Now as you have admitted that justice is one of that highest class of goods which are desired indeed for their results, but in a far greater degree for their own sakes – like sight or hearing or knowledge or health, or any other real and natural and not merely conventional good – I would ask you in your praise of justice to regard one point only: I mean the essential good and evil which justice and injustice work in the possessors of them. Let others praise justice and censure injustice, magnifying the rewards and honours of the one and abusing the other; that is a manner of arguing which, coming from them, I am ready to tolerate, but from you who have spent your whole life in the consideration of this question, I expect something better. And therefore, I say, not only prove to us that justice is better than injustice, but show what they either of them do to the possessor of them, which makes the one to be a good and the other an evil, whether seen or unseen by gods and men.

2 Ethical Virtue: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics**

The relationship between virtue and happiness, which had much exercised Plato, was also a central issue in the ethical writings of his pupil Aristotle. Aristotle was in no doubt that the life of virtue, informed by reason, constituted the good for mankind; he argued consistently that living in accordance with virtue was the key to achieving *eudaimonia*, happiness or fulfilment. But what if selfish desires are in conflict with the demands of virtue – suppose we ought to be courageous and help defend our fellow citizens against foreign attack, but selfishness makes us want to run away? Aristotle's crucial insight here is that ethical virtue is not merely something intellectual (a rational grasp of how one should act), but involves ingrained dispositions of character, habits of feeling and action (he connects the very word 'ethical' with the Greek noun *ethos*, 'custom' or 'habit'). Ethical excellence, Aristotle argues, is in this respect like musical excellence: you become good by constant practice. It is therefore a mistake to think that we can be good just by weighing up calculations, or balancing the costs and benefits of various courses of action.[1] The virtuous individual will have been trained from an early age to have the right kinds of desires, and to behave in the right kind of way, at the appropriate time. So the presence (for example) of an excessive desire to run away, in the face of reasonable odds, is already an indication that the ethical character has not been developed as it should have been. Here Aristotle introduces his famous doctrine of the *mean*: courage is a disposition (to act and react in certain ways) that lies in between two extremes – the vice of excess (foolhardiness), and the vice of deficiency (cowardice). And so with the other virtues (generosity, for instance, lies on a mean between being a spendthrift and being stingy).

Aristotle's doctrine of the mean does not, and is not meant to, provide a decision procedure or criterion for determining what should be done on any given occasion. Indeed, part of the point of Aristotle's approach is that ethical virtue is not a matter of isolated acts, but involves an ingrained pattern of action and desire that is manifested over a whole lifetime – hence the importance of his account of virtue as a *disposition* of character. The dispositions of the virtuous agent, however, are not a matter of mindless habituation: the patterns of virtue which we aim to acquire, and instil into our children, are those which reason can recognize as making for a maximally worthwhile human life, a life where we can develop our human potentialities to the full.

* Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* [*Ethika Nikomacheia*, c.325 BC], extracts from Bk I, ch. 7, and Bk II, chs 1, 5 and 6 (1097b21–1098a18; 1103a16–b25; 1105b19–1107a8). Translation by John Cottingham.

[1] Contrast the utilitarian approach: see extract 6, below.

To say that happiness is the supreme good perhaps seems something that is generally agreed, and we need a clearer account of what it is. This might be available if we find the function of a human being... What might this be? Living seems common to plants, but we are looking for something special to humans, so we should set aside the life of nutrition and growth. Next would come some sort of sentient life, but this is common to horses, oxen and every animal. There remains some sort of active life of the rational part of the soul... Suppose, then, that the function of a human being is an activity of the soul in accordance with, or involving, reason. Now the function of an *X* and a good *X* are of the same kind (for example of a harpist and a good harpist); this is true in all cases, when we add to the function the outstanding accomplishment that corresponds to the virtue (the harpist's function is to play, that of the good harpist to play well). So if we take the function of a human being to be a certain life, namely an activity of the soul and actions expressing reason, then the excellent man's function will be to do this well and in a fine way (each function being discharged well when performed in accordance with its special virtue). So it follows that the good for humankind is an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue (or if there are several virtues, in accordance with the best and most complete virtue). And we must add, in a complete life. For one swallow does not make a summer, nor does one day; and similarly neither one day, nor a short time, is enough to make someone blessed and happy...

Virtue is of two kinds, intellectual and ethical. Intellectual virtue owes its origins and its growth more to teaching, and so needs experience and time; but ethical virtue comes about from habit – hence even its name derives (by a slight modification) from the word 'ethos', custom or habit. It is clear from this that none of the ethical virtues arises in us by nature; for none of the things that exist by nature can be radically altered by habituation. For instance, a stone, which by nature moves downwards, cannot be habituated to move upwards no matter how many thousand times you try to train it by throwing it upwards; and you cannot get fire to move downwards, or train anything that naturally behaves in one way to behave in another. Hence the ethical virtues do not come about by nature – but neither do they come about contrary to nature: we are naturally constituted so as to acquire them, but it is by habit that they are fully developed.

Now whenever we come to have something by nature, we are first provided with the relevant capacities, and subsequently come to exercise the activities. (This is clear in the case of the senses: it was not from frequent seeing or hearing that we acquired these senses, but the other way around – we had the senses and then used them, rather than acquiring them as a result of using them). But in the case of the virtues, we acquire them by previously exercising them, as happens with the other arts. Whatever we have to learn to do, we learn by doing it: people become builders by building, and lutanists by playing the lute. Thus it is by doing just things that we become just, and by acting temperately that we become temperate, and by doing brave things that we become brave. This is confirmed by what happens in city-states: legislators make the citizens good by instilling good habits (this is the intention of every legislator, and those who do not achieve it fail in their aims – this is how a good constitution differs from a poor one).

The causes and means whereby every virtue is cultivated or destroyed are the same, just as in the case of all the arts. It is by playing the lute that people become good or

bad lute players, and the same holds for builders and all the rest. By building well people get to be good builders, and they become bad builders from building badly. If this was not the case, there would be no need for teachers, and everyone would be born good or bad. It is just like this with the virtues. By behaving in a certain way in our dealings with human beings some of us become just and others unjust; by what we do in the face of danger, and by acquiring habits of timidity or boldness, we become brave or cowardly. And the same holds good with respect to desires and feelings of anger: some people become temperate and patient, while others become self-indulgent and bad-tempered, depending on the way they behave in the relevant situations. In a word, activities of a certain kind produce corresponding dispositions. This is why the activities we perform must be of a certain kind; for as these differ, so the dispositions that follow from them will differ. Thus the kinds of habits we form from early childhood are of no small importance; they matter a great deal – indeed, they make all the difference...

We must now examine what virtue is. Since there are three conditions arising in the soul – feelings, capacities and dispositions, virtue must be one of these. By *feelings* I mean anger, fear, boldness, envy, joy, love, hatred, longing, jealousy pity and in general whatever is accompanied by pleasure or pain. By *capacities* I mean what makes us capable of the relevant feelings – in virtue of which we are said to be capable of being angry or sorrowful, or feeling pity. *Dispositions* are what make us in a good or bad way in respect to the feelings; for example, in the case of being angry, we are in a bad way if our feeling is too vehement or too feeble, and so in other cases.

Neither the virtues nor the vices are feelings, for we are not called worthy or worthless on account of our feelings, but on account of our virtues and vices. Moreover, we are not praised or blamed on account of our feelings. For a person is not praised for being frightened or angry; it is not simply for being angry that someone is blamed, but for being angry in a particular way. But we are praised or blamed on account of our virtues and vices. Then again, we feel angry or frightened without choosing to, whereas virtues are choices of some kind, or involve choice. In addition, we are said to be moved with respect to our feelings, but in the case of the virtues and vices it is not a matter of being moved but of being in a certain condition. By the same token, the virtues are not capacities either. For we are not said to be good or bad, or praised or blamed, simply in virtue of being capable of feeling. And again, we have capacities by nature, but we are not good or bad by nature, as noted above. So if the virtues are neither feelings nor capacities, it remains that they are dispositions. This then is our account of the kind of thing virtue is.

But to say, as we have, that virtue is a disposition is not enough – we need to specify what kind of disposition. Whenever something has a virtue, the virtue is what ensures it is in a good state and makes it perform its function well. Thus the virtue of the eye makes the eye and its function good – it is the virtue of the eye that makes us see well. Similarly, the virtue of a horse makes it an excellent one – good at galloping and carrying its rider and withstanding the enemy. If this applies to all cases, then the virtue of a human being will be the disposition that makes a human being good, and makes him perform his function well...

In everything continuous and divisible, one can have a larger or smaller or equal quantity, either with respect to the object or relative to us; and the equal amount is a mean between excess and deficiency. I call the mean with respect to the object that which is equidistant from the two extremes, and this is one and the same for everyone; but the mean in relation to us is what is neither excessive nor deficient, and this is not one and the same for all. Thus ten is many and two is few, we take six as the mean with respect to the object, for it is equidistant between the larger and the smaller numbers. This is the mean as an arithmetical ratio. But the mean in relation to us cannot be taken in this way. If ten pounds is a lot to eat and two pounds a little, it does not follow that the trainer will prescribe six, since this may be a lot or a little for the person who is to take it (for Milo the athlete it may be too little, but for someone starting to train too much; and similarly for running or wrestling). So everyone who understands what they are doing avoids excess and deficiency and seeks out and chooses the mean – but not the mean with respect to the object, but relative to us.

Let us take it then that every science performs its function well when it looks to the mean and guides its products towards it. Hence people say of products that are in a good state that one cannot take away or add anything, any excess or deficiency being enough to destroy the good state, while the mean preserves it; and good craftsmen, as we have said, look to the mean when they work. If this is so, then since virtue, like nature, is more accurate and efficient than any craft, it too will aim at the mean. I am speaking here of ethical virtue, or virtue of character; for this is concerned with feelings and actions, and here we find excess, deficiency and the mean. For one may feel fear and confidence and desire and anger and pity, and pleasure and pain generally, too much or too little; and neither of these is good. But to have these feelings at the right time, on the right grounds, towards the right people, for the right purpose and in the right way – this is the intermediate and best condition, and the characteristic of true virtue.

In the case of actions too, there is, in the same way, excess, deficiency and the mean. Virtue is concerned with feelings and actions, in which excess and deficiency go astray, while the mean is praised and on the right path, both of which are marks of virtue. So virtue is a mean, and it aims at what is intermediate.

Now it is possible to go astray in many ways, but there is only one correct path (for evil, as the Pythagorean model has it, belongs to the Unlimited, while good belongs to the limited). Hence the former is easy and the latter difficult, and it is easy to miss the target and hard to hit it. This again shows that excess and deficiency relate to vice, and the mean to virtue: 'Many the paths of vice; of goodness only one.'

Virtue then is a disposition concerned with choice, lying on a mean that is relative to us, determined by reason, in the way a prudent man would determine it. It is a mean between two vices, one of excess and the other of deficiency. And while some vices fall short and others exceed the right amount, in both feelings and actions, virtue discovers the mean and chooses it. So as far as its nature and essential definition goes, virtue is a mean; but in respect of what is best and right, it is an extreme.

these are circumstances very requisite to happiness, and will be cherished and cultivated by any honest man who feels the importance of them.

Such a one has, besides, the frequent satisfaction of seeing knaves, with all their pretended cunning and abilities, betrayed by their own maxims; and while they purport to cheat with moderation and secrecy, a tempting incident occurs and they give into the snare; whence they can never extricate themselves without a total loss of reputation, and the forfeiture of all future trust and confidence with mankind.

But were they ever so secret and successful, the honest man, if he has any tincture of philosophy, or even common observation and reflection, will discover that they themselves are, in the end, the greatest dupes, and have sacrificed the invaluable enjoyment of a character, with themselves at least, for the acquisition of worthless toys and gewgaws. How little is requisite to supply the *necessities* of nature? And in a view to *pleasure*, what comparison between the unbought satisfaction of conversation, society, study, even health and the common beauties of nature, but above all the peaceful reflection on one's own conduct; what comparison, I say, between these and the feverish empty amusements of luxury and expense? These natural pleasures, indeed, are really without price; both because they are all below all price in their attainment, and above it in their enjoyment.

5 Duty and Reason as the Ultimate Principle: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals**

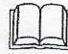
The moral philosophy of Hume (see previous extract) gives pride of place to our natural feelings or sentiments, and links moral approval to what is useful or agreeable for human life. A view in many ways diametrically opposed to this was put forward later in the eighteenth century by Immanuel Kant. Kant's starting-point is a distinction between what is good merely as a means to an end, and what is intrinsically good, or good in itself. Health, well-being, contentment, happiness – none of these guarantee that their possessor is someone who is morally praiseworthy; only a good will has pure value in itself, 'shining like a jewel for its own sake'. Kant's position here is an uncompromising one. Suppose (in the manner suggested by Hume) we have a natural inclination to help others, and warm feelings of human sympathy make us act benevolently. However right and amiable such action may be, says Kant, it does not merit moral esteem. Only if someone acts 'without any inclination, from the sake of duty alone, does his action for the first time have genuine moral worth'.

It is clear that the Kantian moral agent is someone who acts 'out of principle' as we nowadays say. But what *is* the guiding principle of action, given that Kant has disqualified as morally worthy anything done merely from inclination? Kant's answer is that actions are right if they conform not to any particular inclinations or desires, but to a *universal law*: 'I ought never to act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law.' Deliberately breaking a promise for some

* Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* [*Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, 1785], chs 1 and 2 (extracts). Trans. H. J. Paton, in *The Moral Law* (London: Hutchinson, 1948).

personal advantage is thus forbidden, since I cannot rationally will that everyone should act in such a way – if I did, the whole institution of promising would collapse. This notion has come to be known as Kant's *categorical imperative.* Most commands or recommendations ('Have a glass of wine!' 'Get down to work!' 'Take a holiday!') are hypothetical in character – they tell us to do something *if* we want a given result. But Kant's imperative is unconditionally binding.

Kant's principle appears to provide a necessary rather than sufficient condition for morality: that is, it *rules out* certain maxims (those which cannot in reason be universally adopted), rather than telling us which maxims we *should* adopt. Nevertheless, in arguing for the intrinsic value of a good will, Kant has provided a cornerstone for morality by locating the source of moral value in the autonomous will of the rational agent. Each rational agent, exercising his or her will, is a bearer of value in him or herself, and thus deserves respect for his or her own sake. This leads to a new version of the categorical imperative (found in the last paragraph of our extract below): 'Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.' This principle of *respect for persons* has since come to be recognized as of enormous importance for morality. Each human being is capable of acting freely and autonomously; the Kantian moral vision is of a 'kingdom of ends' where no one is used simply as a means to the furtherance of someone else's projects, but each human being accords to all other humans the right to respect as a rational, self-determining agent.



It is impossible to conceive anything at all in the world, or even out of it, which can be taken as good without qualification, except a *good will.* Intelligence, wit, judgement, and any other *talents* of the mind we may care to name, or courage, resolution, and constancy of purpose, as qualities of *temperament,* are without doubt good and desirable in many respects; but they can also be extremely bad and hurtful when the will is not good which has to make use of these gifts of nature, and which for this reason has the term '*character*' applied to its peculiar quality. It is exactly the same with *gifts of fortune.* Power, wealth, honour, even health and that complete well-being and contentment with one's state which goes by the name of '*happiness*', produce boldness, and as a consequence often over-boldness as well, unless a good will is present by which their influence on the mind – and so too the whole principle of action – may be corrected and adjusted to universal ends…

A good will is not good because of what it effects or accomplishes – because of its fitness for attaining some proposed end: it is good through its willing alone – that is, good in itself. Considered in itself it is to be esteemed beyond comparison as far higher than anything it could ever bring about merely in order to favour some inclination or, if you like, the sum total of inclinations. Even if, by some special disfavour of destiny or by the niggardly endowment of stepmotherly nature, this will is entirely lacking in power to carry out its intentions; if by its utmost effort it still accomplishes nothing, and only good will is left (not, admittedly, as a mere wish, but as the straining of every means so far as they are in our control); even then it would still shine like a jewel for its own sake as something which has its full value in itself. Its usefulness or uselessness can neither add to, nor subtract from, this value. Its usefulness would be merely, as it were, the setting which enables us to handle it better in our ordinary dealings or to attract the attention of those not yet sufficiently expert, but not to commend it to experts or to determine its value.

…Since reason is not sufficiently serviceable for guiding the will safely as regards its objects and the satisfaction of all our needs (which it in part even multiplies) – a

purpose for which an implanted natural instinct would have led us much more surely; and since none the less reason has been imparted to us as a practical power – that is, as one which is to have influence on the will; its true function must be to produce a *will* which is *good*, not as a *means* to some further end, but *in itself*; and for this function reason was absolutely necessary in a world where nature, in distributing her aptitudes, has everywhere else gone to work in a purposive manner. Such a will need not on this account be the sole and complete good, but it must be the highest good and the condition of all the rest, even of all our demands for happiness. In that case we can easily reconcile with the wisdom of nature our observation that the cultivation of reason which is required for the first and unconditioned purpose may in many ways, at least in this life, restrict the attainment of the second purpose – namely, happiness – which is always conditioned; and indeed that it can even reduce happiness to less than zero without nature proceeding contrary to its purpose; for reason, which recognizes as its highest practical function the establishment of a good will, in attaining this end is capable only of its own peculiar kind of contentment – contentment in fulfilling a purpose which in turn is determined by reason alone, even if this fulfilment should often involve interference with the purposes of inclination.

We have now to elucidate the concept of a will estimable in itself and good apart from any further end. This concept, which is already present in a sound natural understanding and requires not so much to be taught as merely to be clarified, always holds the highest place in estimating the total worth of our actions and constitutes the condition of all the rest. We will therefore take up the concept of duty, which includes that of a good will, exposed, however, to certain subjective limitations and obstacles. These, so far from hiding a good will or disguising it, rather bring it out by contrast and make it shine forth more brightly.

I will here pass over all actions already recognized as contrary to duty, however useful they may be with a view to this or that end; for about these the question does not even arise whether they could have been done for *the sake of duty* inasmuch as they are directly opposed to it. I will also set aside actions which in fact accord with duty, yet for which men have *no immediate inclination*, but perform them because impelled to do so by some other inclination. For there it is easy to decide whether the action which accords with duty has been done *from duty* or from some purpose of self-interest. This distinction is far more difficult to perceive when the action accords with duty and the subject has in addition an *immediate* inclination to the action. For example it certainly accords with duty that a grocer should not overcharge his inexperienced customer; and where there is much competition a sensible shopkeeper refrains from so doing and keeps to a fixed and general price for everybody so that a child can buy from him just as well as anyone else. Thus people are served *honestly*; but this is not nearly enough to justify us in believing that the shopkeeper has acted in this way from duty or from principles of fair dealing; his interests required him to do so. We cannot assume him to have in addition an immediate inclination towards his customers, leading him, as it were out of love, to give no man preference over another in the matter of price. Thus the action was done neither from duty nor from immediate inclination, but solely from purposes of self-interest.

On the other hand, to preserve one's life is a duty, and besides this every one has also an immediate inclination to do so. But on account of this the often anxious precautions taken by the greater part of mankind for this purpose have no inner

worth, and the maxim of their action is without moral content. They do protect their lives *in conformity with duty* but not *from the motive of duty.* When on the contrary, disappointments and hopeless misery have quite taken away the taste for life; when a wretched man, strong in soul and more angered at his fate than faint-hearted or cast down, longs for death and still preserves his life without loving it – not from inclination or fear but from duty; then indeed his maxim has a moral content.

To help others where one can is a duty, and besides this there are many spirits of so sympathetic a temper that, without any further motive of vanity or self-interest, they find an inner pleasure in spreading happiness around them and can take delight in the contentment of others as their own work. Yet I maintain that in such a case an action of this kind, however right and however amiable it may be, has still no genuinely moral worth. It stands on the same footing as other inclinations – for example, the inclination for honour, which if fortunate enough to hit on something beneficial and right and consequently honourable, deserves praise and encouragement, but not esteem; for its maxim lacks moral content, namely, the performance of such actions, not from inclination, but *from duty.* Suppose then that the mind of this friend of man were overclouded by sorrows of his own which extinguished all sympathy with the fate of others, but that he still had power to help those in distress, though no longer stirred by the need of others because sufficiently occupied with his own; and suppose that, when no longer moved by any inclination, he tears himself out of this deadly insensibility and does the action without any inclination, for the sake of duty alone; then for the first time his action has its genuine moral worth…

To assure one's own happiness is a duty (at least indirectly); for discontent with one's state, in a press of cares and amidst unsatisfied wants, might easily become a great *temptation to the transgression of duty.* But here also, apart from regard to duty, all men have already of themselves the strongest and deepest inclination towards happiness, because precisely in this idea of happiness all inclinations are combined into a sum total… But… when the universal inclination towards happiness has failed to determine a man's will, when good health, at least for him, has not entered into his calculations as so necessary, what remains over, here as in other cases, is a law – the law of furthering his happiness, not from inclination, but from duty; and in thus for the first time his conduct has a real moral worth.

It is doubtless in this sense that we should understand too the passages from Scripture in which we are commanded to love our neighbour and even our enemy. For love out of inclination cannot be commanded; but kindness done from duty – although no inclination impels us, and even although natural and unconquerable disinclination stands in our way – is *practical,* and not *pathological,* love, residing in the will and not in the propensions of feeling, in principles of action and not of melting compassion; and it is this practical love alone which can be an object of command.

Our second proposition is this: An action done from duty has its moral worth, *not in the purpose* to be attained by it, but in the maxim in accordance with which it is decided upon; it depends therefore, not on the realization of the object of the action, but solely on the *principle* of *volition* in accordance with which, irrespective of all objects of the faculty of desire, the action has been performed…

Our third proposition, as an inference from the two preceding, I would express thus: *Duty is the necessity to act out of reverence for the law.* For an object as the effect

of my proposed action I can have an *inclination*, but *never reverence*, precisely because it is merely the effect, and not the activity, of a will. Similarly for inclination as such, whether my own or that of another, I cannot have reverence: I can at most in the first case approve, and in the second case sometimes even love – that is, regard it as favourable to my own advantage. Only something which is conjoined with my will solely as a ground and never as an effect – something which does not serve my inclination, but outweighs it or at least leaves it entirely out of account in my choice – and therefore only bare law for its own sake, can be an object of reverence and therewith a command. Now an action done from duty has to set aside altogether the influence of inclination, and along with inclination every object of the will; so there is nothing left able to determine the will except objectively the *law* and subjectively *pure reverence* for this practical law,[1] and therefore the maxim[2] of obeying this law even to the detriment of all my inclinations . . .

But what kind of law can this be the thought of which, even without regard to the results expected from it, has to determine the will if this is to be called good absolutely and without qualification? Since I have robbed the will of every inducement that might arise for it as a consequence of obeying any particular law, nothing is left but the conformity of actions to universal law as such, and this alone must serve the will as its principle. That is to say, I ought never to act except in such a way *that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law.* Here bare conformity to universal law as such (without having as its base any law prescribing particular actions) is what serves the will as its principle, and must so serve it if duty is not to be everywhere an empty delusion and a chimerical concept. The ordinary reason of mankind also agrees with this completely in its practical judgements and always has the aforesaid principle before its eyes.

Take this question, for example. May I not, when I am hard pressed, make a promise with the intention of not keeping it? Here I readily distinguish the two senses which the question can have – Is it prudent, or is it right, to make a false promise? The first no doubt can often be the case. I do indeed see that it is not enough for me to extricate myself from present embarrassment by this subterfuge: I have to consider whether from this lie there may not subsequently accrue to me much greater

[1] *It might be urged against me that I have merely tried, under cover of the word '*reverence*', to take refuge in an obscure feeling instead of giving a clearly articulated answer to the question by means of a concept of reason. Yet although reverence is a feeling, it is not a feeling *received* through outside influence, but one *self-produced* by a rational concept, and therefore specifically distinct from feelings of the first kind, all of which can be reduced to inclination or fear. What I recognize immediately as law for me, I recognize with reverence, which means merely consciousness of the *subordination* of my will to a law without the mediation of external influences on my senses. Immediate determination of the will by the law and consciousness of this determination is called '*reverence*', so that reverence is regarded as the *effect* of the law on the subject and not as the cause of the law . . . All reverence for a person is properly only reverence for the law (of honesty and so on) of which that person gives us an example. Because we regard the development of our talents as a duty we see too in a man of talent a sort of *example of the law* (the law of becoming like him by practice) and this is what constitutes our reverence for him. All moral *interest*, so called, consists solely in *reverence* for the law. [This note repositioned from its location in the original.]

[2] *A *maxim* is the subjective principle of a volition: an objective principle (that is, one which would also serve subjectively as a practical principle for all rational beings if reason had full control over the faculty of desire) is a practical *law*.

inconvenience than that from which I now escape, and also (since, with all my supposed *astuteness*, to foresee the consequences is not so easy that I can be sure there is no chance, once confidence in me is lost, of this proving far more disadvantageous than all the ills I now think to avoid) whether it may not be a *more prudent* action to proceed here on a general maxim and make it my habit not to give a promise except with the intention of keeping it. Yet it becomes clear to me at once that such a maxim is always founded solely on fear of consequences. To tell the truth for the sake of duty is something entirely different from doing so out of concern for inconvenient results; for in the first case the concept of the action already contains in itself a law for me, while in the second case I have first of all to look around elsewhere in order to see what effects may be bound up with it for me. When I deviate from the principle of duty, this is quite certainly bad; but if I desert my prudential maxim, this can often be greatly to my advantage, though it is admittedly safer to stick to it. Suppose I seek, however, to learn in the quickest way and yet unerringly how to solve the problem 'Does a lying promise accord with duty?' I have then to ask myself 'Should I really be content that my maxim (the maxim of getting out of a difficulty by a false promise) should hold as a universal law (one valid both for myself and others)? And could I really say to myself that every one may make a false promise if he finds himself in a difficulty from which he can extricate himself in no other way?' I then become aware at once that I can indeed will to lie, but I can by no means will a universal law of lying; for by such a law there could properly be no promises at all, since it would be futile to profess a will for future action to others who would not believe my profession or who, if they did so over-hastily, would pay me back in like coin; and consequently my maxim, as soon as it was made a universal law, would be bound to annul itself...

Now I say that man, and in general every rational being, *exists* as an end in himself, *not merely as a means* for arbitrary use by this or that will: he must in all his actions, whether they are directed to himself or to other rational beings, always be viewed *at the same time as an end.* All the objects of inclination have only a conditioned value; for if there were not these inclinations and the needs grounded on them, their object would be valueless... Thus the value of all objects that can be produced by our action is always conditioned. Beings whose existence depends, not on our will, but on nature, have none the less, if they are non-rational beings, only a relative value as means, and are consequently called *things.* Rational beings, on the other hand, are called *persons* because their nature already marks them out as ends in themselves – that is, as something which ought not to be used merely as a means – and consequently imposes to that extent a limit on all arbitrary treatment of them (and is an object of reverence). Persons, therefore, are not merely subjective ends whose existence as an object of our actions has a value *for us*; they are *objective ends* – that is, things whose existence is in itself an end, and indeed an end such that in its place we can put no other end to which they should serve *simply* as means; for unless this is so, nothing at all of *absolute* value would be found anywhere. But if all value were conditioned, – that is, contingent – then no supreme principle could be found for reason at all.

If then there is to be a supreme practical principle, and – so far as the human will is concerned – a categorical imperative, it must be such that from the idea of something which is necessarily an end for every one, because it is an *end in itself*, it forms an *objective* principle of the will, and consequently can serve as a practical law. The

ground of this principle is this: *Rational nature exists as an end in itself.* This is the way in which a man necessarily conceives his own existence; it is therefore so far a principle of human actions. But it is also the way in which every other rational being conceives his existence on the same rational ground which is valid also for me; hence it is at the same time an *objective* principle, from which, as a supreme practical ground, it must be possible to derive all laws for the will. The practical imperative will therefore be as follows: *Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.*

6 Happiness as the Foundation of Morality: John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism**

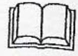
Theories of morality are nowadays often classified as either (*a*) consequentialist or (*b*) deontological, depending on whether they assess the worth of actions or classes of action (*a*) in terms of their results or consequences, or (*b*) on the basis of their conformity to some principle or principles of duty (the term 'deontological' comes from the Greek *deon*, obligatory). Kant's approach (see previous extract) is firmly deontological in character, while the extract that follows, by the celebrated nineteenth-century philosopher John Stuart Mill, belongs squarely in the consequentialist tradition. Mill argues that the rightness or wrongness of an act depends not on any intrinsic worth (contrast Kant), but on the results it produces, or tends to produce. The standard of goodness which Mill employs for assessing those results is Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle: actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. Happiness is defined by Mill as pleasure and the absence of pain.

Mill did not invent utilitarianism. The notion that pleasure might provide a standard for evaluating action had been widely canvassed in ancient Greek philosophy (notably by Epicurus, 341–270 BC), and Mill's more immediate predecessor, Jeremy Bentham, had declared that pleasure and pain were the 'sovereign masters' determining what mankind ought to do.[1] While supporting Bentham's general approach, Mill was sensitive to the worry that such a doctrine might appear to advocate gross physical indulgence, and so be represented as a 'doctrine worthy of swine'. To counter this, he distinguishes 'higher' from 'lower' pleasures: some kinds of pleasure (those involving our more elevated intellectual faculties) are more valuable than others, and hence it is 'better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied'. Though Mill tries to bolster his distinction by appeal to the verdict of 'competent judges' (those who have tried both kinds of pleasure), critics have objected that it is not strictly consistent with his principles of utility: if pleasure is the only ultimate standard, then it might have been more consistent to say (as Bentham did) that 'quantity of pleasure being equal, push-pin is as good as poetry'. Among other objections to utilitarianism addressed by Mill in the following extract is the worry that a consequentialist system of ethics may lead us to break important rules of conduct: if the overall balance of pleasure is the only standard, why should I not tell lies whenever

* J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism* [1861], ch. 2; abridged, punctuation occasionally modified. Many editions available, including that by R. Crisp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), with introduction and notes.

[1] 'Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pleasure and pain. It is for them to determine what we ought to do, as well as what we shall do' (*An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* [1789], ch. 1). See also introduction to Part IX, extract 6, below.

I can maximize pleasure by doing so? Mill replies that utilitarians will want to instil a sense of veracity in the population, since truth-telling is generally productive of happiness. Here and later on in the extract he suggests that utilitarians will not try to make each individual decision by direct reference to the greatest happiness principle, but instead will stick to rules or guidelines based on our experience of the kind of conduct that tends to maximize happiness. The resulting version of utilitarianism, now known as 'indirect' or 'rule' utilitarianism, has strongly influenced the subsequent development of moral philosophy.



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 idea 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 grovelling; 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... 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 conception of happiness. Human beings have faculties more elevated than the animal appetites, and when once made conscious of them, do not regard anything as happiness which does not include their gratification. I do not, indeed, consider the Epicureans to have been by any means faultless in drawing out their scheme of consequences from the utilitarian principle. To do this in any sufficient manner, many Stoic, as well as Christian elements require to be included. But there is no known Epicurean theory of life which does not assign to the pleasures of the intellect, of the feelings and imagination, and of the moral sentiments, a much higher value as pleasures than to those of mere sensation. It must be admitted, however, that utilitarian writers in general have placed the superiority of mental over bodily pleasures chiefly in the greater permanence, safety, uncostliness, etc., of the former – that is, in their circumstantial advantages rather than in their intrinsic nature. And on all these points utilitarians have fully proved their case; but they might have taken the other, and, as it may be called, higher ground, with entire consistency. It is quite compatible with the principle of utility to recognize the fact that some *kinds* of pleasure are more

desirable and more valuable than others. It would be absurd that while, in estimating all others things, quality is considered as well as quantity, the estimation of pleasures should be supposed to depend on quantity alone.

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

Now it is an unquestionable fact that those who are equally acquainted with, and equally capable of appreciating and enjoying, both, do give a most marked preference to the manner of existence which employs their higher faculties... A being of higher faculties requires more to make him happy, is capable probably of more acute suffering, and certainly accessible to it at more points, than one of an inferior type; but in spite of these liabilities, he can never really wish to sink into what he feels to be a lower grade of existence... Whoever supposes that this preference takes place at a sacrifice of happiness – that the superior being, in anything like equal circumstances, is not happier than the inferior – confounds the two very different ideas, of happiness, and content. It is indisputable that the being whose capacities of enjoyment are low has the greatest chance of having them fully satisfied; and a highly endowed being will always feel that any happiness which he can look for, as the world is constituted, is imperfect. But he can learn to bear its imperfections, if they are at all bearable; and they will not make him envy the being who is indeed unconscious of the imperfections, but only because he feels not at all the good which those imperfections qualify. It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are of a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question. The other party to the comparison knows both sides...

From this verdict of the competent judges, I apprehend there can be no appeal. On a question which is the best worth having of two pleasures, or which of two modes of existence is the most grateful to the feelings, apart from its moral attributes and from its consequences, the judgement of those who are qualified by knowledge of both, or, if they differ, that of the majority among them, must be admitted as final. And there needs be the less hesitation to accept this judgement respecting the quality of pleasures, since there is no other tribunal to be referred to even on the question of quantity. What means are there of determining which is the acutest of two pains, or the intensest of two pleasurable sensations, except the general suffrage of those who are familiar with both? Neither pains nor pleasures are homogenous, and pain is always heterogeneous with pleasure. What is there to decide whether a particular pleasure is worth purchasing at the cost of a particular pain, except the feelings and judgement of the experienced? When, therefore, those feelings and judgement declare the pleasures derived from the higher faculties to be preferable *in kind*, apart from the

question of intensity, to those of which the animal nature, disjoined from the higher faculties, is susceptible, they are entitled on this subject to the same regard...

According to the Greatest Happiness Principle, as above explained, the ultimate end, with reference to and for the sake of which all other things are desirable (whether we are considering our own good or that of other people), is an existence exempt as far as possible from pain, and as rich as possible in enjoyments, both in point of quantity and quality... This being, according to the utilitarian opinion, the end of human action, is necessarily also the standard of morality; which may accordingly be defined [as] the rules and precepts for human conduct by the observance of which an existence such as has been described might be, to the greatest extent possible, secured to all mankind; and not to them only, but, so far as the nature of things admits, to the whole sentient creation...

I must again repeat what the assailants of utilitarianism seldom have the justice to acknowledge, that the happiness which forms the utilitarian standard of what is right in conduct is not the agent's own happiness, but that of all concerned. As between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator. In the golden rule of Jesus of Nazareth we read the complete spirit of the ethics of utility. To do as you would be done by, and to love your neighbour as yourself, constitute the ideal perfection of utilitarian morality. As the means of making the nearest approach to this ideal, utility would enjoin, first, that laws and social arrangements should place the happiness, or (as speaking practically it may be called) the interest, of every individual as nearly as possible in harmony with the interest of the whole; and secondly, that education and opinion, which have so vast a power over human character, should so use that power as to establish in the mind of every individual an indissoluble association between his own happiness and the good of the whole...

The objectors to utilitarianism cannot always be charged with representing it in a discreditable light. On the contrary, those among them who entertain anything like a just idea of its disinterested character sometimes find fault with its standard as being too high for humanity. They say it is exacting too much to require that people shall always act from the inducement of promoting the general interests of society. But this is to mistake the very meaning of a standard of morals, and confound the rule of actions with the motive of it. It is the business of ethics to tell us what are our duties, or by what test we may know them, but no system of ethics requires that the motive of all we do shall be a feeling of duty; on the contrary, ninety-nine hundredths of all our actions are done from other motives, and rightly so done, if the rule of duty does not condemn them... He who saves a fellow creature from drowning does what is morally right, whether his motive be duty, or the hope of being paid for his trouble... But to speak only of actions done from the motive of duty, and in direct obedience to principle: it is a misapprehension of the utilitarian mode of thought to conceive it as implying that people should fix their minds upon so wide a generality as the world, or society at large. The great majority of good actions are directed not for the benefit of the world, but for that of the individual, of which the good of the world is made up; and the thoughts of the most virtuous man need not on these occasions travel beyond the particular persons concerned, except as far as is necessary to assure himself that in benefiting them he is not violating the rights, that is, the legitimate and authorized expectations, of anyone else. The multiplication of happiness is, according to the

utilitarian ethics, the object of virtue: the occasions on which any person (except one in a thousand) has it in his power to do this on an extended scale, in other words to be a public benefactor, are but exceptional; and on these occasions alone is he called on to consider public utility; in every other case, private utility, the interest or happiness of some few persons, is all he has to attend to. Those alone, the influence of whose actions extends to society in general, need concern themselves habitually about so large an object. In the case of abstinences indeed – of things which people forbear to do from moral considerations, though the consequences in the particular case might be beneficial – it would be unworthy of an intelligent agent not be consciously aware that the action is of a class which, if practised generally, would be generally injurious, and that this is the ground of the obligation to abstain from it. The amount of regard for the public interest implied in this recognition is not greater than is demanded by every system of morals, for they all enjoin to abstain from whatever is manifestly pernicious to society…

Again, Utility is often summarily stigmatized as an immoral doctrine, by giving it the name of Expediency, and taking advantage of the popular use of that term to contrast it with Principle. But the Expedient, in the sense in which it is opposed to the Right, generally means that which is expedient for the particular interest of the agent himself; as when a minister sacrifices the interest of his country to keep himself in place. When it means anything better than this, it means that which is expedient for some immediate object, some temporary purpose, but which violates a rule whose observance is expedient in a much higher degree. The Expedient, in this sense, instead of being the same thing with the useful, is a branch of the hurtful. Thus it would often be expedient, for the purpose of getting over some momentary embarrassment, or attaining some object immediately useful to ourselves or others, to tell a lie. But inasmuch as the cultivation in ourselves of a sensitive feeling on the subject of veracity is one of the most useful, and the enfeeblement of that feeling one of the most hurtful, things to which our conduct can be instrumental; and inasmuch as any, even unintentional, deviation from truth does that much towards weakening the trustworthiness of human assertion, which is not only the principal support of all present social well-being, but the insufficiency of which does more than any one thing that can be named to keep back civilization, virtue, everything on which human happiness on the largest scale depends; we feel that the violation, for a present advantage, of a rule of such transcendent expediency is not expedient, and that he who, for the sake of a convenience to himself or some other individual, does what depends on him to deprive mankind of the good, and inflict upon them the evil, involved in the greater or less reliance which they can place in each other's word, acts the part of one of their worst enemies. Yet that even this rule, sacred as it is, admits of possible exceptions, is acknowledged by all moralists; the chief of which is when the withholding of some fact (as of information from a malefactor, or of bad news from a person dangerously ill) would save an individual (especially an individual other than oneself) from great and unmerited evil, and when the withholding can only be effected by denial. But in order that the exception may not extend itself beyond the need, and may have the least possible effect in weakening reliance on veracity, it ought to be recognized, and, if possible, its limits defined; and if the principle of utility is good for anything, it must be good for weighing these conflicting utilities against one another, and marking out the regions within which one or the other preponderates.

Again, defenders of Utility often find themselves called upon to reply to such objections as this – that there is not time, previous to action, for calculating and weighing the effects of any line of conduct on the general happiness... The answer to the objection is that there has been ample time, namely the whole past duration of the human species. During all that time, mankind have been learning by experience the tendencies of actions, on which experience all the prudence as well as all the morality of life are dependent... [T]hat the received code of ethics is by no means of divine right; and that mankind have still much to learn as to the effects of actions on the general happiness, I admit, or rather, earnestly maintain. The corollaries from the principle of utility, like the precepts of every practical art, admit of indefinite improvement, and in a progressive state of the human mind, their improvement is perpetually going on. But to consider the rules of morality as improvable is one thing; to pass over the intermediate generalizations entirely, and endeavour to test each individual action directly by the first principle, is another. It is a strange notion that the acknowledgement of a first principle is inconsistent with the admission of secondary ones. To inform a traveller respecting the place of his ultimate destination is not to forbid the use of landmarks and direction-posts on the way. The proposition that happiness is the end and aim of morality does not mean that no road ought to be laid down to that goal, or that persons going thither should not be advised to take one direction rather than the other... Nobody argues that the art of navigation is not founded on astronomy, because sailors cannot wait to calculate the National Almanack. Being rational creatures, they go to sea with it ready calculated; and all rational creatures go out upon the sea of life with their minds made up on the common questions of right and wrong, as well as on many of the far more difficult questions of wise and foolish. And this, as long as foresight is a human quality, it is to be presumed they will continue to do.

7 Utility and Common-sense Morality: Henry Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics**

The ideas behind the 'indirect' version of utilitarianism propounded by J. S. Mill (see previous extract) were further examined and developed later in the nineteenth century by the Cambridge philosopher Henry Sidgwick. Though Sidgwick is often classified as a utilitarian, his discussions of utilitarianism are concerned in the main to provide a critical account of the relationship between utilitarian theory and ordinary common-sense morality. In the following extract he examines first of all the hypothesis that common sense, based on the long experience of mankind, can be expected to be a reliable guide to those rules and practices which promote happiness. There may be all sorts of reasons, Sidgwick argues, why the prevailing code in any given society may not be an ideal maximizer of utility (such reasons include the limited sympathy and limited intelligence of the human beings involved). Given that the set of rules that has evolved over the ages is likely to be only a very imperfect guide to the general happiness,

* H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* [1874] (7th edn, London: Macmillan, 1907), extracts from Bk IV, ch. 4, § 1; ch. 5, §§ 1–3.