



Topic
Better Living

Subtopic
Personal
Development

Moral Decision Making: How to Approach Everyday Ethics

Course Guidebook

Professor Clancy Martin
University of Missouri–Kansas City



PUBLISHED BY:

THE GREAT COURSES
Corporate Headquarters
4840 Westfields Boulevard, Suite 500
Chantilly, Virginia 20151-2299
Phone: 1-800-832-2412
Fax: 703-378-3819
www.thegreatcourses.com

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A 2011–2012 Guggenheim Fellow, Professor Martin has authored, coauthored, and edited a variety of books in philosophy, including *Love, Lies, and Marriage*; *Honest Work: A Business Ethics Reader* (with Solomon and Joanne Ciulla); and *The Philosophy of Deception*. He has published dozens of articles, essays, and reviews on Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Romanticism, the virtue of truthfulness, and many other subjects and has translated Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and other texts from German and Danish. Before becoming a philosopher, he was a successful businessman and owned a chain of luxury jewelry stores, a wine bar, and a mergers and acquisitions company.

Professor Martin’s writing has appeared in *Harper’s Magazine* (where he is a contributing editor), *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, the *London Review of Books*, *GQ*, *Esquire*, *Ethics*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *VICE*, *The Australian Financial Review*, *Details*, *Men’s Journal*, *ELLE*, *The Harvard Advocate*, the *Columbia Journalism Review*, *Bookforum*, and many other publications. His work has been translated into more than 20 languages, including Portuguese, Korean, and Mandarin. In 2009, Kansas City’s *The Pitch* named him the Best Author of the Year.

A Pushcart Prize winner, Professor Martin's first novel, *How to Sell: A Novel*, was selected as a 2009 Book of the Year by *The Times Literary Supplement* and received recognition from *The Guardian*, *The Kansas City Star*, *Publishers Weekly*, and several other publications. It also was optioned by Sony for film. His second novel, *Travels in Central America*, was published in 2012. Two of his magazine stories are currently being developed for film. Professor Martin also has been a finalist for the National Magazine Award. His work in progress includes a book on the nature of the will, a novel, and several essays, both philosophical and popular. ■

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Moral Decision Making: How to Approach Everyday Ethics

Scope:

We are all constantly confronted with moral challenges. A friend asks if you like his new beard: Do you lie and say yes or tell him the truth and hurt his feelings? You discover that a friend is having an affair or “taking liberties” with office resources: What are you required to do, if anything? Morality forces its way into the most everyday decisions we make, such as recycling, whether or not to buy the “cage-free” eggs at the grocery store, and whether or not we should shop at only the local stores or find the best price. What about that promotion that means spending less time with your family? How much do you owe your aging parents or your adult children? We all have intuitions about how best to handle moral situations—and in our pluralistic society, many of us have differing moral intuitions—yet we rarely stop to ask ourselves why we believe what we do. Can we defend our moral intuitions with good reasons? Are our various moral commitments consistent with one another? Do we often simply avoid thinking about what is the right or the wrong thing to do and follow that old familiar guide, habit?

This course charts the terrain of the many great thinkers, in both the Western and Eastern traditions, who have wrestled with these and many other moral questions, difficulties and dilemmas. We will look as far back into our intellectual history as Homer and Confucius to understand how we have come to formulate the moral opinions we have, and we will examine what contemporary Nobel Prize–winning thinkers, such as Kenneth Arrow, have to say about moral debates that continue to puzzle us today. Much of our course will focus on what great philosophers and moral leaders have said—such thinkers as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, the Buddha, Abraham, Paul, Immanuel Kant, and John Stuart Mill. But we will also look at what contemporary neuroscience has to say about morality and especially how that applies to the ethics of everyday life. The course covers much of the history of the great theories of morality, but we always keep one eye focused on practice. All of the thinkers we discuss agree that theorizing about morality is useless

if it doesn't help us each, as individuals, to solve moral problems and think through genuine moral challenges.

By learning about the history and current state of intellectual theory in ethics, we will discover better techniques for recognizing moral problems when they present themselves, develop approaches for untangling the complicated knots morality can tie us in, and even arrive at concrete answers for many common moral dilemmas. Most importantly, we will learn how to ask ourselves tougher questions about what the good life is and what kind of ethical challenges it presents. We will broaden our worldview about value. And we will recognize that very often what we thought was ethically simple and straightforward is actually much more complex, morally speaking, than it first appears. We will become experts in ethics—and experts in confronting our own moral mistakes, prejudices, and hypocrisies. ■

Why Be Good?

Lecture 1

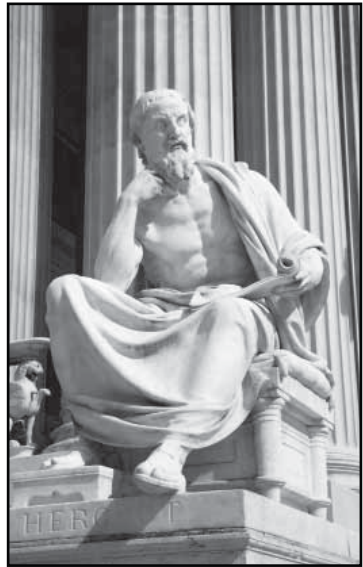
Why be moral rather than immoral? Are we good because we know other people are watching? Are we afraid of the consequences? Are we naturally inclined toward being good? Or is it—as Socrates thought—that we have thought the problem through and come to the realization that being good actually benefits both ourselves and the people around us? In this course, we will look at all these questions and find out how many of the wisest people in both the Western and the Eastern philosophical traditions have tried to answer them. We will also think through the ethical dilemmas and specific moral challenges that many of us face in our lives.

Herodotus and Moral Relativism

- In one of the great masterpieces of the Western philosophical tradition, *The Republic*, the ancient Greek philosopher Plato proposed a now-famous thought experiment. Suppose that you came into possession of a magical ring, called the Ring of Gyges, that made you invisible. Would you behave yourself, or would you engage in criminal and immoral behavior because you could get away with it? In this lecture, we will examine how various thinkers have replied to the questions posed by Plato in the Ring of Gyges thought experiment.
- The 5th-century-B.C. Greek philosopher and historian Herodotus famously wrote, “Circumstances rule men; men do not rule circumstances.” Herodotus started the long tradition of writing down historical accounts to produce factual narratives about the past. In doing so, he came to some conclusions about morality that prevail even today.
- Among the most influential of these conclusions was Herodotus’s argument—revolutionary in his own day—that all morality is relative. He pointed out that if you studied the history of virtually

any moral or immoral practice, you would soon find one or more civilizations that had either supported or discouraged that practice.

- Furthermore, Herodotus argued, we have no way of standing outside of history to say “this is right” or “that is wrong.” Because we ourselves are always fixed in a particular historical time and place, we inevitably believe that the moral code we endorse is the “right” or “true” one.
- Herodotus would have responded to the challenge of the Ring of Gyges by asserting that anyone who did not use the ring in immoral pursuits had been trained by his or her culture to behave in customary ways. Arguments about cultural relativity and moral relativity made by Herodotus are still powerful today.



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In Herodotus’s view, human beings act in accordance with the circumstances that the world and history has thrust upon them.

Humans: Creatures with a Conscience

- Many of us adopt our moral codes from our religious traditions—from the commandments of God. For these believers, the relativist is simply wrong. God trumps history every time. However, even if your moral code is strongly rooted in your religion, life still presents you with many moral confusions and challenges.
- Scientific research and evolutionary theory is increasingly showing that we may actually be naturally inclined toward a universal set of moral intuitions that we might collectively call the good. It turns out that the latest scientific research shows that we have a kind of

baseline sense for morality that transcends the relativity of cultural, social, or historical position.

- This line of thinking among scientists started with Charles Darwin, who claimed that it was precisely morality that distinguished humans from other animals. Darwin went on to ask the question: “Where does conscience come from?”
- According to Darwin, we have a conscience because of our social instincts, habits, and—most important for our discussion—a mind that is wired to make things work in a societal unit.

Oxytocin: The Conscience Hormone

- The contemporary evolutionary biologist and philosopher Patricia Churchland has asserted that acting cooperatively in a societal setting is actually part of the process of natural selection. She identified the mammalian hormone oxytocin as the primary seed of both human and animal morality. Oxytocin reduces defensiveness, fear, and stress. In mammals, oxytocin is released in a mother and her offspring when they are together; for this reason, when they are separated, they feel pain and anxiety.
- As an example, Churchland pointed out that prairie voles, after their first litter is born, mate for life. The montane vole, however, does not exhibit this behavior. The difference between the two is that the prairie vole has vast regions of oxytocin receptors in its brain; the montane does not.
- Churchland also noted that instincts of self-preservation and ability to prioritize lead a social animal to behave to preserve the social unit. In other words, the survival instinct may well lead social animals to behave morally—not to kill, not to lie. Thus, not only human beings but also nonhuman animals with social structures have a rudimentary inclination toward what we call goodness.

The Four Sprouts of Mencius

- Over thousands of years, many philosophers have argued that human beings are naturally good. The 4th-century-B.C. Chinese philosopher Mencius, for example, maintained that human beings are born with the moral instinct. In his opinion, human beings are a species of animal that works well in social structures that mutually support one another's efforts.
- In defense of his view that humans are naturally good, Mencius used an example of how people react if they see a child falling into a well. Anyone who sees the event, he says, will experience four reactions—reactions he called the four sprouts, because they are like the seedlings of goodness in us, which should be nurtured so that we can all develop into virtuous human beings.
- When we see the child fall into the well, we immediately feel alarm and distress—intrinsically, not just because we want to appear to feel that way. We also feel commiseration for the suffering of the child and for the suffering of the child's family. We feel shame that we were unable to help the child. We feel that the right action would have been to prevent the child from falling into the well, and the wrong circumstance was that such an accident was allowed to occur.
- Mencius argued that with the right kind of nurturing by society and with personal effort and the application of work and reason, we will naturally grow into people with humanity who act with propriety in a morally righteous way that displays wisdom. Conversely, in the wrong sort of society or no society at all, the four sprouts of goodness in human beings can be discouraged, stunted, twisted, or even destroyed.

Original Sin

- Many thinkers in both the Western and Eastern traditions believed that humankind was innately evil or that we are at best a mixture of good and evil. For example, the 3rd-century-B.C. Chinese philosopher Xunzi disagreed with Mencius, insisting that human beings were born with a nature that was morally confused. He

argued that we tended toward “waywardness,” and without strong moral guidance from our teachers and society, we would seek base and immediate pleasures, act violently, and be inclined toward jealousy and hatred.

- In the Western tradition, the Christian philosopher Augustine embraced the doctrine of original sin. There is something about humans that is fundamentally evil, Augustine said. Given that Augustine believed that we are made in the image of God, who is perfectly good, this fundamental evil that lurks in us was proof of the existence of original sin.

Humans Are Good; Society Is Evil

- “Man is born free, but he is everywhere in chains,” the French Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote. Like Mencius, Rousseau argued that humans are naturally inclined toward goodness. Unlike Mencius, however, Rousseau worried that when people formed societies, their competitive instincts, combined with the scarcity of natural resources, transformed us. For Rousseau, human beings were good, but society was evil. Once we enter into competition for resources—including such social resources as attention, esteem, and power—our good natures become warped.
- The dilemmas of everyday ethics emerged from the fact that we are in competition with one another. After all, even if we are naturally good, we will often be confused about the right thing to do, especially when circumstances or competition are encouraging us to do the wrong thing.
- In other words, no matter where we stand on the issue of whether humans are born good, the fact of the matter is that we live in a social context that persistently requires us to make moral decisions.

Thinking Through Ethical Dilemmas

- This series of lectures will help you approach the many difficulties of life and realize when you are doing the right thing for the right reasons. To make progress in solving ethical problems, an important

criterion is the ability to keep an open mind and to avoid assuming that you already know the right answer. Because most of us have many moral convictions, part of the enjoyment in these lectures will be to constantly challenge them.

- Socrates, who is generally thought of as the founder of moral philosophy in the Western tradition, was much better at asking questions than he was at answering them. He well understood that the first step along the road to doing the right thing is to ask ourselves tough questions about our own moral convictions. Do we really know the right thing to do, or are we just acting according to habit or social or cultural prejudice? Can we give good reasons for our moral choices? And how do we decide what the right thing to do is when both choices look good—or, more difficult, when both choices look evil?
- In this course, we'll get down to the hard work of solving all the world's moral problems. If not that, we'll at least make some progress on the fascinating, challenging task of thinking through some of the complex ethical dilemmas that most of us face in our ordinary, everyday lives.

Suggested Reading

Moore, *Principia Ethica*.

Plato (Grube and Reeve, trans.), *Plato: Republic*.

Wright, Ayer, and Williams, *Varieties of Goodness*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why might a ring of invisibility incline a person to do immoral things? Would a ring that made everything a person did visible to all make that same person more moral?
2. What is morality? Is it mere custom? Or is it more than that? Why or why not?

Is It Ever Permissible to Lie?

Lecture 2

We all tell lies and probably more often than we admit. What's more, we often lie for what we believe are good reasons. Just because many of us lie often, however, it does not follow that it is morally acceptable to lie. As a rule, other moral prohibitions, such as murder, are not so commonly and comfortably flouted as lying. In this lecture, we'll look at several philosophers in the Western tradition who have had something interesting and important to say about lying and deception.

Plato and the Noble Lie

- Plato was the first philosopher in the Western tradition to argue that sometimes we must tell lies and for good reasons. He argued in *The Republic* that the leader of an ideal society must tell a “noble lie” to the citizens so that they will be content with their own roles within the society.
- Plato's concept that sometimes the government must lie to the people for their own well-being has since become a relatively standard view in political theory, even in democracies where transparency and truthfulness in government are prized. The view is justified on the philosophical principle known as paternalism, from the Latin word *pater*, or “father.”
- The idea is that sometimes a government, ruler, or parent may know what is better for us than we know ourselves. Sometimes this means protecting us from the truth itself.

Mill and Soft Paternalism

- One of the most common and plausible justifications of a paternalist defense for lying comes from the lies we tell to children. Some of the lies we tell are relatively benign, such as the story of Santa Claus. But some lies carry a heavier moral weight. For example, if

a young child asks a penetrating question about a painful concept, such as death, most parents will not tell the unvarnished truth.

- The English philosopher John Stuart Mill argued that a lie is justified when the good consequences outweigh the bad consequences. This sounds reasonable enough, but one of the bad consequences of lying is that it tends to corrode our trust in both communication and each other.
- Mill appeals to what we now call soft paternalism—the notion that sometimes we need to tell lies for the good of others.



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Paternalism is often used to justify lying by the government, especially during times of national emergency.

Bonhoeffer and the Living Truth

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer also argued that it is sometimes permissible to lie. He defended a concept which he called the living truth. According to Bonhoeffer, we very often mean something quite different than the literal truth of what we say; what's more, we are often understood by others to mean something quite different than the literal truth. We have an obligation to think about how our words are understood by others.
- Bonhoeffer maintained that many of the stories we tell each other are not literally true. Nonetheless, they may communicate a living truth that could not be better communicated through the literal use of words.
- In the example of Santa Claus, explaining that giving to others is a virtuous and kind thing to do and that we should try to behave ourselves will make only so much headway with a small child. But

telling a story about a good-natured, jolly fellow who spends the whole year making toys for good children and ventures out one day a year to give those toys away free—that lie teaches a living truth about generosity and moral behavior that the child otherwise might not understand.

Kant: “Ought Implies Can”

- In strong contrast to Plato, Mill, and Bonhoeffer—who argued that it is sometimes permissible to lie in the service of a greater good or truth—was the 18th-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant. Kant maintained that it was always wrong to lie, under any circumstances. This was one of the most controversial, fascinating, and contested claims in the whole history of moral philosophy.
- Kant’s basic concept was that to act morally means to be free. He summarized this in one of the greatest slogans of moral philosophy: “Ought implies can.” In other words, if we say that a person ought to do something, then it must follow that the person is free either to do it or not do it.
- To be moral, we must be free. But to be free means to make choices. And for our choices to be free, they must be based on beliefs and reasons that we have willingly arrived at on our own. Kant’s argument was that when someone lies to you, he enslaves you.
- Kant argued that there is a second reason it is always wrong to lie—because to act morally means to act rationally. Reason inclines us toward the good. To be rational means to be consistent or logical.
- If it were acceptable to lie, then all confidence would be destroyed and we would be unable to communicate meaningfully with one another—which means it would be impossible to tell a lie in the first place. Lying is essentially irrational because it contradicts itself.

Rich: Lying Destroys Intimacy

- Another thinker who argued that it is almost always wrong to lie is the American poet Adrienne Rich. Rich reasoned that it is wrong

to lie—especially in contexts of trust—because we build our entire worldviews around the beliefs that we suppose are honestly reported to us by the people we love. To find out that we have been lied to by an intimate, Rich said, is to feel as if we have gone insane.

- She also went further by saying that lying is terrible for the liar because “the liar leads an existence of unutterable loneliness.” By hiding their true beliefs—their true minds—from the people around them, liars make it difficult (even impossible) to establish intimacy between themselves and others.

Machiavelli and Situational Ethics

- When we hear the name Niccolò Machiavelli, most of us think of the 15th-century Italian philosopher as one of the few figures in the history of Western thought who would certainly advocate lying. After all, the adjective *Machiavellian* is synonymous with deception and intrigue.
- In fact, however, Machiavelli believed that all modes of speech, and especially truth and deception, were entirely pragmatic. He advocated a kind of situational ethics, in which the decision of whether or not to lie did not rest on moral principles or justifiable intentions. Rather, lying was a morally relative issue, and only individual considerations could determine whether or not a lie was virtuous.
- In most cases, Machiavelli observed, the truth is the quickest and easiest way to deal with a problem. A lie, by contrast, usually requires some form of salesmanship. Machiavelli warned the leader that if he wanted to hear the truth—something he thought invaluable for a successful leader to hear—then he must make the people below him understand that they will not benefit from lying to him and neither will they suffer for being honest with him.
- Should circumstances require it, however, Machiavelli believed there was nothing morally blameworthy about telling a lie. It was a viable option so long as it was the most practical way to achieve one’s goals.

Nietzsche and the Blue-Eyed Lies

- As it has with Machiavelli, today's popular culture has given the 19th-century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche a somewhat dubious reputation. If God is dead (as Nietzsche wrote), then why worry about telling the truth? In fact, however, Nietzsche was a vigorous champion for the truth.
- Nietzsche argued that we all learn to lie by first lying to ourselves. What's more, he believed that we lie much more often to ourselves than to other people. What is surprising here is that contemporary scientific research on the subject confirms Nietzsche's observation.
- Nietzsche, like Socrates, was convinced that the most dangerous force in culture was our collective tendency to close our eyes to the truth. The most dangerous lies, Nietzsche suggested, were what he called blue-eyed lies: lies we tell ourselves before we tell them to other people. This self-delusional process essentially means that we want something to be true that we know is false.
- Like Machiavelli, however, Nietzsche did not believe that any statement had an inherent moral quality. Statements were as good or as bad as their circumstances and their outcomes made them. Also like Machiavelli, Nietzsche thought that many good things can be achieved only through deception (or self-deception).
- Although Nietzsche saw virtue in some types of lies, he feared the corrosive consequence of the kind of lies told by people who refuse to honestly seek and examine the truth before deciding whether or not a lie is appropriate. For this great champion of truth, these sorts of lies were both the most common and the most blameworthy.

The Truth Will Set You Free

- Conservative estimates show that most people lie at least once a day, while other studies have shown that some groups of people regularly lie as many as 40 times per day. To make things still more complicated, recent research by evolutionary biologists has shown that most of the time when we tell a lie, we do not even realize

we're doing so. This works to our evolutionary advantage because we can bluff and lie more convincingly when we do not know we are doing it. But even if lying is common and may confer all sorts of social, economic, and even evolutionary advantages, that does not make it morally desirable.

- George Orwell noted, “In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act.” Once we admit that lying is as common as it is—which also means facing the fact that we all lie more often than we would like to admit—then telling the truth seems more interesting than it did before. At the very least, there is a lot of power in telling the truth.
- We can learn much from the truth, especially what we may not want to know about ourselves. And in identifying what makes it difficult for us to be honest, we learn a lot about ourselves. Perhaps the truth really can set us free.

Suggested Reading

Bok, *Lying*.

Trivers, *The Folly of Fools*.

Questions to Consider

1. Is there something morally blameworthy about the lies we tell to children about Santa Claus? What would Kant say?
2. Telling the truth is often hard; telling a lie is often easy. Why is that the case?

Aren't Whistle-Blowers Being Disloyal?

Lecture 3

Many of us have encountered ethical conflicts or moral dilemmas in the workplace, when we realize that a friend and coworker or our company is doing something we know to be wrong. Obviously, there are adverse consequences that come with whistle-blowing. But if people do not speak out in the face of a moral wrong, they not only compromise themselves but also encourage and promote that immoral behavior. The philosopher Adam Smith worried that a marketplace without high moral standards would be governed by “force and fraud.” In this lecture, we will explore the three components of whistle-blowing that make it particularly difficult: dissent, loyalty, and accusation.

Dissent

- Dissent occurs when a person or group disagrees in a public way with the popular opinion or with the position maintained by authority. Whereas social or political dissent can take many forms—with the law or government policies or religious views—the whistle-blower has a more focused goal of calling attention to a specific abuse and pointing out the source of this abuse.
- Dissent means taking a risk. It is almost always easier to look the other way or to conform with the established practice. Blowing the whistle on some practice or person means bringing unwelcome attention on ourselves and others.
- Furthermore, whistle-blowers, like all dissenters, often stand alone against a powerful person or group that wants to maintain the existing power structure. This can take enormous moral courage. When Mahatma Gandhi was asked by a *New York Times* reporter whether a small minority could stand up to the might of the British Empire, he famously said, “Even if you are a minority of one, the truth is the truth.”

- Moreover, often the practices whistle-blowers expose are not amended. This is what philosopher Michael Davis calls the “first paradox of whistle-blowing,” or the “paradox of burden”—because such great harms are likely to fall upon a whistle-blower.
- Whistle-blowers who are willing to speak out in dissent should recognize that they cannot rely upon the good consequences of blowing the whistle to justify the action. It is only the certainty that the moral principle they are acting on is the right one that can reliably justify the decision to voice one’s dissent.



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Loyalty

- The greatest concern facing any whistle-blower is the question of loyalty. Loyalty, particularly between friends and family members, has long been considered one of the most important moral virtues. Loyalty and good faith were the two chief virtues prized by the ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius, because he saw that society could not continue to exist and thrive unless we esteemed these values highly.
- The American philosopher Josiah Royce developed the most complete account of loyalty in ethics. According to Royce, loyalty was “the willing and practical and thoroughgoing devotion of a person to a cause.” For Royce, in order for a person to be loyal to something, it must have what he called inherent or intrinsic value; that is, it is valuable not simply because it pleases us

Entire companies have been closed down and thousands of jobs lost as a result of whistle-blowers.

or is of use to us, but it has a goodness independent of our particular interests.

- Furthermore, to be loyal to something, generally speaking, is to be loyal to something greater than oneself. What Royce worried about—and this is why intrinsic value was so important to him—were the many cases where loyalty would mislead us into doing the wrong thing.

Truth: A Good in Itself

- Loyalty means that you are willing to put the interest of what you are loyal to ahead of your own particular interest. It means that the object of your loyalty can count on you or trust in you. A person counts on you or trusts in you, but so does a company, a group, or even a country.
- Now you can see where we run into problems. On the one hand, we have what philosophers call a *prima facie* duty not to betray someone's trust without good cause. The Latin phrase *prima facie* means that the truth of a thing is obvious—literally, “at first face.” It is self-evident, so long as other things are equal.
- Say, for example, that you witness a friend and coworker acting wrongly in the workplace. According to Josiah Royce, you have a loyalty to something greater than your friend and coworker: the business. The reason is that the business is bigger than the coworker or you—not just bigger in terms of size or number of people, but bigger in terms of what it represents. A good business is the engine of the well-being of our entire society. We cannot have a good country without good businesses.
- There is something else a whistle-blower is loyal to: the truth. If you tell the truth about your friend and coworker, you are expressing your commitment to the idea that the truth is a thing that is good in itself.
- Aristotle stated, “It is our sacred duty to honor truth more highly [than friends].” Like most ancient Greeks, Aristotle thought that

friendship was among the highest and most moral of goods that life has to offer. Nevertheless, he prized the truth higher still, because while friendship is something that takes place between two people, the truth is something greater than any number of people. The truth is something that everyone depends on and something that has a profound and unique intrinsic value to us.

- Suppose, however, that now it is not your friend and coworker but rather your company that is doing something wrong. Here again, Royce's account of loyalty comes to our aid, because what we recognize when our company has gone astray is that it no longer represents a good in itself; it is, in fact, doing evil.

Whistle-Blower Protections

- The 20th-century American philosopher Sissela Bok has pointed out that often whistle-blowers do not act out of entirely pure motives; they may also be angry at their companies, feel ignored, or are upset about missing a promotion. According to Bok, it is perfectly acceptable to do the right thing for the wrong reasons or for some of the wrong reasons. That does not change the fact that it is the right thing to do.
- The question of how much a person ought to be willing to suffer in pursuit of a moral principle is one that each person must determine. Martin Luther King, Jr., famously said that a life worth living must include a principle worth dying for. We can hope that, for most of us, if we truly believe that we had to expose a highly immoral practice, we would find the courage to do it.
- There are some protections for whistle-blowers. In 1989, the federal government passed a whistle-blower protection act to protect the jobs of any federal employees who reported agency misconduct. Many companies and corporations have followed suit, writing internal protections for whistle-blowers into their bylaws or codes of ethics.

- The Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act of 2010 created a rewards program for people who report to the SEC violations of security laws that lead to legal enforcement of SEC regulations. Under this act, whistle-blowers can receive as much as 30 percent of any monies that the SEC recovers from a rule-breaking company.
- Whistle-blower protection is actually an old tradition in America. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees our right to free speech, is a massive whistle-blower protection act. The First Amendment was originally designed to protect citizens when they wanted to blow the whistle on their own government. That was a right that was not guaranteed to British citizens at that time, and its absence was fresh in the minds of the Founding Fathers and the generations immediately following them.

Accusation

- The third difficulty encountered in whistle-blowing is that of accusation. It is difficult to accuse someone, especially a friend. It involves social confrontation, which few of us enjoy. It often provokes aggression, which most of us enjoy even less. It may mean having the tables turned on you; the accused person or company may feel that the best defense is a good offense, and the accuser suddenly finds himself the accused. (This is common in whistle-blowing cases.) Finally, most of us are uncomfortable in the position of the accuser.
- Our discomfort with the role of the accuser reminds us that there are cases when blowing the whistle is inappropriate. Most of feel there is a basic moral right to privacy. When we feel as if someone is going out of his way to try to find questionable behavior, it feels like a betrayal of that basic prima facie trust.
- Also, there are many behaviors that are so innocuous we think that blowing the whistle is inappropriate. In general, before we blow the whistle, we should use common sense to evaluate the seriousness of the moral infraction. We should also ask ourselves some tough

questions about our own behavior and motivations. We should ascertain whether we are living up to the same standards to which we are holding others. We should determine if there are minor infractions we are also committing—ones that we would not want to see exposed.

- In this examination of whistle-blowing, we have taken a look at the best ways to speak out about what is right and wrong and the difficulties of speaking out. In other words, we have explored how we talk in order to reinforce moral norms. In the next lecture, we will examine the moral norms that govern how and when we speak.

Suggested Reading

Royce, *The Philosophy of Loyalty*.

Swartz and Watkins, *Power Failure*.

Questions to Consider

1. How does loyalty relate to intrinsic value? Can we be loyal to things that have merely instrumental value? Why or why not?
2. What are five questions you might tell a whistle-blower to ask himself or herself before blowing the whistle?

What's Wrong with Gossip?

Lecture 4

Nearly every conversational act is also a moral act. The way we talk about and to other people can have tremendous moral force, not only in the development of our own characters but also in the way that we reinforce the ethical norms of society. Simply standing around and chatting with friends can turn out to be an important expression of the kind of person we are and the kind of person we would like to be—or rather not be. In this lecture, we look at several types of moral problems related to conversation: gossip, criticism, and flattery.

What Is Gossip?

- If we are talking to the mechanic about our car or speaking with a coworker about our vacation plans, we do not worry very much about what we ought or ought not to say. But when we are talking about each other, we often notice a twinge of conscience that is a telltale sign that we are engaged in an activity that is governed by moral rules.
- Think about the familiar saying “Sticks and stones can break my bones, but names can never hurt me.” The first part of that sentence is true, but the second part is not: Names certainly can and do hurt us, and there are laws in many societies governing the kinds of names we can use to describe other people.
- This lecture deals with a more subtle kind of talk—that which is potentially hurtful but not hateful: the phenomenon of gossip. A 2008 study published in *Scientific American* suggested that humans are hardwired to enjoy gossip; it is part of our biological makeup as social beings. When we are gossiping, however, we are talking about someone or some group of people who, if they were present to hear what we were saying, would not appreciate what we had to say.

In Defense of Gossip

- Before we discuss the moral dilemmas associated with gossip, let's take a quick look at the pleasures it provides us. First of all, as social beings, we naturally enjoy it; it would be classed by Epicurus as a natural—though not a necessary—pleasure. We could live our whole lives without gossiping and never suffer (unlike sleeping, eating, or exercising), but when we gossip, we add a little pleasure to our own lives.
- What's more, talking about other people is one way we have of establishing intimacy within a particular group. It is a means of making friends and establishing social circles. To be included, however, means that some people will be excluded. One of the oldest human pleasures is the feeling of “us and them,” and gossip is a way of establishing an “us.”
- Gossip is also often simply funny, entertaining, or diverting: Everybody loves a good story. Gossip is often about immoral or dubious acts—cheating on a partner, dressing inappropriately, being caught in a lie; thus, we not only feel justified in telling the story, but we also take pleasure in reinforcing our own moral code.
- Gossiping in order to feel morally superior leads to another natural—if not necessarily morally desirable—satisfaction of gossip: the feeling of superiority. As Nietzsche pointed out, the feeling of rank is one of the most basic human instincts, and to gossip about someone else is to feel that you rank higher than that person—even if, technically, that person ranks over you.



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The “Mean Girl” effect is the term used to describe the well-documented correlation between popularity and the ability to gossip.

- There is yet another pleasure in gossip, the enjoyment that was one of the keys to Greek tragedy: watching the proud and the mighty fall.

Eastern and Western Injunctions against Gossip

- One obvious commonsense argument against gossip is that it creates a groupthink that does not necessarily reflect the facts. And while it may be for entertainment, it also affects other people's reputations. Gossip brings out in us what Nietzsche called our herd mentality: our tendency to think, act, and speak differently when we are behaving as a crowd or a pack. The worst kinds of human behavior can result when we start letting herd mentality settle the question of what is true and false, what is right and wrong.
- Importantly, two ancient moral systems speak strongly against gossip: the Judeo-Christian and the Buddhist ethical traditions. In both the Old and New Testaments, there are prohibitions against gossip. The apostle Paul was especially concerned about the dangers of gossip because he saw how cliques could form within or between Christian communities.
 - These cliques could then use moral standards as weapons against minorities or persons who saw things a different way, and Paul specifically did not want morality to be used as a weapon against others.
 - Morality was supposed to bring people together and allow them to function as a group in a way that helped all of them, not in a way that caused harm to some of them or destroyed that moral community. The familiar Christian maxim "Love thy neighbor as thyself" is in part an injunction against gossip.
- In the ancient Buddhist tradition, there is a similar restriction on "idle speech." For the Buddhist, gossip is a particularly pernicious form of idle speech, because it harms others, excluding some people from a social group, hurting their feelings, spreading untruths about them, or interfering with their livelihoods. For the Buddhist, the simple principle "Avoid doing harm" means that one should never gossip.

- Buddhists also argue that any kind of idle speech—even just chattering away without saying anything negative—is morally undesirable. Such chatter distracts yourself and others from better uses of precious time, such as talking about things that might benefit you, studying, helping others, or meditating or praying.

The Happiness of the Group

- Like the apostle Paul, Buddhists were particularly concerned about the damage gossip could do to communities (what the Buddhists call *sangha*). In this way, both the Judeo-Christian and Buddhist traditions anticipated the work of the American psychologist and philosopher Carol Gilligan, who studied the differences between how girls and boys developed their moral codes in early childhood.
- Studying children as young as four and five years old, Gilligan discovered that boys tended to emphasize “rule following” and “reasons” in defining what was right and wrong. Girls, in contrast, tended to emphasize “the happiness of the group” and “feelings” in sorting out moral dilemmas.
- The girls’ way of thinking about gossip provides us with a guide. Gossip about yourself is acceptable, and gossip about other people is acceptable as long as they are clearly “in on the gossip.”

Criticism

- Although there are clearly times when we need to criticize the behavior of others, criticizing someone else simply for the pleasure of feeling superior is not morally justified. Both the Scottish philosopher David Hume and one of his fans, Friedrich Nietzsche, agreed that we should take pride in our accomplishments; they both argued against false humility. But that does not extend to criticizing someone else simply because you take pleasure in doing so; that is morally demeaning to the criticizer and is simply disguised cruelty.
- Consider the more common example of constructive criticism. Here, Gilligan can instruct us: Preserving feelings and relationships are useful moral guidelines rather than hard-and-fast rules about

how a person ought to speak or behave. Proper criticism requires what we call a “situational” and “particularist” ethic that recognizes that every person must be handled differently.

Praise and Flattery

- The converse of criticism is praise and flattery. Where praise becomes morally complicated is when it approaches flattery—that is, when the intent of the praise is to benefit the person doing the praising.
- Aristotle’s discussions of lying include the flatterer. Aristotle cautioned that we should be careful not to praise too much—or we will look obsequious. What Aristotle was concerned about was people who exaggerate the virtues of others or even tell others that they have virtues they do not possess.
- Here, both Aristotle and Machiavelli are in strict agreement: Flattery is morally wrong because people who believe flattery will expose themselves to risks and dangers that they otherwise would not. A leader who is flattered into thinking he or she is doing a great job when, in fact, that’s not the case will not be a leader for long.
- When is it acceptable to win friends and influence people by looking for the good in them and pointing it out to them? For Aristotle and Machiavelli, it is best to do so when you have no ulterior motive—when the person you are praising or complimenting is not in a position to directly benefit you.
- Honest praise of a friend or someone doing a job well is, in fact, a moral good. But praise of your superior, even when truthful, should be given with greater caution. You should make sure that you are not praising too much or too often—and that you are not using compliments as a form of currency.

Suggested Reading

Bok, *Secrets*.

Chapman, *The Five Keys to Mindful Communication*.

Questions to Consider

1. Is gossip morally blameworthy for the same reasons that lying is morally blameworthy? Why or why not?
2. What would be a few examples of morally justifiable gossip?

Do I Have an Obligation to Be Healthy?

Lecture 5

Legally speaking, we can eat, drink, and smoke tobacco as much as we please. Liberty is one of the most important moral values in Western society, and it is a key principle on which American society was founded. As a people, we do not appreciate others telling us what to do or how to live: We pride ourselves on our individualism. In this lecture, we will look at three philosophers who address questions of liberty and self-determination. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle and the 20th-century American philosopher John Rawls argued that a lifestyle of excess was morally blameworthy. Another 20th-century American philosopher, Robert Nozick, maintained that such a lifestyle has absolute moral legitimacy.

Eudaimonia

- A recent study of mandrills (a type of primate) revealed that when the animals were allowed to eat as much as they wanted, they died younger but showed every sign of being happy. By contrast, mandrills that were kept on a lean, controlled diet lived 15 percent longer but showed every measurable sign of being less happy.
- Like Socrates and Plato, Aristotle argued that happiness is the moral ideal of all human beings. The Greek word for happiness is *eudaimonia*, which literally means “good spirits” and is often translated as “flourishing.” Flourishing is an excellent way to think about this moral ideal, as opposed to happiness as a quiet state of bliss.
- In an argument usually called the function argument, Aristotle asked: What is the proper function of human beings? We want to know this, he maintained, because whenever we are trying to decide whether or not a thing is good, we look for the particular function of that thing and assess how adequately it fulfills that particular function.

- Aristotle asked: What is the function of a human being that will create and sustain *eudaimonia*? When he considered the life of the human being who simply lives to enjoy the senses, he dismissed it as a life “worthy only of beasts.” All animals sense, he pointed out, but there is something unique about the human species. According to Aristotle’s famous definition of human beings, we are the “animal that reasons.”

Aristotle and the Golden Mean

- Reason shows us that activity—the means by which we develop and maintain our lives—is best pursued with balance or in moderation. If we are moderate in all our activities, we will find that we achieve happiness, *eudaimonia*, and have the time and capacity to develop our minds and fully flourish. In all activities, Aristotle argued, there is both an excess and a deficiency, and between the two lies moderation, or the “golden mean.”
- Aristotle’s idea of rational moderation that seeks excellence—usually called virtue ethics—adapts to different situations and to different people in ways that many systems with rigid codes or principles do not. For Aristotle, flourishing included psychological virtues, such as courage and truthfulness, but also bodily virtues, such as exercise and health. To be a happy human being is to be a good human being: to live a long, full, and complete life.
- For Aristotle, as long as a person is knowingly undermining his own health, he is acting irrationally and, therefore, not flourishing. Moreover, if this person continues an unhealthy lifestyle, he will develop habits that even his reason will not be able to break. Aristotle called this phenomenon *akrasia*, or “weakness of will.”

John Rawls: Justice as Fairness

- Another, more commonly cited argument against a lifestyle of excessive eating, drinking, and smoking is that if this person continues, he will become sick and will place an unfair burden on society. According to this line of argument, the over-indulger

is acting in an unfair or unjust way, using an unequal share of society's limited resources.

- The 20th-century American philosopher John Rawls maintained that a just society required a just division of property. The way things are set up in our current system, he claimed, the rich tend to stay rich and the poor tend to stay poor. Whether you are born rich with lots of advantages or poor with lots of disadvantages—or somewhere in between—is, in our current system, merely a matter of luck.
- Leaving it all up to luck seemed deeply unfair to Rawls. A just society, the kind that we want in America and, indeed, generally believe that we have, should also be a fair society. Thus, the slogan attached to Rawls's name and the title of one of his most famous works was "Justice as Fairness."
- Rawls suggested the following thought experiment: Suppose that, before you were born, you had no idea who you were going to be, but you had to make a decision about how property would be divided. Rawls called this the original position—the hypothetical place we can imagine before property is divided. He said your decision about property division was made from behind a "veil of ignorance."
- Some of us would probably roll the dice and hope for the best, giving all the resources to only a few. Others might divide all the resources equally, but then those who had other advantages



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Rawls's view takes into account the fact that when one rich person has a heart attack, the cost of everyone's health insurance increases.

would soon have the upper hand. What the rational ones among us would do, Rawls argued, is arrive at a principle such that the most disadvantaged members of our society were given the maximum assistance in terms of resources.

- This argument—which justifies, of course, the redistribution of wealth and property, usually through a system of taxation—is often derided as creating a welfare state. But even if you disagree with the politics of the argument, you can see the appeal in terms of fairness and how, at the very least, it suggests that those who are born in a position of privilege have the obligation, at a bare minimum, not to place an undue strain on the society that has already provided them with a great deal.

Robert Nozick: Liberty Is Paramount

- In contrast, the philosopher Robert Nozick pointed out that what we are talking about is our own bodies and our own resources; why should we not be allowed to do with those as we please? While Rawls argued that “justice is fairness,” Nozick maintained that fairness depends on an even more fundamental principle: liberty. After all, our society is based on life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. “Fairness” may be attractive—and Nozick agrees with Rawls that fairness is a good moral ideal—but it is not anywhere on that list.
- How, then, do we resolve questions about the distribution of property and the basic principle of liberty?
 - In a particularly ingenious philosophical thought experiment, Nozick declared the following: Imagine any division of property you like. Then, further suppose we are allowed to exchange our property—that is, we are free with respect to our property. We have liberty to do with our property as we please.
 - Now, finally, imagine that Wilt Chamberlain has decided to play on selected nights of the week. On the nights Wilt is playing, he puts a box outside the stadium, and he stipulates that he will play only if everyone who is watching will put 25 cents in the

box. We all know what will happen. Pretty soon, Wilt has a great deal of money, and those of us who are basketball fans—whether we were advantaged or disadvantaged in the original property distribution—have less money than we used to have.

- Nozick’s point is elegant and simple: Given that we know that people themselves are unequal—with unequal talents, abilities, and motives—it is inevitable, given the freedom to distribute property, that over time, inequities in the distribution of property will occur. People are simply not equal, whatever fictional equality we might give them in the eyes of the law, and inevitably, property distributions will reflect that fact.

The Government Versus the Individual

- When we try to control people’s eating and drinking—whether by charging a higher tax on french fries or soda or imposing a much higher-than-proportionate rate for insurance—we are, in fact, doing something unjust because we are interfering with a person’s liberty. We are telling people how to distribute their own property, and coercing people with respect to their property is immoral in the same way as coercing them with threats or force.
- We have a name for coercively taking away someone’s property. It is called theft. Even if, like Robin Hood, we are stealing from the rich to give to the poor, it is certainly not fair or just, Nozick argued, and participating in such a system does not make for a moral society or a moral person.
- That said, Nozick noted that as individuals we should all consider the impact of our actions on the people around us. Nozick and Rawls agreed that a good society will only come from the collective effort of good people, all of whom have in mind both individual well-being and the well-being of the society around them. The difference between Rawls and Nozick on this point is not so much how a person ought to act as who ought to have the final say about how a person ought to act.

- Rawls believed that individuals should act according to a certain vision of a good society, and when they are not so acting, the society itself should have rules in place to reasonably govern that person's behavior. Rawls is comfortable with the idea that some of our behavior should be regulated by well-reasoned government policies. For Nozick, the behavior of the individual, at the end of the day, ought to be left to the individual, because the individual's liberty is the highest good protected by our society.

Suggested Reading

Aristotle (Ostwald, trans.), *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Epicurus (O'Connor, trans.), *The Essential Epicurus*.

Questions to Consider

1. Should we tax french fries to help pay for research on obesity and heart disease? Why or why not?
2. Suppose you have a friend who never exercises. Do you have a moral obligation to encourage that friend to start hitting the gym with you or to go on a walk together?

Can I Sneak a Grape or Two While Shopping?

Lecture 6

In a grocery store, say that you sample a grape or two. What you are doing is shoplifting, which is a crime. Most of the laws in the United States—and the vast majority of the legal disputes—are related to property. You may have felt a twinge of guilt when you sampled the grape; the reason for that is that you understood you were violating someone else's property rights—and for most of us, that is a moral feeling. In this lecture, we will discuss some of the philosophical history of how and why property, in our culture and society, has become so closely tied to our feelings of morality.

John Locke's Labor Theory of Property

- The concept that property is an important moral entity entered the Western mind most prominently in the 17th century with the philosophy of John Locke. Prior to Locke, all property of substance—what we now call real property, or real estate—was the province of kings. None of the king's subjects could own land.
- Locke had a completely revolutionary idea—one so radical that it led to the French Revolution, the formation of the American government, and political revolutions worldwide. He asked why the land should belong to the king. The people who actually take the untilled land and transform it through hard work, then till it and grow food on it are the ones who make the property valuable.
- This is called the labor theory of property. Property, Locke argued, should belong to the person who invests his or her labor into it. Locke, in fact, insisted that if the king was not willing to recognize that the property belongs to those people, the people had the moral right—even a moral imperative—to overthrow the government.
- Locke was tremendously important to the Founding Fathers of the United States. His political philosophy provided justification for

the American colonists to oust their British rulers, because they, the colonists, were the ones working the land. “In order to preserve the public good, the central function of government must be the protection of private property,” Locke wrote.

Moral Justification of Property

- Locke’s vision led to the phenomenon where people began to see property as an extension of themselves. For the laborers of Locke’s day, as they worked the land and owned it, the land became an important expression of themselves. It represented who they were. It also represented their freedom because it was the source of their independence and their ability to support themselves.
- Locke recognized that the people who managed the land were also working it in another sense. But the basic idea was that property is as valuable as the labor we invest into it, and therefore, those who invest their labor into the property ought to own it and reap the benefits of it.



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Property has become the most concrete expression of how we express our moral worth in the world; it’s how we sustain ourselves, create happiness, and express our freedom.

- Here is what Locke set into motion: First, take the labor theory of property. Then, add the emerging idea of free markets—what we now call capitalism. Now, stir in the idea that the free exchange of property creates happiness for everyone involved in that free exchange. Put it in the oven of emerging freedom and developing prosperity of the Industrial Revolution—and what emerges is a tremendous moral justification for property.

Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Property

- Consider the utilitarian idea that whatever maximizes the happiness of all is the most moral situation. Now, consider the situation in which people own their own land, produce wealth from it, and engage in the free exchange of that wealth, each of them for the purpose of increasing their own particular happiness.
- When one person freely trades a pint of cow’s milk for a dozen of someone else’s eggs, the two are doing something that is morally praiseworthy, because both are made happier by the exchange. The labor theory of property and capitalism, combined with utilitarianism, made money a moral entity.
- Living in a capitalist society, as we do, we understand that property has a deep moral value. In fact, one of the first drafts of the Declaration of Independence called for life, liberty, and the pursuit of property. The Founding Fathers thought that sounded crass and changed it to the pursuit of happiness, but it is hardly trivial that they thought the pursuit of property and the pursuit of happiness were synonymous.

Ayn Rand and Ethical Egoism

- This line of thinking was made explicit by a great champion of ethical egoism in the 20th century, the author and thinker Ayn Rand. Writing under the influence of vigorous champions of completely free markets, such as the Austrian-born British philosopher Friedrich Hayek, Rand argued that capitalism was the most moral form of society.

- In Rand's view, so long as all we individually seek out our own best interest—primarily expressed through the accumulation of property—all of society will progressively become happier, richer, and more ethical.
- For Rand, precisely because property is the source of moral significance and happiness, we ought never to take someone else's grape. To steal a grape is, in effect, as grave a crime as injuring another human being.

Milton Friedman and Social Responsibility to Seek Profit

- Economist and Nobel Prize winner Milton Friedman made arguments similar to Rand's. For Friedman, not just individuals pursuing wealth but also companies pursuing profits meant maximizing the moral goodness and well-being of our entire society. In a famous article, Friedman argued that the only social responsibility of business is to seek profit. Anything else, he claimed, is not only stealing from the stockholders of the company but is also harmful to society as a whole.
- Friedman's argument is important for us because it further develops the idea that property—and profit—is a fundamentally moral phenomenon in our culture. According to Friedman, if we want all property exchanges to be free, we cannot have monopolies.
- If one company had a monopoly on grapes, then it could charge whatever it wanted for grapes, and we could no longer say that we were freely choosing to pay a certain price for the grape. The problem would be even more egregious if the monopoly were on necessities, such as gas, water, or electricity.

Profit as a Measure of Happiness

- Consider this example: Suppose it costs you 50 cents to produce a bunch of grapes, and your customer is willing to pay up to \$1.00 for that same bunch. Because there are others in the marketplace also competing to sell their grapes, you finally lower your price to 75

cents. Both sides freely make the exchange: Your customer gives you 75 cents, and you give the customer a bunch of grapes.

- The ideas of Rand and Friedman are most compelling if we understand that at least one measure of moral worth is happiness. The question is: What is the measure of happiness produced by the grape exchange? It is the difference between what the grapes cost you to make and what the customer was willing to pay for them—namely, the profit, or 25 cents.

Theft Steals from Everyone

- Suppose that you decide to give part of your grape profits to a charitable organization. In Friedman's view, if you have shareholders, you are stealing from them, unless they all also agree to give the money away. What's more, even if everyone wants to do this, you are still reducing the profit of the transaction—profit that could be reinvested to produce more profit still—and, in fact, diminishing the happiness produced by the transaction.
- Even if the group you give the money experiences some happiness, that is a one-time benefit. What's more, you have no idea how much happiness your act will produce because the group is not choosing the transaction; it is simply the beneficiary of the transaction.
- Theft is wrong for exactly the same reason. To take what is not yours is to steal from all of society: When you eat those grapes, you are eating up someone's profits—tearing at the very fabric of our free-market society.

Kenneth Arrow

- Another economist and Nobel Prize winner, Kenneth Arrow, agrees that Friedman's argument is a tremendously powerful one. But if we accept it, Arrow says, we must also accept some other conclusions.
- First, Arrow says, we should recognize that Friedman's argument discourages philanthropy, and many of us might be uneasy with a conclusion that philanthropy is something to be avoided.

- Second, there is a chance that the majority of a society's wealth will wind up in the hands of a minority. Free transactions can have unequal consequences, especially over time, and result in vast disparities in the distribution of wealth.
- Third, Arrow insists, we must have strict controls preventing monopolies, price-fixing, collusion, or any other way of coercing transactions. The only way Friedman's free-exchange argument maximizes happiness is if the transactions are truly free.

Arrow's Arguments for Regulation

- Suppose two producers are selling organic grapes. Your grapes are genuinely organic, while the other producer is fraudulently selling nonorganic grapes for a lower price. Arrow points out that for the free market to represent happiness and moral goodness with its transactions, we must regulate it so that sellers stay honest.
- In another example, suppose one of the grape sellers is using toxic chemicals to make the grapes bigger and heavier, then dumping those chemicals into a river. Other people who are not even involved in the exchange of the grape sale will be picking up the costs—in hospital bills for illness or in cleaning their land or water.
- As a result, there are participants in the exchange who are unhappy, and the profit measure of happiness does not reflect the real collective happiness produced by the exchange. Thus, Arrow says, any polluters must pay for the costs of their pollution—which again requires regulation.

When a Grape Is Not Just a Grape

- When you pop that stolen grape in your mouth at the grocery store, in short, you are attacking the fundamental moral principles of our economy and our political structure. You are just like those “free riders” who are selling fake organic grapes or polluting the waters.
- Respect for property is not just following a commandment: “Thou shalt not steal.” It is showing an appropriate attitude toward that

which makes our way of life possible and determines the well-being of everyone else.

- Our prosperity depends on the way we understand and respect property. And our prosperity is not just about our material well-being; as we have seen, it includes a deep sense of who we are as free, self-sustaining, moral individuals.

Suggested Reading

Arrow, *Social Choice and Individual Values*.

Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*.

Rawls, (Kelly, ed.), *Justice as Fairness*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why might a credit score be a fair indication of a person's moral character? Are most of the people you know with excellent credit scores therefore good people? Are the ones with bad credit scores bad people?
2. Why might property, in our society, be viewed as an importantly moral thing? Does it follow then that "more property for all" means "a morally superior society" for all? Can everyone have more property? If not, is that immoral?

Is It Wrong to Make as Much Money as I Can?

Lecture 7

A conflict many of us have encountered is how much of our leisure and family time we are willing to exchange for wealth and property. Two familiar slogans illustrate the difficulty: “Whoever has the most toys wins” and “You can’t take it with you.” On the one hand, we live in a society that puts a premium—including a large social premium—on the acquisition of wealth. On the other hand, making money takes time and means sacrificing other aspects of our lives, such as leisure and family time, that matter deeply to us. In this lecture, we will examine what several great thinkers have had to say about the role of money and work in the pursuit of the good life.

Aristotle and *Pleonexia*

- Aristotle was the first Western philosopher to discuss in detail the fact that we need money in order to live a good, moral life. For Aristotle, fostering such virtues as an educated mind meant having the money to pay for teachers. Cultivating the virtue of generosity meant having enough money to entertain and, when necessary, to give money to friends and family in need. To be happy was the key to living a moral life. To be happy meant to be free from worry and want, and that required money.
- Aristotle wrote on how to manage a household with good economics and how best to make an honest living—not our standard idea when we think of a philosopher talking about ethics. Aristotle thought that the best, most reliable, and simplest way to earn a living was through cultivation of one’s land, because that depended entirely on one’s own labor. Making a living through trade relied on the consent of others and included bargaining with people who might not be as reasonable or honest as you are.
- Aristotle also thought that the key to understanding how money promotes the good life was to recognize that the pursuit and

management of wealth was like all other pursuits: It should be done in moderation. Just as one can sleep too much or too little, eat too much or too little, exercise too much or too little, Aristotle thought that one can own too much or too little.

- Interestingly, for Aristotle, the vice of *pleonexia*—wanting too much or being greedy—was damage that people did to themselves. By failing to recognize that there is a healthy, moderate amount of wealth that a person needed, the person who falls into the vice of *pleonexia* throws his or her whole life out of balance and can no longer live a good life.
- Aristotle also pointed out that, unlike happiness, wealth is not worth pursuing for its own sake. It is good only to the degree that it enables us to pursue those things that are good for their own sake. There is nothing good about money in itself; it merely has instrumental value.

The Tragedy of the Commons

- Mahatma Gandhi would no doubt have agreed with Aristotle. When Gandhi argued that “poverty is the worst form of violence,” he meant that, in most societies, wealth is distributed in an unequal way, and inequality of wealth was difficult to overcome unless people recognized that resources were scarce.
- A story called the tragedy of the commons is often used to illustrate the problem of scarcity of resources and the need to share. Imagine that we are all dairy farmers, sharing a plot of land. If all of us graze our cows from 9:00 until 5:00, five days a week, the grass will have enough time to recover, our cows will have enough to eat, and we can go on using this plot of land for many years to come.
- Because all our cows arrive to eat at the same time and leave at the same time, all get their fair share. But suppose some farmer decides to bring his cows to pasture at 8:00, rather than 9:00. By the time the rest of us have brought our cows to pasture, his cows will have eaten more grass than they normally would; the rest of our cows do

not eat as much. Thus, the other farmers start to bring their cows at 8:00—then at 7:00, then 6:00, and so on.

- We will all have fatter and healthier cows, but soon, the grass will not have enough time to recover, and in the end, we will have destroyed the common pasture. Without grass, all the cows will die.



In the 2008/2009 collapse of the housing industry, individuals allowed their own personal desire to acquire wealth to eclipse their knowledge that chasing money comes at the expense of others.

Martin Luther and the Protestant Work Ethic

- Interestingly, the value of hard work—which we believe will lead to the creation of more wealth—is a relatively new concept in Western society. The ancient Greeks argued that work was a curse placed on humankind to keep us from becoming too proud and to occupy us so that we would never attempt to challenge the gods. During the Renaissance, when social and financial status was relatively fixed, work was seen as good only insofar as it was an expression of one's creative impulses. Work that made beautiful things was highly valued, but otherwise, it was something to be avoided.
- It was not until the religious reformer Martin Luther appeared in the 16th century that what we now call the Protestant work ethic was formulated. Luther convinced the people of his time—and subsequently, in many ways, all of civilization—that work was morally praiseworthy.
- The reason was not that Luther thought that hard work would help people break out of poverty; at that time, it probably would not have helped. The reason was not that the Bible teaches us that hard

work is good in itself; the Old Testament does include the proper management of money as one of the virtues, but the Bible does not insist that working hard is morally praiseworthy.

- It was not even that Luther thought that idle hands were a tool of the devil. In fact, Luther's reasons were political; he thought that the priests and monks of his day were living off the hard work of the people they were supposed to be serving. He thought that convincing people that hard work was a morally good thing would lead to a revolution in the social and political structure—and he was right. This way of thinking about work was further promoted by another Protestant religious reformer, John Calvin, who also directly associated hard work with moral virtue.
- Sloth has been recognized as an undesirable vice throughout human history. But the good life requires that we know when to work and when to rest and enjoy other pursuits. Like money, work is not good for its own sake; it is not what we would call an inherent or intrinsic good, as pleasure is.

Work versus Leisure

- Most people work for the sake of other goals; it is those goals, not work, that they value as such. Many would argue that they work in order to have plenty of leisure and to fully enjoy that leisure—because it is in leisure that we can enjoy things that are inherently good.
- The British philosopher Bertrand Russell argued that leisure was, in fact, the most important aspect to living what he called a free and happy life. It is our leisure hours that we devote to caring for our families, talking with friends, and cultivating pleasures (such as furthering one's education with a set of lectures, for example). These are the activities that make life a pleasure rather than a pain.
- The philosopher and scientist Francis Bacon said it very well: "If money be not thy servant, it will be thy master. The covetous man

cannot so properly be said to possess wealth, as that may be said to possess him.”

- The happiest people, all the great philosophers agree, will seek as much wealth as they need in order to take care of their needs and the needs of those who depend on them, plus have a little set aside for emergencies. But as Aristotle reminds us, this attitude should be adopted with rational moderation in mind.

Conspicuous Consumption

- The 20th-century American philosopher, sociologist, and economist Thorstein Veblen coined the expression “conspicuous consumption.” In a wealthy society, he thought, people begin to consume things simply in order to show others that they can.
- At some point, we no longer think we want a bigger house because everyone else is getting one; we become convinced we *need* a bigger house—because so many of our wants are determined socially, and social status matters to us very much. As long as we continue to think of money—and the display of wealth—as an indication of the kind of people we are, Veblen argued, we will continue to think we need things that can only be provided by wealth.
- We might revise the slogan to read: “Whoever has the most toys gets buried beneath them.” Clearly, material possessions and money will not provide us with the good, happy life that all of us seek and value.

Suggested Reading

Hayek, *Prices and Production and Other Works*.

Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*.

Questions to Consider

1. “Money is the root of all evil.” True or false, and why?
2. Can you imagine a morally desirable society in which money didn't exist? Try discussing the possibility with a friend or family member.

What Are My Obligations to the Poor?

Lecture 8

While North Americans annually consume about 900 kilograms of grain per person, people in developing countries consume about one-fifth that amount. Economists tell us that the problem is not a shortage of wealth but a problem of the distribution of that wealth. Just as the majority of the wealth in the United States is owned by only five percent of the population, the majority of the world's wealth is owned by a very small minority of the world population. In this lecture, we will look at what several thinkers have had to say about charity. We know that most of the great religious traditions recommend giving to the poor, so we will look at some other arguments.

Aristotle: Generosity in Moderation

- Aristotle's idea of a good life was to cultivate virtues that would follow a principle of moderation so that an individual could be excellent in as many ways as possible. Part of living a virtuous life meant managing one's household and money well to provide for one's own needs and the needs of family and friends.
- Among the virtues associated with managing money, Aristotle argued, was the virtue of generosity: being able to give to family and friends who needed a little help—and even to needy strangers.
- For Aristotle, the virtue of generosity benefited the person who practiced it and who was seen as a source of financial happiness to his friends. And, of course, it advantaged the people surrounding the generous person. It is a principle similar to “share the wealth.”
- As always with Aristotle, however, generosity should be practiced in moderation. If you give too much away, you will ruin yourself and become a burden to others. If you give away too little, you will be viewed as cheap, and people will be less inclined to be friendly to you and certainly less likely to help you should you ever fall on

unexpected hard times. In this way, being generous is also a kind of insurance policy.

Charity Begins at Home

- Aristotle lived in a relatively small community, where one's reputation was of the utmost importance. Generosity, in his mind, was essential to preserve a good reputation. To be generous to people on the other side of the world or to be generous anonymously would have struck Aristotle as highly peculiar.
- He believed that one might be generous to a friend solely for the friend's sake—this was in fact the purest form of friendship. But to be generous other than to one's closest friends was really only justified, for Aristotle, because of the good it did for you and your family. Otherwise, you should sensibly conserve your resources and let strangers take care of themselves.
- Recent ethicists have also argued that, given the scarcity of resources in society, we have a moral obligation to recognize, in the old saying, that “charity begins at home.” Following this line of thought, we should care for those who we can see are in need, for those in our families and our communities. Only when their needs are adequately satisfied should we start to consider the needs of strangers or people on the other side of the world.

Andrew Carnegie

- The famed American industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie argued that simple charity to people in need—giving a beggar on a street corner a dollar, for example—was in fact one of the very most immoral things a person could do.
- There is a familiar adage: “Give a man a fish, and he'll eat for a day; teach a man to fish, and he can eat for a lifetime.” But Carnegie argued something beyond this. He maintained that it is actually morally blameworthy to give charity to a beggar.

- Carnegie believed that such an act teaches the beggar that begging works. If he can make a living by begging, then he will never be inclined to pursue any other profession. Anyone who gives to a beggar is reinforcing in him a habit that is actually destructive.

Paternalism

- Implicit in Carnegie's argument is the moral principle called paternalism: the idea that sometimes we know what is better for people than they know themselves, usually because they have been blinded by their circumstances or their habits.
- Often, paternalism is justified because it is for the greater good of society. For Carnegie, that was another reason that giving to the beggar is wrong: You are not only showing the beggar and the others around him that begging works, but you are also taking away from the productive possibilities of his labor by reinforcing this habit.
- When we are all working well and productively in a free capitalist society, Carnegie argued, everyone benefits, and we all become wealthier and happier. By giving to the beggar, you are effectively stealing the benefits of his potential labor from the rest of us.
- Furthermore, you are acting on a principle that undervalues the moral significance of your own money. By throwing your money away on someone else's bad habit, you are wasting a resource that could have been productively used elsewhere. If you recognize the power of money to produce greater good for you, your family, and society as a whole, it is foolish to put it to a bad purpose.

Wealth: A Product of Our Society

- That said, Carnegie was deeply committed to the enormous good that money can do. Once we have taken care of ourselves and those who depend on us, we have a moral obligation to help our society to enjoy the benefits that wealth can provide because our wealth is only possible because of our society. In Carnegie's way of thinking,

the money we create through hard work and intelligence is on loan to us from society.

- We have the moral obligation to discover how and where the money can do the most good, in an enduring way that will genuinely benefit both our current society and generations to come. In Carnegie's time, libraries were a great example of money wisely invested by the philanthropist. And indeed, public libraries have helped millions of people educate themselves and lift themselves out of negative circumstances.
- For Carnegie, one of the worst moral sins a wealthy person could commit was to go to the grave as a rich man. He did not believe that the government should legislate over these questions, however. Carnegie believed that would create inefficiencies and disincentives to producing wealth. Nevertheless, we should all recognize the moral imperative to financially benefit the society that had provided the means for us to create wealth.

Peter Singer

- What are our obligations—if any—to the millions of people who live in other countries and are in desperate need?
- The contemporary Australian philosopher and utilitarian Peter Singer offered the following example: Suppose you are hurrying to class and notice that a small child is



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Many people who are truly poor have no way to bring themselves out of poverty.

drowning in a fountain. If you stop and help the child, you will suffer some inconvenience as a consequence of saving this child's life.

- Most people would insist that it would be a terrible moral lapse if you did not help the child. The reason, Singer argued, is that we all share a deep moral intuition that if you can do something of tremendous significance to help someone else, while yourself suffering only modest inconvenience, you are always required to do it. And, indeed, this principle seems unassailable.

Aligning Our Moral Compass

- Finally, let's consider a story told by Bowen McCoy, a successful businessman who spent many years as president and chairman of Morgan Stanley Realty. McCoy tells of how he was once on an Everest climb with some friends. In order to get past a very difficult pass, they had to climb very early in the morning, and there was real urgency to the hike. Moreover, this was a climb that McCoy had tried before and failed; thus, he really wanted to succeed this time. As he and a friend approached the pass, one of the teams in front of them came back from the pass with an Indian holy man, a *sadhu*, who was half-frozen and near death.
- A New Zealander from the team who found the *sadhu* put some clothes on the holy man and gave him to McCoy's group, saying: "I've done all I can for this man; I leave him in your hands." The man was in terrible shape but clearly alive. McCoy helped get the man a little more warmly dressed, then said to his friend, "I'm going to press on," hurrying to get to the pass before it was too late.
- When McCoy met his friend again, McCoy was overjoyed after making the summit. But his friend was furious. "How does it feel to know you contributed to the death of a fellow human being?" his friend accused him.
- McCoy never learned whether the *sadhu* lived or died, but the point was that no one—none of the several hiking teams that passed him that day—did what really needed to be done, which was to carry

the man back down off the mountain to safety. Chances are, McCoy hints, the *sadhu* did not make it. The question is: How could everyone's moral compass be so skewed that they would let a man die who, with a little effort, could have been saved?

- We all have a million reasons to think about something other than our fellow human beings, many of whom are in the same dire straits as the *sadhu*. We hurry on up the mountain and hope that someone else will do what we know should be done, but just do not have the time or the resources to do ourselves.

Suggested Reading

Gates Sr., Gates, and Mackin. *Showing Up for Life*.

Singer, *The Life You Can Save*.

Questions to Consider

1. You just gave a dollar to an old woman with a bucket sitting on the ground outside the movie theater. Was what you did right or wrong, and why?
2. Should you give five percent of your after-tax income to help starving children in Third World countries? If not, why not? If so, are you doing so?

Can We Do Better Than the Golden Rule?

Lecture 9

In Matthew 7:12, Jesus says, “Do to others what you would have them do to you.” That is the Golden Rule. It appears not only in the New Testament but also in slightly different versions in a variety of different ancient traditions. In the *Udanavarga*, for example, the following saying is attributed to the Buddha: “Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.” And in the *Analects* of Confucius, we read, “Do not do to others what you would not like yourself.” This lecture will examine our moral duties to others, as embodied in the Golden Rule.

The Golden Rule

- The Golden Rule is familiar to all of us, and in fact, it may have been the first moral principle that many of us were taught. But because the Golden Rule is so familiar to us, we have a tendency to underestimate its enormous moral power.
- Let’s use the Golden Rule as a touchstone against some moral dilemmas. You wonder if it is ever permissible to lie. Simply ask yourself if you like being lied to. None of us likes being lied to, especially if a lie is being used to manipulate us or leads us to believe false situations. Here, the Golden Rule is a good, reliable guide.
- Let’s apply the Golden Rule to gossip. If you don’t like being gossiped about, don’t gossip about others. If you would appreciate a handout if you were desperate, then you should give to the poor.

Immanuel Kant

- The noted philosopher Immanuel Kant was not a proponent of the Golden Rule. Kant is often actually cited as the single greatest philosopher in the Western philosophical tradition. Among his many seminal works were the three *Critiques*: *Critique of Pure Reason*, *Critique of Practical Reason*, and *Critique of Judgment*.

- These three works, along with his many other writings, have had an enormous impact on philosophical discourse in the West since Kant wrote them in the 18th century.
- Indeed, some of the more recent thinkers who factor significantly in this course, such as John Rawls, owe their largest intellectual debt to Kant and describe themselves as “Kantians.” Jean-Paul Sartre, the French existentialist philosopher, was a Kantian when it came to his moral thought.

The Categorical Imperative

- Probably Kant’s most significant legacy was his concept of the categorical imperative. An imperative is a particular kind of statement that commands.
- There are two different kinds of imperatives: hypothetical imperatives and categorical imperatives. A hypothetical imperative is an imperative that expresses a condition that allows for the achievement of a specific goal. A categorical imperative, in contrast, is a special kind of statement. It is a command that will have authority in all circumstances.
- For Kant, categorical imperatives were exceedingly rare, and they accorded with reason in such a way that they had moral urgency. They were morally required.
- According to Kant, an act was morally justifiable insofar as we can imagine that act being universalized—that is, applied to all human beings in all places at all times. In other words, if you are acting on a principle that is tied only to your happiness at this moment (a hypothetical imperative), then you are not acting morally. For an action to be moral, for it to apply categorically, it must be based on a principle or a maxim that would apply regardless of your particular feelings at any given time.
- Kant further noted, “If you’re acting solely out of what makes you happy, chances are you’re not acting in a moral way, because your

intention should be to accord with what you would freely choose as reason dictates to you.” Thus, the categorical imperative will often run, at best, parallel to your personal happiness and sometimes contrary to it.

Maxims

- Categorical imperatives express maxims. A maxim is a subjective principle of action. Kant meant that whenever we act, we act according to rules that we formulate in our heads. A maxim is a kind of rule we use to govern our behavior. We speak the truth most of the time because we believe the rule that we’re not to speak untruths. We respect each other’s property because we believe and follow the rule, or maxim, that we shouldn’t take what doesn’t belong to us.
- The first version of the categorical imperative is the most famous one: Act only according to that maxim such that you can, at the same time, will that the maxim of your action should become a universal law.
- To explain this, we’ll take the example of making a promise: “I promise to show up for work on time tomorrow.” Suppose that you universalize that promise. What if everyone, at all times, always kept the promise of showing up for work on time tomorrow. Kant asked whether it generated any kind of contradiction or whether was it perfectly consistent. As a matter of fact, it works out just fine. If everyone says they’re going to show up for work tomorrow and then universally does show up for work tomorrow, no contradiction is generated at all.
- Now suppose that the maxim you’re following is promise breaking. You say “I’m going to show up for work on time tomorrow,” but you don’t. Suppose that everyone, universally, at all times, made the promise to show up for work on time and then didn’t. Then, that promise would be meaningless because our ability to make a promise depends on the idea that people will be able to count on that promise.

Morality as an Absolute

- Kant also believed that as long as we're looking at the consequences of our actions for their moral value, we are leaving morality up to chance, because we can't tell what the consequences are going to be with any certainty. Kant thought we needed a much more fundamental ground for something as important as morality than events in the world or how our actions might turn out.
- What was absolutely certain, Kant believed, were the principles of logic and reason. Consistent principles were few in number, they all could be formulated as categorical imperatives, and they all would turn out to be morally urgent.
- Kant locates morality in the absolute realm of what any rational person would have to accept as true and authoritative in all places and at all times. The Golden Rule, by contrast, locates morality in the very particular realm of what one particular individual wants in one specific place and specific time.
- Thus, when it comes to the question of how we should treat each other ethically, Kant found the Golden Rule to be an unsatisfactory ground for behavior. In fact, in his treatise *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant wrote that the Golden Rule “contains the ground neither of duties to one's self nor of the benevolent duties to others.”

Humans an End in Themselves

- Kant offered other guidance on how we should treat one another. He derived a second formulation of the categorical imperative—a principle that was absolutely crucial to Kantian ethics. The principle is this: Treat every human being never merely as a means but also always as an end in themselves.
- What Kant was saying is that we must always be certain that we recognize that the other person is a moral authority in just the same way we are.

- Let's think about Kant's maxim as it might apply to other situations. Consider the employee-supervisor relationship when an employee is flattering the supervisor. The supervisor is being treated merely as a means and not respected as an end in himself.



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In Kant's view, consumer culture is based on an immoral understanding of human relationships; advertisers view consumers as merely a means to an end.

Objectification of Women

- Criticism of the objectification of women is essentially an extension of Kant's second formulation of the categorical imperative, that we should treat all people not merely as means but as ends in themselves.
- The problem of objectifying women has been with us a long time, but in the past couple of decades, it has, for some thinkers, taken on new dimensions and new urgency. The Internet has made access to sexual imagery and videos, especially involving women, routine to the point of banality.
- One could argue that these viewing habits are a perfectly legitimate, legal, and morally neutral exercise of our right to get pleasure out of life. What's more, some ethicists argue that properly regulated pornography, in fact, shows an important moral respect for human dignity and free choice.
- However, if we think like a Kantian, then these habits raise the problem, very literally, of how we view others. Most objectification of women involves the denigration of women, treating women as a means rather than respecting women as an end in themselves.

- There are also many other strong arguments against objectification of women, including that it changes the way men view women, changes social norms about acceptable sexual behavior, changes female self-perception in a negative way, depersonalizes intimacy between men and women, and undermines or even destroys one of the most sacred and intimate of human experiences.

Morality and Freedom

- The idea here is that you are using someone as an instrument to get what you want, rather than recognizing that, from the perspective of reason and from the perspective of every other human being, each of us counts just as much as the other.
- This is particularly true when it comes to freedom. As the French existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre said, “We will freedom, for freedom’s sake, in and through particular circumstances. And in thus willing freedom, we discover that it depends entirely upon the freedom of others, and that the freedom of others depends upon our own.”
- That’s not to say that we adopt the Golden Rule entirely but, rather, for all of us, morality and freedom are equally important. Once we recognize that, we simply must—if we are going to be rationally consistent, if we’re going to follow the categorical imperative—treat all others with the respect and freedom that we know we deserve for ourselves.

Suggested Reading

Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*.

Olcott, *Golden Rules of Buddhism*.

Questions to Consider

1. What are some objections, morally speaking, to the Golden Rule?
2. What, according to Kant, is wrong with treating a human being in the same way that you might treat, say, a beloved family pet?

Why Can't I Just Live for Pleasure?

Lecture 10

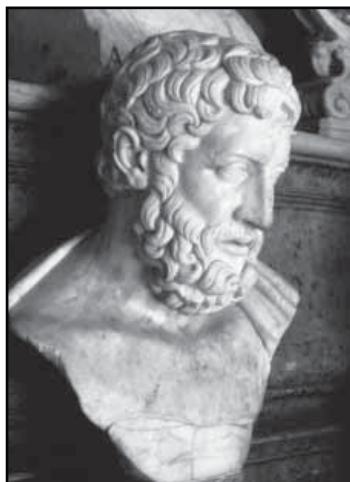
The English philosopher and social reformer Jeremy Bentham observed that if you desire a particular thing, your reasoning will eventually lead back to the fact that it gives you pleasure. Bentham further noted that the question of why we want to feel pleasure has nothing but a circular answer. It's a primal urge, a basic truth: We all desire pleasure, and we all seek to avoid pain. In this lecture, we will look at the history of an ancient school of thought: hedonism. Derived from the Greek word *hedon*, meaning "pleasure," hedonism is the philosophy that pleasure is the highest, most intrinsic good. In fact, hedonism has become one of the most powerful moral theories in contemporary Western civilization.

Epicurus and Hedonism

- The greatest early advocate of hedonism was the 4th-century-B.C. Greek philosopher Epicurus. According to Epicurus, human beings make life much more complicated than it needs to be. He was a student of the Greek philosopher Democritus and believed, like Democritus, that there was nothing more to the universe than matter in motion.
- For this reason, he rejected Greek religion, as well as any moral precepts derived from religion. He believed that we should neither expect paradise when we die nor fear any hell or purgatory. Epicurus thought it was pointless to worry about the afterlife because, as he famously wrote, "When you die, your mind will be gone even faster than your body." Therefore, he argued, we should simply listen to our bodies and do what they guide us to do through pleasure and pain.
- That said, Epicurus pointed out that seeking pleasure and avoiding pain is more complex than it might first appear. Simply getting drunk every night is not an option: You will soon be broke, hung over, sick, perhaps addicted, and probably friendless. Thus, Epicurus argued, we must use our reason, seek out rational long-

term pleasures, and manage our lives so as to avoid pains.

- The first key to this, in his view, was to live a simple life, without many possessions, needs, and obligations. Although we need sufficient material wealth to stay healthy and guarantee the well-being of ourselves and those we care for, beyond that, the accumulation of material goods tends to create problems for us rather than solve them.



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The average Greek was obsessed with the question of what happens after death, but Epicurus believed that all talk of paradise, hell, and purgatory was nonsense.

Necessary and Natural Pleasures

- According to Epicurus, pleasures fall into two categories: those that are necessary for the body (such as sleeping or eating) and those that are natural for the body (which include unnecessary pleasures, such as playing chess, reading, or having a glass of wine). Epicurus also warned of pleasures that are unnatural and unnecessary, such as getting drunk.
- Natural pleasures should be indulged with moderation, Epicurus noted, because some of them—such as a glass of wine or a good meal—can become unnecessary, unnatural, and destructive pleasures when we overindulge in them.
- For Epicurus, the key to living the good life and being a moral person was simple: Use your reason to guarantee your share of natural and necessary pleasures, avoid unnatural and unnecessary pleasures, and avoid pain. Of course, cultivating pleasure and avoiding pain requires the active, daily use of reason. Fortunately, according to Epicurus, the active, daily use of reason was also a pleasure.

- What was missing from this picture, however, was interaction with other people. Even though Epicurus insisted that we should cultivate and care for our friends, today, we consider Epicurus an egoist. Like the American philosopher Ayn Rand and the American economist Milton Friedman, Epicurus thought it was best that we seek our own individual pleasure and let other people take care of their own pleasures.

Jeremy Bentham and Utilitarianism

- Jeremy Bentham was the 18th-century English philosopher who revived Epicurus's philosophy and created what we now call utilitarianism. Unlike Epicurus, however, Bentham was not an egoist: He thought that the good person, before deciding what action to perform, should look at the likely consequences of that action.
- It is for this reason that we call utilitarianism one form of consequentialism. Upon evaluating the likely consequences, a good person will try to act in such a way as to maximize pleasure and minimize pain for himself or herself and for all others immediately involved in the action. Bentham called this performing a utilitarian calculus, and referred to units of pleasure as *utils*.
- Here is an example of performing a utilitarian calculus: Suppose a tsunami is expected, and you have to decide whether to save three people you know on one side of the island or five strangers on the other side of the island. Because there are more *utils* in saving the five strangers, the good utilitarian, according to Bentham, will save the five strangers.
- Crucially, for Bentham, what matters are the consequences of your actions. If you try to save the five strangers and fail, you have not performed a morally praiseworthy act simply because you had good intentions. Maximizing happiness means making the rational decision that truly will lead to the most happiness for the greatest number.

John Stuart Mill

- Bentham's emphasis on the consequences of our actions was profoundly important because it represented a radical course in ethics at the time. When Bentham was writing, Western civilization was dominated by the Judeo-Christian ethical system; from that ethical perspective, the consequences of our actions count far less than our moral intent.
- Further, the philosopher Immanuel Kant also believed that our intentions were the morally relevant aspect, not the consequences of our actions. Bentham's suggestion was controversial indeed.
- John Stuart Mill, Jeremy Bentham's godson, was raised on a diet of utilitarianism. Mill was perhaps the greatest English-speaking genius of the 19th century, producing important work in mathematics, history, social theory, and philosophy.
- By the time Mill began advocating utilitarianism, the theory had become one of the most popular moral theories in Europe. It is still the most popular moral theory among most intellectuals—and many interesting objections have been raised against it.

The Swine Objection

- A significant objection to Mill's version of utilitarianism was known as the swine objection. According to the swine objection, utilitarianism makes human beings seem like pigs rolling in the mud and eating at the trough. If all we do is seek pleasure, how are we any different than an animal that seeks pleasures and avoids pains? Aren't humans nobler beings than animals?
- Mill agreed with the complaint and said that we should not think about maximizing pleasure but, rather, happiness. He divided pleasures into two classes: lower pleasures and higher pleasures. According to Mill, lower pleasures tended to be bodily and short-lived, and they did not improve with practice.

- Higher pleasures, however, were mental and endured over time, improved with practice, and did not bring pains. Human beings exposed to both classes of pleasure, Mill argued, will prefer the higher to the lower and, thus, will create happiness. If we seek the higher pleasures, Mill argued, we will be enduringly happy. True utilitarianism advocated the greatest happiness for the greatest number—a concept called the greatest-happiness principle.

Objection from Egoism

- A second important objection to utilitarianism was the objection from egoism. Because each of us performs our own utilitarian calculations, there is nothing to prevent us from doing the math so that we can pursue whatever goal we please. In the tsunami example, if we simply say that saving our friends' lives would give us a vast number of utiles of pleasure, the friends are saved and the strangers drown.
- Here, too, Mill took the objection seriously and said that when performing a utilitarian calculus, we must adopt the attitude of the “perfectly benevolent ideal spectator.” This meant that when calculating likely happiness outcomes, we must pretend to be spectators; we must not value our own perspective any more than that of anyone else in the situation.
- There are many other objections to utilitarianism. The most obvious is that this theory commits us to sacrificing the happiness of the few on behalf of the greater happiness of the many. So does the democratic process, the utilitarian would say, and many of the decisions we make as a society.
- There have been many refinements made to utilitarianism in order to finesse the problem of human rights and other basic moral decisions so that we do not make the mistake of justifying the death of innocents in order to promote the happiness of many.

Preference Utilitarianism

- To be morally praiseworthy, according to utilitarianism, we must always act in a way that maximizes our own happiness and the happiness of those around us. Having a one-night stand or lying by the pool and drinking margaritas would, of course, generate pleasure. But neither is the sort of activity that would cultivate enduring pleasure over the long term. Also, neither activity will contribute very much pleasure, if any, to the people around us.
- Because of the strengths and clarity of utilitarianism, it is the tool that many contemporary economists use to solve virtually all moral problems. For example, say that a commission has to decide where to build a new highway—which will benefit many but also inconvenience many. We settle the question by taking a vote; that is, we perform a utilitarian calculus to decide how the happiness of the greatest number will be best served.
- This particular kind of utilitarianism—crucial to our democratic system—is called preference utilitarianism. But it leaves out some important criteria, such as our moral intentions, our sense that wanting to do the right thing is important even when the consequences turn out differently than we expect.
- Although Epicurus might have endorsed informed leisure, his type of hedonism would have discouraged casual sex with strangers or drinking by the pool. We know that acts that we consider deeply moral—such as keeping a promise—can be fraught with pain, not pleasure. What's more, we should be aware of the tremendous moral significance of our intentions, not just the consequences.

Suggested Reading

Feldman, *Pleasure and the Good Life*.

Lucretius (Stallings, trans.), *The Nature of Things*.

Questions to Consider

1. Your teenager is a self-declared hedonist. What are some guidelines you might recommend to him or her?
2. Name some ways in which pleasures differ from one another. Why and how are those differences morally relevant?

Why Can't I Date a Married Person?

Lecture 11

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche believed that love was the single most powerful creative force human beings possess. Nietzsche argued that when we love, we create compelling illusions about ourselves and the objects of our love—illusions that create the meaning of life. A married couple has the obligation to try to use the full power of their imaginations and their energy to bring as much life as possible into their love relationship. They should see their love as a great work of art they are struggling to create together, and they should not abandon that creative struggle too quickly or easily. In this lecture, we'll explore the morality and ethics of the bond of marriage.

Mythical Origins of Romantic Love

- Let's say that you are a single contractor who often has dealings with a real estate salesperson, a young married woman. She says she thinks her marriage is over. She tells you that she's not sure she ever really loved her husband—and if she loves him now, it's more like a sister loves a brother.
- You ask yourself if you should date her to determine if the spark between you is as strong as you both think it is. Suppose you go on the date and the spark is explosively powerful. Does that justify her breaking the vows of marriage? Are you doing something immoral by encouraging her to break her marriage vows?
- “All's fair in love and war,” the old saying goes, which suggests that the rules of morality have no force when it comes to love. This is in part due to the fact that romantic love—sometimes called erotic love—involves one of our most basic instincts, the sexual drive. In *The Four Loves*, C. S. Lewis argued that sex and erotic love may be as close as many of us ever get to the love of God, which he considers the very highest form of love.

- In the *Symposium*, Plato’s famous dialogue on love, the poet and playwright Aristophanes described the original state of human beings as being, in effect, double what we are now. We were once, he said, combined with another human being, with two heads, four arms, and four legs. But because the humans were displaying hubris, Zeus cut everyone in half.
- Aristophanes used this to explain the feeling of completeness we have when we are in the throes of romantic love. The myth is psychologically profound and accurate. It reflects the fact that many of us believe that we can achieve that feeling of completion with another person in romantic love.

Four Kinds of Love

- The ancient Greeks identified four kinds of love.
 - *Eros* is erotic or romantic love—an intimate and sexual kind of love.
 - *Storge* is the Greek word for domestic love—the kind of love we feel for our family, our spouse or partner, and our children. Sometimes translated as “affection,” this is the kind of love that unites a family in daily life.
 - *Philia* refers to the love between friends; it may also be the love of any deep intellectual interest.
 - *Agape*, often translated as “unconditional love,” is the kind of love that gives yet expects nothing in return. Interpreted as “charity” in the Christian tradition, it is thought that God and Christ have this kind of love for human beings, and in the purest form of faith, we give this kind of love in return.

Moral Norms Governing Marriage

- First and foremost, the marriage bond is constituted by a promise that each party in the marriage makes to the other. In the vast majority of marriages, this includes the promise of sexual fidelity, but even if sexual fidelity is not paramount, it includes the promise



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One reason the discussion of whether or not one can have an affair is so pressing is that many people believe that marriage and family are at the moral core of our society.

to maintain the familial bond with one's partner even when times are difficult. The marriage vow is one of the most significant promises a person can ever make, in part because it is a very difficult promise to keep.

- The promise we make when we marry has the moral force of a contract. Furthermore, because it is a promise about love—perhaps the most moral of our emotions—it has much more moral force than most contracts and perhaps the greatest moral force of any contract.
- In the situation with the real estate agent, there is an immediate moral norm in place: the promise that the real estate agent has made to her husband. She has promised to try to make their marriage work, even—or especially—in the face of challenges to it.
- What's more, you have a moral duty in this situation not to interfere with the promise that the realtor has made. You may ask why you

have a moral obligation here, why you don't have a right to pursue your own good, or why you should worry about promises other people have made to each other. There are two profound responses to these questions. The first comes from Kant and concerns the rationality of promise keeping; the second comes from ancient Greek thinking about love.

Kant and Promise Keeping

- According to Kant, an act is morally justifiable insofar as we can imagine that act being universalized—that is, applied to all human beings in all places at all times. An act that can be universalized is one that shows itself to be noncontradictory and, therefore, rational.
- Consider the act of promise keeping. If people always kept their promises, there is no contradiction. In fact, that's the morally ideal situation; that's how it is supposed to work. If people always break their own promises, however, then making a promise becomes meaningless. Universal promise breaking would make it impossible to make a promise at all—a contradiction. Therefore, promise breaking is irrational and immoral.
- But what about interfering with someone else's promise? According to Kant, the principle behind interfering with someone else's promise is not theoretically any different than breaking a promise yourself. When you interfere with someone else's promise, you are telling that person, in effect, you should break your promise.
- For Kant, it didn't matter who the particular promise breaker is: The principle is promise breaking. Universal promise breaking is irrational and immoral; it doesn't matter whether you are doing it or you are encouraging someone else to do it.
- In some sense, for Kant, your encouraging the real estate to break her promise is even worse than breaking the promise yourself, because it seems as if you are treating both the real estate agent and her husband as a mere means to the end of your own happiness. You are not recognizing that both the woman and her husband

are free moral beings just like yourself and that they deserve all the moral respect that you demand. Thus, for Kant, you are really making two grave moral errors when you encourage someone to break a promise.

Diotima's Definition of Love

- Furthermore, you may be interfering with a more robust conception of what it is to love. Let's consider Socrates's account of love in Plato's *Symposium*. Socrates tells the group what he was taught by a woman, Diotima, who knew a great deal about love.
- According to Diotima, Socrates says, love begins by attracting us to the pleasing outer appearance of one particular person, what we normally think of as erotic love. Next, it attracts us to what is beautiful inside that person: the mind, emotional life, beliefs, and principles. Once we recognize the beauty in that person's moral beliefs, we will start to love moral principles more generally, including the principles that create and guide the state (such as the principle of marriage). Finally, we will come to love the very highest principles that bring all of humanity together, such as justice, harmony, and truth. We begin with *eros*, but *eros* leads us into *philia* and *agape*.
- On Diotima's account, then, if you truly love the real estate agent, you will also love in her the impulse that caused her to get married in the first place, and you will love the moral principles that guide her. Practically speaking, this does not mean that you will stop being attracted to her. But it does mean that a more cultivated love for her will require you also to respect her marriage and the morality of promise keeping that informs it.
- This approach respects the other kinds of love that the real estate agent and her husband have for each other. It acknowledges that their *storge*, or domestic love, is important. It respects the *philia*, or friendship, they share. Finally, it is an example of *agape*, or selfless love. In insisting that her marriage is as important as your desire, you

are elevating your erotic love to a nobler kind of love. Like many moral decisions, this won't be easy, but it is morally praiseworthy.

- If the real estate agent goes through the proper steps and her marriage nevertheless comes to an end, then both you and she will begin your new relationship with the much more satisfying feeling that you have done things in the best way. This may also significantly increase the feeling of trust you have for each other—a trust that could have been undermined if your relationship began with secrets and lies.
- In short, it looks as if you cannot date the married real estate agent—at least not until she and her husband are divorced. If they sincerely try to work out their problems, but their marriage simply can't continue, and they mutually decide it's time for the contract to be dissolved—for the promise to end—then, morally speaking, you can come into the picture—but not before.

Suggested Reading

Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*.

Lewis, *The Four Loves*.

Phillips, *Monogamy*.

Questions to Consider

1. We all talk about the “marriage contract.” Spell out, for a friend, five rules of that contract. Are they morally praiseworthy rules?
2. Is there some one person out there in the world who “completes” us? How do we know that person when we meet him or her? What moral impact does that have?
3. What are the four kinds of love, according to the ancient Greeks? Can you think of any others?

Are Jealousy and Resentment Always Wrong?

Lecture 12

A great deal of emotion is invested in our everyday ethics. We should also recognize, as American philosopher Robert C. Solomon argued, that reasoning also factors into our emotions: Thinking controls how we feel. Although heartbreak, jealousy, and resentment are generally considered to be negative emotions, they are actually potent forces that motivate our moral psychology. In this lecture, we will continue our examination of moral psychology, exploring the complex terrain of how emotions invest our lives with meaning. We will also analyze the arguments of Friedrich Nietzsche and David Hume, who maintained that emotions serve as the basis for our moral lives. These philosophers believed that emotional responses can generate entire moral systems.

Robert C. Solomon

- There is a debate in the philosophy of emotion about the level of cognition in our emotional experiences. It began in American academic philosophy with the work of the philosopher Robert C. Solomon.
- Solomon argued that jealousy and similar emotions were actually highly rational and moral experiences. Such emotions as heartbreak, jealousy, and resentment are not just reactions, Solomon reasoned, but decisions that we make.
- For many of us, this idea runs counter to our intuitions. The traditional view is that our emotions build up or drive us to act in certain ways. This is sometimes called the hydraulic, or drive, theory of emotions.
- Solomon argued, however, that every time you feel jealousy, for example, it is a consequence of how you think about the situation. You perform all kinds of conscious acts and process all kinds of judgments that add up to the larger emotional response that finally

emerges as jealousy. You do not merely feel jealousy, Solomon said; you think your way into it.

Heartbreak

- In the context of love, the nature of how emotions work has been investigated by the contemporary American philosopher Martha Nussbaum. Nussbaum argued that there are two ways to think about the problem of how we come to have such emotions as love and how they relate to the way we understand ourselves and our ethical situations.
- One way of thinking is that we actually come to know or recognize love in heartbreak. On this account, we simply do not understand ourselves very well, especially when it comes to our emotional lives. If we think about heartbreak in this way, we would say that Solomon is wrong about our emotional lives. We do not think our way into emotions; we simply suffer them—or enjoy them.
- The other way of thinking is that the suffering of heartbreak is, in fact, constitutive of love. On this account, we would tend to agree with Solomon’s way of analyzing emotions: It is through thinking about love that you come to an even greater desire for the lover and a fierce jealousy of him or her.
- A third option is that perhaps the pain we suffer in heartbreak is yet another layer of self-deception. Pain—real suffering—seems to bear the mark of undeniable truth; nevertheless, the pain may be a kind of half-truth, false belief, or strategic self-deception.
- The reason cognition matters is that pain seems primitive (and, thus, somehow “truthful”) in a way that thinking does not. If emotions are involved with thinking—if they are, as Solomon put it (following the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre), judgments or evaluations—then they are much harder to grasp when they are swimming in the muddy pond of self-knowledge.

- Perhaps heartbreak is not so much a state or a judgment as it is an activity; thus, our usual way of thinking about the emotional condition does not fit heartbreak very well. Judgments are part of the activity of heartbreak but are not sufficient to its description. (The judgment without the heartbreak, Kant would say, is empty.) Heartbreak without judgments—what some have called primitive pain and Proust simply called suffering—would be blind.

Jealousy

- A broken heart is often the lover's first real taste of jealousy. As Freud insisted, we all experience jealousy first with our mothers. The psychoanalyst Adam Phillips wrote, "Our mothers are a model of infidelity." They have lives of their own. They take an interest in others. But because we understand that we must share our mothers—because they have authority over us—we reluctantly accept the separation.
- In heartbreak, separation from the beloved is already unbearable, but when that separation is a consequence of someone else enjoying the beloved's company, the heartbroken lover goes wild with pain and anxiety. In the tempest of jealousy, there is no act the lover will not perform, no lie he or she will not tell, no fantasy of betrayal that is unbelievable, and no promise or moral code that cannot be broken.
- It is probably superficial to suppose that feeling jealous is either passive or active. In the philosophy of emotions, for centuries, it was generally supposed that love—like the other passions—was something inflicted upon a person and that love, jealousy, and other passions were involuntary. Many of us still understand falling in love in this way. The French call this *coup de foudre*: the "lightning bolt" that strikes the lover.
- In the 20th century, however, especially with the work of Jean-Paul Sartre and Robert C. Solomon, emotions—in particular, such emotions as love and jealousy—were understood as activities, choices that we make.

Voluntary and Involuntary Components of Emotion

- The prevailing view is that a complex emotional experience, such as jealousy, has both voluntary and involuntary components.
- The reason this question is philosophically difficult is that it reflects a more fundamental debate about what it is to believe at all. Let's say you truthfully tell a friend, "I'm suffering jealousy." Is this the same kind of statement as "It's raining outside"?
- On the one hand, insofar as you hold both beliefs and both beliefs are true, the two statements seem the same. On the other hand, the first belief can only be known with certainty by you, while the second belief is known by anyone who observes the state of the weather.
- An "involuntarist" holds that our beliefs are inflicted upon us, independent of our will. A "voluntarist" holds that our wills are involved with our states of belief.
- When philosophers advance this view, however, they admit that certain sorts of beliefs, such as moral beliefs and the belief in the existence of God, may be by their nature at least not involuntary. Of course, these are precisely the sorts of beliefs we care most about.

Nietzsche and Inversion of Values

- Friedrich Nietzsche used his ideas about jealousy and a related emotion, resentment, to analyze how an entire moral system developed. Nietzsche argued that in society, before the development of Judeo-Christian ethics, a different kind of ethics applied, what he called master ethics and slave ethics.
- Master ethics placed an emphasis on health, the body, wealth, sex, power, and pride—many of the aspects we associate with Aristotle's virtue ethics. Only the wealthy and powerful could enjoy this kind of life, however. Meanwhile, another set of people—the slave class—Nietzsche argued, felt jealous or resentful of the master class. The slaves wanted what the masters had but could not get it.

- What did they do? Nietzsche called this the greatest creative moment in the history of Western civilization: They turned the masters' ethics upside down in what Nietzsche termed an "inversion of values."
- The slaves decided that whatever the masters valued, they would value the opposite. Out of this basic emotional response of jealousy and resentment (what Nietzsche actually called *ressentiment*, after the French way of thinking about resentment and jealousy), the entire Judeo-Christian code of ethics was generated.
- The problem, Nietzsche believed, was that the kind of negative evaluation of life that we saw with heartbreak and jealousy stayed with this ethical system. Dwelling on resentment—founding a morality on it—ends up turning all of life into a negative condition. We say no to life rather than saying yes. There is a profound psychological and moral point here: Resentment and envy are ultimately destructive moral forces.

David Hume

- The 18th-century Scottish philosopher David Hume argued that our moral lives are simply an expression of our emotional lives. This is sometimes called the sentimental theory of ethics. "Reason is, and ought to be, a slave to the passions," Hume famously wrote, and he developed his entire theory of ethics on this core observation.
- Hume encouraged us to think about our simple emotional responses to a variety of situations: a man who kicks his dog, a beggar in abject poverty, a woman who steals



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It's important to try to find a healthy balance between the rational life and the emotional life and always observe that they are working together.

a loaf of bread. He asked us, however, to consider about how we might feel if that person was a mother stealing a loaf of bread to feed her starving children.

- Finally, consider how you feel when someone offers you a false apology: “I’m sorry, but ...” and then offers a flimsy defense. You have an ethical response: You feel outraged. By contrast, consider how you feel when someone offers a sincere apology; you feel forgiveness.
- Hume thought that, just as our bodies had a natural tendency to seek pleasure and avoid pain, so our minds or our natures had a natural tendency to move us in moral directions. This comes partly from the society of which we are members and partly from the sort of beings we are.

Suggested Reading

De Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*.

Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*.

Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why might heartbreak be an important moral emotion? How does it work?
2. Suppose a person lived his or her whole life without suffering the pain of romantic loss. Do you think that would be a morally diminished life? Why? Discuss with a friend.

What Are the Rules for Respecting Privacy?

Lecture 13

Privacy issues have become even more pressing because of advances in technology. Two philosophical issues are at work here: how much privacy we are entitled to and why, and how intrusions into our privacy affect our freedom and autonomy. These issues are deeply interwoven, especially when it comes to the ways technology complicates moral life. In this lecture, we will look at arguments for why our privacy and autonomy might sometimes be sensibly compromised, as well as dangers that technology poses to our privacy. You may have heard of the LoJack® vehicle tracking system, a technology for tracking a stolen car. A frustrated parent of a teenager might well complain, “Why can’t I LoJack my kids?”

The Right to Privacy

- In the United States, the right to privacy is not constitutionally guaranteed, although there is a body of law that suggests strong constitutional support. That we have a right to privacy is more like a moral instinct that we all share. The right to privacy, as we think of it today, is often divided into four concerns:
 - First is the concern over intrusion on a person’s seclusion or solitude or into his or her private affairs.
 - Second is the concern over public disclosure of embarrassing private facts about an individual.
 - Third is the concern over publicity placing a person in a false light in the public eye.
 - Fourth is the concern for the appropriation of one person’s likeness for the advantage of another person (a form of identity theft).
- For the purposes of this lecture, we will examine the morality and dangers associated with the first form of privacy: when there

is intrusion into a person's private affairs, especially when that intrusion involves a compromise of that person's autonomy or freedom. Sometimes that intrusion may also mean making a person's private life public or collapsing the difference between the private and the public, which is another way of potentially infringing on the right to privacy.

Public versus Private Life

- In a discussion of the violation of the right to privacy of one of his characters, the writer Milan Kundera provided a powerful statement of the distinction between the public and the private. The crucial idea was that the difference between the public and the private is “the indispensable condition ... for a man to live free.”
- The first philosopher in the Western tradition to make a distinction between the public and the private was Aristotle. Aristotle distinguished between the public sphere of life, or the *polis*, and the private sphere of life, the *oikos*, or family.
- For Aristotle, there were two quite different sets of rules that governed how people behaved when they were in their homes with their families and when they were out in public among the other citizens of the city-state. The rules of the family were dictated by the head of the household, but those rules were informed by the needs of the household and its individual members.
- Once people entered the *polis* or the public sphere, they explicitly relinquished that kind of privacy, however. In the public sphere, individual freedom would be constrained by the way we all had collectively agreed to behave in public, and people could not insist that what they did or said would remain private.

Plato and the Noble Lie

- Aristotle's teacher, Plato, thought rather differently about privacy and autonomy than Aristotle did. Based on his concept of paternalism, Plato believed that a ruler was justified in controlling the lives and minds of the citizenry. Sometimes, Plato thought, the

citizens must be protected from themselves for their own well-being and happiness.

- For this reason, in his ideal state or “republic,” Plato eliminated almost entirely the division between the public and the private. He advocated that children be raised communally, for example, because he thought that experts on child care would do a better job than untrained parents.
- Plato even argued that the leader of the state could and should invade the privacy of the minds of his citizens to control their beliefs. Thus, he advocated the *gennaion pseudos*, or “noble lie,” told to the citizenry to prevent civil strife or to promote the leaders’ agenda.

Mill and Soft Paternalism

- The soft paternalism advocated by John Stuart Mill could also be used to justify interference with our right to privacy. Consider the case of a friend who has a drug problem and needs help. Part of intervening to help that friend is to invade his or her privacy. All this can be justified because, according to soft paternalism, addicts need the help they would wish for if they were in their right minds.
- There are many problems with this view. One difficulty is identifying who decides when addicts are or are not in their right minds and how much of their privacy you are allowed to invade in order to find out the condition of their minds.

Privacy and Coercion

- Why worry about privacy at all? Some might find it comforting to live in an ideal state, such as Plato’s, where we have almost no privacy but we feel completely secure and the government tells us exactly what to do. For most people, however, this situation raises moral hackles, because it attacks one of our most fundamental values: liberty.

- Liberty requires privacy. The more public our activities are, the more inclined other people are to try to manipulate or control us. When your private behavior is made public, you submit to the possibility of coercion; you have lost your autonomy.

Maternalism

- Another way of thinking about privacy and autonomy could be considered maternalism, as opposed to paternalism. Maternalism relates to the ethics of care advanced by many feminists.
- Consider as a moral ideal the best possible mother, both inquisitive but respectful of developing autonomy. A good mother, operating with respect for individuality, will know how much autonomy and how much privacy each child needs (also how much paternalism).
- But supervising can easily turn into snooping, even spying, which is destructive for everyone. For example, if members of the government start feeling justified in spying—like a good mom might feel justified in doing some snooping—it can soon create significant problems.
- Furthermore, many feminists, such as Catharine MacKinnon, worry that some privacy issues can be dangerous for women. Privacy has often been used to hide repression of women and even physical harm to them. It has also been crucial to the subjection of women in the domestic sphere. Finally, the private–public distinction has interfered with the development of the rights of women by insisting that the state not be allowed to interfere in family matters.

Privacy in the Public Sphere

- Many employers are now legally treating employees as a parent treats a child: reading their e-mails, monitoring their computer time, observing their online searches, and so on. Furthermore, the government now has the ability to monitor almost any activity you pursue. For this reason, many contemporary philosophers advocate a right they call “privacy in the public sphere”—the legal right not to be observed in many environments.

- Unfortunately, privacy in the public sphere is in stark contrast with security necessities, and in our world of growing security threats, especially terrorism and pointless acts of mass violence, security will most likely win out over privacy.

Guidelines for Respecting Privacy

- Following are important guidelines for how businesses and governments can use, rather than abuse, the power of monitoring, without sweeping invasions of privacy.

- First, businesses and governments should recognize, in some cases, our desire to maintain anonymity. This applies to information about medical history, sexual preferences, religious beliefs, and even purchasing history.



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Today's technology makes spying much easier than it was in the past—by family members, corporations, computer hackers, and our own government.

- Second, employers should make a strong distinction between what is “company time” and what is “employee time.” Employers should not be allowed to monitor employees when they are off the clock.
- Third, corporations and the government should not have access to any activity that could not possibly be deemed a threat to the public security. There are express permission policies in place for the release of financial information and medical records; these kinds of express permission clauses can be created and written into law to govern other kinds of information.

Advantages of Transparency

- There are many advantages to keeping certain information in the public sphere, however. To make facts public is to make them

transparent and open to all. In fact, we've seen frequently in this course that one good guide to doing the right thing is simply to ask yourself: Would I do this if everyone knew I was doing it?

- As often before, Aristotle has answers for us. Clearly, a moderate approach to the private–public distinction allows us to maintain healthy private lives while also guaranteeing the transparency that we want from the public sphere.

Suggested Reading

Assange, Appelbaum, and Muller-Maguhn, *Cypherpunks*.

Brin, *The Transparent Society*.

Questions to Consider

1. Electronic surveillance is at an all-time high. You have “nothing to hide.” Should you still be alarmed? Why or why not?
2. Should companies be allowed to tailor their advertisements to you online according to your past purchasing history—regardless of where the purchases were made?

What Do I Owe My Aging Parents?

Lecture 14

As the American population ages and people live longer, many of us find ourselves in the position of caring for our aging parents. Because our parents have always been a source of help to us, we may think we do not have to realign our moral priorities based on our parents' needs. We know we have an obligation to care for our children, but do we have a moral obligation to care for our parents? In this lecture, we'll demonstrate that the decision is not just about the division of resources; it is about ethical values and priorities. In essence, it is a matter of respect.

A Perspective from Cultural Anthropology

- The anthropologist and philosopher Jared Diamond has studied the way traditional societies cared for their elderly. He maintained that their different approaches to care are all instructive social experiments.
- Although modern approaches to caring for the elderly are not ideal, some traditional societies were often quite harsh in their treatment of the elderly. In fact, murder of the elderly was not uncommon in nomadic societies or under conditions of great scarcity.
- In some societies, however, the elderly are valued for practical reasons, such as babysitting, ability to find food, and life experience; they are seen as sources of wisdom.
- What's more, the lives of the elderly in traditional societies tend to be much more socially rich and woven into the fabric of the society. Consequently, Diamond believes, children in those societies are much more self-assured because they gain confidence from interaction with their elders.

Aging in America

- By contrast, in America, Diamond argued, being old is simply a social handicap. As an example, a sociologist at Boston University sent out identical applications for jobs. Half the applicants listed their ages at 25 to 40, and the other half listed their ages at 45 to 60. Employers were twice as likely to call the younger applicants. This is significant when you consider that older applicants presumably have more knowledge, more experience, more resources, and more skills.
- One reason Americans do not have a strong respect for the elderly might arise from the Protestant work ethic. As we get older, we obviously cannot work as hard. Americans prize the value of self-reliance, and the elderly may be viewed as a kind of social handicap.
- Furthermore, in America, for better or worse, we idolize the culture of youth. And because we have become an increasingly mobile society, older people tend to be physically distant from their children and friends.



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Interestingly, single children are better at caring for their elderly parents than multiple children are, perhaps because their priorities are different.

- Modern society does present some positives when it comes to the elderly: We have much longer lives than we had in traditional societies; we have better health today; and we have many more recreational opportunities.

Confucius and *Xiao*

- The Chinese philosopher Confucius (6th–5th century B.C.) placed filial piety, or *xiao*, at the heart of his ethical system. According to Confucius, because we owed our parents our very existence, there was no more fundamental moral obligation than our obligation to our parents.
- Our parents, Confucius taught, form the basis of our entire lives, and they embody the foundation of the social order. The very fabric of our society, according to Confucius, therefore depends on our attitude toward our parents. When we care for our parents, we demonstrate the kinds of virtues we want to display when we interact with everyone else.
- *Xiao* comprises three basic virtues: devotion, care, and obedience. Devotion means showing an attitude of loving attention. Care means putting the other person’s needs and wants thoughtfully at the center of your attention and action, quite possibly ahead of your own. Obedience means listening to your parents and doing your best, within reason, to act according to their requirements.

Li and *Ren*

- The person displaying *xiao* will also behave with the proper manner and appropriate expression of respect. In this way, Confucius says, the child demonstrates the attitude of *li*, or proper social etiquette.
- Another key Confucian virtue is *ren*, which means to “act with humanity”; it encompasses much of what Kant meant by treating human beings as ends in themselves rather than mere means. Another way of understanding *ren*, or the fundamental respect for human life, is that—as we emphasize in both the Judeo-Christian and Buddhist traditions—all of humanity should be treated with love.

- Confucius argued that if we all individually practice *xiao*, this virtue will carry over into our interactions with other human beings around us, and society as a whole will operate with greater care, deference, and mutual respect.

Socrates in *Crito*

- One of the most famous analyses of what we owe to society and to our parents is offered by Plato in the dialogue *Crito*. In *Crito*, Socrates has been convicted of the crime of corrupting the youth, conducting scientific research, and not respecting the gods.
- As he is sitting in prison, waiting for execution, Socrates is visited by Crito, who presents an escape plan. Socrates looks at Crito and says (characteristically) that he will escape if it is the right thing to do.
- Socrates then performs a thought experiment for Crito. He imagines that the laws of Athens are speaking to him: “Will you, O professor of true virtue, say that you are justified in this [escape]? Has a philosopher like you failed to discover that our country is more to be valued and higher and holier farther than mother or father or any ancestor, and more to be regarded in the eyes of the gods and of men of understanding, also to be soothed and gently and reverently entreated when angry even more than a father, and if not persuaded, obeyed?”
- Although Socrates refers to the laws and the state, not to one’s parents, the analogy he uses is the duty that one owes to one’s parents; the moral force of his argument depends heavily on that analogy and on obedience. In short, from Socrates’s point of view, everything that we are, we owe specifically to our parents.

Nel Noddings and the Ethics of Care

- In more recent ethical thinking, Nel Noddings championed the Confucian virtue of care. Noddings, a contemporary American feminist philosopher, argued that from the time we are children, we act from a natural caring that motivates us to help others—not because we have some obligation to do so or even because our

parents have taught us to do so, but simply because we have wired into us a natural desire to help other people.

- In later life, we may feel we just do not have time to care for so many. In this case, Noddings maintained, we have an obligation to recognize that we must consciously choose to care for those who need and deserve our care. Our elderly parents will be at the very top of that list, along with our children. This was the foundation of our moral way of life, according to Noddings.
- Noddings believed that we have the natural ability and even the inclination to tap into that caring impulse that we all shared when we were children.
- Noddings also argued (controversially) that women were better caregivers, perhaps more natural caregivers, and took more pleasure in caregiving than men do. Women also had a tendency to care to such a degree that they neglected themselves.

William James and Pragmatism

- Finally, we'll turn to the 20th-century American pragmatist and philosopher William James, the founder of psychology in America. Interestingly, James was also a proponent of Eastern philosophy. When the Hindu philosopher Krishnamurti gave a lecture at Harvard and explained some basic principles of his moral philosophy, James leapt to his feet and cried out, "This is the philosophy of the future."
- The basic idea of moral pragmatism is that one should experiment, then practice what works. Let's see how this operates in the decision to care for aging parents.
- Consider two siblings, John and Wendy, caring for an aging father. First, John could try bringing his father into his large home, in which he lives alone, and experiment to see if it is possible to incorporate his father into his life. Wendy could come over during the week to help John. In fact, that would be a sensible arrangement

and respectful of the fact that both of the siblings should care for their parent.

- If that arrangement didn't work, Wendy could try having their father live in her apartment with her; John could come over and provide some of the care. Alternatively, they could try different sorts of nursing homes.
- The fundamental idea is that there is never just one solution, according to the pragmatist. In the case of caring for our aging parents, we must experiment in order to find the best solution, and we must be practical and see what actually works. We won't know what works best, however, until we try it.
- Although we have a preeminent moral duty to respect our parents and care for them, as moral pragmatists, we should try out different experiments to see what works best for us, for our families, and for our parents.

Suggested Reading

Weiming, *Confucius*.

Weisheit, *Aging Parents*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why and how might filial piety be the sort of moral value that could provide a moral framework for an entire society?
2. Why does respect for the needs of our parents seem to be diminishing in contemporary civilization, especially in the West?

Should I Help a Suffering Loved One Die?

Lecture 15

Most people believe that there is nothing more morally significant, nothing more sacred, than human life. In this lecture, we will explore whether or not you should have the ability to decide when and how you or someone else dies. In most states, you are, in fact, not allowed to make that decision. The state has already made it for you: You cannot choose to decide whether or not you live or die. You must die of natural causes and only of natural causes. Given that death is irreversible and life is the most profound moral value that humans share, is it not incumbent on us to protect human life at all costs?

Euthanasia

- *Euthanasia* derives from the Greek words *eu*, meaning “good,” and *thanatos*, meaning “death.” Most of us have a commonsense notion of a good death and a bad death. No one wants to die alone in terrible pain. Most of us would like to die a relatively painless death surrounded by our family and friends.
- Once we know that we are going to die—say, within weeks or even days—having the ability to choose just when we will die may seem, to many of us, like a gift. To others of us, it might seem like having too much power. Or it might seem like a decision we cannot bear to make.
- A “good death,” in the context of contemporary medical debates, includes three different but related types: death that is entirely in one’s own hands (conditional suicide), death that requires the help of someone else (physician- or family-assisted suicide), and death that one cannot obtain on one’s own because one is no longer in a position to choose (for instance, withdrawal of life support for a patient in a vegetative state).

- The problem of euthanasia is relatively new and is growing. Thanks to advances in medical technology, people now live much longer, and their lives can be prolonged even when they are very sick and in terrible pain. In short, as our ability to extend life grows, so does the question of the morality or immorality of euthanasia.

Allowing or Assisting: An Important Distinction

- For our purposes in thinking this question through philosophically, we are particularly concerned with the difference between *allowing* someone to die (“pulling the plug” or not administering a life-extending treatment) and *assisting* someone to die.
- Suppose, for example, that you hear a small child drowning in a bathtub. You know what is happening, but you wait outside the door and let the child die. Is there any difference, morally speaking, between your behavior and drowning the child yourself? Whether it is your direct action or your grossly negligent inaction, many of us would believe you have been directly involved in a preventable death. Either way, morally speaking, you are to blame.
- But consider the following case, proposed by the 20th-century British philosopher Philippa Foot. Suppose you are on an island and you have the only vehicle that can drive to the beach during a terrible storm. Two groups of people—on opposite sides of the island—are trapped and will be killed by the storm. On one side are two people; on the other side, five people. The answer seems obvious to all of us: Save the five people. We certainly will not blame you for the deaths of those other two people.
- Foot then continues: Imagine the same example, but to get to the five people, you have to drive over a collapsed bridge. Beneath that collapsed bridge a man is trapped. If he is left alone, he will be saved soon. But if you drive over the bridge to save the five people, you will kill him.
- This dilemma is much more difficult because there is a very important distinction in our minds—and in our moral psychology—

between letting someone die and actively killing someone. On this account, then, we would argue that not administering life-extending treatments is a significant moral distinction from helping someone to commit suicide.

Arguments for Life

- Many believe that allowing a human life to end is always wrong. There are four standard arguments that defend that position.
- First, it is argued that the mere suggestion that a critically ill person should commit suicide is a way of abandoning that person. It is important for those who are dying to know how important their lives are to us, and part of that knowledge comes from our refusal to let them go.
- The second argument concerns miracle cures. The reason we ought to keep a person alive as long as we possibly can—whether he or she is conscious and in pain or in a vegetative state—is that science constantly surprises us. Miracle cures may emerge just when we think all hope is lost.
- The third argument reasserts the premise that we can never choose death over life.
- The fourth argument is that taking action when a person is dying interferes with God’s divine plan. This argument is most compelling when we consider the case of active euthanasia, or what we also call assisted suicide. Nearly all religious traditions, which deeply inform our moral precepts and intuitions, agree that suicide is wrong.

Right to Suicide

- There are five main arguments on behalf of “pulling the plug” and more active forms of ending a human life, including assisted suicide. The first of these arguments asserts that individuals have rights over their own bodies, lives, and deaths. On this account, if it

makes sense to say that we have any rights at all, we ought to have the right to take our own lives.

- Many eminent philosophers have argued this position—perhaps most notably the Scottish Enlightenment philosopher David Hume, who said, “No man ever threw away life while it was worth keeping.” Even Socrates chose hemlock over exile.
- There are many problems with this argument, but at least two are focal. First, severe suffering, whether physical or psychological, distorts our thinking, and few people actually choose to commit suicide when they are in the best position to make that decision. Second, taking one’s own life causes harm to many other people, especially loved ones, friends, and family.
- The “right-to-suicide” argument is stronger in cases when a person is going to die soon, has moments of lucidity, and friends and family support the wish.

Right to Refuse Treatment

- The second argument for allowing a patient to end life arises from the fact that, since the Patient Self-Determination Act of 1991, people in the United States have a right to refuse treatment. This includes the right to make an advance directive or to appoint a surrogate who will make health-care decisions for a patient.
- This argument is hard to attack. Most of us believe, morally speaking, that we should be permitted to tell people that we do not want to have a treatment performed on us. This right seems basic to our self-determination as human beings.
- But the right to say no to treatment will only apply in cases where extraordinary means are being used to keep a person alive. In other words, it will handle “pulling the plug” or passive euthanasia cases, where life support can be withdrawn. It will not help with cases when treatment has ended and only palliative care is being used.

Other Arguments for Euthanasia

- The third argument in favor of allowing someone to die is that doing so will shorten suffering. Objections to this argument are threefold, however: the suffering might be temporary; the suffering distorts judgment; and it is difficult to determine exactly how much suffering justifies euthanasia. Also, once other people are involved in deciding how much suffering we can endure, they may interfere with our autonomy.
- The fourth argument is that patients have the right to die with dignity, and a death that is unnecessarily prolonged eliminates that possibility. Objections to this argument are that it is difficult to decide what counts as dignity, and that death is most dignified when we allow God to decide how it will proceed.
- Finally, some argue that there can be a “duty to die”: that some people may reach a point in their lives when they are draining society’s resources and the resources of friends and family. This is probably the least persuasive of the arguments in favor of euthanasia.

Hospice Care

- Before leaving the complex and compelling topic of euthanasia, let’s consider the hospice approach to death. With hospice, patients die in their own homes, surrounded by their families, and with little or no medical technology supporting life. There is an emphasis on comfort and care rather than curing and healing.
- Hospice care is a team approach, designed to provide support for patients and families. It recognizes the difference between acute and chronic pain and treats acute pain. It respects the idea that chronic pain—pain that simply is never going to go away—may be cause for keeping patients under heavy sedation for most or all of their final days.
- Hospice care is much less expensive than dying in the hospital and provides the family with freedom from financial worry, in addition

to bereavement counseling before and after the death. It is often argued that hospice provides a more “natural death” in a family context.

- Finally, this approach obviates most of the need for mercy death and mercy killing, because the patient is, generally speaking, relatively free from suffering and does not receive the extraordinary means of medical care that would prolong his or her life beyond its natural limits. Hospice care seems like one practical way of providing a “good death.”

Suggested Reading

Dworkin, Frey, and Bok, *Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide*.

Orfali, *Death with Dignity*.

Questions to Consider

1. Is suicide always wrong? Why or why not?
2. How do you want to die? What would you describe as a “good death”? Do you think modern medicine is likely to help with that goal?

Is Genetic Enhancement “Playing God”?

Lecture 16

Bringing a new life into the world is, without a doubt, the single most significant act we can perform. Moreover, the moral implication of creating new life is even more momentous. As Immanuel Kant argued, human beings are like morality machines: We are free. We can choose. We can reason. We can create moral laws and follow them. In fact, conceiving a human life is, in essence, creating an entirely new moral universe. We are creating a moral agent. This lecture will explore the ethics of genetic enhancement, or genetic engineering—whether we have the right to control or coerce that moral agent or decide what capacities he or she will have.

Genetic Engineering

- Imagine being able to choose your baby’s gender, eye color, and hair color. Going a step further, say that you can control for diseases, such as leukemia, diabetes, or alcoholism. Or consider that you have the ability to manipulate genes to create a baby who is athletic, musically talented, and intelligent—but not too intelligent.
- You might think that this all sounds fairly far-fetched, but in fact, it’s not. Advances in reproductive technology, gene mapping, and genetic engineering are progressing at such an astonishing rate that the scenario described could very easily present itself in your lifetime. We are already testing for various genetic defects at very early stages of fetal growth.
- Evolutionary biologists maintain that we are attracted to certain qualities in others simply because we perceive them—albeit often subconsciously—as more fit for making babies with us. The question is: Through genetic engineering, are we not just doing consciously and deliberately—precisely and scientifically—what we have always been doing in choosing a mate?

“Playing God”

- Many religious traditions have a strong and straightforward argument against genetic engineering—an argument against “playing God.” Kant gives extra emphasis to this argument; if we genetically program an unborn child, we are treating that baby as a mere means—as a kind of slave to our wishes—rather than recognizing that the baby we are making is a moral being, like ourselves.
- With genetic engineering, we are controlling aspects that normally are left up to individual choices. We are controlling that baby’s autonomy, and when we do that, according to Kant, we’re doing the worst thing we can possibly do to another human being.
- Furthermore, when we play God, we inevitably deal with unforeseen consequences. If we leave things up to nature or up to God’s will, we accept the child as he or she is born and work with those capacities.
- But when we play God, when we control what that child is going to look like, how that child is going to think, what that child will pursue in life, we take direct responsibility for the way that child comes into the world. If something goes wrong, we have no one to blame but ourselves (and our doctor). For many of us, that is much more responsibility than we want or can handle.
- There are two additional arguments to consider that speak against genetic enhancement. The first is based on the question of social fairness, and the second is based on the question of the importance of human uniqueness and human will.

***Gattaca*: A Metaphorical Tale**

- Before we address those arguments, let’s look at a thought-provoking case provided by the film *Gattaca*. This film is set in the not-so-distant future, at a time when liberal eugenics, or the use of genetic and reproductive technologies to enhance human characteristics and capacities, has become widespread.

- In the film, the hero, Vincent Freeman, has been conceived without genetic enhancement. He is myopic, he has a heart condition, and he is expected to die at age 30. Vincent’s younger brother, Anton, on the other hand, has been genetically enhanced; thus, he is stronger, more handsome, and smarter, and he should live a long and full life.
- Vincent’s dream is to become an astronaut, but his genes make this impossible. He is simply genetically inferior to the enhanced applicants, and this fact is constantly made explicit. For example, part of the job interview to enter the astronaut training program is a DNA test. Vincent’s DNA alone would rule him out because other applicants will simply show that they have superior genetic profiles.
- One day, Vincent runs away from home and purchases what is called a borrowed ladder. That is, he buys hair, tissue, and urine samples from an enhanced citizen—a genetically improved individual—and assumes that person’s identity. With a bit of subterfuge, he completes the DNA test and is admitted to the space training program, Gattaca, as a legitimate genetically enhanced person.
- Then, in the climax of the film, Anton, who has suffered a debilitating injury and can no longer enjoy his vastly superior physical powers, kills himself; he decides that his life as a physically challenged person is no longer worth living.

John Rawls and Social Justice

- In the society of Vincent and Anton, the wealthy can afford to create genetically superior beings, who then have the most desirable jobs and lifestyles. The poor cannot afford to create those superior children and have to settle for whatever happens naturally.
- As sophisticated moral theorists, let’s consider some of the problems of this metaphorical tale and the arguments related to genetic engineering. Consider the viewpoint of the American philosopher John Rawls, for example.

- For Rawls, this looks like a straightforward case of social injustice. We are creating a class of human being that is superior to another class of humans simply because we have the wealth and resources to do so.

The Veil of Ignorance

- According to Rawls, before we decide how to distribute resources, we are supposed to step behind the veil of ignorance. If we are behind the veil of ignorance, it is rational to distribute money in such a way that the most disadvantaged members of society will receive the most help.



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Advances in genetic enhancement introduce new moral questions: Do we have an idea of the “perfect” human being in mind, and what do we lose by seeking that ideal?

- Actually, according to Rawls’s logic, if anyone is going to obtain genetic enhancement in the society of *Gattaca*, it ought to be poor people, not wealthy people. The poor are the ones who really need to advance themselves. The society of *Gattaca* has it exactly backwards.
- Furthermore, from Rawls’s perspective, our situation in the present day is a kind of genetic lottery. Before a baby is born, we are taking a chance at what sort of human being we have conceived.
- In a sense, we are having our children from behind the veil of ignorance, because we do not really know how they will look when they are born or what their capacities will be. As it stands, this genetic lottery actually works in favor of a more just society because physical and psychological traits are distributed with some surprises by nature.

- For Rawls, the genetic lottery is fair rather than biased in favor of those who have resources to guarantee superiority. According to Rawls, as long as the particular characteristics of a new baby are more or less randomly assigned, that’s a fair and reasonable situation.

A Utilitarian Perspective

- In contrast, let’s consider the case of Vincent and Anton from a utilitarian perspective. If we follow the logic of the film, it looks as if, again, the *Gattaca* society has the situation upside down. The happiness of the few—those wealthy people who can genetically program their children for advantages—is being provided for by the unhappiness of the many.
- One portion of society is very happy but only through the effective creation of a slave state of poor people who are not able to enjoy the benefits of genetic engineering. After all, not everyone can be an astronaut or have the most desirable position in society. The most successful people in *Gattaca* are those who have been genetically engineered with superior capacities, talents, and intelligence.

The Good Life

- In an interesting twist, it looks as if genetic engineering has given Anton a confused idea of the good life.
- In some ways, Anton’s life accords well with what a utilitarian might call a good life. Utilitarianism is just an advanced form of hedonism, and it certainly seems as if a genetically superior or even genetically perfect human being can enjoy all sorts of pleasures that a less genetically advantaged one could not.
- Thus, Anton expects to live a long life full of pleasures because he has a perfect body, with no disabilities, and is highly intelligent, whereas Vincent has numerous disadvantages and will die young. From a utilitarian perspective, we might choose to be Anton rather than Vincent.

- But then, Anton suffers an injury and finds that he is no longer superior. When he has a little instance of what we often call moral bad luck, life loses all meaning for him.
- This is either a problem with utilitarianism—if it gives us such a circumscribed notion of the meaning of life that Anton’s life really is more desirable than Vincent’s—or a problem with understanding genetic enhancement as an expression of utilitarianism. Perhaps one of the pleasures of life is to be more like Vincent, who has to struggle and work with the materials he has to achieve his dreams.

Suggested Reading

Mehlman, *Wondergenes*.

Sandel, *The Case against Perfection*.

Questions to Consider

1. Suppose I can genetically program my unborn child not to have cancer. How is that different, morally speaking, from genetically programming my child to be extraordinarily good at basketball?
2. Should all genetic enhancement be banned? If not, what sorts of enhancement should we allow and why?

Is Conscientious Objection a Moral Right?

Lecture 17

In a famous historical account, as a matter of conscience, Sir Thomas More, the renowned 16th-century Lord Chancellor of England, declined to sign a letter asking Pope Clement VII to annul Henry VIII's marriage to Catherine of Aragon. More objected on the grounds that he could not deny the pope's supremacy in ecclesiastical matters. When he refused to compromise, he was executed. We continue to face such crises of the fundamental moral concept of conscience even today. In this lecture, we will explore the evolution of the concept of conscience and examine several examples of crises of conscience.

Pharmacists and the Right to Life

- The Plan B drug, or morning-after pill, created a crisis of conscience for many pharmacists because prescribing it conflicted with their religious convictions about the right to life. Pharmacists also felt especially challenged to prescribe it to customers under the age of 18.
- Some pharmacies developed opt-out plans for those pharmacists so that they could simply ask another pharmacist to prescribe the pill. Some pharmacies created "conscience clauses" that allowed pharmacists to refuse to fill prescriptions for the morning-after pill to women age 17 and under. Under such policies, pharmacists who objected to the contraceptive were allowed to ask their coworkers to fill prescriptions as long as it did not interfere with the sale.
- It's interesting to ask whether this is an effective solution to the problem and whether handing the prescription to another pharmacist solves the crisis of conscience. Today, the Plan B problem has grown still more complex because the drug is widely available over the counter. Some cashiers refuse to sell the drug because of the claims of conscience.

- One might argue that the pharmacist or cashier should quit his or her job. In other words, if your conscience is offended, act like Sir Thomas More and accept the consequences. That may be a morally praiseworthy solution, but the question remains whether it is morally required.

What Is Conscience?

- Conscience is a crucial part of a moral tradition in the West that goes back at least as far as Socrates. Socrates claimed to have a *daimon*, or spirit, who instructed him morally. Interestingly—and this is common when it comes to appeals to conscience—Socrates’s *daimon* never told him what he ought to do, morally speaking; it simply told him what he could not do. According to Socrates, his conscience kept him out of moral trouble without giving him specific moral duties.
- The term *conscience* generally refers to our ability to judge our own actions. As in the case of Socrates, it is most often referred to as a kind of naysayer. That is, we generally become aware of our conscience when we have done something wrong; we feel a pang of conscience.
- *Conscience* comes from the Latin *conscientia*, a direct translation of the Greek *syneidesis*, which means “being aware of something” or “knowing something in common with someone.”
- The second meaning could be applied in judicial contexts. If you know something that someone else knows, you might be aware of his or her secrets, and you might, therefore, be able to serve as a witness against that person. In some cases, *syneidesis* began to refer to bearing witness against oneself.

Evolution of a Moral Tradition

- Medieval philosophers understood the conscience as having two elements. One part, *syneidesis*, referred to an ultimate, infallible, innate moral core, which they believed was human nature. The

second part, *conscientia*, referred to our judgments prior to taking action, whether moral or immoral.

- Medieval thinkers were particularly interested in the failings of *conscientia* and the question of where mistakes in moral reasoning would leave a person.
- In the 17th and 18th centuries, philosophers did away with that distinction and dealt solely with what medieval philosophers would have termed *conscientia*. There were two basic schools of understanding. One saw conscience as the thought process preceding action. The other defined it as the feelings and judgments that follow an action, whether that action is moral or not.

Bishop Joseph Butler

- The English philosopher and religious leader Bishop Joseph Butler, born in 1692, defined conscience as an innate disposition to judge actions as right or wrong. Butler said that the human mind is wired to think about its actions and their consequences; that is, he argued that judgment was innate.
- For Butler, conscience was not necessarily an absolute moral guide—a kind of kneejerk “this is right” or “this is wrong.” Rather, conscience was the voice of God in us that said, “Stop and think about what you’re doing. Apply your reason to the situation. Evaluate what’s going on.” Butler maintained that conscience stimulated us to use our reason to evaluate.
- Butler believed that the conscience had authority but not power. For example, imagine that you have an extramarital affair, and you justify it by declaring that you cannot control your passion. According to Butler, you will never quite fool yourself. Your moral authority may not have the power to coerce your will—that is, to make you do the right thing—but your conscience will still maintain its authoritative judgment.

Return to *Crito*

- Consider again the story of Socrates told in Plato's *Crito*. In *Crito*, Socrates obeyed the law when he was in prison because the laws were the source and substance of everything he was and everything he enjoyed—even though, after his conviction, the law had become decidedly inconvenient for him. In fact, the law was going to execute him.
- This is the beginning of what is called social contract theory, which is also the origin of our idea of professional responsibility.

Thomas Hobbes

- The 17th-century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes proposed what has become the basis of all later forms of social contract theory.
- Consider life in the state of nature, Hobbes speculated. He asked us to imagine human beings before we were all gathered together in societies. Life in the state of nature, Hobbes wrote, would be “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”
- The reason for this was that all human beings were naturally selfish and would seek—and, in fact, were morally obligated to seek—their own well-being, their own self-preservation.

The Social Contract

- In *Leviathan*, Hobbes tells the story of the beginnings of civil society through an ingenious thought experiment: Imagine that you are a farmer with a few cows; you have a neighbor with a few cows. A man who lives nearby and who is bigger and stronger than you and has weapons threatens to steal your cows.
- The solution to the problem, says Hobbes, is that you and your neighbor band together. But as we band together in larger and larger groups, soon we will find that we are having disputes, and we need a way of settling those disputes.

- We then come up with rules governing our behavior—rules determining whose cows belong to whom, whose property belongs to whom, and how we treat one another. We call those rules laws.
- Now we have to guarantee those laws, argued Hobbes. We need some force to guarantee them or, of course, people will break their promises. We need a police force. We will also need to organize a certain part of our society to defend our group: a military to protect us from outside threats.
- Further, in order to protect us against possible abuses of power by the police or the military, we need to appoint someone in charge of these people. For Hobbes, that had to be an absolute authority, or a king. Of course, the philosopher John Locke later refined this view to propose other forms of government.

A Perplexing Dilemma

- The social contract institutes a complex set of agreements that establish our obligations to one another. Part of our social contract, our network of promises, includes professional obligations. For example, a doctor has a set of promises to keep: a special kind of social contract that goes all the way back to the Hippocratic Oath. First and foremost, the doctor has a promise—a contract—not to cause any harm.
- Consider the pharmacists in the Plan B situation. As members of our society, they have a set of obligations to all the other members of our society. Part of their profession is the promise to provide medications. If



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The agreement between a lawyer and a client is a particular kind of social contract that is crucial to the success of our society.

they want to continue to fill that social role, they have a profound obligation to do so.

- This all comes down to a perplexing dilemma. It looks as if a moral claim of conscience—something that would normally force us to respect others—is, in essence, demanding that we act selfishly. It requires that we put our own sense of moral authority ahead of what we owe to someone else.
- What's more, the belief that we should all act selfishly—the social contract theory offered by Hobbes—stipulates just the opposite. The social contract demands that we serve someone else.

Accepting Consequences

- Consider other noteworthy crises of conscience. During the Vietnam War, for example, some college students faced the question of whether or not they should serve their country in a war that they morally opposed.
- According to the context of social contract theory and Socrates in *Crito*, someone facing the draft who has a crisis of conscience nevertheless has an obligation to serve the society of which he or she is a part and to follow the laws of that society.
- The student who is facing the draft would either have to do what the laws commanded and fight in the war or take the consequences and go to prison. By the same token, the pharmacist who wants to follow his or her conscience must quit the job and accept the consequences of that decision.

Suggested Reading

Strohm, *Conscience*.

White, *The Works of Bishop Butler*.

Questions to Consider

1. What kind of thing is “a conscience”? How does it work?
2. If your conscience tells you to do one thing and your work demands that you do another, what should you do and why?

Is It Always Wrong to Fight Back?

Lecture 18

In this lecture, we'll examine three emotional and moral responses: anger, revenge, and forgiveness. These phenomena are much more closely interrelated than we might think. Surprisingly and perhaps contrary to our initial intuitions, all three of them—anger, revenge, and forgiveness—can contribute to living a good life. We'll look at the thinking of several philosophers who present analyses of anger and suggest that it can be usefully incorporated into the larger structure of our morality.

Stoics and Skeptics

- Anger is an important moral emotion that, although sometimes dangerous, can be incorporated into our thinking about the good life. In many ways, anger is a destructive force in our lives. Many of the worst decisions we make are made when we are angry. Anger, when it is out of control is, we can all agree, highly undesirable.
- Some philosophers have inclined in the same direction. The ancient Greek and Roman stoics, for example, thought that anger was a form of lust and was a straightforward example of a vice. They believed that a good stoic should cultivate a life and a character that did not include anger as part of the emotional structure.
- Similarly, the ancient skeptics, who went out of their way to disagree with the stoics on every other point, maintained that a wise person would generally not display anger. For the skeptics, an angry response to a phenomenon would always be an excessive response—a response that gave the phenomenon or the problem more weight than it deserved.

Christ and Buddha

- The moral teacher we might suppose least likely to approve of anger is Jesus Christ, who vigorously championed “Love thy neighbor as thyself.” However, when anger was appropriate, even Christ acted

with outrage—for example, in Matthew 21:12, turning over the tables of the moneychangers in the temple to make his point.

- Similarly, most of us expect anger to be discouraged in the Buddhist tradition. However, according to Buddhist philosophy, a “moral genius” might use anger to protect another being. In the Buddhist view, a person’s intention was the important thing. If his or her motivations were compassionate, the actions did not really matter.

Aristotle

- According to Aristotle, anger was a surge of heat around the heart, accompanied by a desire to cause pain in return. Both the physical and vindictive aspects of anger were caused, Aristotle said, by an insult to one’s self or to one’s friends, nation, or family.
- Aristotle defined hatred as “the calcification, cooling, and generalization of anger.” He also argued that it was, along with love and delight, the bedrock of virtue. For Aristotle, anger was an impassioned wish to harm a person who has harmed you, and it evolved into hatred over time. For Aristotle, this kind of hatred was purely rational and morally necessary.

Saint Augustine

- The Christian philosopher Saint Augustine wrote, “Hope has two beautiful daughters. Their names are ‘anger’ and ‘courage.’ Anger at the way things are, and courage to see that they do not remain as they are.”
- For Augustine, anger had an entirely appropriate role in our emotional and spiritual lives. Anger helped us to see when an action or a situation was morally inappropriate, and it motivated us to change that situation.
- Augustine also wrote of self-directed anger—when we become frustrated with ourselves to achieve morally important goals. When we are appropriately angry with ourselves, Augustine said, that anger can provide us with a motive to do better.

- Interestingly, this was very much how the atheist moral philosopher David Hume also viewed anger. Hume argued that our emotional life was the foundation of our moral life. Accordingly, for Hume, the emotion of anger was a crucial aspect of our larger moral sense of what is right and wrong, especially what is just and unjust.



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Revenge: Eye for an Eye

- The oldest and simplest way of trying to right a wrong is to seek vengeance. In Homer's *The Iliad*, the word for *justice* simply means "vengeance." That's how deep this runs in our cultural history.
- The ancient Greeks of Homer's time believed in vengeance pursued even beyond the bounds of balancing the scales of justice. In *The Iliad*, when someone, such as Helen, offends you, you don't just punish her. You raze the entire city of Troy and sow the ground with salt so that nothing can ever grow there again.
- The Old Testament injunction "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" does not encourage bloodshed; rather, it affirms that justice requires measure, proportion, even moderation. And in the New Testament, vengeance is given such high importance that it is taken out of our hands and put in the hands of the higher power of God.

According to the philosopher David Hume, anger is a bit like a moral red flag, telling us that something immoral might be taking place.

Solomon on Vengeance

- The philosopher Robert C. Solomon has questioned whether we have taken an important psychological and moral phenomenon—

namely, vengeance—out of the way we live and somehow made ourselves less human in doing so.

- Solomon defined vengeance as personal. He has said that in America, we have handed over many of our personal concerns to the government, and he thinks that this is a real loss for us as people. He points out that in many traditional societies, it is, in fact, the responsibility of the individual or the family to enact retributive justice in the form of vengeance.
- The idea of impersonal punishment is also morally dubious, according to Solomon. After all, in many situations, the wrong we have suffered is a deeply personal one—not a legal or objective wrong that we would want to be handled by a jury and judge.
- Fighting back can actually be a morally superior option in many circumstances, Solomon argues, because it reestablishes fairness. We feel as if the wrong has been righted, while also respecting the person who has committed the wrong as an equal.
- Fighting back can also be a necessary precursor to forgiveness, Solomon says, rather than holding on to resentment or bearing a grudge. Think about an argument between a husband and wife. The argument very often is not settled until both people have had their say, until the vicious words have gone back and forth. Sometimes that can be hurtful, but a little hurt, in this context, might provide for the possibility of forgiving each other, moving on, and improving the relationship.

Nietzsche and Order of Rank

- Nietzsche, like Solomon, reasoned that revenge was an important psychological and moral phenomenon, and that it was crucial for reestablishing equality between people. For Nietzsche, in fact, revenge was often essential for the possibility of forgiveness.
- For Nietzsche, human beings are constantly mindful of what he called the “order of rank.” That is, we see each other on a kind of

ladder of social esteem. When one person inflicts harm on another, that's a way of shoving the person down the ladder. In order for real forgiveness to occur, he said, the person who was pushed down must be lifted back up again. In order to climb back up the ladder of prestige, Nietzsche thought, we must allow for personal revenge.

- He thought that revenge was much healthier, morally speaking, than harboring a grudge or resentment. He also thought that forgiveness only counted when it came from an equal. Revenge was designed to reestablish equality after a moral wrong had been done.

Plato and the Chariot Metaphor

- According to Plato, forgiveness was a way of reestablishing balance within the soul. Plato divided the soul into three parts, using the metaphor of a chariot with two horses. One of the horses was the spirited part of the soul: our will. The other horse was the appetite, or desirous part of the soul. The chariot driver represented reason and logic, managing the two horses.
- When we get angry, one of the two horses is going faster than the other one. Either our will or our desires are pointed in the wrong direction. The soul is out of balance. For Plato, the way to get the soul back into balance is through forgiveness.

Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development

- Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of how morality works is useful to us in thinking about forgiveness. According to Kohlberg, moral development occurs in six stages.
 - An individual functioning at the first stage evaluates an action by asking, "How can I avoid punishment?"
 - The second stage of moral development is self-interested; an individual asks, "What's in it for me?"
 - At stage three, an individual obeys social norms.

- The fourth stage is oriented toward the preservation of law and order.
- The fifth stage adheres to the social contract, which sees multiple perspectives at odds with one another and values respecting each, acknowledging the necessity for compromise.
- The sixth, most evolved, stage is based on reason and fundamental abstract ethical principles, such as justice, fairness, and happiness.
- For Kohlberg, forgiveness could take place at any of the six stages, but robust, true forgiveness, he argued, required the ability to see that it was the rational and moral thing to do. Ultimately, we forgive for the sake of the person who has wronged us, not for our own sake. We forgive because we see that it is right to forgive.

Carol Gilligan

- In her seminal work *In a Different Voice*, the feminist philosopher Carol Gilligan criticized what she saw as the sexism implicit in Kohlberg's work. In the research on which it was based, women were found to be of lower moral evolution than men.
- According to Gilligan, Kohlberg took justice as the foundation for morality, an approach she maintained favored masculine values. She went on to argue that if one founded morality on compassion or care, women would, in fact, score better than men.

Suggested Reading

Dershowitz, *The Genesis of Justice*.

Solomon, *A Passion for Justice*.

Questions to Consider

1. Is anger ever morally appropriate? When and why?
2. Is revenge ever morally appropriate? When and why? Should the state be allowed to take revenge? If not, why not?

Should the Death Penalty Be Abolished?

Lecture 19

The United States is one of the few Western nations that still has the death penalty—as of 2013, in 32 states. In fact, the United States is one of the major executioners of murderers in the world. In this lecture, we will examine the arguments surrounding the use of the death penalty for murder. Arguments in favor are usually called retentionist arguments; their proponents argue that states with the death penalty should retain it and convince other states to adopt it. In the other camp are the abolitionists, who would abolish the death penalty. Abolitionists maintain that the issue should be settled at the federal level rather than being left up to individual states.

Revenge

- The arguments for justice and punishment are couched in terms of revenge, retribution, rehabilitation, and deterrence. The simplest defense of the death penalty is that it is a justified form of revenge.
- In contemporary society, however, few people appeal to revenge as a justification for punishment because it undermines the larger system of justice as a whole—and, indeed, the very fabric of society.
- We created a social contract in the first place, in part, to protect us from justice as revenge, if only because revenge is usually motivated by passion and, therefore, often misguided or



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Revenge as a system of justice would lead to vigilantism, which is not how we want our laws to operate.

completely mistaken. A society governed by revenge would quickly degenerate into a state of nature.

Retribution

- The most noted argument in favor of the death penalty in Western civilization comes from the Old Testament, which states that when you have taken another person's life, your life will be taken. The principle here is very simple and is based on the idea that justice should be strictly retributive. If someone has taken something from someone else, then the guilty party should pay an exact retribution to the person who has been victimized.
- Strict retributivism is rarely argued as a system of justice these days; instead, we usually talk about some form of moderate or proportional retribution, where the punishment is supposed to reflect the seriousness of the crime.
- In matters regarding money, this is often easy, and most of those crimes—corporate misconduct, copyright infringements, pollution offenses, and the like—are usually settled in civil courts.
- The state fines people or puts them in prison as a form of proportional retribution. This serves as retribution for the crime—that is, it “balances the scales of justice.” The idea of justice as a kind of balancing of the scales between two parties is the most fundamental, enduring, and effective metaphor we have for justice. Justice reestablishes social balance.

Kant on Punishment

- The most compelling advocate of the death penalty as the only appropriate retribution for the crime of murder was the German Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant. Kant thought that the basic moral principle behind all punishment was that justice was a kind of balancing of the scales.
- For Kant, a murderer is acting so irrationally—in such stark contradiction to any sense of how morality functions—that the

only possible way of balancing the scales of justice is to take the life of the murderer. In fact, Kant goes so far as to argue that it is our moral duty to execute murderers. When we don't execute them, he maintains, we fail morally—not only with respect to our duty to society and justice but with respect to what we owe the murderers themselves.

- If we recognize that murderers are human beings—moral creatures—we owe it to them to show them how immorally they have acted. This is why we do not necessarily execute animals that kill human beings; according to Kant, they are not part of the moral order. Although Kant is a proportional retributivist when it comes to all other crimes, we often call him a strict retributivist when it comes to the crime of murder.

Other Retentionist Arguments

- “It’s a helluva thing, killing a man,” Clint Eastwood’s character Will says in the movie *Unforgiven*. “You take away all he’s got, and all he’s ever gonna have.” This argument, a variation of the argument made by Kant in the 18th century, is still the most powerful argument in favor of the death penalty.
- If we put a murderer in solitary confinement for the rest of his life, with no parole, we can take away everything he has—except his life. The only way to completely deprive a murderer of everything he has taken from his victim—to completely balance the scales—is to take away his life.
- Retentionists also offer other arguments offer in favor of the death penalty. A recent, comprehensive study conducted by several of America’s best law schools concluded that the death penalty does have a modest deterrent effect. This means not only that we are saving at least some lives by having the death penalty in effect in the states where it is law, but also that when we fail to execute a murderer, we are effectively valuing the murderer’s life higher than that of the person who might have been spared through the deterrent effect of execution.

- Finally, retentionists argue that the families of murder victims deserve the closure provided by the execution of the murderer. We should recognize that this is a version of the revenge argument: It is an emotional justification of execution. But that does not make it illegitimate; revenge is an instinct as old as the human species, and if the families of victims indeed find solace in the execution of the murderer, we would need strong arguments to deny them that.

Scott Turow

- As with arguments for retaining the death penalty, some of the most vigorous arguments for abolishing the death penalty come from our religious traditions.
- In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the “eye for an eye” ethic of the Old Testament is radically changed by the “Love thy neighbor as thyself” ethic of Christ and the New Testament. For most thinkers who use the New Testament as a principal ethical text, the value of human life is so sacred that no one must take another human life under any circumstances. Human life is understood as divinely granted; thus, it can and should be taken away only through divine power.
- One of the most persuasive arguments for abolishing the death penalty comes from the famous lawyer and author Scott Turow. After he spent two years studying death penalty cases in Illinois, he became an abolitionist. Turow determined that because the system of justice had so many flaws and complexities, innocent people were being convicted of murder and executed. Some people were even executed after their innocence had been proved.
- Because the system of criminal justice is so complicated, because alleged murderers are often poor and consequently have an inadequate defense, and because it is almost impossible to prove guilt “beyond the shadow of a doubt,” Turow concluded that we should abolish the death penalty.

Arguments for Abolition

- A more vigorous abolitionist argument is that the state should never have the power to execute a citizen, under any circumstances. These abolitionists point out that the United States was founded with an emphasis on three principal rights: “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” The right to life is the most fundamental of these. If the state abuses its power by imprisoning an innocent, it can make some amends for depriving that person of liberty. It can make no amends for depriving an innocent person of his or her life.
- Some abolitionists argue that life in prison without parole is, in fact, a more severe punishment than the death penalty. Abolitionists also maintain that it is more expensive to execute someone than it is to keep a convicted murderer in prison for life because of America’s costly and complex system of appeals.
- Although many of us believe that the best justification for punishment is that it educates or rehabilitates the criminal, abolitionists point out that the very possibility of rehabilitation is negated by the death penalty. Others have noted the social disparities in the application of the death penalty.
- There are also psychological factors that would seem to favor abolition of the death penalty. Most murderers come from abusive homes; they were victims before they became perpetrators. Furthermore, murderers have the lowest rates of recidivism of any criminal; murder is almost always a one-time crime. Therefore, the need to prevent a murderer from ever committing the crime again is actually significantly lower, statistically speaking, than it is with every other criminal activity.

Albert Camus

- Probably the strongest argument against the death penalty is made by those who appeal to the notion of moral progress and the development of standards of civilized behavior. These abolitionists argue that if we look at the development of civilization, we are

growing away from corporal or bodily punishments toward mental or psychological punishments.

- The death penalty, they argue, is the last remaining punishment that accords with that old way of thinking about punishment—that the criminal’s body is the appropriate place to inflict punishment.
- One last argument against the death penalty comes from the French philosopher and novelist Albert Camus. It is the worst form of torture and barbarism, he contended. Camus worried that the state, when it executes, is, morally speaking, far worse than the most vicious murderer.
- Camus writes: “Capital punishment is the most premeditated of murders, to which no criminal’s deed, however calculated, can be compared. For there to be an equivalency, the death penalty would have to punish a criminal who had warned his victim of the date on which he would inflict a horrible death on him and who, from that moment onward, had confined him at his mercy for months.”

Suggested Reading

Prejean, *Dead Man Walking*.

Turow, *Ultimate Punishment*.

Questions to Consider

1. Is corporal punishment immoral? Why or why not? Should we perhaps have more corporal punishments?
2. If we deter even one murderer from taking a human life because of the deterrent power of the death penalty, are we morally required to retain it? Why or why not?

Is Torture Ever Acceptable?

Lecture 20

Imagine a scenario in which a terrorist group has hidden a nuclear device in Washington DC, and it will explode in a matter of hours—killing hundreds of thousands and paralyzing the government. One of the terrorists, Sam, admits that he knows where the ticking time bomb is. What's more, once before, while in prison, Sam broke under torture to reveal a terrorist plot. What do we do? This is a classic scenario in the philosophical debate about torture, called the ticking-time-bomb defense. Although the situation is not exactly everyday ethics, it is relevant to us because we live in a world where such frightening scenarios have become possible.

International Law

- Many governments have participated in torture in recent years—sometimes for good reasons—or shipped suspects off to countries where torture is legal. A variety of national and international laws prohibit torture, including most famously the Geneva Conventions of 1949.
- For our purposes, the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, ratified in 1984, is the best current guideline for international consensus about what constitutes torture and other forms of unacceptable treatment of persons, especially prisoners.
- The U.N. convention, like many other bodies of law, distinguishes between torture and other kinds of inhumane treatment, such as humiliation, morally or religiously degrading treatment, or more modest corporal punishments, such as flogging, which many countries consider to be a cruel and inhumane punishment but not as severe as torture.
- In the United States, torture is against the law. Torturing the terrorist Sam would be illegal. An important question, however, is whether

or not torture is morally wrong, merely morally dubious, or—given the ticking-time-bomb scenario—morally required.

U.N. Convention against Torture

- The U.N. Convention against Torture identifies four reasons for torture: (1) to obtain a confession, (2) to obtain information, (3) to punish, and (4) to coerce the prisoner to act in certain ways.
- Many philosophers would argue that torture to obtain a confession and torture to punish are straightforward examples of moral evil. What makes torture morally suspect is that if we torture Sam, we are doing it with the specific purpose of getting him to say something that he truly does not want to say.
- We are denying his autonomy; we are controlling his will. According to Kant, one of the tests for what is right or wrong is that an activity is moral if everyone is engaged in it freely. If someone is being coerced into the activity, however, Kant calls this treating the person as a mere means rather than as an end in himself. Something immoral is taking place.

Religious Approaches

- For the Buddhists, any time that we cause harm, we are doing something morally blameworthy, no matter what the outcome of our actions. Some Buddhists argue that torture, as a matter of fact, is even worse than killing. The act of torture is a morally blameworthy act of the highest order.
- Similarly, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, although torturing a person may not be as bad as taking his or her life, it is such an unnatural act that it cannot be justified by any ethic that defines itself in terms of “Love thy neighbor as thyself.” Torture is never a morally praiseworthy act.

Kantian Objections

- Kant would have four objections to torture. The first is that when we torture Sam, we are treating Sam as a mere means to an end,

rather than recognizing that he is an end in himself. Sam is a human being and, as such, is a source of moral law. He is free and rational, and he must be treated in a way that accords with his freedom and rationality.

- The second Kantian objection is that torture is always coercive. It prevents the victim of torture from exercising his freedom. The torturer deliberately sets out to break and control the will of the torture victim, which means, according to Kant, the torturer is acting in the most immoral way imaginable.
- The third Kantian objection is that torture deliberately destroys the victim's capacity to reason—which, again, removes the victim from the realm of the moral domain. To be able to think is to be able to choose. When we torture someone, we are eliminating that person's ability to reason—that is, to be moral. The torturer is effectively transforming his victim into an insane person or a beast.
- The final Kantian objection is the question of whether or not torture is a rational way to treat another human being. If torture were universalized to every case, that would mean using reason to generate and rely upon irrationality—a dubious proposition at best.
- This final objection generates the most likely outcome in cases of torture, which is that it simply does not produce reliable information. If we are forcing someone to be irrational, what should we expect from that person other than irrationality?

Rule Utilitarianism

- Let's look at some arguments that maintain we can torture Sam but only under specific constraints. The moderate utilitarian will argue that we can torture Sam, but we have to form a specific rule to allow it. This is called rule utilitarianism.
- In rule utilitarianism, we formulate rules that we think will generate the most morally desirable consequences. We build in a number of constraints to the rule.

- First, we only torture in instances when we know that the torturer is already guilty of a crime.
- Second, we must know that the danger is real, significant, and imminent.
- Third, we must know that, by torturing Sam, we can and will achieve a good outcome.
- Fourth, we must know that the torture will, in fact, provide us with the information that we need.
- Fifth, torture will be undertaken only in these very rare circumstances and will never be adopted as a general principle.
- Sixth, the torturer himself must be willing to face the consequences of his actions.

The Black Box

- The strong utilitarian position is that we are morally required to torture Sam, and it might even be morally heroic to do so.
- A famous thought experiment in utilitarianism is called the black box. Imagine that you have the power to end all human suffering forever and create a perfectly happy world. All you have to do is flip a switch on a black box. When you are about to flip the switch, you notice a little girl standing in the corner. You are told that the child powers the box, and after the box is powered, for the rest of her life, the child suffers terrible torture. But everybody else in the world will be happy and healthy.
- The strong utilitarian pulls the switch. This thought experiment illustrates both the greatest strengths and the greatest weaknesses of utilitarians: The utilitarian simply must accept the fact that, very often, we will sacrifice the interest of the few in pursuit of the good of the many.

Strong Utilitarianism

- According to the strong utilitarian, in the case of Sam, he is a terrorist and has caused misery for many people for a long time. What Sam is doing is the opposite of utilitarianism.
- Furthermore, Sam's physical suffering will probably be brief and minor compared to the vast unhappiness that will result if we do not torture Sam.
- In fact, Sam may prove to be happier in the end if he is tortured, because at least Sam will not be burned alive in the fiery nuclear explosion that he is determined to unleash on an unsuspecting population.
- The torturer who extracts the information from Sam will likely be viewed as a hero because he or she saved the lives of hundreds of thousands of innocents—another good result, according to utilitarianism.
- Therefore, even the torturers may come out of this situation feeling happy because of the enormous moral good they have produced.
- The strong utilitarian does not need to know for certain that torturing Sam will yield the desired results. He or she has only to make the best bet that it will.

The Moral Supererogatory

- A final question about the morality of torture is referred to as the problem of what is morally supererogatory. *Supererogatory* means going above and beyond the call of duty.
- We tend to think that if we are willing to torture Sam in order to achieve the greater good, that's an excellent example of going above and beyond the call of duty; it is an act of incredible moral courage.

- But the utilitarian, who must focus on the greater good, cannot make that appeal. In fact, from a utilitarian perspective, the torturer would still not be a moral hero even if he or she was imprisoned for life after torturing Sam.
- The utilitarian would say that given the greater good, the torturer’s action was not supererogatory or moral heroism; the torturer simply did what was morally required.

Suggested Reading

Mill and Bentham (Ryan, ed.), *Utilitarianism and Other Essays*.

Waldron, *Torture, Terror, and Trade-Offs*.

Questions to Consider

1. Would you torture a “ticking-time-bomb terrorist”? Why or why not? Do you think the government should have the power to do so?
2. Suppose a scientist had the cure for cancer in her head—and we knew so for certain—but she refused to disclose it. Would we be morally justified in torturing her to get the cure? Why or why not?
3. What is rule utilitarianism?

Do Animals Have Rights?

Lecture 21

This lecture addresses the question of whether or not nonhuman animals have some basic rights, just as humans do. Kant thought that because all our rights derived from the fact that humans are moral beings—which means free and rational—it was nonsense to suggest that animals could have rights. Others believe, however, that all sentient beings are deserving of respect and we should avoid harming them whenever possible. An important question is whether animals have a certain quality that would indicate that they are moral creatures. If so, that might suggest that we should not eat them, perform experiments on them, or even keep them in zoos and other forms of captivity.

Morality as a Function of Rationality

- For thinkers who suppose that our rights arise as a result of our “social contract”—the system of laws and protections that we establish when we create a society—the easy answer to whether animals have rights is no. Human societies are formed for the benefit of other human beings.
- Many of us believe that there is something more fundamental about us that gives humans at least certain basic rights, such as the right to life, the right to freedom, or the right to be treated equally under the law.
- The Judeo-Christian way of thinking about this question is that there are certain God-given rights granted to us—and that we must respect in one another—because we are made in the image of God. On this account, animals have no rights at all; indeed, the Old Testament states clearly that humans will have dominion over the animals.
- Kant endorsed this view of animal rights—that human beings could do with them as they pleased—because, as Kant insisted, morality

is a function of rationality, and animals do not have reason. He goes on to say, however, that although they do not have reason and we do, we should treat animals with kindness and respect; we are their stewards and caretakers and should show compassion for them.

Singer and Specieism

- The Australian moral philosopher, utilitarian, and animal rights activist Peter Singer disputes Kant's argument. Singer contends that Kant is merely claiming that the reason human life is special—the reason we deserve rights and other animals do not—is just that we are human: a circular argument.
- Singer not only calls Kant's argument circular, but he maintains that Kant is guilty of what Singer calls “specieism”—that is, we have rights because we are the species *Homo sapiens*, and other species do not have rights because they are not. Specieism, in Singer's view, is no better than racism or sexism.

Degrees of Sentience

- In the Buddhist tradition, starting in about the 4th century B.C., a very different view of animal rights was offered. The Buddhist concept is that all sentient beings are deserving of respect, and we should avoid harming them whenever possible.
- Sentience is the ability to enjoy pleasure and to suffer pain. But the crucial idea here is that sentience is the relevant moral criterion for establishing a being's right not to suffer, and it is our moral obligation to avoid and even prevent that sentient being from coming to harm. This explains, of course, why most Buddhists are vegetarians.
- Singer, like the vast majority of utilitarians, insists that sentience comes in degrees. For utilitarians, as we have seen, the relevant moral criterion is the quantity of pleasure and pain. For example, the life of a child is more valuable than the life of an old man close to death; similarly, the life of a pig, a very intelligent animal, is more valuable than the life of a mosquito.

- In a famous and highly controversial article, Singer went so far as to suggest that, for the utilitarian, if one had to choose between the life of a mature cat and a newborn infant, one should in fact save the cat. He argued that the conscious life of the cat—the cat’s sentience—was more fully developed and more prone to pain than the newborn baby’s.
- Naturally, the majority of us reject this extreme view. Singer himself, given the choice, would save the baby; he admits as much. But, he says, he would be doing so not for good, rational, utilitarian reasons but simply because of his emotional prejudice as a human being.



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Animals and Cognition

- Even those who are not utilitarians can see the appeal of the objective to minimize suffering for beings that can clearly experience pain. We should respect the sentience of those creatures with which we are intimately connected, with which we occupy the planet, and with which we share many evolutionary traits.
- For example, wolves have complex family structures, as do whales and dolphins; the octopus can solve complex puzzles; rats are nearly as intelligent as dogs; and pigs seem to be much smarter than either species.
- A 2013 study showed that dolphins have a longer social memory than any other nonhuman animal. Dolphins seem to remember

As we know, dolphins are among the most intelligent of animals; in Switzerland, there is even a movement to classify dolphins as “nonhuman persons.”

each other—and other animals, including humans—very nearly as long as we do. This is widely considered to be one of the most important criteria in evaluating what it is to be an intelligent, cognitive being. Just because nonhuman animals do not use the same kinds of tools we do, it does not follow that they do not have rich cognitive lives.

A Better Way to Eat

- Humans are the kind of animal that likes to eat other animals, as well as plants. This fact of life does not make humans moral monsters. This reality can be incorporated into what we might call a more moral approach toward the treatment of animals. We can strive to attain the Buddhist ideal: Although we cannot altogether eliminate suffering from the process of living, we can do our best to cause less suffering rather than more.
- It is this observation that has led popular contemporary thinkers, such as Michael Pollan, to argue that we should take a careful look at our farming practices and determine that there are, morally speaking, better and worse ways to eat.
- Increasingly, in America, we are seeing support for small, local farms. In many cases, these are farms where cows, sheep, and pigs are raised with room to graze, have social interaction, and live a comparatively contented life before they are quickly and humanely slaughtered. Few Buddhists would agree with this approach, and Peter Singer opposes it, but for many of us, it seems to be a significant step in the right direction.
- There is even recent research that supports the idea that an animal raised and slaughtered in a healthy environment is a better product to eat. This is hardly surprising, when you consider the difference in taste between a wild Copper River salmon and one raised through aquaculture.
- A salient characteristic of organic foods or free-range animals, however, is that they are more expensive. Such foods are a privilege

for members of a wealthy society. But most societies are not as wealthy as we are, and there is poverty in our own country. Perhaps that extra money for organic foods would be better spent on feeding or clothing the poor at home. A worthy goal would be to eliminate human suffering first, then go to work on animal suffering.

Animal Testing

- Much of the animal suffering that takes place in this country is not to provide food, but to provide safe cosmetics and personal care products and, importantly, life-saving drugs. Animal testing—which can sometimes mean animal torture—is a crucial part of our economic and scientific culture. Utilitarians argue that it is done for the greater good, but one wonders if the suffering of the monkeys and mice could ever be considered morally praiseworthy.
- As with many of the other everyday ethical questions we have considered, the best we can do with regard to animal suffering is to recognize that there is, in fact, a better and worse way to live—a more moral approach and a less moral one—and try as we might to take steps in the right direction.

Zoos

- Zoos have been moving in the direction of more ethical treatment of animals for quite some time now, doing their best to re-create natural environments for caged animals, to keep only animals that have been bred in captivity (rather than moving them out of the wild), and to encourage breed-and-release programs.
- No zoo is perfect; animals in many zoos still display the signs of insanity, such as incessant pacing or self-destructive behavior, that we associate with humans kept in solitary confinement. But for advocates of animal rights, the point is not to eliminate zoos altogether; it is to slowly change the way we think about how best to treat animals other than ourselves. It is to start to recognize that animals other than ourselves may deserve rights and maybe for precisely the same reasons that we do.

Suggested Reading

Conn and Parker, *The Animal Research War*.

Singer, *Writings on an Ethical Life*.

———, *Animal Liberation*.

Questions to Consider

1. What is “speciesism”? How is the term used in the debate about animal rights?
2. Suppose a cow has been treated lovingly throughout its life and has been given a good death. Does that change the morality of eating the cow? How and why?

Why Should I Recycle?

Lecture 22

The debate over the environment has changed in recent years. As one philosopher wrote, the question used to be: What matters more, people or penguins? Today, as far as the environment is concerned, people and penguins are pretty much in the same circumstances. We're both dealing with the accelerating decline of the planet. In our relationship with the environment, we do a lot of damage that we can see, but at the same time, much of our negative impact is done without our knowing. Those who believe the environment is in trouble think we have a duty to do something about it.

Kohlberg Applied to the Environment

- In thinking about the environment, there is still a great deal of tension between our short-term needs as a society and our duty to future generations. In order to clearly outline the arguments for and against recycling, let's turn again to American psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development.
- Stage one is concerned with avoiding punishment. At best, this is how many of us handle recycling and pollution—both as individuals and as companies. We pollute until we get caught—and then we stop for awhile and start polluting again, or we find a different way to pollute.
- Kohlberg's second stage of moral development asks the question: What's in it for me? This sort of attitude would lead someone to save and return high-dollar organic milk bottles for the \$1.00 deposit.
- At stage three, individuals obey social norms. They behave in such a way that others will regard them as good citizens; they will recycle in order to be regarded as environmentally conscientious. However, this stage is effective only when the social norms convey that the environment is in trouble. In many developing nations,

environmental damage is still a much lower priority than other problems; such places lack the social norms to encourage recycling.

- The fourth stage is oriented toward the preservation of law and order. We recycle simply because it is the law.
- Kohlberg's fifth stage adheres to the social contract. It sees multiple perspectives at odds with one another, and it compromises. A person operating at this level might say, "It's wrong not to recycle, but because I am too lazy to recycle, I'm just going to stop buying anything packaged in plastic."



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The Social Contract and Recycling

- The social contract theory of why we ought to recycle and how we ought to treat the environment is the one that

is most often appealed to in the international arena. In this line of thinking, all nations have a kind of social contract with one another when it comes to the environment. Therefore, we have to accept certain restrictions on our freedoms in order to enjoy certain kinds of privileges.

- The problem in any social contract—even if we all agree that it's a fair contract—is that there will be rule breakers, or "free riders." Those are people—or nations—who take advantage of the fact that others are following the rules in order to benefit themselves by breaking

For many of us, our recycling behavior falls into the first stage of Kohlberg's hierarchy; we do it to avoid fines imposed by our communities.

the rules. It's always easier and cheaper to produce a product if you dump the pollution made in the process into the ocean.

Nature as Sacred Expression

- The sixth and most evolved of Kohlberg's stages is based on abstract ethical principles and reason. At this level, one would recycle in order to preserve nature. Some philosophers, such as Mark Sagoff, argue that the purely ethical or rational way of thinking about the environment is simply to realize that it is directly connected to the divine. Nature is part of God's plan, a spiritual expression of God's nature. He wrote, "The reasons for protecting nature are often religious or moral."
- In a recent survey, Americans from various walks of life agreed by large majorities with the statement "Because God created the natural world, it is wrong to abuse it." The anthropologists who conducted this survey concluded that "divine creation is the closest concept American culture provides to express the sacredness of nature."

Aldo Leopold

- The American philosopher, novelist, and environmentalist Aldo Leopold is widely considered the founder of the environmental movement in the United States. In many ways, he was the embodiment of Kohlberg's sixth stage of moral development when it comes to the environment.
- Leopold was the model of the altruistic conservationist. He summed up his position best: "We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect." Leopold was a true lover of nature; he regarded animals, plants, and even sand and dirt as infinitely precious.

Jared Diamond

- In a lecture at Duke University's Nicholas Institute Environmental Summit, the philosopher Jared Diamond asked three significant questions: Does the environment really matter? Do we really

need to preserve the environment? Should environmental policies compromise with corporate interests?

- The question “Should I recycle?” is, at heart, Diamond’s first question: Does the environment really matter?
- There are many arguments against recycling. Some critics claim that recycling wastes more energy than it saves. In fact, as it turns out, that claim is not true; it does not take more energy to produce products from recycled materials.
- According to the Environmental Information Administration, paper mills use 40 percent less energy to make paper out of recycled pulp. According to the EPA, manufacturing an aluminum can out of recycled aluminum uses 95 percent less energy than manufacturing one from its source, bauxite.
- Others point out that jobs in the recycling industry—picking up bottles, for example—are not as good as the jobs they eliminate in such industries as logging and mining. This argument is correct; the elimination of jobs in logging and mining is a sacrifice. The economist Steven Landsburg has pointed out that paper mills create forests; they replant the trees they cut down. He argues that recycling actually eliminates these farm forests.
- Environmentalists point out, however, that farm forests and virgin forests are very different. Farm forests are heavily fertilized and have little biodiversity, and the conditions of farming often result in soil erosion.

Corporate Interests and the Environment

- Diamond’s ultimate point is made most clearly in the answer to his third question: Should environmental policies compromise with corporate interests?
- Corporate interests argue that environmental regulations reduce their profits. An important question is whether lawmakers are

obligated to acknowledge and protect both corporate interests and the environment, especially when numerous jobs are at stake. That would be an example of Kohlberg's stage five—when multiple perspectives are acknowledged and a compromise between them is found.

- Diamond maintains that corporate interests try to view their net returns as independent of their assets. He notes that the usual talk about balancing the environment and economy has it exactly backwards. The strongest motive for taking good care of the environment is that a healthy environment and population is the bedrock on which a healthy economy rests.

Environmental Regulation

- The American philosopher Stephen Meyer goes even further. In a paper titled "Economic Impact of Environmental Regulation," he asks how much money we would make if we were to eliminate environmental regulation. The answer to the question, according to Meyer, is "Nobody knows."
- According to Meyer, accounts of companies destroyed by environmental regulations or brought back from the brink by deregulation are all anecdotal. A rigorous, independent, economic study of the effects of deregulation on profits at a nationwide level—according to Meyer—does not exist.
- Meyer analyzed statewide studies and determined that deregulation does not benefit corporations or raise profits. Although deregulation tailored to a specific company's interests can assist that company, the picture is too complex for a widespread deregulation to benefit companies in general.

Other Perspectives

- Throughout history, Native Americans have treated animals well because they believed animals could be from the spirit world. They revered plants for the glimpses they offered into the supernatural. And they thought the land revealed God. Fundamentally, they treated the natural world, and every space they came to, as though

it were sacred. One could argue that this is a stage seven moral evolution—one that goes beyond Kohlberg’s principled reason.

- The Dalai Lama wrote: “I believe that to meet the challenge of our times, human beings will have to develop a greater sense of universal responsibility. Each of us must learn to work not for his or her self, family, or nation, but for the benefit of all mankind. Universal responsibility is the real key to human survival. It is the best foundation for world peace, the equitable use of natural resources, and through concern for the future generations, the proper care of the environment.”

Suggested Reading

Roberts, *What Would the Buddha Recycle?*

Sagoff, *The Economy of the Earth*.

Questions to Consider

1. No one else in my neighborhood or county recycles. It’s very inconvenient for me to do so. Am I still morally obligated to do it?
2. I am thinking about buying a “green” car, even though it makes no economic sense to do so. What would you advise me and why?

Does It Matter Where I Shop?

Lecture 23

In this lecture, we'll examine what kinds of responsibilities we have as citizens and as consumers in how we do business, as we vote for economic policies, and, perhaps most important, in the way we spend our money. Central to the debate is the question of what kinds of markets we should support and what our accountability is within those markets. We will review the theories of two renowned economists with opposing views, Friedrich Hayek and John Maynard Keynes, and evaluate the morality of the everyday decisions we make as consumers, as businesspeople, and as citizens.

Friedrich Hayek

- According to the economist and Nobel Prize winner Friedrich Hayek, we are morally obligated to buy the cheapest products available in our particular marketplace. Otherwise, we are undermining freedom and democracy and embracing totalitarianism.
- Hayek argued that the government should not stimulate the market or attempt to control it in any way. His reason for this was to protect liberty. According to Hayek, a free market could be managed only by a centralized authority. But the creation of an authority, he reasoned, would inevitably lead to totalitarianism.
- According to Hayek, to be effective, a central planning authority would have to be endowed with powers that would control social life because the information required for centrally planning an economy is inherently decentralized and would need to be brought under control. And that, of course, was highly dangerous.
- Hayek also argued that government intervention and the redistribution of wealth created only a temporary solution to social problems, such as unemployment. According to Hayek, economic problems could never be solved by artificial stimulus.

- In fact, he argued that economic problems stem from a previous unsustainable episode of government interference with markets—for example, artificially low interest rates that were not determined by the natural forces of the market but by government.

The Invisible Hand

- Hayek maintained that what an individual product costs—its price—tells us an infinite number of facts about that product. When wages are not set by unions, Hayek argued, hourly rates and salaries are a reliable indicator of which professions are desirable and lucrative.
- When the government increases inflation to reduce unemployment, it hinders the free play of the market. It interferes with the “invisible hand”—a metaphor that Adam Smith introduced into our thinking to describe the self-regulating behavior of the marketplace.
- Any policy that redistributes incomes will discriminate against certain parts of the population. Once we allow the government to make those kinds of decisions, we set a perilous precedent.
- Hayek reasoned that if it is permissible to tax investments and not income—that is, to tax the wealthy—then it would arguably be permissible to tax District A and not District B—that is, to tax people of a certain background according to where they live or to tax people of a particular profession. This would give the government entirely too much power.
- Hayek believed that a government is responsible for providing a safety net or the minimum requirements for sustenance to citizens who are in need. But he would argue that many Western countries have created a kind of welfare state by providing too large a safety net.

John Maynard Keynes

- In contrast, according to British philosopher John Maynard Keynes, markets must be regulated by the government, or they will

inevitably tend toward unfairness and instability. A certain small minority of the population will guarantee their own wealth at the expense of the vast majority.

- As this happens, both demand and supply will become unbalanced once the workers—growing numbers of the lower middle class or the poor—come to realize that their conditions are unfair or unreasonable.
- Keynes argued that we cannot let supply and demand determine the markets. We must interfere, or people will rebel and interfere themselves. Workers will compete for jobs, and wages will get lower, but there will be a point at which workers will rebel. They will unionize, strike, or insist in some other way that the government intervene.
- Even Adam Smith insisted that for markets to work, basic moral principles of fairness and justice had to be in place. Unrestricted free trade would produce diminishing quality in products and injustice for workers, and both consumers and workers would react. We are indeed beginning to see moral reactions to that free market.

Kwame Anthony Appiah

- The philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah, who grew up in Ghana, introduced the concept of the “citizen of the world.” He pointed out that he did not coin the term; it was first used by Diogenes, a Greek philosopher who lived in the 4th century B.C.
- We can think of ourselves as world citizens even if we do not share a government—or maybe especially if we do not share a government. As world citizens, we must care about what happens to everyone in the world, not just to our families, friends, and countrymen.
- Conversation between cultures is important. Appiah noted that globalization has made those conversations possible and made the ideas of others relevant. We are all citizens of the same world, and we have obligations to each other as world citizens.

Price Stickiness

- For Appiah, we have the obligation to investigate where our dollars are going because those dollars are part of the conversation. They have a direct impact on people. We should not buy locally just to stimulate our local economies or to help the people in our neighborhoods or our cities.
- We should also be willing to pay higher prices for certain items. The idea that sometimes it is morally right to pay a higher price was first discussed by Keynes in his argument for price stickiness. When we are willing to pay a higher price, we are, in fact, supporting the general rise of value in certain goods and services.
- The line of thinking is that as producers see our dollars going to companies that pay a living wage, they will experiment with living wages themselves.
- Both Appiah and Keynes would advise us to spend our money with so-called fair trade companies—especially international ones—that guarantee good living conditions for their workers.

Thomas Friedman and Globalization

- American journalist Thomas Friedman has defined globalization as follows: “Globalization means the spread of free market capitalism to virtually every country in the world. Globalization also has its own set of economic rules—rules that revolve around opening, deregulating, and privatizing economies.”
- Friedman offers a variety of ways to characterize globalization. The global market is dynamic and unpredictable. It incorporates markets, nations, and technology quickly, and it allows corporations, individuals, and nations to reach around the world to communicate in both positive and negative ways. Globalization is increasingly homogenous, and it is increasingly homogenizing our world.
- One example of globalization, Friedman points out, is Walmart’s recent adoption of organic products. Nevertheless, Walmart seeks

to buy and sell those organic products at the very cheapest price, and that decision entails compromises.

Globalization's Structure of Power

- “Globalization has a defining technology,” Friedman maintains, and that defining technology is the World Wide Web. He says, “If the Berlin wall symbolized the Cold War, the World Wide Web symbolizes our new global economy.”
- Corporations are now determining the way the world works. Globalization has its own demographic pattern; for example, people are moving from rural to urban areas and into urban areas linked with global trends in food, fashion, markets, and entertainment.
- Globalization has a unique structure of power, built around three balances: the balance of power between the United States and other nations, the balance between nation-states and global markets, and the balance centered around super-powered individuals.
- Because people are able to communicate freely with other people all around the world, certain individuals, Friedman argues, are able to shape the political and financial landscape for better and for worse.



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Products that are made with an eye to quality rather than mere profitability become more desirable, allowing employers to increase workers' wages.

Buying Local and “Fair Trade”

- Another aspect of globalization is the question of buying local versus fair trade. Friedman points out that fair-trade products constitute a \$4 billion industry worldwide (and growing) and a \$2

billion industry in the United States alone. More than 70 percent of the money spent on local goods is reinvested in the community, while only 10 percent of money spent at major chain stores makes it back into the local economy.

- Such items as coffee, bananas, tea, and sugar generate far more profit for producers when they are sold as fair-trade products internationally than when they are sold locally.
- Profit is certainly not inherently bad; in fact, in many ways it is crucial to doing good. We want and need companies to be profitable, and we want and need fair-trade products in the marketplace. The fact that companies can be more profitable while engaging in fair-trade practices is positive progress.
- On the other hand, we also want to be sure that local economies are not deprived of the staples that they need or that those staples become too expensive for the people who produce them. We must keep one eye on the living conditions of the people in countries where companies get their fair-trade products.

Keeping Markets Free

- Consider the example of the company Foxconn, with plants in China. It was reported that 17 of Foxconn's workers had committed suicide in five years. The news struck a chord on the Internet because Foxconn's partner was Apple. Consumers were outraged.
- In this case, technology had an unexpected benefit. Because of the widespread reporting of the story and the way it was circulated throughout the Internet to millions, general outrage created a change in Foxconn's policies.
- Foxconn is reportedly changing the way it does business, pledging to pay its workers a living wage and creating a more stimulating work environment for employees.

- This case study is an example where the greatest impact—in fact, the only real impact—came not from government regulation but from consumers.
- In this way, Keynes was wrong and Hayek was right. The market ends up doing most of the work. As far as our individual ability to influence the market is concerned, we actually have tremendous power.

Suggested Reading

Klein, *Fences and Windows*.

Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents*.

Questions to Consider

1. I am a very thrifty person. Why shouldn't I always simply buy the cheapest product I can find in my area?
2. I always only buy from local producers. Am I therefore always on safe ground, morally speaking?

What Would Socrates Do?

Lecture 24

Distracted and preoccupied are two of the most profound moral evils facing modern society—so argued the 19th-century Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. It is our own fault, he said, because humans prefer a lazy state of self-deception, and it is our culture’s fault, because as mass media increasingly dominate our daily attention, we become absorbed in trivial matters. We do not stop and think about complex and demanding issues, such as questions of morality. In our final lecture, we’ll see why thinking about moral questions might be just as important—or even more important—than finding moral answers.

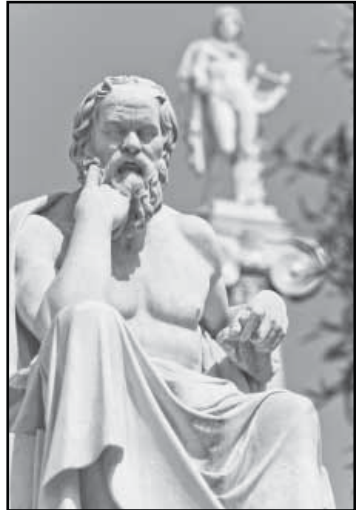
Euthyphro

- In one of Plato’s earliest dialogues, *Euthyphro*, he tells the story of Socrates and a young man named Euthyphro. Socrates has been in court answering charges brought by Meletus that he is guilty of corrupting Athenian youth. Meeting Socrates on the courthouse steps in Athens, Euthyphro says that he is bringing criminal charges against his father for neglecting one of his slaves, which resulted in the slave’s death.
- Euthyphro claims to be an expert when it comes to piety and is consequently also an expert in all moral matters—so much so that he feels completely comfortable prosecuting even his own father.
- Socrates is shocked that the son would bring charges against his father. He says, “Rare friend! I think that I cannot do better than be your disciple. ... You, Meletus, as I shall say to him, acknowledge Euthyphro to be a great theologian, and sound in his opinions; and if you approve of him you ought to approve of me, and not have me into court; but if you disapprove, you should begin by indicting him who is my teacher, and who will be the ruin, not of the young, but of the old; that is to say, of myself whom he instructs, and of his old father whom he admonishes and chastises.”

- Socrates is already employing his notorious technique of *eironia*—or irony—and soon poor Euthyphro is subjected to the kind of close philosophical grilling that led to Socrates’s reputation as the “gadfly of Athens.”
- Before the dialogue is finished, Euthyphro will have offered half a dozen different definitions of piety to Socrates, but none of them will stand up to the Socratic *elenchus*, or technique of cross-examining and scrutinizing the details of a proposed definition or solution. Finally, by the end of the dialogue, we see that Euthyphro has not made any progress on a definition of piety—and has not provided Socrates with any support for his assertion that he should feel comfortable bringing charges against his own father.
- At the end of the dialogue, Socrates asks Euthyphro, “What is piety? ... Speak out then, my dear Euthyphro, and do not hide your knowledge.” Euthyphro responds, “Another time, Socrates, for I am in a hurry, and must go now.”

The Importance of Moral Questions

- Euthyphro finds himself in the position of many of us when we think about our moral convictions. We cannot really say in a satisfactory way why we do what we do or think what we think; thus, we simply decide to worry about it later.
- There are three ways of avoiding thinking about morality, ethics, and how we should live: (1) supposing that you already know what you do not in fact know (the case of Euthyphro); (2) telling yourself that you are too busy to think



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Socrates was careful not to claim knowledge about many things, especially about matters of morality.

about these issues right now; and (3) perhaps most dangerous for us today, allowing ourselves to be distracted from thinking about what really matters.

- In fact, moral questions might be just as important—or even more important—than moral answers. The mistake Euthyphro makes is that he supposes he knows what he does not know. That is, he acts according to convictions that he does not understand and cannot defend.
- Euthyphro is in a morally dangerous state of ignorance, Socrates reasoned, because he has beliefs, but he cannot provide justification for them, and he does not even know whether or not they are true.

What Is Knowledge?

- One of our oldest definitions of knowledge comes to us from Plato. Plato believed that knowledge had three components.
- First, to have knowledge, we must actually hold a belief; that is, to know something is to have a kind of proposition in one's head. Second, the belief we hold must actually be true. You could not say that you had knowledge about a subject if you held the belief, but the belief was false.
- For the third element of knowledge, we turn to the 20th-century British philosopher Bertrand Russell. Say that you are walking around in London, Russell proposed, and suddenly you realize that you might be late for an appointment. But you've forgotten your watch. You look up at Big Ben and note that it is 12:15. Comforted, you hurry off to your appointment and arrive at 12:30. Later, however, you find out that Big Ben was broken and has been showing 12:15 for a week. But you got lucky; by sheer chance, you glanced at Big Ben at the exact time the clock was actually showing the correct time.
- This ought to trouble us, Russell argued (and Plato agrees). You had the belief that it was 12:15; you have satisfied the first requirement

of knowledge. The belief you held was true; when you believed it was 12:15, it was in fact 12:15. You've satisfied the second requirement of knowledge. But crucially, the fact that your belief was true was merely a matter of good luck. The third requirement of knowledge, according to Plato, is that we must have proper justification for our beliefs.

The Socratic Paradox

- This demand for certainty in what we know is why mathematics was so fundamental to Plato's way of thinking about knowledge and the world. We can know with excellent justification, Plato thought, what the relationship is between a circle's radius and its circumference, or why the square root of 4 is always 2. In fact, Plato loved mathematics so much that above his school of philosophy, called the Academy, he had this motto inscribed: "Let no one enter here who has not studied mathematics."
- Socrates acquired a reputation for wisdom because the oracle at Delphi once insisted—contrary to his own belief—that he was the wisest of men. As Socrates said in Plato's dialogue *Apology*, however, "Although I do not suppose that either of us knows anything really beautiful and good, I am better off than he is—for he knows nothing, and thinks that he knows. I neither know nor think that I know."
- This is the famous Socratic profession of ignorance, sometimes called the Socratic paradox. This is the simple wisdom Socrates possessed that gave him a moral advantage over the rest of us: He doesn't pretend to know what he doesn't, and he doesn't suppose that he knows things that he doesn't. *He only knows that he does not know.*

The Importance of Skepticism

- This attitude of skepticism is actually much more powerful than it initially appears. First, as Socrates himself maintained, it keeps us from falling into all kinds of grievous moral errors. Think about the events of September 11, 2001; the terrorists had been convinced and

had convinced themselves that what they were doing was morally desirable. Dogmatism and moral certainty have led individuals, political parties, and entire societies into the gravest of moral errors.

- By contrast, skepticism, or the belief that we don't really know, puts us in the position of Socrates. "Through pride we are ever deceiving ourselves," the psychoanalyst Carl Jung wrote. "But deep down below the surface of the average conscience a still, small voice says to us, something is out of tune."
- An important question is whether skepticism leads to moral nihilism. The answer is no. A skeptic, such as Socrates, doesn't draw the conclusion that there simply are no moral solutions. As we've seen repeatedly in this course, some ways of acting truly are to be preferred to others. The Greek word *skepsis* means an inquiry, an examination, a search—and no one searched for moral truths more ardently than Socrates.
- Another benefit of skepticism, as Jung hinted, is that it frees us from the danger of moral hypocrisy. One of the easiest moral traps is Euthyphro's trap: the belief that because we are in possession of moral truth, we can judge others—even, perhaps, our own parents.

Moral Particularism

- The 20th-century British philosopher Bernard Williams argued that if we avoided moral hypocrisy and maintained an attitude of moral curiosity, we would recognize that the world is full of a vast variety of different moral goods. This is the ethical theory that has come to be called moral particularism. The idea is that an open-minded person will discover many good things and even good principles that he or she can follow in order to lead a good life.
- At times, open-minded people will face dilemmas, when the goods they discover are incompatible or the principles they follow seem contradictory. But at those times an alarm bell will go off. Thinking people will recognize that they are engaging with a moral dilemma.

For the moral particularist, what is most important is that we don't assume we already know the right answer.

- We began this course by discussing the Ring of Gyges: Plato's mythical magic ring that could make one invisible. We shouldn't suppose that on the basis of 24 lectures, we've been transformed into perfectly moral people; we're probably just as morally fragile as we ever were. But there's one thing the Ring of Gyges can't give us—something that we might want more than anything else. The Ring of Gyges can't make us moral. And that, we might think, is the very best thing to try to be.

Suggested Reading

Botton, *The Consolations of Philosophy*.

Nozick, *The Examined Life*.

Phillips, *Missing Out*.

Romano, *America the Philosophical*.

Questions to Consider

1. What is moral hypocrisy, and why might it be morally dangerous?
2. Is it possible that moral questions could be more important than moral answers? But if that's so, how will I ever know the right thing to do?

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