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ETHICS

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Ethics is the study of right and wrong, of the most desirable manner of life, and of the most worthy motivation. More profound than specific moral rules and guidance in particulars is that part of ethics that attempts to answer the question, Why? Why is stealing wrong? Why is honesty right? What makes one type of life higher or better than another?

This article is divided into two parts: first, a summary of the history of ethical theory, which is perforce largely secular; and, second, a discussion of Christian principles.

A. From the ancient period. 1. Plato (427 – 347 B.C.). Plato lived at the time the OT canon was completed. He was the first philosopher to discuss ethics in a somewhat systematic fashion. His ethics, far from being a mere appendage to his system or even an honorable part of it, permeated and controlled it.

In his early years he seems to have considered pleasure to be man's chief and only good, and the solution to ethical problem consisted of calculating the amount of pleasures and pains to be derived from alternative courses of action. This theory, called Hedonism, reappeared in the ancient Epicureans and modern Utilitarians.

On a journey to Italy, after the death of Socrates in 399 B.C., Plato was converted by the Pythagoreans to a vigorous belief in the immortality of the soul. The Pythagoreans, descendants of the Orphics, were a religio-mathmetical brotherhood that believe in knowledge as the way of salvation. Mathematics and certain ethical and cultic rules, if followed, would guarantee a happy immortality (see GREEK RELIGION).

Plato's conversion compelled him to repudiate hedonism and to adopt a form of asceticism. In the *Gorgias,* he argued that it is better to be the victim of injustice than to be its perpetrator. Contrary to the views of Callicles Plato held that a dictator, whose every command must be obeyed and who can be unjust with impunity, harms himself more than he harms others. This argument was supported by an appeal to rewards and punishments in the life after death. In the *Phaedo,* asceticism is more pronounced. Not only is pleasure not man's only good; pleasure is positively evil. This does not mean that pain is good. The point is that pleasures, pains, and all sensations rivet men's souls to their bodies. This is evil, for the body is a tomb (σωμα σημα); life on earth is punishment for previous sins; and a philosopher strives to free his soul from contamination with body. A philosopher is one who loves truth, but truth is not obtainable by sensation. Hence, love of truth and hatred of evil are both motives for wishing to die. A philosopher must try to die. He may not, however, commit suicide, i.e. deliberately

escape his prison house, for the gods have put man on earth for a purpose, just as the Athenians imprisoned Socrates, and it is unjust to defeat the purposes of proper authority. But by philosophic study, by the avoidance of pleasures, and by a disregard for the body, a philosopher can prepare for death, gently loosen his soul from its rivets, and anticipate a pure intellectual or spiritual existence in the higher world.

In the *Republic*, Plato described man's soul as divided in three parts. The lowest of the three is the appetitive function, concupiscence, or, simply, desire; the next may be named “spunk,” or the spirited principle; and the highest is reason, or the intellect. This psychology is Plato's key to his theory of virtues. Temperance is the virtue of the lowest part of the soul and consists in its obedience to the higher function. Similarly, courage is the virtue of the second part, and wisdom is the virtue of the intellect. Then here is a fourth virtue, justice, which consists in each part minding its own business and not interfering with or disobeying the principles above it.

Plato had a parallel theory of politics. The lowest social class, the business man, must be temperate and obedient to superiors. The soldiers must be courageous and obey the rulers. The rulers are the philosophers, who alone possess wisdom. And justice is the harmony between all the classes.

In addition to such definitions of virtue, ethics must provide some implementation of morality. How is it that not all people are virtuous? Plato included the story of Leontius, who, on a walk, observed some dead bodies and the executioner standing by them. Leontius immediately had a desire to look at them, but at the same time loathing the thought, he tried to divert himself, and covered his eyes. At length he was overmastered by desire; he opened his eyes wide with his fingers and exclaimed, “There, you wretches, gaze your fill at the repulsive spectacle.”

Vice then occurs when desire, either alone or with the help of the spirited element, usurps the rule of reason. A deeper question, however, is why does not reason always rule? What enables desire to usurp the soul's throne?

Plato's answer to this question seems to have been inherited from Socrates; it is given in the early dialogue, *Lesser Hippias*, and though never later emphasized, it was never retracted.

Socrates and Plato thought that no one ever does wrong voluntarily. Evil always harms him who commits it, and no one wants to harm himself. If he does so, it must be involuntarily. That is to say, the person who does wrong does so because he thinks an evil act is good. In this he is mistaken. If he knew what was good for him, he would choose it. Choosing evil is evidence that he does not know. Ignorance therefore is the cause of vice; knowledge guarantees moral action.

In the case cited above, Leontius desired to gaze upon the corpses, and he experienced a loathing at the same time. The loathing derived from the common opinion that it is degrading to enjoy

brutality, tragedy, or death. This opinion may well be true, but as long as it is merely common opinion, it is not knowledge. Therefore Leontius' desire conquered the loathing. Desire could not have conquered knowledge.

To this, the reply is often given that men and women know that cigarettes cause cancer, and yet they continue to smoke. This reply, however, is superficial because it fails to understand Plato's strict view of what knowledge is.

Christian moralists, going beyond this superficiality, often criticize Plato's theory, not only as an inherent defect of paganism, but also as a defect in Plato's analysis of the will. It is held, and with fair reason, that the peculiar function of the will remained unrecognized until the advent of Christianity.

Another Christian objection is that Plato made the norms of morality independent of the will of God. His world of Ideas, which contains moral concepts as well as mathematical and zoological concepts, is an eternal reality superior to and independent of God. Because of the fundamental nature of this question, its discussion will be reserved for the second part of this article. Though it is easy to criticize Plato, it is more profitable at this point to consider something in Christianity that resembles what is taken to be a defect in his view of knowledge and the will. Of course, Christianity recognizes the conflict of reason and desire. This conflict is in fact sharpened by regeneration, so that Paul wrote, “For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. . . . For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do” (Rom 7:15, 19).

In addition to this psychological observation, there is something akin to Plato's view of knowledge in the doctrine of justification by faith. Romans 6 teaches that faith inevitably produces sanctification. Other passages say that faith without works is dead, and a dead faith is simply not faith at all. Therefore when a man says he has faith, but he is devoid of works, others judge that he has no faith. This situation is sometimes called dead orthodoxy. An orthodoxy that is dead is imply not orthodoxy, which is synonymous with right thinking.

So also would Plato argue. The man who does wrong may say he knows, but he does not know; for if he knew, virtuous action would be forthcoming.

2. Aristotle. Aristotle, unlike Plato had very little interest in religion. Morality for him had no connection with a future life; in fact his few references to “immortality” are so vague, it is unlikely that he had any belief at all in the future existence of an individual person. For Aristotle, morality was social custom, refined of its inconsistencies by reason, and based on a view of human nature.

Aristotle formulate the problem of ethics as the search for the Good—the Good for man. In other words, there is a desire to know *that for which* man does everything else. It is the end, or purpose,

of all human action.

Purposes are ordered in series. A man walks to his garage for the purpose of getting his care for the purpose of driving downtown for the purpose of getting to work on time. Whereas ethics gives proper consideration to immediate purposes, which then become the means o a more distant end, the culmination of the study is the absolutely final end, the end that is never a means to anything else, namely, Happiness.

Happiness does not mean pleasure. It is true that men choose pleasure for its own sake, as they also choose health for its own sake, but they choose health and pleasure for the sake of other things as well. Amusement and pleasure are forms of rest, and men rest, or take recreation, because they cannot go on working without relief. Pleasure, therefore, is a means to further activity. Some pleasures actually cause harm; these should be avoided. Thus it is clear that pleasure is not Happiness; the absolutely final end—Happiness—is never chosen as a means to anything else.

To ascertain the nature of Happiness, one must analyze, rather than simply accept pleasure. The way to arrive at its meaning is not see that the Good for man is related to man's ultimate purpose. Happiness is not a matter of individual choice; it is determined by human nature; it is defined by the function of man as man. The goodness of a flutist or a shoemaker resides in his function. If flutists and shoemakers have definite functions, would it not seem strange if man as man has none and is not designed by nature to fulfill any function? If also each part of the body, the eye or the hand, has a particular function of its own, surely the human being as a whole must have a function. The good man, then, as the example of the flutist shows, is the man who performs his function well.

In a generic sense, man has many functions, including nutrition, growth, and sensation. Man, however, has these in common with plants or animals. Ethics must determine the function peculiar to man; and this is to be found, not in mere life nor even in sensation, but in rationality. Because reason, therefore is the specific function of man, and because a thing is good if it performs its function well, it follows that the good for man is the active exercise of his soul's faculties in conformity with reason.

Such active exercise has two forms: moral and intellectual virtue. Moral virtue is not a natural property, but one acquired by habit. Since it is the nature of a stone to fall downward, and since it cannot be trained to fall upward, it is clear that natural properties cannot be altered by habit. But morality is produced, altered, and brought to maturity by habit. In the case of natural actions, the capacity precedes the activity; for example, no one acquires the faculty of sight by repeatedly seeing. It is the reverse; Man first had the sense and then used them. But with virtue, man first goes through the motions and by doing so acquires the capacity, just as one does in learning to play the piano. By acting courageously or temperately, a man becomes courageous or temperate.

Action thus produces character. If anyone practices bad fingering on the piano, he becomes a poor musician. No one begins as either a good or bad musician. Habituation determines what he becomes.

Moral virtue is a mean between two extremes, for morality has to do with feeling and actions, of which a man may have an excess or a deficiency. For example, if in a given situation a man is too fearful, he is called a coward; on the other hand, if he has no fear at all, when bullets are whistling by, he is considered foolhardy. Courage consists in feeling the right about of fear, neither too much nor too little. This right amount is relative to the situation and to the person. More fear is proper in battle, less in a less dangerous situation. Similarly, what is courageous for an elderly person may be cowardly for a young athlete whose physical powers are so much greater.

For this same reason, practical advice on how to become virtuous would be to counteract one's inclinations. Usually this would require a greater risk of being a little too rash than a little too cowardly. If, however, anyone knew he was inclined to rashness, he should run the risk of a little cowardice, and so possibly hit the mean. The same considerations apply to temperance, liberality, and all the moral virtues.

Higher on the scale than moral virtue is intellectual virtue; for the highest level of human nature is reason, and its proper functioning is the highest purpose of man. Contemplation, therefore, is the highest activity. Its objects are the highest objects, and its exercise is more continuous than any other human function can be. It is also most self-sufficient; for whereas the moral virtues require either the presence of other people, as in the case of justice, or the possession of goods, or both, as in the case of liberality, the wise man can think and contemplate by himself, and the more he does so, the wiser he becomes.

Furthermore, contemplation is the only activity that is loved for its own sake alone. It produces no result beyond the actual act of contemplation. The moral virtues are, to be sure, loved for their own sakes; they are ends, but they are also means to other good ends, and therefore are not absolutely final as is contemplation.

Once again, contemplation is the most god-like virtue. It is man's nearest approach to immortality. Obviously the gods cannot be moral; they cannot make contracts, restore deposits, endure terrors, run risks, or temperately restrain evil desires. Contemplation can be their only activity. Hence, contemplation is man's greatest source of happiness.

In the section on Plato, the problem of the will and its relation to knowledge was discussed. Aristotle also examined the subject. Christians may be a little disappointed because his interest was more political than theological or metaphysical, or even psychological; yet his arguments are well

worth studying.

Feelings and actions, which constitute the area of morality, may be voluntary or involuntary. The former are praised or blamed, the latter pardoned and sometimes pitied. Therefore ethics must study volition and choice.

Involuntary actions are those done through (1) force or (2) ignorance. A forced action is one whose principle of initiation is entirely external to the man, who contributes nothing. Compulsion by threat or by fear, is not pure compulsion; a tyrant may threaten, or a storm at sea may “force” one to throw the cargo overboard. Such actions are partly voluntary, but are more similar to involuntary actions. They are given a measure of praise or blame according to the circumstances because the initiation of the motion is in the man.

The claim that pleasure forces a man into immorality implies that all action would be compulsory, and no one would be responsible for anything.

Ignorance is the second cause of involuntary actions, but there is a distinction. All acts done through ignorance are nonvoluntary; only when pain and repentance follow do they become involuntary. Further, acting in ignorance is not the same as acting through ignorance. The drunk acts in ignorance but through drunkenness. Every wicked man is ignorant of what he ought to do. This ignorance does not cause involuntary action; it causes wickedness. The ignorance that causes involuntary action needs further specification.

An action is involuntary if the agent is ignorant of who is doing the act. This point of ignorance occurs only in insanity. The action is involuntary also if the agent is ignorant of the thing done, as in the case of Aeschylus who did not know he was revealing the mysteries, or in the case of a man who did not know the gun was loaded; similarly, if the agent does not know the object of the action, whether a person of a thing, as, for example, a man mistakes his son for a robber in the night, or mistakes a rapier for a foil, or poison for medicine.

Therefore, “Since that which is done under compulsion or through ignorance is involuntary, the voluntary would seem to be that of which the moving principle is in the agent himself, when he is ware of the particular circumstances of the action.”

In this discussion Aristotle insisted on distinguishing between an act being voluntary and its being good or evil. There is a common tendency to dodge responsibility by blaming evil actions on force or ignorance, while taking credit for good actions. Similarly, modern liberal penology tends to excuse the criminal because he was either raised in a slum or pampered in a wealthy home. But, to be consistent, this destroys responsibility for evil actions and credit for good actions alike, and dehumanizes everybody.

Next, a subspecies of the voluntary, called deliberate choice, is a better criterion of morality than feelings and actions. Children and some animals act voluntarily, but never by choice. Sudden actions also may be voluntary, but they are not deliberately chosen. What then is choice?

Choice is a subdivision within the area of the voluntary because both children and animals can act voluntarily, but not by choice. Acts done on the spur of the moment also are voluntary, but they are not chosen. Nor is choice the same as desire, anger, wish, or opinion, for animals experience desire and anger. Similarly an incontinent man acts from desire, but not from choice. Conversely, the continent man acts from choice, not from desire.

Choice is not the same as wish because one may sometimes wish for the impossible, but he never chooses it. Further, wish relates to the end of an action, whereas choice selects the means; for example, one may wish to be happy, but one must choose the method to obtain that happiness.

Nor is choice opinion. Opinion is concerned about everything, including both the impossible and the eternal. Opinion is true or false, not good or bad. Character is the result of choice, but not of opinion. Man chooses to take or avoid something, but man holds an opinion of wha a thing is. Indeed, some people have fairly sound opinions, but by reason of vice choose what they should not.

Choice, then, is what is decided upon by previous deliberation. To make the concept clearer, it is necessary to describe deliberation.

This identification of the objects of deliberation is the key to the manner or mode of deliberation. If deliberation concerns the variable and centers on means rather than on ends, the process consists of a search for the series of means that will produce an end. In a temporal sense, the search goes backward. For example, a man decides to purchase a necklace (the object of his deliberation) as an anniversary gift for his wife. Working backward, he next selects the store where he will purchase the necklace. The store selected, he then chooses the means of transportation, to drive his car or go by bus. The goal determines the choices.

The object of deliberation and of choice is the same object, except that the object of choice has already been determined as the result of deliberation. A man stops thinking how to act when he has brought the moving principle back to himself.

Aristotle continued in much more detail which cannot be included here. To conclude this section, a comparison with the Bible may be made. The Bible does not work out a theory of voluntary action and deliberate choice. It does, however, base responsibility on knowledge, and allows for greater responsibility, greater sin, and greater punishment in proportion to the amount of knowledge. The idea is clearly expressed in Romans 1:18, 19, 32; 2:12, 13, 15. Also, Christ said, “that servant who knew his master's will, but did not make ready … shall receive a severe beating. Every one to whom much is

given, of him much will be required." (*For later theories of ethics in pagan antiquity, see EPICUREANS, also STOICS.)*

B. From the medieval period. 1. Augustine (354-430). In patristic and medieval Christianity, Augustine and Aquinas developed full-fledged theories by interpreting Scripture, contrasting it with and defending it against the pagan theories, but sometimes utilizing pagan theories in combination with Biblical teachings.

Aristotle's view that the highest type of life is contemplation of truth is sometimes exaggerated, if not caricatured, as a withdrawal from the practical activities of life. Augustine's view, determined by Scripture and to a certain extent also influenced by Plato, rejects this exaggerated position. Knowledge pure and simple is not the end of life. Knowledge itself is a means to an end, and this end is blessedness. This basic Augustinian principle is embedded in the Protestant phrases, "Truth is in order to goodness," and "The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever."

If knowledge were for the sake of knowledge only, it would have no purpose, no end, and therefore no direction—for example, one could spend one's time counting the blades of grass on the front lawn or measuring the lengths of random bits of string. If knowledge has a purpose, however, one will not waste time contemplating useless information.

Philosophy is not the love of knowledge, but the love of wisdom. Though wisdom is a kind of knowledge and must possess the certitude of science, there is a distinction between them, as hinted in 1 Corinthians 12:8. Not all knowledge leads to blessedness; wisdom does.

Man is both corporeal and spiritual. If the mind were divorced from the body, it would not doubt attend only to the divine Ideas; but actually one of the soul's functions is to rule the body. Therefore man must know not only the divine Ideas, but things and bodies as well. He must act, and this requires thought of inferior objects and lower ends. Of course, even Aristotle did not deny the need for moral virtues as distinct from intellectual virtues.

The concern with corporeal affairs, however, is a means to higher intellectual activity. Thought leads to action only to prepare for contemplation. Action is work, effort, pursuit. Contemplation is reward, rest, vision. The distinction is illustrated in Scripture in the persons of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42). During a Christian's earthly life, there is action in view of heavenly contemplation. Morality is the preparation for the vision of God.

Attention to bodily things is legitimate, if this interest is kept in proper perspective. If a man restricts himself to the lower sphere, he is guilty of pride, avarice, and personal cupidity. Instead of subordinating himself to God, he tries to subordinate the universe to himself. Science itself is good, but

man easily abuses science.

Wisdom, on the other hand, turns man from things to God. Pride is replaced by humility. Science is necessary to arrange temporal affairs, but when people subordinate themselves to God, they put their various activities in their proper places.

Why isn't everyone wise? Plato had tried to answer this question in terms of a conflict between reason and desire. Christianity, however, although it does not deny a conflict between desire and reason, has a different psychology that requires a profounder explanation of evil. This difference in psychology is revealed in an emphasis on the will. Such emphasis was lacking, or at most, rudimentary, in Plato and Aristotle; although the Stoics advanced over their predecessors in the matter of the will, there are other differences.

All things, mans included, are subject to the order God has imposed on the world. Each thing, so Augustine teaches, has its proper place in the universal hierarchy. Nevertheless, for morality, man must act and act voluntarily. Even intellectual learning depends on the will. One can almost say that a man is his will. In sensation the will is required to sustain attention. A person's fingers may be in contact with an object, or his eyes may be fixed on an object, yet if he does not attend to it, he does not perceive it. Memory also requires attention, and neither understanding nor belief takes place without an act of will.

Modern terminology might define volition as a natural drive. It is a principle of action. According to Aristotle, earth, air, fire, and water have a natural tendency to seek their proper places. Earth naturally falls, and fire by nature rises. As earth has weight, Augustine felt, so man has love. Love is man's natural motor power.

Parenthetically, it should be noted that in orthodoxy theology, love is a volition, not an emotion. Contemporary references to God's love and man's love for God often go astray because of faulty psychology. Love toward God consists in voluntary obedience to His laws (John 14:15, 21, 23, 1 John 2:4, 5). Emotion has little to do with it.

Accordingly, Augustine argues that the moral problem is not whether to love or not to love. This would be like asking whether earth should have weight or not have weight. The problem is to love what one ought to love, for this is virtue. Because men continually fail, the problem arises whether a natural principle of motion can go astray.

The difficulty was sharper for the Christian Augustine than it was for the pagan Plato, for in addition to the psychology of the will, Augustine had to operate with the theological concept of sin. This does not refer simply to the fact that men choose evil. The pagans knew that much. The Christian concept of sin is based on original sin and the inheritance of it. Aristotle had explained evil actions as

the results of bad habits, such as poor fingering on a piano. At the start, a prospective musician has neither good nor bad habits. He is neutral, and practice makes him what he becomes. But Christianity teaches that man is born in sin; he has bad habits at the outset, and this together with guilt is inherited from Adam. Therefore, sin is a much more radical defect than is acknowledged by the pagan view of evil.

Augustine gives a memorable example. When he was a boy, he and his gang stole some pears from a nearby orchard. He did not steal because he was hungry for he had pears at homes; in fact, much better pears, for the stolen pears were so bad that the boys threw them to the pigs. It is wrong to steal, but if one steals because he is hungry, or even because the pears taste good, there is some superficial plausibility in the theft. Augustine's theft, however, was not so motivated. He stole simply for the fun of stealing; he enjoyed evil for its own sake; and he enjoyed it all the more because he did it with his friends who also enjoyed evil just because it was evil. Stealing pears may not be a great sin, but what depravity could be greater than a love of evil for its own sake.

The passages (*Confessions*, Book II) containing this psychological analysis of the motives of sin does not itself refer to original sin. The immediate point is merely the perversity of the human heart. This depravity cannot be accounted for on Aristotelian principles, though even at this late date some professing Christians still say that a child becomes sinful only upon committing a voluntary transgression at or after the so-called age of accountability.

Those who deny that men are dead in sin hold also that sin is not merely voluntary, but is particularly an act of free will. Volition and free will are not the same, as the article on Stoicism shows. Free will, that is, a choice that is not caused either by God, by character, by motives, or anything else, is substituted for knowledge as the basis for responsibility. Moreover, the problem is complicated by the fact that God is omnipotent. He could have made men sinless, had He so desired. This is not the case in Platonism, where God is conceived as limited in power; Plato's god does his best to restrain evil and impose order on the visible world, but the opposing forces are sometimes too much for him. Christianity teaches that God is omnipotent, so that He could even now eradicate evil. Superficial thinking attempts to say that God limited Himself. The infinite made itself finite. God undeified Himself, and hence there is sin. This reply is inadequate because limited omnipotence is a contradiction in terms, but also because it does not answer the original question: why does not God now unlimit Himself and make all men sinless? The problem is difficult, and Augustine changed his views, beginning as a new Christian with a certain form of free will and then developing a more consistently Christian and Biblical solution.

Augustine's first attack on this basic problem of ethics, *On Free Will*, was written about A.D.

390. The question is, “If sins comes from the souls which God has created, and these souls are from God, how explain that sin is not borne back upon God (*referantur in Deum*)? Or in other words, how is God not responsible for sin?

By A.D. 390, Augustine had made such little progress in grasping Christian doctrine and was still so under the influence of Plato that he denied the sovereignty of God by adopting the Platonic view that an action is wrong not because God forbids it, but God forbids it because it is wrong i.e. or some other principle independent of God. This error subtly influenced his arguments, but gradually he was able to discard Platonism.

He next contended that things superior to the human mind, i.e. God, cannot subject a man to sin or lust because being superior they are good and would not do so. Things inferior to the mind cannot do so because they are inferior and weaker. Therefore the mind or will itself causes sin, and God is not responsible.

Yet if God created the will of man good, how could man ever choose evil? Augustine replied with another bit of Platonism that he later discarded. He wrote that perhaps souls lived in a preexistent state before birth, and that this fact (somehow, not too clearly) answers the questions (Book I, 12). In fact he soon repeated the question (I, 16): If God gave men free will, is He not responsible for their sins; if He had not given them free will, they would not have sinned?

This is an unfortunate flaw in Augustine's argumentation. He nowhere defines free will, and without an explicit definition, one can only guess what he means. Presumably he meant an uncaused or unmotivated will. But if so, the flaw takes the form of assuming without proof that a will can operate without a cause. Therefore Augustine's immediate remark is irrelevant: God gave man a free will so that he might live righteously (which contradicts the previous statement that without a free will no one would sin), and God is not to blame if man uses free will for the wrong purpose (II, 1), just as one cannot object to wine because some use it wrongly (II, 18).

The argument becomes more theological as it progresses. If God foreknow Adam's sin, was it not inevitable? And must not man will as God foreknows? No, replied Augustine, because *must* means *no will*; therefore foreknowledge does not conflict with human ability. For example, if one man foreknows that another will sin, the former's knowledge is not the cause of the sin. As memory of the past does not exert force on the past, so knowledge of the future does not determine the future.

Apparently Augustine assumed that a man can know the future and that God discovers an independent future the way a man does. Neither of these assumptions seems sound.

For such reasons as these, Augustine concluded that it is unwise to seek a cause of volitions. When one asks what causes the will to choose, one is led into an infinite regress. The will itself is the

cause, and further search is useless.

Nevertheless Augustine went further. He admitted that sinning is inevitable, for he could not escape Romans 7:18. Therefore man does not have free will; strictly speaking only Adam had free will (III, 18). Adam's descendants are punished as Adam himself was, because the descendants of a sinner are of necessity sinful. If all souls have descended from one soul, then all have sinned and deserve punishment. Furthermore, because virtue can be acquired by God's grace, the sinful state is a stimulus to progress.

Late in life, after he had gone through the Pelagian controversy (cf. PELAGIUS), Augustine wrote two more books on the same subject: *Grace and Free Will* in A.D. 426, and P*redestination of the Saints* in A.D. 429. In the former, he still used the phrase "free will," but the discussion no longer denied a divine cause of the will's action. Chapter 29 stated that God is able to convert opposing wills and to take away their hardness; otherwise, if God could exercise no causative power on the will, it would be useless to pray for the conversion of anyone. It is certain, he continued, that it is men who will when they will, but it is God who makes them will what is good. It is God who makes them act by applying *efficacious* powers to their wills. The Scripture "shows us that not only men's good will, which God converts from bad ones … but also those who follow the world are so entirely at the disposal of God that he turns them whithersoever he wills and whensoever he will. . . . For the Almighty sets in motion even the innermost hearts of men the movement of their will so that he does through their agency whatsoever he wishes to perform through them" (chs. 41, 42).

In the latter book he wrote against semi-Pelagianism and insisted that faith is a gift of God. God causes men to believer. Augustine confessed that he had not always understood the doctrines of grace: he had thought that Romans 7 referred to the unregenerate; he had denied prevenient grace; but now he retracted his earlier errors for he obtained mercy to be a believer—not because he had believed.

Christ Himself is the best example of predestination, for if He had had free will, He could have sinned, therefore, He did not have free will, but was predestinated in all that He did. In fact, in both of theses books, but esp. in the last one, Augustine taught the full Protestant position, forgotten during the Middle Ages, but rediscovered by Luther and Calvin.

After Augustine, the Rom. Empire in the W disintegrated under the advances of the barbarians, and learning became almost extinct. As church superstitions multiplied, theology became semi-Pelagian or worse, though what philosophy survived was mildly Augustinian.

2. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). In the 13th cent., however, Thomas Aquinas succeeded in overthrowing Augustinianism and establishing Aristotelianism.

His ethics is based on the fact of a similarity and a difference between human beings and inanimate objects. The similarity, on which the difference is built, lies in the possession of a natural tendency or inclination. Earth has a natural tendency to fall. In inanimate things these tendencies are unconscious and are not subject to the being's control. Man also has a natural inclination, but it is a higher form because man is rational and volitional. He inclines to what he knows, and he controls his own conduct.

Appetite or desire is proportionate to knowledge. In animals, the knowledge is merely sense knowledge, and since this requires a bodily organ, it follows that if a dog sees or smells a bone, he automatically desires it. Man, however, has rational knowledge, which does not immediately depend on any bodily organ; therefore the will or rational appetite does not act automatically. Nevertheless the object chosen must be known.

The will naturally or automatically inclines toward the good. Just as each plant or animal naturally tends to the preservation of itself and of the species, so too man is directed to the good. In actual life, however, man is not confronted so much with the Good as with particular goods. These are not completely satisfying, and hence they do not compel the will.

In fact, not even God can compel the will.

The reason is that

> what is done voluntarily is not done of necessity. Now, whatever is done under compulsion is done of necessity, and consequently what is done by the will cannot be compelled. . . . The will can suffer violence insofar as violence can prevent the exterior members from executing the will's command. But as to the will's own proper act, violence cannot be done to the will. . . . God, who is more powerful than the human will, can more the will of man . . . . But if this were by compulsion, it would no longer be by an act of will, nor would the will itself be moved, but something against the will (*Summa Theol*. II I, 2.6, Art. 4).

On a later page (2.10, Art. 4), Thomas considered the objection,

> It would seem that the will is moved of necessity by God. For every agent that cannot be resisted moves of necessity. But God cannot be resisted, because his power is infinite; and so it is written (Rom 9:19) “who resisteth his will?”

In reply to this quotation from the canonical Bible, Thomas uses a verse from an apocryphal book:

> On the contrary, it is written (Ecclus. 15: 14) “God made man from the beginning and left hi in the hand of his own counsel.”

Natural inclinations, as in inanimate things, tend toward a form existing in nature; the sensitive appetite and all the more the rational appetite tend toward an apprehended form. Therefore, the will chooses, not the universal good as such, but an apparent good. The agent intends the good; he never voluntarily chooses evil; when he chooses a particular apparent good that turns out to be evil, the evil is unintentional.

The intellect therefore moves the will, but not necessarily, by presenting an object to it. If the intellect offered to the will an object good universally and from every point of view, the will would choose it of necessity, if it choose at all, for it cannot choose the opposite. If, on the other hand, the will is offered an object that is not good in every respect it will not tend toward it of necessity. Hence the will can either accept or reject particular goods.

Choice is an act of both the intellect and the will. The matter of the choice comes from the intellect, but the form of the choice comes from the will. Intellect and will interact, but their acts are not to be confused. The intellect may even command the will and say, “Do this!” Even when the will obeys, it does so freely.

With all their interaction, more complicated than this brief essay indicates, Thomas Steadfastly maintained the distinction between intellect and will. Augustin, as said above, virtually identified man with his will, in which case intellectual acts are simply particular volitions. After the time of Thomas, the discussion intensified. Descartes, at the beginning of the modern period, returned to a position somewhat similar to Augustine's, but these intricacies can be followed no further here.

One who has not read Thomas can have no ideas of the immense amount of detail he incorporated in his writings. Basing his views on Aristotle, he argued that habit is a quality, a species of quality, which implies order to act; it is necessary that there be habits; some habits are bodily, some exist in the soul; some habits, such as temperance and fortitude, belong to the sensitive and irrational part of the soul; science and wisdom are habits of the intellect, however, is a habit of the will; and even angels have habits.

Thomas then discussed whether any habit is from nature; whether any is caused by acts; whether a habit can be caused by one act; whether any habits are infused by God; whether habits increase (which he answers in the affirmative, for faith is a habit and faith increases); and so on until he is able to show that virtue is a habit. He then continued for many long pages on virtue in general, and had something to say about a few particular virtues.

One basic factor in the ethics of Thomas, a factor that seems to deal more closely with the particular decisions of everyday morality, is the theory of natural law.

There are several types of law: eternal law, natural law, and civil law. A law is a rule that

prescribes or forbids an action; it is an obligation founded on reason. There is no other regulative principle of action than reason. The unreasonable commands of a tyrant are not laws, but merely usurp that appellation.

So completely is reason the source of law that a private person is not competent to make laws. He can give advice but he cannot efficaciously lead anyone to virtue. Coercive power is vested in a public power. A father cannot gives laws even to his family, for a family is part of the state. The father can indeed issue certain commands to his children, but they do not have the nature of law.

Furthermore, although there are various precepts of prudence, the first principle in practical affairs is the highest end—happiness or beatitude. Therefore law is chiefly ordained to the common, rather than to the individual, good.

The first of the three types of law is the eternal law. Since this is the plan of government laid down by God, the Chief Governor, all the plans of inferior governors must be derived from this eternal law.

Insofar as the eternal law applies to the conduct of men, it has been inscribed in man's substance is called natural law. Because this law causes men to be what they are—it takes the form of a human inclination toward certain ends—they obey it when they yield to the legitimate tendencies of their nature.

The first and basic principle is that good should be done and evil avoided. All other precepts depend on this. Since good has the nature of an end, “all those things to which man has a natural inclination are naturally apprehended by reason as being good, and consequently as objects of pursuit” (*Summa Theol*. II, I, 2. 94, Art. 2). Thus self-preservation is the basic inclination; next comes reproduction and the care of children; in short, all virtuous acts are covered by natural law.

These laws are indelibly written in the human heart. They cannot be effaced. Men need only to observe themselves to discover them, or in Thomas' own words, “The natural law is promulgated by the very fact that God instilled it into man's mind so as to be known by him naturally” (ibid. Q. 90, Art. 4). Thomas also extended the details of what man ought to do by including the theological virtues taught by Revelation. These make his good life more Christian than that of an Aristotelian gentleman, but they are not logically deduced from his philosophic system.

Two criticisms of Thomism should be considered—one theological, one philosophical. The first is that Christian theology is inconsistent with Aristotelian ethics. The discussion of ethics depends on an assertion of free will with the assumption that man is able by practice to make himself virtuous. Man may “naturally” seek the good but since the Fall no one is “natural.” All are born in sin and are in need of grace. Therefore they cannot will to be virtuous. Although Tomas never achieved the full Christian

vision of Augustine's later works, he nevertheless had some notion of predestination and reprobation. Whether the latter can be consistently combined with free will is the question. At least the consistency is not clear in the following: “When it is said that the reprobated cannot obtain grace, this must not be understood as implying absolute impossibility, but only conditional impossibility; just as it was said above that the predestined must necessarily be saved, yet by a conditional necessity that does not do away with liberty of choice” (*Summa Theol*. I, Q.23, Art. 3). Also, “Man's turning to God is by free choice; and thus man is bidden to turn himself to God. But free choice can be turned to God only when God turns it . . . man can do nothing unless moved by God. . . . It is part of man to prepare his soul, since he does this by free choice. And yet he does not do this without the help of God moving him and drawing him to himself” (ibid. II, I, 2. 109, Art. 6).

The inconsistency here seems to be that Thomas made a good case for freedom from coercion, and that this freedom is compatible with predestination, for God is not a mechanical agent. Yet Thomas also held that for responsibility and morality, the freedom of an uncaused cause is required, and this is not compatible with predestination. Until a theologian clarifies himself out on these points, neither his theology nor his ethics will escape confusion.

The second objection to be considered is philosophical and ethical—the question whether Aristotle or Thomas can build an ethics on natural law. Is it actually true that men can observe what is written on their hearts and discover that adultery and theft are forbidden?

It is plausible that natural law would prescribe the care and education of children. Animals instinctively care for their young, but are not for that reason monogamous. If it be replied that a human child requires a longer period of care and that therefore a human family ought to remain together for this longer period, neither monogamy nor permanent union is thereby established. Indeed, since the state, on Thomistic principles, is to spell out most of the details left obscure in natural law, could not a rational ruler establish communal nurseries? Who is to say that Soviet laws are less rational that American?

This includes the question of theft. If property is a creation of the state, confiscatory taxation is as reasonable as Jeffersonian democracy, and laissez faire as collectivism. Thomas admits that it is always dangerous to rebel, even when a tyrant violates natural law; but how can one distinguish between a just rebellion and an unjust usurpation?

Even self-preservation is not clearly an inviolable law of nature. Military service is considered a duty, but this can lead to death. If natural law obliges, a young man would be obliged to dodge the draft. Or, on the other hand, why must suicide be considered wrong? There may be an instinct of self-preservation, but some unfortunate people have concluded that the conditions of life were so onerous

that it was rational to kill themselves. This was a definite part of Stoic philosophy, and the Stoics prescribed a life of reason as strongly as Aristotle did. But if natural law cannot absolutely prescribe self-preservation, it would seem that ethics needs a better foundation.

C. From the modern period 1. English ethics. a. THOMAS HOBBES (1588-1679). In the history of English ethics, the approach differs from that of medieval times and antiquity. Thomas Hobbes aimed to make ethics scientific. Thus he held that all forms of life are but complicated relationships among particles of matter in motion. This materialism serves as a basis for his psychological hedonism. Hobbes professes to have discovered by scientific observation that all men naturally desire and are motivated only be personal pleasure. Man is essentially self-seeking. “Pity is imagination or fiction of future calamity to ourselves proceeding from the sense of another man's calamity”; and “The passion of laughter proceedeth from the sudden imagination of our own odds and eminency; for what is else the recommending of ourselves to our own good opinion by the comparison of another man's inferiority or absurdity.”

For Hobbes, ethics is descriptive rather than normative. He did not say what men ought to do; he described their actual conduct. Surreptitiously, perhaps he made some recommendations.

Thus he argued that the condition most unfavorable to obtaining pleasure is political anarchy. To be sure the war of each against all is man's natural state; but it an intolerable one. No one's life is safe; and without life pleasure is impossible. Therefore, everyone must surrender all his rights to the government, preferably by selecting one man and making him an absolute monarch.

This is a form of the social contract theory of government. The people enter into a covenant with each other to set up a king. Forever after it will be wrong to rebel: by the contract that retain no rights at all—therefore no right to rebel. Nor can they later claim that the king has broken the contract, for the king was never a party to the contract.

The king now, as selfish as anyone else, protects his property, i.e. his subjects, for his own good. He enforces laws that preserve life and protect property, and under such a totalitarian government man can best enjoy himself. To rebel against the king and to diminish his authority would be to revert to anarchy and misery.

Hobbes had some reason to be apprehensive of social disturbances. His age was one of confusion in England—the disaffection of the Scottish army toward the perfidious Charles I in England and the Puritans' hostility toward the Arminian and Romish tendencies in the Anglican Church. Civil war was on its way. Foreseeing this, Hobbes contended that the principle of private conscience, by which the Puritans read the Bible for themselves, conflicted with governmental authority. Similarly, the

independent conscience of the Pope was destructive of peace. Therefore Puritans and Romanists were both to be repressed, and the king by his supremacy could not only legislate the rules of morality as he saw fit, but he could even decide what books make up the Bible and what they mean.

The immediate reaction to Hobbes, on the surface at least, was an attack on his egoism. More fundamental was a rejection of scientific observation as a basis for morality. If a sense of obligation is to be maintained, if the concept of duty and the authority of normative principles is to be defended, more factual descriptions of *what is* are not enough; something more is needed to show what *ought to be*.

b. RALPH CUDWORTH (1617-1688). Therefore Ralph Cudworth returned to a Platonic or Neoplatonic theory of suprasensible Ideas. For him as for Plato, the Good—and its derivative forms—are independent of both human and divine volition: an action is not wrong because God forbids it, but God Himself subject to the Ideas, forbids it because it is wrong.

c. HENRY MORE (1614-1687). Henry More based morality on intuitions. As one knows a rock or a mountain simply by seeing it, so in somewhat a similar fashion he can have an intellectual vision of first principles. They are not deduced from anything prior or more certain: they are simply seen. Most philosophers, except the most extremely scientific, will acknowledge the legitimacy of undemonstrable axioms, but More's two dozen moral intuitions seem unnecessarily abundant.

d. SHAFTESBURY (1671-1713) and HUTCHESON (1694-1747). Shaftesbury and Hutcheson paid more attention to the conflict between egoism and altruism. If men had no sense of good distinct from personal advantage, is their argument, they would hold in equal esteem a fruitful field and a generous friend. One would hold in equal esteem a man who serves him with delight and a man who bring him the same advantage by constraint. But one does not esteem these equally. Therefore we have a sense of good other than egoistic advantage.

e. JOSEPH BUTLER (1692-1752). A much more important writer was Bishop Joseph Butler. His most influential work, used a textbook for over a century in many seminaries, was *The Analogy of Religion to the Constitution and Course of Nature*. His system of ethics is expounded in *Fifteen Sermons*. Neither of these is founded on Platonic or intuitionist principles. Bishop Butler believed that moral obligation, and the basic theses of Christianity too, can be established by observation. Whereas not so attach to the materialistic mechanism of Thomas Hobbes, he still depended on scientific methods. This procedure served him will in his *Analogy*, for he was able to destroy English Deism on its own grounds. He could show, for example, that the immortality of the soul was a reasonable conclusion, at least as reasonable as the opposite. This, however, may be the fallacy in his thinking. Pure, unmixed observation can just as reasonably arrive at either of two incompatible positions, and

arrive at them by equally reasonable, that is equally unreasonable, arguments. Similarly, in ethics one must always scrutinize an argument that professes to deduce what ought to be from what merely is.

In the second of his *Fifteen Sermons*, using the text, “For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves” (Rom 2:14 KJV), Joseph Butler, not noticing the intuitional or a priori thrust of the verse, argues that the purpose of man can be discovered by observation, or, more particularly, introspection, and that this purpose reveals man's nature and fixes his obligations.

Man has a conscience as truly as he has eyes; and as the purpose of the eyes is to see trees and houses, so the purpose of the conscience is to see right and wrong. Furthermore, man's instincts lead him to contribute to the happiness of society in a way and with a force that no inward principle leads him to evil. Hence, man is at least more altruistic than selfish.

If it be replied that evil and selfish instincts are also natural, and that we therefore follow nature in following them, the reply is, first, that such an argument would destroy all distinctions between good and evil—everything would be indifferently natural: and, second, that observation of human nature did not result merely in the discovery that both altruistic and selfish inclinations equally exist, but rather that conscience exists as a superior, governing principle—its purpose is to sit in judgment over the others.

Butler is quite confident of the rectitude of conscientious judgments: “Let any plain, honest man, before he engages in any course of action, ask himself, Is this I am going about right, or is it wrong? It is good, or is it evil? I do not in the least doubt, but that this question would be answered agreeably to truth and virtue, by almost any fair man in almost any circumstance.”

A person, whose viewpoint is not so restricted to Eng. common opinion in the 18th cent. may wonder whether all the world in all ages has enjoyed such a universal agreement. Without pressing the Scriptural revelation of the total depravity and desperate wickedness of the human heart, but adhering solely to observation “exclusive of revelation” as Butler insists (Sermon II, paragraph 20), an observer of humanity also notes that some widows have conscientiously mounted the funeral pyres of their husbands, that some military nations have taught that suicide is honorable, that Congolese savages regard cannibalism as normal. Observation, it would seem, allows for incompatible results.

Butler next considered a most important objection. Suppose, the objection runs, that conscience prescribes for a person a line of action that would injure him. Why should he be concerned about anything other than his own personal good? If he discovers in his makeup certain restrictions of conscience, why should he not endeavor to suppress them?

Butler's answer is that personal happiness and the good of other people coincide. All the

common enjoyments of life, and, even the pleasures of vice, depend on a person's regard of his fellow creatures. The satisfactions of selfishness are not to be assumed superior to the satisfactions of acting justly and benevolently. Butler wrote, “It is manifest that, in the common course of life, there is seldom any inconsistency between our duty and what is *called* interest: it is much seldomer that there is an inconsistency between duty and what is really our present interest. . . . But whatever exceptions there are to this . . . all shall be set right at the final distribution of things. It is a manifest absurdity to suppose evil prevailing finally over good, under the conduct and administration of a perfect mind” (Sermon II, paragraph 28).

Some puzzles emerge in the study of Butler's arguments. Altruism and selfishness, conscience and “reasonable self-love” may coincide, but when they do not seem to—and in the 20th cent., duty does not speak so clearly as it did in his day—should a man follow what seems to be his duty? Is duty in fact more clearly discernible than interest? Again, “a final distribution of things” that will equalize the temporary inconsistencies is not a principle to be derived from observation. Butler's argument is circular: he must appeal to divine Providence to save his ethical theory, although he cannot prove the existence of Providence except by observing the uniform and inviolate coincidence of conscience and self-love.

2. **Utilitarianism**. a. JEREMY BENTHAM (1748-1832). In 19th cent. England Jeremy Bentham propounded the theory of utilitarianism. Based on psychological hedonism, as was the theory of Thomas Hobbes, it, too, claimed to be observational, descriptive, and scientific. From the thesis that everyone as a matter of fact seeks nothing but pleasure, Bentham somehow arrived at the position that one ought to seek, not only his own pleasure, but the greatest pleasure of the greatest number.

“Nature,” writes Bentham, “has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure*. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. . . . They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think.”

The pleasure to be expected from prospective lines of action is to be measured by seven parameters: intensity, duration, certainty, propinquity, fecundity, purity, and extent. The latter is the number persons to whom the pleasure extends. By calculating the amounts of pleasure to be produced from alternate lines of action, anyone should know which action he should choose.

The right action is enforced by four sanctions. Consequences, painful or pleasurable, derived through the ordinary course of nature, presumably physiological, issue from or belong to the *physical* sanction. Consequences derived through the actions of the police, the courts, and the state form the *political* sanction. Pleasures and pain received at the hands of such chance persons who spontaneously

react to our conduct form the *moral* or *social* sanction. Bentham also makes religion a fourth sanction; but this *religious* sanction operates only through the other three. Bentham gives lip service to the possibility of divine rewards and punishments in a future life, but these can have no effect on man's present choices. Such consequences are not open to observation; men cannot calculate the amounts—whether those pains and pleasures are like or unlike the present kind is something beyond the realm of discovery by observation.

Bentham's utilitarianism provides a good opportunity for showing the weaknesses of many secular systems. In the first place, the calculation of future pleasures, on which choice the knowledge of obligation depends, is impossible. Only in a few simple instances, and in these only roughly, can anyone estimate the amount of pleasure he as an individual will enjoy from a particular choice. To suppose that anyone can calculate the sum total of pleasure accruing to the whole human race is utterly and obviously impossible. Let anyone who wishes, try measuring along the seven parameters.

The principle of the greatest good for the greatest number is one by which dictators can justify their cruelty. When the communists starved to death millions of Ukrainians, massacred thousands of Polish officers, murdered possibly twenty million Chinese, and slaughtered the Tibetans, they could justify themselves on the ground that the pleasure of future generations of communists would outweigh the temporary pain. Certainly no scientific observation can prove the contrary.

Less gruesome but even more fundamentally destructive of utilitarianism is the fact that descriptive science can discover no reason for aiming at the good of all society. Plato, Aristotle, Butler, all agree that men should seek their own good; who can urge them to seek their own harm? Why should anyone govern his actions by the good of another person? If perchance, as Butler asserted, there is never any conflict between a man's good and the good of every other human being, then self-seeking and altruism will both prescribe the same choices. But this utopian assumption contradicts observable evidence. Persona jealousies and international conflicts alike demonstrate the incompatibility of goods. Actual life is much more like Hobbes' war of each against all than like a perfect universal harmony.

b. HENRY SIDGWICK (1838-1900). To avoid this disastrous argument against utilitarianism, Henry Sidgwick, whose *Methods of Ethics* is the best analysis of ethical methodology so far written, relinquished the descriptive basis Bentham used, and tried to found utilitarianism on intuitions. He urged his readers to look at the matter “from the point of view, if I may say so, of the Universe.” But unfortunately no one man is the universe, and therefore no one man can see things from its point of view; nor it is easy to learn why anyone ought to take any other point of view than his own. For another person's pleasure, enjoyment, or good cannot be mine.

Sidgwick was honest enough to admit that the compatibility of all individual goods can be

maintained only on the basis of God's rewards and punishments. It is incapable of empirical proof. Therefore, much to his distaste, he is forced to admit the question whether a theory of ethics can be constructed on an independent basis, or whether it is forced to borrow a fundamental principle form theology (*Methods of Ethics*, pp. 506-509). His modesty, his honest, and his almost superhuman effort to save utilitarianism seal its doom.

Hedonism in any of its forms is a teleological system. Moral acts have the purpose of producing pleasure, and they are tested by their actual consequences.

3. Categorical imperative—Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). A century earlier Immanuel Kant, of Germany, constructed a nonhedonistic, nonteleological system, in which the moral quality of an act was entirely independent of actual consequences.

One of Kant's chief objection to an ethics of calculation was that on such an arrangement only those who are brilliant mathematicians can be moral. On the contrary, morality ought to be within the abilities of every human person. Furthermore, common opinion never regards a man as immoral just because he fails to obtain a great deal of pleasure. He may be imprudent or stupid, but if his intentions are sincere and good, he is considered moral. Conversely, successful calculation may prove a man clever, but is no basis for judging him to be particularly moral.

In opposition to empirical ethics, therefore, Kant put forward a theory of a priori duty. A moral precept is such because it is a categorical imperative. Some imperatives are merely hypothetical: to bisect a line, one must draw certain arcs. Such imperatives are scientific, and if anyone does not wish to bisect an arc, no obligation exists. Moral, or categorical imperatives, however, do not depend on *ifs*. It is “immoral” to say that if a person wants a good reputation, he should be honest and tell the truth. One ought to be honest and tell the truth regardless of consequences, and even without being so motivated. A moral act must be motivated only be reverence for duty.

Duty then is determined, not by any pleasure accruing to the individual, but by maxims that can be universalized. If I tell a lie by making a promise I do not intend to keep, I make myself an exception to a universal maxim. The only reason I can deceive anyone by a false promise is that people expect promises to be kept. If all or even more promises were broken, there would be no promises at all because no one would believe them. Hence the intent to deceive depends on the maxim of nondeception. An individual cannot universalize the maxim of false promises because such an attempt is self-contradictory. A false promise is always and of necessity an exception and can never be a general rule. Universalization therefore, or the absence of self-contradiction, is the test of morality. The results of the action have nothing to do with it.

Kant's example of truth-telling is the best one he could have used. Others are no so convincing. For example, the maxim, “Be a miser,” can be universalized; so also “Be a spendthrift.” Neither of these requires the agent to be an exception to the general rule; neither is self-destructive. Similarly the maxim, “Commit suicide,” contains no self-contradictions. Or, if the maxim applied to children so that the human race would become extinct, in which case suicides would no longer possible, the maxim can be replaced, “Commit suicide on your forty-fifth birthday.” Kant tried his best to show that suicide is immoral, but if he succeeded it is because of an appeal to God and not because of a categorical imperative. Kant's ethics can be saved, then, only be an admission that suicide is right and that a miser and a spendthrift are morally equal.

However, Kant's thesis faces even greater difficulties. Morality seems to presuppose freedom. Ask a man, wrote Kant, whether he can refuse to bear false witness in court when his king requires it; and the man might doubt that he would refused, but he would not doubt that he could refuse. Duty and the categorical imperative depend on freedom.

At the same time, Kant, to escape Hume's empirical skepticism, worked out a system of epistemology, by which every atom, every motion, every physiological change, ever natural desire is determined by mathematical, mechanical law. Freedom is physically, scientifically impossible. How then can freedom and morality be saved?

It must be insisted upon that free will is not the ability to indulge one's desire and natural impulses. Natural impulses are natural; they are caused by physiological conditions. A will is free only when self-caused—independent of all influences external to itself. Such freedom is impossible in a physical, visible world.

In this predicament Kant asserts that men are citizens of two worlds. Beyond the visible world there is an intelligible world, where neither matter nor mechanism can corrupt, and where causality does not break through and steal man's freedom. In that world, morality is possible.

In this world, where men's bodies are and where men's actions occur, is morality possible? Consider a particular act of theft a man breaks the lock on a door enters a house, and steals some cash and jewelry. All these actions are physical actions in time and space. Now Kant is adamant. There can be no freedom, he says, for bodies or actions in time; all temporal factors are mechanically determined. Some moralists have tried to preserve freedom by denying that ht emotions of the theft are physically necessitated, by asserting that they are produced by some sort of psychological causation. The thief is said to be free because he acts according to his own character. Kant calls this theory a wretched subterfuge. Psychological states are as much necessitated as physical motions. Logically, it follows therefore that the theft itself could have been avoided in the higher world, although the motions of the

theft could not have been avoided in this world.

This conclusion is paradoxical, to say the least; and Kant refused to explain it. He wrote, “Reason would therefore completely transcend its proper limits, if it should undertake to explain how pure reason can be practical, or what is the same thing, to explain how freedom is possible . . . while therefore it is true that we cannot comprehend this practical unconditioned necessity of the moral imperative, it is also true that we can comprehend its incomprehensibility; and this is all that can be fairly demanded of a philosophy which seeks to reach the principles which determine the limits of human reason” (*Critique of Practical Reason*, T. K. Abbot's tr., pp. 189-191).

4. Instrumentalism—John Dewy (1859-1952). For American readers something needs to be said about John Dewey. He offered an empirical, scientific ethics, and therefore the criticism must center on points previously discussed; but he is not a utilitarian and he details are significantly different.

In fact, his details and their practical application may overshadow the pure theory. For example, much of the agitation against capital punishment, which is a Biblical provision for the administration of justice, stems from Dewey's teaching. Capital punishment, he argued, ignores the fact, or alleged fact, that society is as much to blame for crime as is the criminal. Criminals should not be punished—this is irrational vengeance—they should be rehabilitated and paroled. (The the solicitude of the liberals for criminals and their callousness toward the victim result in sharply rising crime rate never occurs to such penologists.)

This loose attitude toward crime seems to contrast with an insistence on stringent government controls over all business transactions. Rejecting the ideal of liberty, Dewey, the liberal, wrote, “Find a man who believes that all men need is freedom *from* oppressive legal and political measures, and you have a man who, unless he is merely obstinately maintaining his own private privileges, carries at the back of his head some heritage of the metaphysical doctrine of free will, plus an optimistic confidence in natural harmony” (*Human Nature and Conduct*, IV. Iii). That power corrupts and that politicians are as depraved as other men, and that therefore the extent of government regulation should be minimal is too theological an argument to impress Dewey. In fact, Dewey looked forward to the day when the government would control, not merely many human activities, but even men's thoughts and wishes. He saw in the future a scientific advance that would enable politicians to manipulate men as we now manipulate physical things (*Problems of Men*, pp. 178, 179).

As a pragmatist, or instrumentalist, Dewey did not believe in fixed ethical principles any more than he believed in fixed truth of any sort. “We institute standards of justice, truth, esthetic quality,

etc. . . . exactly as we set up a platinum bar as a standard measurer of lengths. The superiority of one conception of justice to another is of the same order as the superiority of the metric system" (*Logic, The Theory of Inquiry*, p. 216).

Dewey used an even better analogy. Moral standards are like the rules of grammar. They are both the result of custom. Language evolved from unintelligent babblings; then came grammar. But language continues to change and grammar changes with it. So too, the rules of morality change with changing customs, from which it may be inferred, though Dewey does not explicitly use the example, that cannibalism and rape would be moral wherever they occurred frequently enough.

In consonance with this, Dewey held that nothing is intrinsically good or bad; nothing is valuable in and of itself alone; all beliefs, all actions, and all values are instrumental. They are judged by the consequences. If they solve human problems, they are good instruments.

Unless the solution sought is itself an independent or intrinsic value, it is hard to see how it can confer value on the means. For example, chess can be considered as an instrument in cementing friendships. Yet this is hardly the reason why anyone plays chess. Usually its intrinsic merit is the motivation.

Dewey, in strange company with Aristotle, might have spurned this illustration on the ground that games are too trivial. As Aristotle said, recreation is for the sake of serious work. But Aristotle said this out of a theory of human nature that Dewey could not consistently use. If nothing is intrinsically valuable, there is no ground for distinguishing recreation fro serious work.

In particular, Dewey could not accept Aristotle's view that knowledge is intrinsically valuable. He castigated such a view as a retreat to an ivory tower. Knowledge and going to college are instrumental. For a young man, they are instrumental in getting a job. For a young woman, they are instrumental in getting a young man. But the job and the marriage also are merely instrumental—to raising a family and sending the children to college. Chess, however, is instrumental in restricting social contacts, therefore in avoiding marriage and its expenses, and this saving is instrumental in buying a more handsome set of chessmen. Nowhere is there any intrinsic value. The choice therefore between marriage and chess is entirely irrational.

Dewey tried to escape this criticism by asserting that there are evil ideals. Without aesthetic enjoyment, mankind might become a race of economic monsters (*Reconstruction in Philosophy*, p. 127). But could Dewey consistently maintain that monsters are intrinsically bad?

In another place he relied on common opinion and declared that no honest person can think that murder is instrumental to anything good and that everybody resents acts of wanton cruelty (Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics*, pp. 251, 265, 292). Yet is known that the communists and other radicals use assassination

as a political device (cf. Hermann Raschhofer, *Political Assassination*, Tübingen [1964]; and some Latins enjoyed the wanton cruelty of bullfights.

In his opposition to wanton cruelty, Dewey has inherited a Puritan ideal. In addition to the inconsistency of relying on Protestant ethics, there is the more formidable question as to how one decides between incompatible ideals: assassination, equal justice, minority rights, wanton cruelty and kindness. If nothing is intrinsically valuable, how could Dewey choose?

In fact, how could Dewey choose to do anything? If there are no intrinsic values, if there is no final goal, like Aristotelian *Happiness*, if man has no chief end, by which alone subordinate means become worthwhile, the ultimate ethical questions arises in full force: Why continue living—why not commit suicide?

The value of life is not just one more point of detail, as if a group would discuss theft and honest, brutality and kindness, and then discuss suicide. These particular details are subsidiary to the all-embracing question of the reason for living. Obviously a man can choose neither honesty no theft, unless he has firs chosen to continue living.

Many modern moralists, unlike Kant, refuse to face this question. F. C. S. Schiller, a pragmatist like Dewey, notes the logical possibility of a pessimism that holds life to be, not necessarily painful, but merely too dreary and boring to be worth the trouble. On the other hand, he offers no argument against this position.

This pessimistic view is not an odd affectation of a few publicity seekers. Buddhism, with its millions, is a close approximation. Granted, the Buddhists do not approve of suicide—but not because they think life is worthwhile. Suicide is rejected because they think it is not effective enough. It does not extinguish life. Hence, they try to suppress all desire, try to make no choices, and thus attain the "extinction" of Nirvana.

The failure to give a rational refutation of pessimism is the final refutation of instrumentalistic ethics. To choose an action as a means to another ad infinitum, and to find value nowhere, resembles nothing so much as the frustration of Sisyphus.

5. Contemporary ethics. One more contemporary view of ethics needs to be included, and it is the one that crowns the whole history of secular ethics with failure. The view (for it is not a theory but the absence of all theory) has a negative and positive stage.

a. Negatively, P. H. Howell-Smith in his *Ethics* writes, "Moral philosophy is a practical science; its aim is to answer questions in the form 'What shall I do?" But no general answer can be given to this type of question. The most a moral philosopher can do is to paint a picture of various types of life . . .

and ask which type of life you really want to lead." Ethical choices are therefore personal preferences, and no one can question another's preference for murder and rape anymore than his preference for olive and onions."

b. W. H. F. BARNES. The positive stage of this viewpoint is expressed by W. H. F. Barnes, A. J. Ayer, and C. L. Stevenson. Their point is that ethical propositions are emotional ejaculations. Barnes writes, "Many [and I do not see why he does not say 'all'] controversies arising out of value judgments are settled by saying, 'I like it and you don't, and that's the end of the matter.'"

c. A. J. AYER. Ayer is more explicitly: "If I say to someone, 'You acted wrongly in stealing that money,' I am not stating anything more than if I had simply said, 'You stole that money.' I adding that this is wrong I am not making any further statement about it. I am simply evincing my moral disapproval of it. It is as if I had said, 'You stole that money' in a peculiar tone of horror . . . the tone . . . adds nothing to the literal meaning of the sentence."

d. C. L. STEVENSON. Stevenson goes beyond Ayer in that he emphasizes, not merely one's own approval or disapproval, but chiefly one's attempt to induce the same feeling in other people. When an individual says, "Stealing is wrong," he not only means that he does not like it, but in addition he is trying to persuade someone else to dislike it also. It is similar to the ejaculation "onions taste horrible." This conveys not information about onions; it is merely an attempt to persuade anther person to eat olives instead.

Suppose that the other person insists on liking and eating onions. Suppose that the other person insists on thievery and bullfights. What is to be done in such cases of moral disagreement? Here Stevenson frankly admits that there is no rational method for settling such a disagreement. The only method is eloquence and emotional persuasion.

It is true that persuasion, like bribery, sometimes works: but it does not support the conclusion that the action recommended is good or obligatory. It is not obligatory for the person persuaded, but more to the point, it is not obligatory even for the first person. The only problem Stevenson has solved is the problem of getting other unprincipled people to do what the unprincipled persuader wants done. The real problem of ethics, however, is how to decided which action and which principles *ought* to be acknowledged. In the failure to solve this problem is where Stevenson, emotional ethics, and secularism all fail.

II. SOME CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLES

A satisfactory ethics needs principles for systematic consistency and details for practical application. Omitting the former produces chaos, omitting the latter removes all guidelines for choice

and action.

A. The Decalogue and its implications. During the first cent. and a half of the Protestant Reformation, the Calvinists (Reformed, Presbyterian, and Puritan) distinguished themselves by their stress on ethics. They no only emphasized the Ten Commandments—one would natural expect any form of Christian ethics to acknowledge the Ten Commandments as basic obligations—but they took the trouble to outline their implications. This work, initiated by Calvin in the *Institutes*, II, vii, is summarized in the *Westminster Larger Catechism*, from which several following quotations illustrate the detailed application of divine law to the moral situations of life.

"Q. 93. What is the moral law? A. The moral law is the declaration of the will of God to mankind, directing and binding every one to personal, perfect, and perpetual conformity and obedience thereunto, in the frame and disposition of the whole man, soul and body, and in performance of all those duties of holiness and righteousness which he oweth to God and man: promising life upon the fulfilling, and threatening death upon the breach of it."

"Q. 99. What rules are to be observed for the right understanding of the ten commandments? A. For the right understanding of the ten commandments, these rules are to be observed:—1. That the law is perfect, and bindeth every one to full conformity in the whole man unto righteousness thereof, and unto obedience for ever; so as to require the utmost perfection of every duty, and to forbid the least degree of every sin. 2. That it is spiritual, and so reacheth the understanding, will, affections, and all other powers of the soul; as well as words, works, and gestures. 3. That one and the same thing, in divers respects, is required or forbidden in several commandments. 4. That, where a duty is commanded, the contrary sin is forbidden; and, where a sin is forbidden, the contrary duty is commanded: so, where a promise is annexed, the contrary threatening is included; and, where a threatening is annexed, the contrary promise is included. 5. That what God forbids, is at no time to be done; what he commands is always our duty; and yet every particular duty is not to be done at all times. 6. That, under one sin or duty, all of the same kind are forbidden or commanded; together with all the causes, means occasions, and appearances thereof, and provocations thereunto. 7. That what is forbid

den or commanded to ourselves, we are bound, according to our places, to endeavor that it may be avoided or performed by others, according to the duty of their places. 8. That in what is commanded to others, we are bound, according to our places and callings, to be helpful to them; and to take heed of partaking with others in what is forbidden them."

"Q. 134. What is the sixth commandment? A. The sixth commandment is, Thou shalt not kill."

"Q. 135. What are the duties required in the sixth commandment? A. The duties required in the

sixth commandment are, all careful studies, and lawful endeavors, to preserve the life of ourselves and others, by resisting all thoughts and purposes, subduing all passions, and avoiding all occasions, temptations, and practices, which tend to the unjust taking away the life of any; by just defense thereof against violence; patient bearing of the hand of God, quietness of mind, cheerfulness of spirit; a sober use of meat, drink, physic, sleep, labor, and recreation; by charitable thoughts, love, compassion, meekness, gentleness, kindness; peaceable, mild, and courteous speeches and behavior: forbearing, readiness to be reconciled, patient bearing and forgiving of injuries, and requiting good for evil; comforting and succoring the distressed, and protecting and defending the innocent."

"Q. 136. What are the sins forbidden in the sixth commandment? A. The sins forbidden in the sixth commandment are, all taking away the life of ourselves, or of others, except in case of public justice, lawful war, or necessary defence; the neglecting or withdrawing the lawful and necessary means of preservation of life; sinful anger, hatred, envy, desire of revenge; all excessive passions, distracting cares; immoderate use of meat, drink, labor, and recreations; provoking words, oppression, quarreling, striking, wounding, and whatsoever else tends to the destruction of the life of any."

"Q. 140. Which is the eighth commandment? A. The eighth commandment is, Thou shalt not steal."

"Q. 141. What are the duties required in the eighth commandment? A. The duties required in the eighth commandment are, truth, faithfulness, and justice in contracts and commerce between man and man;[801] rendering to everyone his due; restitution of goods unlawfully detained from the right owners thereof; giving and lending freely, according to our abilities, and the necessities of others; moderation of our judgments, wills, and affections concerning worldly goods; a provident care and study to get, keep, use, and dispose these things which are necessary and convenient for the sustentation of our nature, and suitable to our condition; a lawful calling, and diligence in it; frugality; avoiding unnecessary lawsuits, and suretyship, or other like engagements; and an endeavor, by all just and lawful means, to procure, preserve, and further the wealth and outward estate of others, as well as our own."

"Q. 142. What are the sins forbidden in the eighth commandment? A. The sins forbidden in the eighth commandment, besides the neglect of the duties required, are, theft, robbery, man-stealing, and receiving any thing that is stolen; fraudulent dealing, false weights and measures, removing landmarks, injustice and unfaithfulness in contracts between man and man, or in matters of trust; oppression, extortion, usury, bribery, vexatious lawsuits, unjust enclosures and depopulations; engrossing commodities to enhance the price; unlawful callings, and all other unjust or sinful ways of taking or withholding from our neighbor what belongs to him, or of enriching ourselves; covetousness;

inordinate prizing and affecting worldly goods; distrustful and distracting cares and studies in getting, keeping, and using them; envying at the prosperity of others; as likewise idleness, prodigality, wasteful gaming; and all other ways whereby we do unduly prejudice our own outward estate, and defrauding ourselves of the due use and comfort of that estate which God hath given us."

In addition to official and therefore brief expositions of ethics, there are innumerable books, either on Christian ethics as a whole, or on particular problems, such as divorce, the family, alcoholism, etc., or on such Biblical sections as the ethics of the gospels and the ethics of the OT. Some of these are Biblical and orthodox; others are liberal. In general they show how much details can be derived by implication from the Biblical material (*see* BILIOGRAPHY).

B. Christian presuppositions. If one of the purposes of ethics is to furnish concrete instruction applicable to everyday living, the superiority of Christianity over secular attempts is unmistakable. The Ten Commandments however, rest on certain presuppositions that provide the more theoretical or theological basis for Bible ethics.

1. Authority. The Ten Commandments derive their validity from Biblical authority. If the Bible is composed of myths, and superstitions—the product of ingenious human construction—no one would be obliged to obey its commands. Aside from the secular systems previously discussed, men could choose the Code of Hammurabi or could consider the claims of the Koran, the Vedas, and other sacred books. Christian morality, therefore depends on Christian Revelation.

For further material on Biblical authority, see BIBLE, INSPIRATION, INFALLIBILITY.

Underlying the authority of the Bible is the authority of God who gave the Bible; and the God who gave the Bible is not just any kind of deity, but is One with definite characteristics.

2. Revelation. It is almost repetitious to insist that one of God's characteristics is the ability to speak. But the repetition is excusable because many contemporary theologians deny that God can speak. They may try to find some place for Revelation in their theology, but it is a nonverbal revelation, something other than a communication of truth. Revelation in these theologies may be the mighty acts of God in history, or some mystic experience of encounter or confrontation.

This view of revelation is worthless. Without information divinely given man could not discern which historical events were mighty acts of God—the Exodus, perhaps; but why not also Caesar's crossing the Rubicon and Stalin's capture of Berlin? What is worse, after selecting a series of events, man would be at a loss to interpret them. Would there be any difference in value between Moses' crossing the Red Sea and Caesar's crossing the Rubicon? Do these events mean that no one should eat pork, or that everyone should support civil rights, or that attendance at football games is acceptable worship? Attempts to draw practical implications from these historical events would only revert to the

secular theories of developing ethics out of experience, which has been shown to be impossible.

Ethics requires definite information as to what is right and wrong, and such information can be revealed only be a living, communicating God.

3. Immutability. In the present decade several books have been published on theological ethics, presumably in opposition to irreligious secularism. The type of ethics depends on the type of theology. One such book defends the concept of the "New Morality," which in these days is offered as a substitute for the Ten Commandments. Dr. James Sellers declares that men need a new morality, a new ethics, and a new theology. In support of a changing ethics he approves Paul Ramsey's statement: At the level of theory itself, any formulation of Christian social ethics is always in need of reformulation" (*Theological Ethics*, pp. Ix, 39

The notion that the principles of ethics (not merely their applications to changing social forms, but the basic principles themselves) must always be changing requires belief in a changing God and a changing revelation. Obviously this necessitates a rejection of the Ten Commandments and derivative Biblical precepts. Though Dr. Sellers is not too clear on the nature of God, he could not be clearer in his rejection of Scripture. He defines revelation as "something [that] has happened to us in our history which conditions all our thinking" (ibid. p. 71); as for example, the death of one's mother. Concerning the Bible he says, "worse, in some places where it is not silent, it gives us advice and that is manifestly bad if taken literally"; and "the Bible also illustrated its insights with outmoded or downright unacceptable examples of morality" (pp. 88, 92).

The notion of a changing morality presupposes belief in a changing God, and raises theological issues (*see* ETERNITY and IMMUTABILITY). If, on the other hand, men accept the Ten Commandments as permanent obligations, they must also accept he Biblical concept of an immutable God. Biblical morality and Biblical theology are inseparable.

The idea that the firm morality of the Bible must now be replaced with something loose is a practical danger of this present age. In opposition to Christ's specific instructions about divorce and remarriage, some denominations officially encourage their ministers to substitute their own permissive judgment; and individual ministers of various denominations approve of adultery if the two people "really love each other." All this "new morality"—actually as old as the Canaanites—stems from a rejection of the God of the Bible.

4. Sovereignty of God. Immutability, however, is not the only divine characteristics needed for a systematic Christian ethics. Sovereignty is even more important.

In the Platonic philosophy, the principles of ethics, though they differ in detail from those of Christianity, are sufficiently immutable. But God, the maker of heaven and earth, is not sovereign

according to Plato; above God is an immutable World of Ideas to which even He must submit.

In modern times, the point at issue is exemplified in the philosophy of Leibniz. His famous phrase that this is the best of all possible worlds, a phrase Voltaire's *Candide* ridicules with brutal force, depends on the notion that various possible worlds exist in a sort of blueprint form independently of God. Because God is good, He naturally chose the best blueprint at the time of creation. Therefore the actual world is the best possible. This exactly follows Plato, who, in his *Euthyphro*, asserted that goods is not good because God approves of it, but that God approves of it because it is antecedently and independently good.

The Jewish philosopher Philo, who lives at the time of Christ, though profoundly influenced by Plato, made an alteration that completely reversed Platonic and Leibnizian theology. This alteration consisted in making God supreme and in placing the World of Idea in God's mind. Philo wrote, “God has been ranked according to the one and the unit; or rather, even the nit has been ranked according to the one God, for all number, like time, is younger than the cosmos.” In this quotation, Philo subjects mathematics to the thinking activity of God. Similarly, God does not will the good because it is independently good, but on the contrary the good is good because God wills it.

To the same effect Calvin (*Institutes*, I, xiv, 1) wrote, “Augustine justly complains that it is an offense against God to inquire for any cause of things higher than his will.” Later (III, xxii, 2) he says, “how exceedingly presumptuous it is only to inquire into the causes of the Divine will, which is in fact and is justly entitled to be the cause of everything that exists. For if it has any cause, then there must be something antecedent, on which it depends; which it is impious to suppose. For the will of God is the highest rule of justice; so that what he wills must be considered just, for this very reason, because he wills it.”

The sovereignty of God is the key to the basic problem of ethics. Why is anything good, right, or obligatory? Neither utilitarianism, nor pragmatism, nor emotionalism can give a rational answer. Calvin has given the answer in very precise language: “the will of God is the highest rule of justice; so that what he wills must be considered just, for this very reason, because he wills it.” God establishes moral norms by sovereign decree.

That this principle permeates the Bible can easily be seen. No devout Christian holds that anything external to God compelled or induced Him to create a certain number of solar satellites rather than a different number. God could have created water with a different freezing point. Similarly, there was no external cause of His choice of detail in the Mosaic ritual. Could He not have willed the Tabernacle to have been hexagonal instead of rectangular? Similarly could He not have imposed on man other commandments rather than the Ten? Was it not merely His decision to have one Sabbath

each week instead of Two? Or could He not have created the world in five days and have substituted a different fourth commandment to fit a six-day week? Is it not due to God's will that man differs from the animals, and could not man have been made so that, as in their case, the sixth, seventh, and eight commandments would not apply?

The omnipotence and sovereignty of God, as the controlling concept of Christianity, solve the problems of every sphere. The power of God is the answer to the scientific objections against miracles; will will is the authority for civiil government and the key to political science; and similarly His precepts constitute ethics. The good or the right is not the pleasure of the greatest number, to be determined by an impossible calculation; right or justice is what God commands, to be discovered by reading the written Revelation. The sanctions are not Bentham's, nor is virtue its own reward; on the contrary, God enforces moral obligation by the joys of heaven and the pains of hell. Here is the logical consistency unmatched by either the rationalist Leibniz or the emotionalist Stevenson; here is the practical detail absent in secularism; here are the sanctions Stalin and Hitler could not escape. Such is Christian ethics.

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