative – the Universal Law, the End-in-Itself, and the Autonomy formulations – noting that these are three ways of thinking about the same thing, and not different moral principles.

The Universal Law formulation (“Act only on that maxim which you can consistently will to be a universal law” [Ak. 4: 421]) was discussed above with Kant’s four examples and the discussion of perfect and imperfect duties.

The End-in-Itself formulation (“Act so as to treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always as an end, never merely as a means” [Ak. 4: 429]) focuses on the nature of human beings, insofar as they act according to maxims (“have wills”) and so are persons. According to this formulation, I am not to use another in any way with which the other cannot in principle agree, since doing so would be to use that person *merely* as a means, as a mere tool or instrument of my own plans and desires. This forbids the use of deception or coercion, since either of these involve the other person in a scheme of action to which they would not consent if they knew all the details (were not deceived) or if they were not forced. For instance, to make a lying promise to another so as to procure a loan is to use the person lied to as a mere means. One might as well hit him over the head and steal the money outright – the difference here between force and fraud is morally negligible.

Also, we act for various ends, most of which are relative, and so differ from person to person. But is there an end of absolute value? If so, it is an end common to *all* humans, and so can be the basis of a common principle of action. Well, one end we all share is happiness – even Kant believes this (since happiness is a final good). But happiness doesn’t exist in itself; it can occur only in humans, so we are to promote one another’s happiness, which is to promote one another’s ends, since having one’s ends promoted results in happiness. *Perfect duties* require that we not treat a person as a mere means. *Imperfect duties* require that we promote the interests of others (we view another as an end in itself, and therefore wish also to promote its interests).

The Autonomy formulation (“Act so that the will may regard itself as in its maxims laying down universal laws” [Ak. 4: 431]) instructs us to act as autonomous agents legislating for all agents in the kingdom of ends. Everyone is legislating for themselves, and at the same time for everyone else, in that we are all using the same basic formula for deciding which of our maxims are moral, and which not.