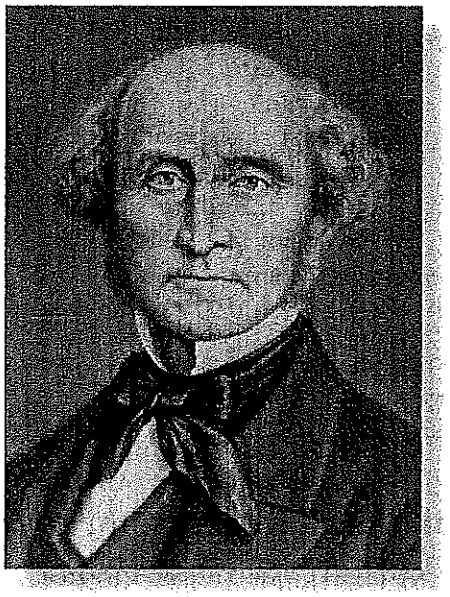
CHAPTER 4

Consequences Matter—Utilitarianism



John Stuart Mill

Source: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

4.1 Define "Utilitarianism" and understand the moral choices and consequences of this philosophy as they apply to real life.

4.2 Articulate the relation of general happiness to utilitarian arguments according to Bentham.

4.3 Critically analyze whether and how one might distinguish between one happiness and another.

4.4 Analyze readings in utilitarianism.

ilitarianism: Difficult Moral Choices onsequences in Real Life

is Poland; the time is World War II. A young woman named Sophie had ted for trying to smuggle food to her dying mother. She was thrown into nd for a concentration camp along with her own two little children and ners. Upon arriving at Auschwitz, Sophie was given a cruel choice. A Nazi rhaps bored with picking who would live and who would die that night, phie to choose between her two children: pick one to be gassed to death , and the other will live, at least for the present. Otherwise, presumably, all be gassed: the little boy, the little girl, and Sophie herself.

is the moral nightmare at the heart of William Styron's heartbreaking 1979 *phie's Choice*, which was turned into a film by Alan J. Pakula in 1982 and he American actress Meryl Streep her second Academy Award. The plot is not in fact it was based on a real story. What would you have done if you were e's place?

rly, choosing one of your own children to be murdered would be wrong ng to Kant's categorical imperative, as discussed in the previous chapter. There e no possible justification, and, in fact, perhaps it would be preferable to choose and let the whole family die: Choosing in such a case is something ply could not do. And yet, what if it is not the act itself, morally repugnant t appears, but rather the consequences of the act that could guide Sophie's in this case? Might it not be preferable, given two horrifying choices, to save one child rather than lose two? Kant's categorical imperative, as we have seen, on the action and would most likely say in this case that it is immoral to either child over the other, so you should let both die. Alternatively, if you choose either child over the other, perhaps it is not that you are using one as s to save the other: Given the situation, you cannot save both. So you have a save at least one.

s case can be made more realistic (as none of us will face Nazi death squads in the future) by considering an alternative and horrifyingly possible sce- of a house fire. Suppose you wake up in the middle of the night to fire and You run toward the rooms of your three children, and you have three doors ose. Which do you enter first? You might simply choose the closest. At no are you thinking I love Sally more than Jim or Sam. Furthermore it is highly ly that you are doing any sort of complex moral calculation. It is also rather ly in this situation that you are bothering to apply the categorical imperative; s simply using common sense and going to save whom you can save. And the g force or motivation for your actions is no doubt the love for your children, s also the recognition that in bad situations you try to mitigate the bad *conse-* . It is better to save one than none, and even better to save two, and in the best nstances you will save all three. Actions have consequences, and, according to litarians, this matters more than anything else in making a moral judgment.

Utilitarianism Ethical theory that considers the end of an action the primary factor in making a moral judgment; see also "Consequentialist" and "Teleological."

Utilitarianism is a **teleological** or **consequentialist** ethical theory that determines the moral permissibility of an act on the basis of the consequences of the act. It is a forward-looking moral philosophy, looking at the consequences of an act and assessing them often before they happen. It assumes a sort of solidarity, a human community in whose general happiness we all have a stake. It concentrates on the actual or possible benefits and harms emerging from the consequences of an act.

Two of the most renowned utilitarians are **Jeremy Bentham** and his student **John Stuart Mill**. Their philosophical analyses provide the foundation for the work of recent utilitarians such as **James Rachels** and **Peter Singer**.

Jeremy Bentham

Source: Georgios Kollidas/Fotolia

MORAL PHILOSOPHERS: JEREMY BENTHAM (1748–1832)

The father of modern utilitarianism, Jeremy Bentham today is remembered chiefly for his moral philosophy, particularly as refined by his follower John Stuart Mill. But Bentham's views on politics and society were at least as radical as the revolution in ethics his powerful utilitarian writings initiated. He was trained as a lawyer, and his earliest works are attacks both on legal tradition and on the notion of natural rights, a concept enshrined everywhere including the legal writings of Sir William Blackstone (1809–1898) and influentially proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence of 1776. You only have the rights you can defend, and the moral arguments Bentham first articulated for that defense eventually developed into the main impulse behind virtually every human rights struggle in the 20th and 21st centuries.

In his views of the law and its limits, Bentham was a champion of individual freedom of expression. He believed that progressive reform would lead to public happiness and that improved education for all citizens would lead to more informed voters and thus to a better government. He was well ahead of his time in advocating for prison reform and also for the abolition of slavery and the death penalty. Bentham argued for the separation of church and state, for divorce, and for the decriminalization of homosexuality. All but buried in his influential *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789) is a simple argument for animal rights that proved an influential revelation in the 20th and 21st centuries.

It was in that book that Bentham famously explained his **greatest happiness principle**, a guide to morals based on the utility of an action and its consequences. To achieve that happiness, everything from an individual's personal morals to larger issues of political philosophy and the law could be illuminated by what he called the **principle of utility**—a term he borrowed from David Hume, whose views on human nature Bentham admired. With a nod to Aristotle, Bentham made happiness the primary concern of a moral decision, defining happiness as the triumph of pleasure over pain. The goal of life as well as of society, then, is to maximize a greater general happiness and minimize its opposite.

That Bentham made little effort to distinguish happiness from pleasure led to criticisms that were addressed by John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), the son of Ben-

Teleological (from the Greek *telos* [end] and *logos* [science]) Broad term for moral philosophies that consider the end of an action the primary factor in making a moral judgment; see also "Consequentialist" and "Utilitarian."

Consequentialist Ethical theory that considers the consequences of an act the primary factor in making a judgment; see also "Utilitarian" and "Teleological."

...ecretary James Mill and the most influential utilitarian philosopher. Not ...ppiness is the same, Mill argued, transforming the utilitarian tradition into a ...rce for social change.

...tham is very much still with us, and not just metaphorically.

...nsidered the spiritual founder of University College London, Bentham left ...y to the school, with specific instructions on how to display it. Stuffed, ...but still with his own hair, Jeremy Bentham has been sitting around the halls ...school since he was permanently installed there in 1850, a dead body in a ...te. He remains active in school affairs, however, and he is included in special ...ons. The smiling corpse was most recently moved out of his display case to ...a school board meeting in honor of the retirement of the University College ...nt provost Sir Malcolm Grant in 2013. He surely was the most distinguished ...er of the faculty at the meeting.

Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), British philosopher considered the father of utilitarianism; active in law and politics as well as ethics, he was an early proponent of women's rights, abolition of slavery and the death penalty, and decriminalization of homosexuality.

John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), British philosopher who perfected classical utilitarianism, an ethical theory that states it is the consequences of an act that matter most in making a moral decision.

James Rachels (1941–2003), American moral philosopher, particularly celebrated for his utilitarian views on animal rights and on the "Death with Dignity" movement.

Peter Singer (b. 1946), a native of Melbourne, Australia, one of the most influential and controversial contemporary utilitarians; he is the author of several books on moral philosophy including *Animal Liberation, Practical Ethics,* and *Rethinking Life and Death.*

Greatest happiness principle Jeremy Bentham's guide to morals based on the utility of an action and its consequences.

Principle of utility A guiding principle of Jeremy Bentham's moral philosophy, declares that the main consideration in making a moral judgment is the utility of an act, that is, the happiness or the elimination of unhappiness its consequences promote.

...entham: Utility and Happiness

...m argues that "Nature has placed mankind under two sovereign masters, ...d pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as ...ine what we shall do." In his view, human beings are put together in such a ...t we respond primarily to two forces, pain and pleasure. Thus we engage in ...s and activities that will lead to pleasure and we avoid actions and activities ...ll lead to pain or suffering. In this quotation, Bentham claims that, as a mat...ethics, we ought to live by this principle and also that, as a matter of human ...ology we will, in fact, live by this principle.

...the principle of utility Bentham means that "principle which approves and ...proves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears ...e to augment or diminish happiness." In other words, ethical actions aug...or increase net happiness and unethical or bad actions diminish or reduce net ...piness. As John Stuart Mill later notes, the happiness involved is not solely indi... happiness but the happiness of all affected directly by an action. Mill adds ...the happiness which forms the Utilitarian standard of what is right conduct, is ...the agent's own happiness, but that of all concerned." In this way, the rightness ...ongness of an act is not based upon the consequences of pain and pleasure for ...lf alone, but also those consequences for others who are directly affected by ...ct. The general good in the long run coincides with your own.

...or Bentham, when one is faced with an ethical dilemma for which one is unsure ...t course of action, then one must employ what he calls the hedonic calculus. ...The following considerations are made regarding acts and pleasure: intensity, dura..., certainty, and nearness in time. The following considerations are made regarding ...consequences of actions: fecundity (the chances that it will be followed by more ...the same), purity (the chances that the pleasure will not be followed by pain), and ...t (the number of people it affects).

> **"Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure*. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think: every effort we can make to throw off our subjection, will serve but to demonstrate and confirm it."**
>
> —Jeremy Bentham

4.3 Mill: Not Every Happiness Is the Same

Bentham argues that pleasure is pleasure and it does not matter if one engages in base, animal pleasure or more robust intellectual activities. Morality then is a simple matter of calculation, much as you might make a list of the pluses and minuses of a prospective law school or of a possible boyfriend. John Stuart Mill, on the other hand, argues that humanity can aim higher and ought to seek out higher, intellectual pleasure.

Some pleasures—or the happiness brought about by the consequences of an action—are demonstrably better than others. As Mill says, "It is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. . . . It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied." Mill goes on to argue that there are higher and lower pleasures. As he says, "If one of the two [pleasures] is, by those who are competently acquainted with both, placed so far above the other that they . . . would not resign it for any quantity of the other pleasure which their nature is capable of, we are justified in ascribing to the preferred enjoyment a superiority in quality, so far outweighing quantity as to render it, in comparison, of small account."

> **"It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied, better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied."**
>
> —John Stuart Mill

The Aristotelian echoes are clear. "The utilitarian doctrine is that happiness is desirable, and the only thing desirable, as an end," writes Mill. "All other things being only desirable as means to that end." Like Aristotle's, Mill's standard of moral worth sets the bar high. But what is new in Mill's *Utilitarianism* (1861), and what is

ment of Bentham's moral philosophy is the exquisitely simple notion atters most in making a moral judgment should be the extent and qual- the consequences of an act lead to the creation of happiness or the of unhappiness. And Mill is clear that the "happiness which forms the tandard is not the agent's own happiness, but that of all concerned."

MORAL PHILOSOPHERS: OHN STUART MILL (1806–1873)

prodigy, John Stuart Mill was not allowed to have any formal schooling, her was tutored by his father James Mill and his utilitarian mentor—Jeremy m. His education focused on classics, mathematics, scientific empiricism, and nism. He was studying Greek at age 3 and Latin by age 8. By his teens, young ped his father in writing pamphlets on political economy. Although he had igorous and thorough education, the subjects of metaphysics and religion nored. In 1823 he began working at the East India Company and like his ventually worked his way up to the position of chief examiner.

the age of 20 he suffered a nervous breakdown, the result of which was valuation of the teachings he had been given by his mentors. Although he broke completely with Bentham, he reformulated these notions and became nch proponent of individual autonomy, freedom of thought, and liberty. He nged Bentham's hedonic calculus as unreasonable, highlighting the difficulties ntifying pleasure and happiness. Mill's enhancement of Bentham's moral phi- hy is at the heart of most of today's classic utilitarian arguments.

n atheist and always a nonconformist, Mill refused to accept the Thirty-Nine es of the Church of England, so he was refused entry into Oxford or Cam- . After leaving his post at the East India Company, Mill continued his studies at rsity College London—founded by Jeremy Bentham and later the permanent of that philosopher's dead body. In the early 1830s, Mill met and fell in love Harriet Taylor, but at the time she was married with two children. In 1833 she ted from her husband John Taylor—the two lived in separate homes—but ined married to him until his death in 1849. Two years later, in 1851, Mill and et Taylor were married. Taylor was an accomplished author in her own right wrote *The Enfranchisement of Women* (1851), which served as the basis for Mill's *The Subjection of Women*.

Mill was a prolific writer on many subjects. Some of his most notable works de *A System of Logic* (1843), *On Liberty* (1859), *Utilitarianism* (1863), and *The ction of Women* (1869). His political essays were often aimed at social reform. revealing, beautifully written *Autobiography* is a model of that genre. In 1865 he lected as a member of parliament. At the same time he was also rector at the rsity of St. Andrews. He was the godfather of the future philosopher Bertrand ell. John Stuart Mill died on May 8, 1873, in Avignon, France.

"As between his own happiness and that of others," Mill continues, "utilita ism requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent sp tor." Each person's happiness counts, and it counts the same as everyone else's. is a radical, liberal position that has gained supporters beyond philosophy int disciplines of economics and politics.

Mill himself, arguing for women's rights in his landmark *The Subjection of Wo* (1869), points out that allowing women the same access as men to education jobs will in the long run increase the general happiness of all by doubling the n ber of possibilities for, say, a leading professional or political position. The unha ness of those men who might not be pleased by women having those rights is r but it is not as significant, because the men's rights would not be affected. Th for example, of how many more presidential candidates there might have beer the last 200 years of American history if women had been in the mix. A more rec example, made more than once by the contemporary utilitarian Peter Singer (1946 is that developed and relatively wealthy nations have a duty to help the poor a hungry in underdeveloped countries, because whatever unhappiness is occasion by this help in the wealthier country is not comparable to the unhappiness caus in the poor country if it is not helped.

QUICK LOOK

Making a Utilitarian Argument

For the utilitarians—from Bentham and Mill to this day—who you are and what you are doing are beside the point in moral decisions. What matters in deciding whether something is right or wrong is simply the consequences of your actions. To make that judgment, you follow these steps:

- Consider the consequences of the act, not the act itself and not the moral agent. Only the consequences matter.
- Consider the amount of happiness or the elimination of unhappiness those consequences bring. Nothing else matters.
- Consider the happiness and unhappiness caused by those consequences to all persons affected by the action in the same way.
- Everyone counts the same, if the consequences affect them directly in the same way.

One problem with a utilitarian justification for the ethical permissibility of an action is that a utilitarian analysis could be used to systematically violate the rights of individual persons if such a violation would result in a net benefit to all involved. This vulgarized notion of the greatest good for the greatest number can emerge from the fact that Bentham's original theory—his "hedonic calculus"—says nothing about

...ion of the good effects, of happiness. So long as the number of people ...efit from an unethical action and the benefit generated to them out-...um caused to the few, then the action is justified.

JOURNAL

...Which Happiness Counts More? Which Unhappiness?

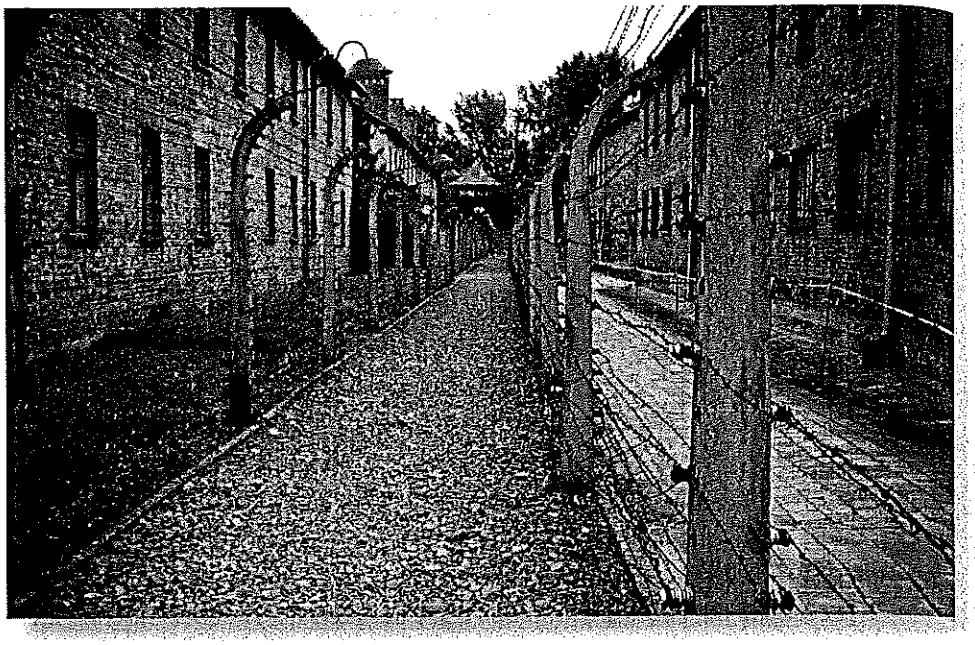
...n old and widely respected university is in the midst of making some ...rticeable changes in some of its most venerable, architecturally important ...uildings. To facilitate access to these buildings for students in wheelchairs, ...t has built ramps over and across the long and high marble steps in the ...quadrangle, including those to the School of Architecture. Many architecture ...students and faculty are unhappy about this measure, calling it a desecration ...and worse. Many other students, among them those who need wheelchairs to ...get around but also many who don't, are definitely happy about the changes.

Not everyone is happy, no matter what decision is taken here. Whose happiness counts the most here? Which has the higher moral value? Can you explain the reason for your judgment?

...fit and Harm—Who Counts?

...zi regime elected in Germany in 1933 articulated flawed utilitarian justifica-...for some of their biological experiments conducted on unwilling prisoners ...World War II, arguing that the appalling pain and unhappiness they were ...g to their prisoners could save lives in the long run—German lives. In their ...no number of Jewish lives was equal to that of a single Nazi. These appalling ...ents were actually given by some Nazi doctors in their defense when they ...on trial for war crimes in Nuremberg after the war. In this particular case, the ...ian analysis is flawed because of the extreme prejudice of the Nazis and their ...e to recognize the rights of all people. If they had recognized the rights of their ...ners, then a utilitarian analysis of the circumstances would have shown that ...actions were wrong.

...n other cases when there is a great need, especially where there is an epidemic ...other disaster, utilitarian justifications are often employed to justify infringing ...or violating the rights of persons in the name of benefiting the greater good. ...finessing of Bentham's original theory—his noticing that it is not the quantity ...ppiness or unhappiness but rather the quality of those things that counts—does ...care of much of this chink in the utilitarian armor, but some problems remain.



Can atrocities like the Holocaust be morally justified?

Source: Pics-xl/Shutterstock

The utilitarians endeavor to block the objection by appealing to "the long run." One may ask what is the long run? Is it 10 years, 40 years, or even 100 years? Whatever time period is picked will be arbitrary. The case against President Harry Truman's decision to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945—something that some feel was an indefensible decision to kill innocent people that has been condemned in no uncertain terms by Kantian moral philosophers as nothing less than mass murder—could, under utilitarian analysis, appear to be the right thing to do if one could prove that Truman saved more lives than he killed. If it had been the case that the war with Japan would go on for another year, for instance, then a defense of Truman might be possible. Recently uncovered facts, such as Japan's documented willingness to surrender before the bomb was dropped, or the subsequent number of people dead from radiation poisoning, would of course affect the calculations. But a utilitarian argument would appear to be Truman's only possible defense. The meaning of "in the long run" in this particular case has changed over the years, as the number of those who have died from cancer directly caused by atomic radiation increased exponentially. A related problem is that there is often no way of knowing whether in the distant future the bad effects of an ethically objectionable action will swamp the good effects.

As will be seen in Part III, the damage human society is perpetrating on the Earth and its atmosphere may have initially been justified by short-term bits of happiness such as profits, better transportation, and cheaper energy but it is in the last half-century that the long-term damage to the atmosphere and the oceans has come

ith a better grasp of the consequences, humanity can now work to bal-
ain progress with environmental responsibility—although some believe
his is actually supposed to be done is unclear.

arians are equipped to deal with a myriad of issues in a thoughtful and
ticable way. Bentham led the way, and Mill revolutionized the argument in
ls of happiness: It is not quantity but quality that counts, and it counts for
The quest for happiness as the goal of life is not new, and millennia earlier
and Epicurus built their moral philosophies on this firm foundation. What
ed revolutionary about the utilitarians is this: Your own happiness counts
as someone else's and—as is the case for Kant, for decidedly different
no one is special. There lies the universality of the utilitarian argument. To
e general happiness and minimize unhappiness has been the groundwork
arious struggles for human rights in the last 150 years.

Readings on Utilitarianism

Y, BENTHAM (1748–1832), the father of utilitarianism, summarizes his
ple of utility and explains how a new moral philosophy can be founded on
luing of the consequences of our actions according to how they help create
ness or eliminate unhappiness.

An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation
by Jeremy Bentham

Of the Principle of Utility

I. Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sov-
ereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure*. It is for them alone to point out
what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On
the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the
chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They gov-
ern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think: every effort we can
make to throw off our subjection, will serve but to demonstrate and
confirm it. In words a man may pretend to abjure their empire: but
in reality he will remain subject to it all the while. The *principle of
utility* recognizes this subjection, and assumes it for the foundation
of that system.

II. By the principle of utility is meant that principle which
approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever according to
the tendency it appears to have to augment or diminish the hap-
piness of the persons whose interest is in question: or, what is the
same thing in other words to promote or to oppose that happiness.
I say of every action whatsoever, and therefore not only of every
action of a private individual, but of every measure of government.

III. By utility is meant that property in any object, whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness, (all this in the present case comes to the same thing) or (what comes again to the same thing) to prevent the happening of mischief, pain, evil, or unhappiness to the party whose interest is considered: if that party be the community in general, then the happiness of the community: if a particular individual, then the happiness of that individual.

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

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

VI. An action then may be said to be conformable to the principle of utility with respect to the community at large when the tendency it has to augment the happiness of the community is greater than any it has to diminish it.

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

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

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

X. Of an action that is conformable to the principle of utility one may always say either that it is one that ought to be done, or at least that it is not one that ought not to be done. One may say

that it is right it should be done; at least that it is not wrong it ld be done: that it is a right action; at least that it is not a wrong . When thus interpreted, the words *ought*, and *right* and *wrong* thers of that stamp, have a meaning: when otherwise, they none.

XI. Has the rectitude of this principle been ever formally con- d? It should seem that it had, by those who have not known they have been meaning. Is it susceptible of any direct proof? ould seem not: for that which is used to prove everything else, not itself be proved: a chain of proofs must have their commence- t somewhere. To give such proof is as impossible as it is needless.

"Is it possible for a man to move the earth? Yes; but he must first find out another earth to stand upon."

—Jeremy Bentham

XII. Not that there is or ever has been that human creature at reathing, however stupid or perverse, who has not on many, per- aps on most occasions of his life, deferred to it. By the natural onstitution of the human frame, on most occasions of their lives en in general embrace this principle, without thinking of it: if ot for the ordering of their own actions, yet for the trying of their wn actions, as well as of those of other men. There have been, at he same time, not many perhaps, even of the most intelligent, who ave been disposed to embrace it purely and without reserve. There re even few who have not taken some occasion or other to quarrel with it, either on account of their not understanding always how to pply it, or on account of some prejudice or other which they were fraid to examine into, or could not bear to part with. For such s the stuff that man is made of: in principle and in practice, in a ight track and in a wrong one, the rarest of all human qualities is consistency.

XIII. When a man attempts to combat the principle of utility, it is with reasons drawn, without his being aware of it, from that very principle itself. His arguments, if they prove anything, prove not that the principle is *wrong*, but that, according to the applications he supposes to be made of it, it is *misapplied*. Is it possible for a man to move the earth? Yes; but he must first find out another earth to stand upon.

XIV. To disprove the propriety of it by arguments is impossi- ble; but, from the causes that have been mentioned, or from some

confused or partial view of it, a man may happen to be disposed not to relish it. Where this is the case, if he thinks the settling of his opinions on such a subject worth the trouble, let him take the following steps, and at length, perhaps, he may come to reconcile himself to it.

JOHN STUART MILL (1806–1873) in this crucial manifesto makes his case that actions are right in proportion to their creation of happiness and wrong if they produce its opposite. He also refines Bentham's utilitarianism by analyzing how not every happiness is the same and also how everyone's happiness counts.

Utilitarianism by John Stuart Mill

There are few circumstances among those which make up the present condition of human knowledge, more unlike what might have been expected, or more significant of the backward state in which speculation on the most important subjects still lingers, than the little progress which has been made in the decision of the controversy respecting the criterion of right and wrong. From the dawn of philosophy, the question concerning the summum bonum, or, what is the same thing, concerning the foundation of morality, has been accounted the main problem in speculative thought, has occupied the most gifted intellects, and divided them into sects and schools, carrying on a vigorous warfare against one another. And after more than two thousand years the same discussions continue, philosophers are still ranged under the same contending banners, and neither thinkers nor mankind at large seem nearer to being unanimous on the subject, than when the youth Socrates listened to the old Protagoras, and asserted (if Plato's dialogue be grounded on a real conversation) the theory of utilitarianism against the popular morality of the so-called sophist.

It is true that similar confusion and uncertainty, and in some cases similar discordance, exist respecting the first principles of all the sciences, not excepting that which is deemed the most certain of them, mathematics; without much impairing, generally indeed without impairing at all, the trustworthiness of the conclusions of those sciences. An apparent anomaly, the explanation of which is, that the detailed doctrines of a science are not usually deduced from, nor depend for their evidence upon, what are called its first principles. Were it not so, there would be no science more precarious, or whose conclusions were more insufficiently made out, than algebra; which derives none of its certainty from what are

monly taught to learners as its elements, since these, as laid
wn by some of its most eminent teachers, are as full of fictions
nglish law, and of mysteries as theology. The truths which are
mately accepted as the first principles of a science, are really the
results of metaphysical analysis, practiced on the elementary
ions with which the science is conversant; and their relation to
science is not that of foundations to an edifice, but of roots to
ree, which may perform their office equally well though they be
ver dug down to and exposed to light. But though in science the
rticular truths precede the general theory, the contrary might be
pected to be the case with a practical art, such as morals or leg-
ation. All action is for the sake of some end, and rules of action,
seems natural to suppose, must take their whole character and
lor from the end to which they are subservient. When we engage
a pursuit, a clear and precise conception of what we are pursuing
ould seem to be the first thing we need, instead of the last we are
look forward to. A test of right and wrong must be the means,
ne would think, of ascertaining what is right or wrong, and not a
nsequence of having already ascertained it.

The difficulty is not avoided by having recourse to the popu-
r theory of a natural faculty, a sense or instinct, informing us of
ght and wrong. For—besides that the existence of such—a moral
nstinct is itself one of the matters in dispute—those believers in
who have any pretensions to philosophy, have been obliged to
bandon the idea that it discerns what is right or wrong in the par-
ticular case in hand, as our other senses discern the sight or sound
actually present. Our moral faculty, according to all those of its
nterpreters who are entitled to the name of thinkers, supplies us
nly with the general principles of moral judgments; it is a branch
of our reason, not of our sensitive faculty; and must be looked to
for the abstract doctrines of morality, not for perception of it in
he concrete. The intuitive, no less than what may be termed the
nductive, school of ethics, insists on the necessity of general laws.
They both agree that the morality of an individual action is not a
question of direct perception, but of the application of a law to
an individual case. They recognize also, to a great extent, the same
moral laws; but differ as to their evidence, and the source from
which they derive their authority. According to the one opinion,
he principles of morals are evident a priori, requiring nothing to
command assent, except that the meaning of the terms be under-
stood. According to the other doctrine, right and wrong, as well as
truth and falsehood, are questions of observation and experience.
But both hold equally that morality must be deduced from prin-
ciples; and the intuitive school affirms as strongly as the induc-
tive, that there is a science of morals. Yet they seldom attempt to

make out a list of the a priori principles which are to serve as the premises of the science; still more rarely do they make any effort to reduce those various principles to one first principle, or common ground of obligation. They either assume the ordinary precepts of morals as of a priori authority, or they lay down as the common groundwork of those maxims, some generality much less obviously authoritative than the maxims themselves, and which has never succeeded in gaining popular acceptance. Yet to support their pretensions there ought either to be someone fundamental principle or law, at the root of all morality, or if there be several, there should be a determinate order of precedence among them; and the one principle, or the rule for deciding between the various principles when they conflict, ought to be self-evident.

Although the non-existence of an acknowledged first principle has made ethics not so much a guide as a consecration of men's actual sentiments, still, as men's sentiments, both of favor and of aversion, are greatly influenced by what they suppose to be the effects of things upon their happiness, the principle of utility, or as Bentham latterly called it, the greatest happiness principle, has had a large share in forming the moral doctrines even of those who most scornfully reject its authority. I might go much further, and say that to all those a priori moralists who deem it necessary to argue at all, utilitarian arguments are indispensable. It is not my present purpose to criticize these thinkers; but I cannot help referring, for illustration, to a systematic treatise by one of the most illustrious of them, the Metaphysics of Ethics, by Kant. This remarkable man, whose system of thought will long remain one of the landmarks in the history of philosophical speculation, does, in the treatise in question, lay down a universal first principle as the origin and ground of moral obligation; it is this: "So act as if according to a maxi that you would willingly admit of being adopted as a law by all rational beings." But when he begins to deduce from this precept any of the actual duties of morality, he fails, almost grotesquely, to show that there would be any contradiction, any logical (not to say physical) impossibility, in the adoption by all rational beings of the most outrageously immoral rules of conduct. All he shows is that the consequences of their universal adoption would be such as no one would choose to incur.

On the present occasion, I shall, without further discussion of the other theories, attempt to contribute something towards the understanding and appreciation of the Utilitarian or Happiness theory, and towards such proof as it is susceptible of. It is evident that this cannot be proof in the ordinary and popular meaning of the

...m. Questions of ultimate ends are not amenable to direct proof. ...hatever can be proved to be good must be so by being shown to be ...means to something admitted to be good without proof. The medi... ...art is proved to be good by its conducing to health; but how is it ...ssible to prove that health is good? The art of music is good, for the ...ason, among others, that it produces pleasure; but what proof is it ...ssible to give that pleasure is good? If, then, it is asserted that there ...a comprehensive formula, including all things which are in them... ...lves good, and that whatever else is good, is not so as an end, but as ...mean, the formula may be accepted or rejected, but is not a subject ...f what is commonly understood by proof. We are not, however, to ...fer that its acceptance or rejection must depend on blind impulse, ...r arbitrary choice. There is a larger meaning of the word proof, in ...hich this question is as amenable to it as any other of the disputed ...uestions of philosophy. The subject is within the cognizance of the ...ational faculty; and neither does that faculty deal with it solely in ...the way of intuition. Considerations may be presented capable of ...determining the intellect either to give or withhold its assent to the ...doctrine; and this is equivalent to proof.

We shall examine presently of what nature are these consid... ...rations; in what manner they apply to the case, and what ratio... ...nal grounds, therefore, can be given for accepting or rejecting the ...utilitarian formula. But it is a preliminary condition of rational ...cceptance or rejection, that the formula should be correctly under... ...stood. I believe that the very imperfect notion ordinarily formed of ...its meaning, is the chief obstacle which impedes its reception; and ...that could it be cleared, even from only the grosser misconceptions, ...the question would be greatly simplified, and a large proportion of ...its difficulties removed. Having thus prepared the ground, I shall ...afterwards endeavor to throw such light as I can upon the question, ...considered as one of philosophical theory.

What Utilitarianism Is. A passing remark is all that needs be ...given to the ignorant blunder of supposing that those who stand ...up for utility as the test of right and wrong, use the term in that ...restricted and merely colloquial sense in which utility is opposed ...to pleasure. An apology is due to the philosophical opponents of ...utilitarianism, for even the momentary appearance of confounding ...them with any one capable of so absurd a misconception; which ...is the more extraordinary, inasmuch as the contrary accusation, of ...referring everything to pleasure, and that too in its grossest form, is ...another of the common charges against utilitarianism. Those who ...know anything about the matter are aware that every writer, from

Epicurus to Bentham, who maintained the theory of utility, meant by it, not something to be contradistinguished from pleasure, but pleasure itself, together with exemption from pain; and instead of opposing the useful to the agreeable or the ornamental, have always declared that the useful means these, among other things.

The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure. To give a clear view of the moral standard set up by the theory, much more requires to be said; in particular, what things it includes in the ideas of pain and pleasure; and to what extent this is left an open question. But these supplementary explanations do not affect the theory of life on which this theory of morality is grounded—namely, that pleasure, and freedom from pain, are the only things desirable as ends; and that all desirable things (which are as numerous in the utilitarian as in any other scheme) are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves, or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain.

Now, such a theory of life excites in many minds and among them in some of the most estimable in feeling and purpose, inveterate dislike. To suppose that life has (as they express it) no higher end than pleasure—no better and nobler object of desire and pursuit—they designate as utterly mean and groveling; as a doctrine worthy only of swine, to whom the followers of Epicurus were, at a very early period, contemptuously likened; and modern holders of the doctrine are occasionally made the subject of equally polite comparisons by its German, French, and English assailants.

When thus attacked, the Epicureans have always answered, that it is not they, but their accusers, who represent human nature in a degrading light; since the accusation supposes human beings to be capable of no pleasures except those of which swine are capable. If this supposition were true, the charge could not be gainsaid, but would then be no longer an imputation; for if the sources of pleasure were precisely the same to human beings and to swine, the rule of life which is good enough for the one would be good enough for the other. The comparison of the Epicurean life to that of beasts is felt as degrading, precisely because a beast's pleasures do not satisfy a human being's conceptions of happiness.

Human beings have faculties more elevated than the animal appetites, and when once made conscious of them, do not regard anything as happiness which does not include their gratification. I do not, indeed, consider the Epicureans to have been by any means

meant
:e, but
ead of
always

Utility,
ght in
y tend
l plea-
priva-
up by
things
extent
ations
ality is
ure the
which
: desir-
ans to

among
nveter-
er end
rsuit—
worthy
a very
of the
e com-

d, that
re in a
s to be
ipable.
id, but
f plea-
he rule
igh for
easts is
satisfy

animal
regard
ition. I
means

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

"The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness."

—John Stuart Mill

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

Of the Ultimate Sanction of the Principle of Utility. If the view adopted by the utilitarian philosophy of the nature of the moral sense be correct, this difficulty will always present itself, until the influences which form moral character have taken the same hold of the principle which they have taken of some of the consequences—until, by the improvement of education, the feeling of unity with our fellow-creatures shall be (what it cannot be denied that Christ intended it to be) as deeply rooted in our character, and to our own consciousness as completely a part of our nature, as the horror of crime is in an ordinarily well brought up young person. In the meantime, however, the difficulty has no peculiar application to the doctrine of utility, but is inherent in every attempt to analyze morality and reduce it to principles; which, unless the principle is already in men's minds invested with as much sacredness as any of its applications, always seems to divest them of a part of their sanctity.

The principle of utility either has, or there is no reason why it might not have, all the sanctions which belong to any other system of morals. Those sanctions are either external or internal. Of the external sanctions it is not necessary to speak at any length. They are the hope of pleasure and the fear of displeasure. There is evidently no reason why all these motives for observance should not attach themselves to the utilitarian morality, as completely and as powerfully as to any other. Indeed, those of them which refer to our fellow creatures are sure to do so, in proportion to the amount of general intelligence; for whether there be any other ground of moral obligation than the general happiness or not, men do desire happiness; and however imperfect may be their own practice, they desire and commend all conduct in others towards themselves, by which they think their happiness is promoted. With regard to the religious motive, if men believe, as most profess to do, in the goodness of God, those who think that conduciveness to the general happiness is the essence, or even only the criterion of good, must necessarily believe that it is also that which God approves.

The internal sanction of duty, whatever our standard of duty may be, is one and the same—a feeling in our own mind; a pain, more or less intense, attendant on violation of duty, which in properly cultivated moral natures rises, in the more serious cases, into shrinking from it as an impossibility. This feeling, when disinterested, and connecting itself with the pure idea of duty, and not with some particular form of it, or with any of the merely accessory circumstances, is the essence of Conscience; though in that complex phenomenon as it actually exists, the simple fact is in general all

trusted over with collateral associations, derived from sympathy, om love, and still more from fear; from all the forms of religious eling; from the recollections of childhood and of all our past life; om self-esteem, desire of the esteem of others, and occasionally ven self-abasement. This extreme complication is, I apprehend, he origin of the sort of mystical character which, by a tendency of he human mind of which there are many other examples, is apt o be attributed to the idea of moral obligation, and which leads eople to believe that the idea cannot possibly attach itself to any ther objects than those which, by a supposed mysterious law, are ound in our present experience to excite it. Its binding force, how-ver, consists in the existence of a mass of feeling which must be roken through in order to do what violates our standard of right, nd which, if we do nevertheless violate that standard, will prob-bly have to be encountered afterwards in the form of remorse. Whatever theory we have of the nature or origin of conscience, this is what essentially constitutes it.

The ultimate sanction, therefore, of all morality (external motives apart) being a subjective feeling in our own minds, I see nothing embarrassing to those whose standard is utility, in the question, what is the sanction of that particular standard? We may answer the same as of all other moral standards—the conscientious feelings of mankind. Undoubtedly this sanction has no binding efficacy on those who do not possess the feelings it appeals to; but neither will these persons be more obedient to any other moral principle than to the utilitarian one. On them morality of any kind has no hold but through the external sanctions.

Of What Sort of Proof the Principle of Utility Is Susceptible. It has already been remarked, that questions of ultimate ends do not admit of proof, in the ordinary acceptation of the term. To be incapable of proof by reasoning is common to all first principles; to the first premises of our knowledge, as well as to those of our conduct. But the former, being matters of fact, may be the subject of a direct appeal to the faculties which judge of fact—namely, our senses, and our internal consciousness. Can an appeal be made to the same faculties on questions of practical ends? Or by what other faculty is cognizance taken of them?

Questions about ends are, in other words, questions what things are desirable. The utilitarian doctrine is that happiness is desirable, and the only thing desirable, as an end; all other things being only desirable as means to that end. What ought to be required of this doctrine—what conditions is it requisite that the doctrine should fulfill—to make good its claim to be believed?

The only proof capable of being given that an object is visi
is that people actually see it. The only proof that a sound is audi
is that people hear it: and so of the other sources of our experien
In like manner, I apprehend, the sole evidence it is possible to p
duce that anything is desirable, is that people do actually desire it
the end which the utilitarian doctrine proposes to itself were not,
theory and in practice, acknowledged to be an end, nothing co
ever convince any person that it was so. No reason can be given w
the general happiness is desirable, except that each person, so
as he believes it to be attainable, desires his own happiness. Th
however, being a fact, we have not only all the proof which the c
admits of, but all which it is possible to require, that happiness i
good: that each person's happiness is a good to that person, and
general happiness, therefore, a good to the aggregate of all perso
Happiness has made out its title as one of the ends of conduct, a
consequently one of the criteria of morality.

On the Connection between Justice and Utility. To recapitula
the idea of justice supposes two things; a rule of conduct, and a s
timent which sanctions the rule. The first must be supposed co
mon to all mankind, and intended for their good. The other (t
sentiment) is a desire that punishment may be suffered by the
who infringe the rule. There is involved, in addition, the concepti
of some definite person who suffers by the infringement; whe
rights (to use the expression appropriated to the case) are violat
by it. And the sentiment of justice appears to me to be, the anim
desire to repel or retaliate a hurt or damage to oneself, or to the
with whom one sympathizes, widened so as to include all perso
by the human capacity of enlarged sympathy, and the human co
ception of intelligent self-interest. From the latter elements, t
feeling derives its morality; from the former, its peculiar impr
siveness, and energy of self-assertion.

I have, throughout, treated the idea of a right residing in t
injured person, and violated by the injury, not as a separate e
ment in the composition of the idea and sentiment, but as o
of the forms in which the other two elements clothe themselv
These elements are a hurt to some assignable person or perso
on the one hand, and a demand for punishment on the other.
examination of our own minds, I think, will show that these tw
things include all that we mean when we speak of violation o
right. When we call anything a person's right, we mean that he h
a valid claim on society to protect him in the possession of it, eith
by the force of law, or by that of education and opinion. If he h

what we consider a sufficient claim, on whatever account, to have something guaranteed to him by society, we say that he has a right to it. If we desire to prove that anything does not belong to him by right, we think this done as soon as it is admitted that society ought not to take measures for securing it to him, but should leave him to chance, or to his own exertions.

Thus, a person is said to have a right to what he can earn in fair professional competition; because society ought not to allow any other person to hinder him from endeavoring to earn in that manner as much as he can. To have a right, then, is, I conceive, to have something which society ought to defend me in the possession of. If the objector goes on to ask, why it ought? I can give him no other reason than general utility. If that expression does not seem to convey a sufficient feeling of the strength of the obligation, nor to account for the peculiar energy of the feeling, it is because there goes to the composition of the sentiment, not a rational only, but also an animal element, the thirst for retaliation; and this thirst derives its intensity, as well as its moral justification, from the extraordinarily important and impressive kind of utility which is concerned. The interest involved is that of security, to every one's feelings the most vital of all interests. All other earthly benefits are needed by one person, not needed by another; and many of them can, if necessary, be cheerfully foregone, or replaced by something else; but security no human being can possibly do without on it we depend for all our immunity from evil, and for the whole value of all and every good, beyond the passing moment; since nothing but the gratification of the instant could be of any worth to us, if we could be deprived of anything the next instant by whoever was momentarily stronger than ourselves.

Our notion, therefore, of the claim we have on our fellow-creatures to join in making safe for us the very groundwork of our existence, gathers feelings around it so much more intense than those concerned in any of the more common cases of utility, that the difference in degree (as is often the case in psychology) becomes a real difference in kind. The claim assumes that character of absoluteness, that apparent infinity, and incommensurability with all other considerations, which constitute the distinction between the feeling of right and wrong and that of ordinary expediency and inexpediency. The feelings concerned are so powerful, and we count so positively on finding a responsive feeling in others (all being alike interested), that "ought" and "should" grow into "must," and recognized indispensability becomes a moral necessity.

SHARED RESPONSE

Are All Lies the Same?

Consider the following two statements made by two different American presidents:

President A said: "I did not have sexual relations with that woman."

President B said: "The Iraqi regime possesses weapons of mass destruction."

For a bit of historical context: President A made the statement when asked about having had casual extramarital sex in his office during his lunch hour; President B made his statement to justify attacking Iraq and start what turned out to be the longest war in American history.

Assume that both statements are lies; that is, each speaker knew the statement was false when he uttered it.

Can you articulate any morally significant differences between the two statements when considering, first, the moral agent (the president who lied), then the act itself (the actual lie), and finally the consequences of the lie?

What is your own position on this question? In other words, which element of this moral problem do you think would be more helpful to highlight when making a moral judgment?

Would you call yourself a utilitarian, a Kantian, an Aristotelian, or anyone else when describing your own morals?

Bibliography and Suggested Further Readings

Bentham, Jeremy. (1948). *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*. New York: Hafner.

Singer, Peter. (2002). "A Better World," in *One World: The Ethics of Globalization*. New Haven: Yale University Press. http://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/2002----.htm

Singer, Peter. (2011). *Practical Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Stuart Mill, John. (1957). *Utilitarianism, 1861*. Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill.

CHAPTER 5

Continental Perspectives

Jean Paul Sartre

Source: Pearson Education

ing Objectives

eading this chapter, you will be able to:

- plain Continental philosophy versus other approaches to ethics.
- iscuss Nietzsche's claims about the role of reason in morals.
- rticulate Sartre and Beauvoir's claims that ethics are ambiguous and ways personal.
- ritically analyze the relation of ethics to politics in Marx and the distentialists.
- iscuss Continental philosophy and ethics after reading selections Marx and Engels as well as de Beauvoir.

5.1 Continental Philosophy and Ethics

Continental philosophy A term used mainly by most philosophers in the United Kingdom and the United States, describing other than analytic philosophy and covering a broad spectrum of overlapping philosophies from the European continent as well as, more recently, from Latin America.

Analytic philosophy A term usually referring to Anglo-American philosophy that denotes a method of focusing on the language of a philosophical problem as the key to examining it; a school of Anglophone philosophy that aims for clarity and precision in its methodology, sometimes sidestepping questions to which the answer might not be clear and precise.

Continental philosophy is a very broad category of philosophy that gained po
larity in the 1970s. It is a term still used mainly by the Anglophone philosop
who invented the term, that is, by most philosophers in the United Kingdom
the United States. It describes something other than **analytic philosophy**, and
in fact an interesting historical feature of the field of philosophy in general as
as of ethics in particular.

The contrast between the analytic and Continental philosophies seems to
on a confusion of methodological and geographical terms, comparable to,
"brain surgeon" versus "Belgian." This is a curiosity the British philosopher Berna
Williams (1929–2003) pointed out: the methods of philosophers over here, and
location of philosophers over there. Williams attempted to bridge the gap betwe
the two traditions. By the early 21st century, the gap is closing a bit, but stereotyp
linger. Recent attempts to return to an earlier term for Continental philosophy, ph
nomenology and existential philosophy were abandoned in the face of more rece
European movements, such as structuralism and post-structuralism, which in fa
are themselves getting away from existentialism. "Continental" remains a useful,
lazy, term for what they do over there.

For philosophical analysts, logical methodology—the first part of this boo
dealing with critical thinking and ethics, for instance—is and ought to be the mai
subject of ethics. Nothing wrong with that, perhaps, save that since the middle o
the 20th century that enterprise has tended to leave out many important everyday
problems as well as major political problems. In other words, it turned the study o
ethics away from practical matters, from the political questions that were at the hear
of ethics from the time of Plato and Aristotle, from the questions that remained
central to Continental philosophers from Hegel and Marx right through Sartre and
Foucault. While analytic philosophers made epistemology—the philosophy of
knowledge—the centerpiece of their academic field, sometimes even proclaiming
the end of metaphysics, continental philosophers still dared to analyze matters of
wisdom. They considered reflection on the meaning of reality and the ways in which
we may know that reality are the basic problems of metaphysics *and* epistemology.
Beginning with the Ancient Greeks, these problems were considered in the *polis*, in
reasoned public discourse, in the context of ethics and politics. That is, as Aristotle
pointedly noticed, it is nearly impossible and certainly unwise to consider ethics
without also considering politics.

An Ethics for Everyday Life as It Is Lived

The thinkers we now call Continental philosophers never stopped making that con-
nection. In many American university philosophy departments, they are not even
considered philosophers. Edmund Husserl is usually given a pass and is often stud-
ied in analytically inclined philosophy departments by concentrating on the German

free use of the tools of logic and on his real concern with distinguishatics and logic from psychology and the human experience as it is lived. **Nietzsche**, a controversial precursor of existentialism, on the other hand, ated as a curiosity in textbooks. Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and ault all have been variously called folk psychologists or sociologists and, insult, artists. **Karl Marx**, Friedrich Engels, and V.I. Lenin are political considerable historical influence, but not "real" philosophers. Simone who will be discussed in detail in Part III, is a feminist, not a moral Questions such as "What is the meaning of life?" "What kind of life ve?" "Am I responsible for others?" or "What is my place in this world?" seen as silly, pretentious, frivolous, or at the very least unclear and at best difficult to answer. Not for the first time, it is worth remembering that the question is difficult does not mean that it has no answer. It merely means estion is difficult.

ilosophies that still analyze these difficult questions are hard to ignore. The ightenment in the 17th and 18th centuries exploded into the historical reali- rench and American revolutions and led to the destruction of the political moral hegemony of church and monarchy alike, all based on an optimis- reason as the root of moral and political truths. Thus, ethical theories as those of Kant's categorical imperative with its absolute moral laws and the hope to find a flexible way to make moral judgments based on the con- of an act all were based on this faith in reason. How to find a law without Reason seemed the best answer. Major reforms, from the establishment atic governments, the likes of which had not been contemplated in millen- movements to abolish slavery, to give women equal rights, to reform and the role of prisons and the morality of the death penalty, and to achieve equality—topics dealt with in Part III of this book—rest largely on a faith in hat faith in reason was already present in Aristotle, who recognized that it is hat makes us better than animals, reason that makes ethics possible.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), the son of a Lutheran minister, Nietzsche announced the death of God and was among the first philosophers to reject the rationalist metaphysics that he believed led to a slave morality of subjection to the established order and to religion. "Which is it," asked Nietzsche with every intention to provoke, "is man one of God's mistakes or is God one of man's?"

Karl Marx (1818–1883), German philosopher, and one of the most influential thinkers in history. His *Communist Manifesto* (1848), edited by his close friend and collaborator Friedrich Engels, gives his earliest and most concise analysis of class relations and the accumulation of capital at the expense of workers who make a minimum wage. Though his philosophy has been variously interpreted and misinterpreted in the last century, the questions Marx asked and the way he examined them continue to pose moral and political challenges.

> **"Morality is neither rational nor absolute nor natural. The world has known many moral systems, each of which advances claims of universality; all moral systems are therefore particular, serving a specific purpose for their propagators or creators, and enforcing a certain regime that disciplines human beings for social life by narrowing our perspectives and limiting our horizons."**
>
> —Friedrich Nietzsche

5.2 Man and Superman: Nietzsche

Then Friedrich Nietzsche sounded the alarm about our trust in reason, and he was among the first to reject the rationalist metaphysics that he believed led to a slave morality of subjection to the established order and to religion. "Which is it," asked Nietzsche with every intention to provoke, "Is man one of God's mistakes or is God one of man's?" He saw the reigning morality as the morality of the herd, of slaves ready to be exploited. It was the morality of the masses who follow orders, supported by Christian ethics. A superior master morality would be the morality of the noble individual human being. The philosopher's role must be, according to Nietzsche, to help destroy the slave morality. The problem remains, as Plato was the first to notice in the *Republic*, of who will decide the enforcement of this superior morality? Nietzsche's famous *Übermensch*, the superman or metahuman mentioned briefly in his 1883 *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, was likely an attempt to lead human beings into being more than, in his words, human, all too human. The concept of the *Übermensch* who is above the slave morality of the masses remains at the very least a difficult ethical and political question.

MORAL PHILOSOPHERS: FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE (1844–1900)

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) was born in the Prussian province of Saxony, on October 15, 1844. His father died when Nietzsche was five years old, and the boy was raised by the women of his household—his mother, sister, and aunts. At age 14, in preparatory school, he studied theology, German literature, and classical studies. He graduated in 1864 and continued his studies in theology and classical philology at the University of Bonn. Soon after he gave up the study of theology and was transferred to Leipzig, where he was introduced to the works of Kant and Schopenhauer.

The precocious scholar was awarded the chair of classical philosophy at the University of Basel in 1868. He also served briefly as a medic in the Franco-Prussian War during that time, but ill health forced him to return to the university. He taught at Basel from 1869 to 1879, and it was at this time that he developed a close friendship with the composer Richard Wagner and wrote the book *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*. Ultimately the friendship fell apart, and Nietzsche began to question the value of the Prussian culture and certain anti-Semitic doctrines being put forth by Richard Wagner and others. Although Nietzsche's writings were employed by Nazis and other anti-Semites in the following century, it is worth pointing out that the author himself was neither. Nietzsche loathed both. He rejected biological racism and German nationalism, saying once "every great crime against culture for the last four hundred years lies on their conscience."

Nietzsche shortly after his time at the University of Basel renounced his Prussian citizenship and began a productive period devoted to writing. In the period

872 to 1888 he published nine books. One of the most influential was *Thus Zarathustra*. In that book, Zarathustra represents the "higher man." This su- rejects faith and morality on the assumption that "God is dead." This notion and superman lends itself to the interpretation that in his view not all people ated equal. Given this basic inequality in our natural abilities, it follows that will be an unequal distribution of rights and liberties. Nietzsche appears to hat moral precepts are primarily derived from either cultural doctrines or s ones. He articulates a dichotomy between what he calls the slave moral- the master morality. The weak and disenfranchised hold the slave morality, claims in part that all people are equal and all people deserve fair treatment. in power or control of society hold the master morality. The master morality morality of nobility, where cunning and pride are held in highest regard. This denies equality. This morality claims that the wool has been pulled over our nd that the notions of equality and fairness are lies perpetuated by lesser men. n exert power over the conditions that seem to control us.

his writings from the *Twilight of the Idols* (or *How to Philosophize with a Ham-* he appears to take an amoralist stand proclaiming that "he [the philosopher] ls stand beyond good and evil and treats the illusion of moral judgment as be- him." This demand follows from an insight that he was the first to articulate: here are no moral facts. Moral and religious judgments are based on realities lo not exist. Morality is merely an interpretation of certain phenomena—more ely, a misinterpretation. Moral judgments, like religious ones, belong to a stage norance in which the very concept of the real, and the distinction between what and imaginary, is still lacking.

"Truth" at this stage designates all sorts of things that we today call "figments of magination." Moral judgments are therefore never to be taken literally; so under- they are always merely absurd. Semiotically—that is, in terms of how we create own meaning—however, they remain invaluable: They reveal, at least for those can interpret them, the most valuable realities of cultures and psychologies that ot know how to "understand" themselves. With prophetic insouciance, looking rd to postmodernism's skeptic attitude toward the possibility of ethics, Nietzsche to suggest that morality is only a language of signs and a group of symptoms. As ites in *Twilight of the Idols*, "one must know how to interpret them correctly to be to profit from them." Only then can we set about the task of improving humanity.

From Marx to Sartre and Beauvoir: Existentialism, Ethics, and Politics

Marx critically analyzed the alienation that comes from facing an unjust world akes no sense, and he suggested in his *Communist Manifesto* and elsewhere that it is political action that must be taken as "everything solid melts into air." cess of ruthless dictators from Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin right through Putin and Kim Jong-Un was envisioned in anguished human terms by

the visionary Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Particularly in the chapter called "The Grand Inquisitor" from his 1880 novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoyevsky added a painfully personal touch to Nietzsche's question as well as to Marx's answers by pointing out the comforts of being told what to do and of pretending that the choice is not ours to make. That was the precocious beginning of **existentialism**, a 20th- and 21st-century philosophical movement that encompasses not only most of those who are bundled together as Continental philosophers but also artists like Alberto Giacometti; novelists including Miguel de Unamuno, Franz Kafka, and Georges Perec; playwrights such as Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, and Harold Pinter; the filmmakers Jean-Luc Godard, Michelangelo Antonioni, and Krzysztof Kieslowski; and, yes, the feminist novelist and essayist Simone de Beauvoir.

Existentialism A school of philosophy that emphasizes that existence precedes essence, that is, that we are responsible for the meanings we bring to the world and also that we are both responsible for our actions and free within the brutal limits of the material world.

Making Ethics Personal

They all have this much in common: Existentialists believe that an intellectual must be engaged in the actual life of his or her world and that philosophy in particular must focus on the confrontation of the individual with a world that reason simply cannot explain. In the 19th century, **Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855)** already had emphasized the excruciatingly personal nature of the choices human beings make and the existential discomfort of making those choices. The Danish philosopher's celebrated "leap of faith," the way he described personally choosing to believe in God for no good reason other than his choosing to do so, describes not a one-time life event but rather simply the authentic way to face life. The existentialists, a word coined in the 20th century, developed this theme and insisted that philosophy must concern itself with the intensely and unavoidably personal nature of our ethical choices. These choices are constant, and they are not easy. They lead to doubt and uncertainty. They lead to the recognition that feelings of emptiness, dread, nausea, and existential anxiety accompany the realization that we are in fact alone: alone in a world without reason, without any a priori moral rules, without any gods we might have invented, and with no reality other than the freedom that defines who we are and the brutal limits on that freedom presented by the facts of the world. Confronting that situation is the most important fact about human existence according to the existentialists. Comprehension of our existence in the world entails the recognition both of our freedom and of the material limits imposed on that freedom by our being here, now. Clarity about this situation also clarifies the need to act if progress is to be made, moral and political progress. With a grateful nod to the Hegelian dialectic that challenged traditional logic and metaphysics with a claim that being and nothing are in a constant process of becoming; it is the existentialist dialectic between brute facticity and absolute freedom—between *Being and Nothingness*, as Sartre put it in his 1942 masterpiece of that title—that defines our place in the world.

Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), Danish philosopher and, along with Fyodor Dostoyevsky, a precursor of existentialism because of his emphasis on the personal nature of ethical and religious choices we make; belief in God, for Kierkegaard, is not a matter of reason but rather of passion, a "leap of faith" taken by each person that has nothing to do with and receives no guidance from any of the proofs of the existence of God offered by theologians. That our choices are always personal would become a main theme in existentialism in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980), French philosopher, novelist, playwright, screenwriter, literary critic and biographer, and human rights activist. Sartre is the father of modern existentialism, and his *Being and Nothingness* (1942), together with his unfinished *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1985), ranks among the most serious and seriously inspiring works in modern philosophy.

Sartre: The Moral Dimensions of Human Existence

The subject was inescapable, but it needed some explaining. The situation was difficult. First, here's some background. **Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980)** studied

the École Normale Supèrieur in Paris, and he was deeply influenced philosophy, the phenomenology of **Edmund Husserl (1858–1938)**, Sartre's friend Maurice Merleau-Ponty had just finished a semester ying. It was Husserl's revolutionary insight that human consciousness eparated from its presence to the world, that is, from the object of Consciousness is always consciousness of something, and the two ke up a phenomenon. Philosophy then must concert itself with that Our intentionality, that is, our presence as witnesses to the world meaning of that world. Philosophy became the study of life as it is d. To say that Sartre was inspired by this insight when he heard about leau-Ponty as they were having drinks in a Left Bank café would be a understatement—he took Husserl's idea and ran with it. It was then bsurd historical events intervened. In quick succession, Husserl died; ns invaded France; Sartre joined the army and fought the Nazis; and he risoner of war, escaped, and worked in the Resistance for the rest of the cupation.

during the occupation that he wrote both *Being and Nothingness* e seminal text of existentialism, and *No Exit* (1944), the first play Paris after the liberation. He also found time for ghostwriting anti-es for the resistance underground paper *Combat* with his friend **Albert 913–1960)** and with the most important woman in his life, **Simone oir (1908–1986)**.

ng and Nothingness, Sartre introduces a novel idea: We are "nothing"; are not a thing. The world is a thing; it is "being." Being is solid, know-just there. Human beings, on the other hand, are defined by not-being, nothingness. You can know the desk where you're sitting now, and know g there is to know about it. But you can never say that about the student xt to you: Whatever you think you know, there's more there. There is re.

refers to these two categories of reality as being-in-itself (the world) and itself (us). We are defined by freedom. We are condemned to be free. ence precedes essence precisely because it is our existence, our presence to hat gives "being" its meaning. We are witnesses to our lives, in other words, e constantly creating its meaning. We are always projecting ourselves into a is can be and often is difficult, even intolerable. So an easy way out of this nd to be a thing or to pretend that others are things. That is what Sartre faith, and he points out that we know better.

is going on here is revolutionary in terms of the nature of reality, and it has thical implications. If existence precedes essence, then we are responsible we are. To pretend otherwise is bad faith. That the responsibility for our ence rests on us now, with Sartre, has an ontological basis. Ontology, we ote here, is either a branch of or a substitute for metaphysics, and it refers to ophical study of reality as it exists in the world. Sartre's *Being and Nothing-*ubtitled *An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*.

Edmund Husserl (1858–1938), considered the father of phenomenology. It was his revolutionary insight that human consciousness cannot be separated from its presence to the world, that is, from the object of consciousness: Consciousness is always consciousness of something, and the two together make up a phenomenon.

Albert Camus (1913–1960), Algerian-born French philosopher, playwright, novelist, essayist, and Nobel Prize winner. A close friend and sometimes ideological enemy of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, Camus himself disliked the term "existentialist" favored by his Parisian Left Bank cohort. But his writings helped define that influential movement and continue to inspire to this day.

Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986), French philosopher, novelist, and also a key figure in modern feminism. She developed Jean-Paul Sartre's concept of bad faith—of treating people as if they were things when we know better—and applied it to how women are treated, famously noting in her revolutionary *The Second Sex* (1949) that "no one is born a woman, one must learn to become one."

MORAL PHILOSOPHERS: SIMONE de BEAUVOIR (1908–1986) and JEAN-PAUL SARTRE (1905–1980)

Jean-Paul Charles Aymard Sartre and Simone-Lucie-Ernestine-Marie Bertrand de Beauvoir first met when they were students in 1929, and they stayed together a lifetime. She was beautiful, he was interesting, and they were both brilliant. He called her "Castor" ("Beaver"), a nickname that stuck and later appeared in the dedication of his books. When it came time for both young Parisians to take the fiercely competitive postgraduate exam for the *agrégation* in philosophy at the École Normale Supérieure to become college professors, Sartre earned the first place, and, narrowly, Beauvoir came in second, becoming at age 21 the youngest student ever to pass the exam.

They were champions of free love well before the 1960s made that concept mentionable. As a couple, Sartre and Beauvoir were not monogamous, but they certainly were faithful in their fashion, to each other and to each other's work. When history forced itself on them, they not only managed but thrived: Sartre joined the French army in 1939, was captured by the invading Germans in 1940 and was sent to a prisoner of war camp, and was released in 1941 because of poor health—his poor eyesight eventually led to blindness. Back in Paris, he and Beauvoir took up teaching jobs, but they also helped found the underground group *Socialisme et Liberté* and soon devoted themselves to the underground resistance in Paris fighting the Nazis. Sartre and Beauvoir also ghostwrote and helped to publish the clandestine resistance newspaper *Combat*, founded by their friend Albert Camus.

It was at this time during the Nazi occupation that Beauvoir wrote her first novel, *She Came to Stay* (1943) and her first philosophical essay, *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* (1944), a prelude to her *Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947). Sartre also kept busy. Besides teaching, working for the resistance, and publishing articles in dangerously illegal publications, he managed to write two plays: *The Flies* (1943) and *No Exit* (1944), the latter becoming the first play staged in Paris after the Liberation and one of the most successful works for the theater of the 20th century. Most important, Sartre wrote and got past the censors his monumental *Being and Nothingness* (1942), the seminal text of French existentialism.

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre introduces the revolutionary concept that we are nothingness; that is, we are not a thing. The world is a thing; it is "being." Being is solid and knowable—it's just there. Human beings, on the other hand, are defined by not-being. We are condemned to freedom, and hard as we might try to pretend that we are determined, we know better. Freedom is not easy, and we constantly escape into bad faith to avoid the terrifying fact that our lives and those of others are on us. Our existence precedes the essence of meaning, and we make that meaning ourselves. No one else does that for us.

Sartre and Beauvoir remained witnesses to their own lives, as we all must be. They were witnesses to the century.

...y stayed together. More, many more works followed for the prolific ...more public commitments to the struggles of their time. These philoso... ...ced what they preached, again and again throwing themselves into the ...r colonialism, against racism, for women's equality, for a woman's repro... ...hts, for gay rights, against tyranny. They both believed that philosophy ...e made in the classroom or in books, that it had to get in there and fight. ...ul Sartre died in Paris on April 15, 1980. A crowd of 60,000 Parisians ...in his funeral. On April 14, 1986, Simone de Beauvoir died. The two are ...e by side in the Montparnasse Cemetery, not far from where they lived ...e lives. In 2000, the city of Paris renamed its Place de St. Germain, in the ...he Left Bank, the Place Sartre-Beauvoir.

...ner: Reminder of Our Own Authenticity

...nce is a phenomenon we are both creating and witnessing, but there's a ...er people are witnessing it as well. They misrepresent and objectify us, the ...isrepresent and objectify them. Yet we are all responsible for our lives. If we ...at it's not our fault, that we couldn't help it, that it is beyond our control, ...bad faith.

...flies in the face of any determinism, of any divine command or theological ...of any absolute moral law. It even flies in the face of many 20th-century ...uman nature such as those of both Sigmund Freud and B. F. Skinner, from ...of humanity of dialectical materialists after V. I. Lenin. Those psycholo... ...political philosophers believe there is a certain way we are determined to ...behave this or that way because of how you were treated as child, or you ...p but reflect the interests of your economic class. It's out of your hands. ...eption and self-deception are what Sartre calls bad faith, and it is our duty ...o be authentic because otherwise we are lying and we know it.

...e is no human nature, Sartre believes; we make it up as we go along. This is ...y so it is very easy to fall into bad faith and blame everyone and everything ...es that are ours and only ours. That we cannot help but recognize that this ...others as well as of ourselves brings in a necessary ethical connection. How ...o live, what are we to do, in a world that we choose but always choose within ...limits as well as under the gaze of others? By realizing that when we choose ...lves, we choose for all the others as well. Our responsibility is inescapable.

...after Sartre and Beauvoir

...his leads to politics, and in fact the major Continental perspectives on eth... ...political and fall outside the scope of this book. The post-Sartrean project of **...Foucault (1926–1984)** remains the most powerful and influential argu... ...prison reform as well as for reconsidering the role of mental hospitals, the ...lization of the mentally ill and the objectification of sexual minorities. In

Michel Foucault (1926–1984), the most significant French philosopher after Sartre and a considerably influential historian and political theorist, Foucault exposed the deep divide between philosophical theories and the brutal political forces that limit human life. He devoted much of his writings to the ways in which society alienates and dehumanizes the groups it oppresses, including prisoners, mental patients, and gay men. He died of AIDS in 1984.

JOURNAL

Bad Faith: A User's Guide

Consider these statements: "She couldn't help it, she's a woman." "What do you expect, after all, he's Jewish?" "I just need to pass this course—I'm just not an 'A' student." "See what you made me do now?" "That's just the way I am." "Come on, get a grip—that's just human nature." These are bits of bad faith, all of them.

Are you taken aback if the checkout clerk at the grocery store tells you about how tough it was to get to work today because her child is sick?

Is it too much information if a waiter at a restaurant turns out to be someone your sister dated?

If you run into your professor at the beach, do you ask "OMG, what are you doing here?"

Yes, your professor likely owns a swimsuit; and no, you didn't need that image in your head. But face it, up to this point you had been looking at that "other" as that thing, a professor. Of course he has a life, as do you. In fact, he's probably objectifying you too.

Have you fallen into bad faith recently? In other words, have you turned yourself into a being-in-itself or objectified someone else that way? Did you know better?

works such as *Madness and Civilization* (1960), *The History of Sexuality* (1976–1984), *Discipline and Punish* (1975), and *The Birth of the Clinic* (1983), Foucault persuasively argues that we create sociopolitical structures, we endow them with power, and then we are oppressed by them in turn when we accept that these structures' claim to knowledge is in fact a tool of oppression.

That psychiatry and psychology have been used to oppress society, and that prisons have been used to keep that society from revolting has been amply, tragically proved by historical examples from the Soviet gulags and the Cuban UMAP concentration camps, to the institutionalized incidents of torture from Iran to Guantanamo. Foucault is not so much attacking reason as exhorting us to notice how rationality is often a tool of oppression. Throughout his life, tragically cut short by AIDS in 1984, Foucault analyzed the relation of knowledge and power, and he advocated

...iticizing and attacking institutions that society might consider neutral but ...t committing violence against society itself.

...e Foucault's structuralism, it must be said that French philosophy is experi... what Aristotle might have called a fatal flaw in a good tragedy: a weak end... project of deconstruction initiated by the Algerian-born French philosopher **... Derrida** in works including *The Force of the Law* (1990) and *Specters of* ...1994) began a healthy debate on existentialism, structuralism, and ethics; but ...ave not led to fresh revelations of the groundwork for the moral arguments. ...a remains most influential in the fields of humanities and literature. Fou... claims that power is always power over something, that action is required to ...me or attain it, remains the most powerful ethical and political insight after ...'s death in 1980.

...ernard-Henri Lévy, also born in Algeria, is a pupil of Sartre, and in *Sartre: The ...opher of the 20th Century* (2000), Lévy proved to be Sartre's most sensitive biog... Lévy so far has had as varied a career as Sartre himself: journalism, theater, ...scripts, political essays on anti-Semitism, and islamophobia, and even some phi... have flowed from the pen of this public intellectual. *War, Evil, and the End of ...ory* (2004) blends political reportage with moral philosophy in ways that have not ...endeared him to the academy. His *Left in Dark Times: A Stand against the New Barbarism* (2008) makes a strong Sartrean connection between ethics and politics and applies it ...the political realities of the Left in a post-Soviet era. He was targeted for assassina... by an extremist Islamic group that same year. Lévy's promised book on the meta... ...physics of evil may still be a welcome addition to the field in the future.

Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), Algerian-born French philosopher, an influential thinker in the "deconstructionist" movement that followed in the heels of Michel Foucault's structuralism by claiming that there is no objective structure but rather there is only the meaning that can be gathered from a given situation. Derrida's analyses of language and meaning proved to be influential in literature and humanities.

Bernard-Henri Lévy (b. 1948), Algerian-born French philosopher and novelist; *The Jerusalem Post* in 2010 named him one of the world's most influential Jews.

5.4 From Politics Back to Its Roots: Ethics and Responsibility

...is worth remembering that Sartre famously promised a treatise on ethics at the ...end of *Being and Nothingness*. He never got around to writing it, instead working ...for much of the rest of his life on what would become the seminal modern texts on ...political philosophy, his vast and posthumously published unfinished masterpiece *...Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1985). It took his life partner, Simone de Beauvoir, to ...fill the gap in the meantime by writing the concise 1947 *Ethics of Ambiguity*, a prole... ...gomena to an existentialist politics.

> **"A freedom which is interested only in denying freedom must be denied. And it is not true that the recognition of the freedom of others limits my own freedom: to be free is not to have the power to do anything you like; it is to be able to surpass the given toward an open future; the existence of others as a freedom defines my situation and is even the condition of my own**

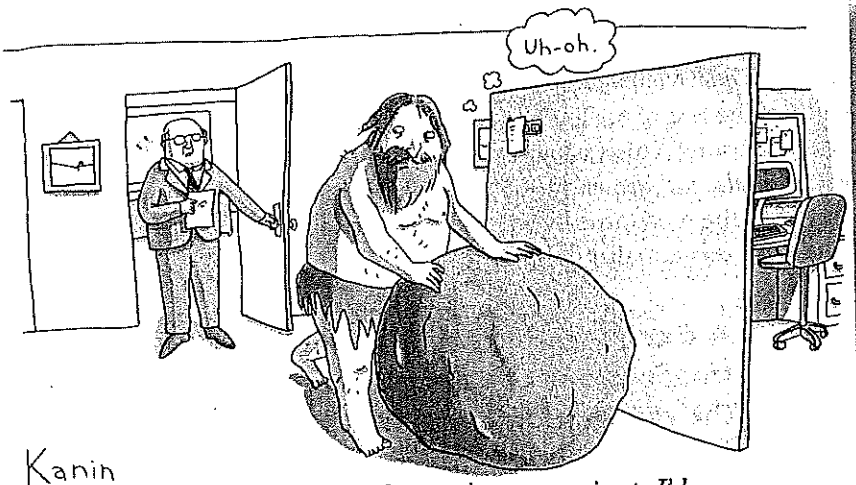
freedom. I am oppressed if I am thrown into prison, but not if I am kept from throwing my neighbor into prison.

—Simone de Beauvoir

There are no answers forthcoming unless we come up with those answers ourselves. It is through our choices that we create what we will be, so the choice is ours. The choice is personal. Making it personal of course makes it ambiguous, inescapably so, according to Beauvoir. That ambiguity, paired with the frightening and liberating prospect of freedom, also makes it political, as Sartre points out in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. Morality is on us. So is politics.

Albert Camus, close friend and sometime ideological enemy of both Sartre and Beauvoir and a fellow underground member of the resistance against the Nazis in Paris during World War II, made much of the concept of absurdity in ethics and in politics, in life. Sartre received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1964, and he controversially refused it. Before Sartre, Camus was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1957, which he happily accepted. The Nobel Academy cited him, one of the youngest Nobelists ever at age 44, "for his important literary production, which with clear-sighted earnestness illuminates the problems of the human conscience in our times." Three years later he was dead from a car accident in the South of France, leaving behind an unfinished masterpiece, *The First Man*. The absurdity of the situation was obvious.

Camus himself had made much of the concept of absurdity throughout his life, from the novels *The Stranger* (1942) and *The Plague* (1947) right through *The Fall* (1956) and the posthumously published *A Happy Death* (1971) and *The First Man*



"Hey, Sisyphus, when you've got a minute I'd like to discuss this progress report with you."

Source: Zachary Kanin/The New Yorker Collection/The Cartoon Bank

(1995); absurdity is a central theme in his plays too, including *Caligula* (1945), and *State of Siege* (1948), as well as in unclassifiable philosophical works such as *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), *The Rebel* (1951), and *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* (1961).

From Homer and other sources, we know that Sisyphus was being punished by the Olympian gods likely because he had stolen their secrets. The divine punishment was harsh: They condemned Sisyphus to roll a huge rock up a mountain, and when at last he got to the top, the rock rolled back all the way down—so down Sisyphus went to roll it back up, up he kept on pushing, and down the rock went again. And again. And Again. Forever. This hopeless labor was his punishment, this hopeless situation his condition. What interested Camus here was Sisyphus as he headed back down, smiling: He is an absurd hero in this tale.

Camus never meant to claim that the world is absurd. The world is a thing, neither absurd nor rational. What is absurd is our presence in the world given that we keep asking "Why?" as the world remains and always will remain silent. The Enlightenment's faith in reason falls apart: There is no reason; there is only action. Praxis precedes theory, as Marx pointed out. Existence precedes essence, so ethics precedes ontology and metaphysics. Every moral choice is personal: We are defined by what we do. We are what we make of ourselves.

And in making ourselves, in projecting ourselves into a future of our own making, happiness may be found. "It is better to bet on this life than on the next," wrote Camus in *A Happy Death*. In his universalizing Sisyphus' plight as nothing less than the human condition, Camus tells us that "happiness and the absurd are two sons of the same earth—they are inseparable." Finding joy—choosing joy—in the midst of this lived dialectic is a daunting but necessary project for all of us, one Camus famously exhorts us to take on in the final lines of *The Myth of Sisyphus:* "We must imagine Sisyphus happy." That may be the most pointed moral rule in existentialist ethics—that we must choose to make ourselves happy.

5.5 Readings on Continental Philosophy

ONE OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL POLITICAL and philosophical documents in history, the *Communist Manifesto* was first published in London in 1848 and was soon translated into several languages. It is the first and simplest outline of Marxist views on class differences, and, while the bourgeoisies is now more commonly referred to as the middle class, Marx and Engels' analysis of class relations and the accumulation of capital at the expense of workers who make a minimum wage raises moral and political questions, which remain challenging to this day.

Communist Manifesto by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

Bourgeois and Proletarians: The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles.

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood