



## **Philosophical Lectures**

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# Chapter 1

## Overview

Let me begin with a story. Once upon a time there was a man who stood behind a telescope and was despairing because, as he said, he had searched all around the sky for some planet of the solar system, but could not find it. Specifically, it was a planet whose name was Earth. A friend referred him to a sage whose name was Martin Heidegger. "What are you searching for?" Heidegger asked the astronomer. "The Earth," the man lamented, "and nowhere in the whole firmament could I find it." "And may I ask you where you have set the tripod?" inquired Heidegger. "On the Earth, of course" was the immediate reply. "O.K." concluded Heidegger. "Here it is."

The subjects we deal with in philosophy are like that; the ground that we stand on but hardly ever think to question. Clearly, the ground is important to what we do seek and for that reason if for no other we should examine from time to time our foundations. Socrates once said "the unexamined life is not worth living." Philosophy is your invitation to examine life and the assumptions we make about it in a critical fashion. We will be examining some important questions and the answers offered by various philosophers. Many of these questions are deceptive in that they appear to be simple but are in fact very difficult. So difficult in fact that we have yet to find answers to many of them.

Our look at philosophy will proceed thematically. We will examine four distinct areas of philosophy in depth and in so doing we will be taking a historical approach to the subject matter. We will begin our investigation roughly twenty five centuries in the past and work forward. We will make a few historical leaps along the way simply because we cannot cover everything in such a short time. Doing so will raise a peculiar problem that you will be tempted to think is one only philosophy must bear. It will seem that there are many competing answers to the

questions and that in fact philosophy makes no progress. I will maintain that this is untrue. What we are seeing in our historical survey is nothing more than the normal formulation of theory and the criticising of it that is a natural part of the quest for an answer. You would see the same thing if you took a historical survey of physics, psychology, sociology, economics, or any other human discipline. The nature of our search for knowledge is to offer possible answers, raise questions about the answers, and formulate refined answers in light of those questions. So without further delay...

Our survey of philosophy will cover four distinct areas.

Metaphysics-the study of the nature of reality. Metaphysics deals with questions like "What is the nature of reality?" "What is the fundamental substance of reality?" "What is the nature of change?" The central issues in metaphysics for us to consider will be the nature of reality and the nature of consciousness (the mind). In metaphysics there are three divisions. First the most common view that there are two distinct substances in the world (mental substance and physical substance) and also two realms of existence. The details of this will come later but for now this view is called dualism. Some of its most prominent advocates were Plato and Descartes both of whom we will be studying in more detail. A second answer to the question postulates that everything in the universe, including the human mind, is made of physical substance. This view is called materialism and is very common in contemporary science though it has its origins in ancient Greek philosophy in such people as Lucretius and Democritus. In the modern era one of the most prominent materialists we will discuss is Thomas Hobbes, a contemporary of Descartes. The third answer to the question of how many substances there are is the most unique. This view, called idealism, postulates that everything in existence is the product of a mind and so is simply an idea. The fundamental nature of reality is thought and the fundamental substance of reality is ideas. The most famous advocate of this theory is the British philosopher George Berkeley.

Epistemology-the study of knowledge. Epistemology deals with questions like "What is the source of our knowledge?" "Can anything be known with certainty?" One of the biggest issues in epistemology is whether there are innate ideas, that is, ideas that are formed in the mind prior to birth. There are two distinct categories in epistemology for us to

investigate. First the theory that says that some knowledge, if not all is innate. We are born knowing some things and do not have to be taught them. This view is called rationalism. There are several degrees of rationalism we will consider from the most radical version which claims that ALL knowledge is innate (defended by Plato) to the more moderate position that some elements of knowledge are innate (defended by Descartes among others). The other side of the coin is the claim that ALL knowledge is learned through sense experience. This view, called empiricism, does not really admit of degrees because its central tenet is the complete denial of innate knowledge. One of its earliest advocates was the famous Greek philosopher, and student of Plato, Aristotle. Empiricism had many modern advocates beginning in the 18th century with three philosophers in particular we will consider: John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume.

The questions raised in these two areas of philosophy no doubt strike many of you as scientific questions. In fact, science has its origins in ancient Greek philosophy. Many of the questions that scientists are asking today were first raised by philosophers. The ancients simply did not make the distinction we make between philosophy and science. Aristotle wrote on many subjects under the heading of philosophy that we would hardly think of as such: meteorology, physics, and biology. In fact, until the 18th century science was considered a part of philosophy called natural philosophy to distinguish it from moral philosophy. Another way to think of this distinction is to say that what we have just discussed is academic philosophy as opposed to applied philosophy which we will now consider.

There are many areas of applied philosophy but the two we will discuss are philosophy of religion and ethics.

Philosophy of religion. This is quite different from theology which is the study of a particular religion's beliefs or comparative religion which is the study of different world religions. Philosophy of religion focuses on the underlying issues of religion and religious belief in general. A central question is the existence of God. As St. Thomas Aquinas once said "if we do not demonstrate that God exists, all consideration of divine things is necessarily suppressed." We will also be considering possible objections to the proofs of God's existence. A second issue in philosophy of religion is the nature of the religious experience. This will bring us to consider

issues such as religious visions, near death experiences, and mediumistic communication. Lastly, we will consider the problem of evil. Simply put this is the question of how evil can exist if God is all powerful and loving.

Ethics. Finally, we will consider ethics which deals with questions such as how one ought to live, the nature of morality and moral obligation, and the general question of right and wrong. In particular we will be discussing two of the most prominent theories in ethics: utilitarianism and deontology. The first postulates that an action is right if it produces the best consequences. That is we should judge an action based on its outcome. The second theory states that we should judge an action not based on its consequences but rather on what motivates the action.

One of the challenges to be faced is to show that the academic field of philosophy can give us insight into the applied field. I want to show that there is a connection between them and that learning about the academic can help us with the application. As we proceed, the point should become clear but let me briefly explain what I mean. Let us begin with philosophy of religion and the question of God's existence; a question in which you perhaps have some passing interest. To answer the question of God's existence (or any other existence for that matter) presupposes some idea about the nature of existence in general. For example, if we begin with the supposition that the universe is composed of physical substance, this may have some bearing on our investigation of God's existence and certainly on our view as to what God is. Merely asking the question implies that we have already addressed the more fundamental issue. Since it is quite likely that many of you have not thought about the metaphysics of this before an investigation of that area will no doubt be helpful and informative.

We can also illustrate the connection between God and epistemology. Quite simply, our view of whether we can have knowledge of God and what this will be like presupposes that we have dealt with issues like the nature of knowledge and where we get knowledge. The proofs for God differ radically based on whether we postulate that some knowledge is innate or all knowledge comes from sense experience. Our answer to this question will, in fact, guide our search for evidence for the existence of God.

## Chapter 2

### **The Relevance of Philosophy**

So many students come to my philosophy class wondering if it will be relevant to their lives or careers. The simple answer to the relevance question is that there's no way to say for sure. As Thomas Sowell points out, relevance is something you can only assess after you've learned a subject. You can't tell until then whether something is relevant to your life or not. Closely related to this point is the fact that none of us knows for sure what will happen next in our lives and so we can never be absolutely sure that a subject, any subject, will not be relevant. Think about it. As a 20 year old you might say, I know I'm never going to use this in my career or life. Assuming (which is a safe assumption) that you'll live for 50-70 more years, how can you say this? How do you know for that length of time what will be relevant to your life and what won't?

Connections can be made between subjects that seem completely unrelated. A good example of this is offered by Jeffrey Schwartz in his book *The Mind and The Brain*. Schwartz himself is a professor of psychiatry who writes about treating patients with OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder). In trying to describe his four step treatment he writes as follows:

"I was sitting at the keyboard, typing out a case history to describe the treatment, with Iver beside me. How to explain what I was doing with patients? Okay, Relabel, Reattribute, Refocus- but what else was going on? It suddenly hit me. In 1989 I had begun reading the Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises, who defined valuing as 'man's emotional reaction to the various states of his environment, both that of the external world and that of the physiological conditions of his own body.' This was exactly what the OCD therapy was changing. Combining Buddhist philosophy with Austrian economics, I had a name for the last of the Four Steps: Revalue."

Could Schwartz have guessed as he was studying Austrian economics that he would one day connect it with Buddhist philosophy to help develop a treatment for OCD? No way! Similarly, you cannot guess how you might find philosophy relevant to your life or career. Rest assured though that the chances are very great that you will. Just consider the subjects philosophy addresses: the meaning of life, ethics, morality, God, knowledge, certainty, the self, the mind, government, society, language. How could learning how to think about these various subjects not be relevant to your life?

But, learning to think is not what everyone wants. Many simply want easy answers to life's most difficult questions and when they are not forthcoming they conclude that there are no answers to these questions or what is worse that philosophy is simply incapable of supplying them. While it is true that philosophy does not provide easy answers, there is still much to be gained by studying the great works of philosophy.

To illustrate let me use a very practical example from Martin Seligman's book *The Optimistic Child*. In describing the process of disputing pessimistic beliefs he outlines a multi-stage process. The first three steps are particularly useful and require the reader to ask the following questions:

1. What is the evidence for my belief?
2. What is the evidence against my belief?
3. What are some other ways of seeing this situation?

These can be very difficult questions to answer especially the second one. Many people are reluctant to search for evidence against their beliefs and all of us find this difficult from time to time for reasons I will discuss in the chapter on using logic. My point here is that the study of philosophy teaches precisely these skills. In reading philosophical texts you are always being asked to consider evidence both for the author's argument as well as against it. This is probably the single greatest reason for the difficulty in many philosophy texts. But, it is an immensely practical skill and one well worth the time and effort to learn.

But given the other opportunities to learn these skills you still may be wondering why do philosophy? This is a question all philosophers must face and answer. However, it is not good enough to provide an answer that will satisfy other academic philosophers. No we must provide an

answer that will satisfy other human beings. Not because philosophers in particular must justify their activity, while others simply perform their activities unjustified, but because our activity, qua philosophers, is prima facie unjustified. It is not clear what we do in the way it is clear, but perhaps equally uninteresting, what historians do. You might not care what it is a historian can tell you, but clearly they can tell you something you didn't know before. Philosophers, it seems, cannot do this. So before we answer the first question, why, we must answer a second question: What is philosophy?

Clearly I cannot provide an answer that will suffice in the short space I will use here. However, I think I can say something about what philosophy is, or better yet what philosophy should be, that will provide us with a foundation upon which to build an answer to our original question. I think philosophy is best thought of as a method. Philosophers clarify concepts and in doing so provide us with a method for thinking clearly. We can see this clearly in the work of Bertrand Russell and Gottlob Frege in the areas of logic and mathematics. Here the notion of clarification can become quite technical. Its application as well is very narrowly defined. However, there is more than an accidental connection between the work of such logicians and the work of Alan Turing and Alonzo Church in mathematics and logic which led to important advancements in computer science.

The other area of clarification which philosophy contributes to in a particularly useful way is in the realm of ordinary language. The best exemplars in this area are John Austin and John Wisdom. This area of philosophical analysis less clearly lends itself to breakthroughs than the previous area, but is not for that reason irrelevant or uninteresting. This philosophy is in a sense potentially more useful because it deals with subject matter that all people commonly use; language. Here the only goal is to understand what we mean when we say things and in doing so improving our clarity. To encourage clarity of thought seems to me to be not only the most noble of philosophical goals, but also the most useful.

I have defined philosophy here in terms of utility. The use of philosophy is clarification and the value of this can be seen in its application to what we do and say and think. However, I do not think this line of reasoning constitutes the best answer to our original question concerning why we should do philosophy. This line of reasoning fails for me because it is not

universal. Everyone need not do philosophy, in this respect, because everyone need not desire clarity in their language use. They may feel that their ways of talking and thinking are in need of no further clarification. Additionally, there is no universal need for clarity in logic or mathematics because everyone need not deal with the concepts of logic and mathematics. The best reason to do philosophy would be a reason which would encourage everyone to do philosophy in the sense of philosophy I have outlined. However, the best answer to the normative question, why ought I to think philosophically or clearly, will appeal to the sheer humanness of doing philosophy. Philosophy is a way to enhance human communication.

The best of philosophy, even in the clarification sense in which I have defined it, would address serious questions in a personal way. In this respect, philosophy provides us with a method, to communicate amongst ourselves on serious human questions. This kind of communication when done philosophically can enhance our ability to communicate and relate to people in general. It is important at this point to contrast this notion of philosophy with some notion of psychoanalysis and be clear about the differences. This kind of philosophical communication is not simply an enunciation of feelings on subjects of personal interest. My ideal of philosophy here is critical thinking, clearly stated, on serious human questions which are in some sense universal. Although they do involve me personally, they do not involve only me. Philosophy deals with and describes our human condition as beings in-the-world, to use Martin Heidegger's phrase and in doing so, it seems to me, we improve our ability to relate to others.

Where, then, lies the end of inquiry? It would seem, on this interpretation of philosophy, that there is strictly speaking no end of inquiry in the sense in which I've normally understand this term. That is, I maintain that philosophy is misunderstood if it is taken to be the quest for the meaning of life for all people and all times. Even if such a thing does exist, philosophy, and all other human disciplines, would be inept in pursuit of it. We are forever enclosed in our human world of meaning and we run up against this barrier when we search the eternal. The problem of the hermeneutical circle is what our philosophy in the twentieth century has left with us; even if it proves to be wrong it is where we must begin our inquiry.

Philosophy is continuous in our life even as our thinking is. It is the goal of the former to improve the latter and in doing so have some positive effect on human life. Philosophy at its best is good conversation; critical, serious, humorous, interesting. It is personal communication. In this respect Wittgenstein has a very personal view of philosophy saying in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, "perhaps this book will be understood only by someone who has himself had the thoughts that are expressed in it... Its purpose would be achieved if it gave pleasure to one person who read and understood it." But philosophy, that is, clear thinking, is not easy. It is a rigorous discipline which works best when it forces us to improve our own thinking. In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein said "I should not like my writing to spare other people the trouble of thinking. But, if possible, to stimulate someone to thoughts of his own." This is the apex of what philosophy can achieve and I hope that my own modest contributions can meet the rigorous standard I have set for philosophy.

# Chapter 3

## New Chapter

If you have decided to pick up a philosophy text to read your first reaction may be that philosophy is nothing more than different people expressing their opinions. This is a common reaction and many times my students confuse the arguments of philosophers with opinions. I want to show in this chapter that philosophy does more than simply express opinions.

It is important to distinguish arguments from opinions because our understanding of what philosophical reasoning does depends on a clear understanding of the difference. Philosophers certainly do express opinions, but they do more than this. This is what makes their works worth reading. If they were only expressing their opinion there would be no reason to concern ourselves with what they say. It is the fact that they provide reasoning to back up their opinion that makes their claims worth noticing and analyzing.

So, what is the difference between an argument and an opinion? Let me illustrate with an example. Suppose I say "Toyota produces the best cars in the world." Clearly, this is my opinion and you may disagree. But, suppose in addition to this I present some reasons for my belief that Toyota produces the best cars in the world. For example, I say that they produce the best cars because they are fuel efficient, they have a high resale value, they are low maintenance, and are inexpensive to repair. Now I am presenting an argument. Granted you may disagree with my argument but now, in order to explain why you disagree, you need to show where my reasoning is faulty. Are my facts incorrect? Do my facts not really support my conclusion? It's no use simply saying that you disagree because that gets us no further. You need to say why you disagree. The reason you need to do this is because I have said why I believe that Toyota produces the best cars in the world. It is the "why" question that

is important.

This kind of question is best answered by providing evidence. However, this raises another question: What constitutes sufficient evidence? This is well answered by Vincent Ruggiero in a book titled *Beyond Feelings: A Guide to Critical Thinking*. In it, he spells out three general guidelines. First, "evidence is sufficient when it permits a judgment to be made with certainty. Wishing, assuming, or pretending that a judgment is correct does not constitute certainty." This standard is usually very difficult to reach which brings us to the second point. "If certainty is unattainable, evidence is sufficient if one view of the issue has been shown to have the force of probability." The important consideration when trying to demonstrate probability is that you have considered all options and shown, not simply stated, that your position is the most probable among all competing options. If certainty and probability are both unattainable then you should conclude that "the evidence must be considered insufficient."

Ideally the evidence for a particular conclusion should be evaluated objectively. However, this can be difficult. Another issue arises when there is a possibility that the evaluation of evidence is biased. Ruggiero provides some clues for detecting such bias. Bias may be affecting your ability to fairly evaluate the evidence if the following are true: "You approach your evaluation wanting one side to be proved right. You begin your investigation assuming that familiar views will prove correct. You look for evidence that supports the side of the issue you favor and ignore evidence that opposes it." These strategies will not provide you with the best chance of arriving at a well-reasoned conclusion.

Some people take a very futile approach to philosophical argument saying that we will never be able to resolve such questions. Questions about God's existence, morality, innate ideas, and the origin of life are all difficult questions. But, when you say that we will never be able to resolve or settle these debates you are making a claim that needs to be defended. Why do you say this? What evidence do you have to back up your claim? If you have no evidence other than your own opinion then you have not really advanced the conversation. As difficult as it is, we need to focus on the realm of argumentation when doing philosophy. The mere expression of opinion in and of itself is of little value to the progress that can be made in philosophical reasoning. To say that

philosophical questions such as the existence of God can never be resolved or are simply a matter of opinion reduces them to insignificance. If they cannot be answered or resolved then why discuss them at all? In fact, the questions do have answers, which is different than saying that the questions can be easily answered or answered soon. To say that they cannot be answered is to say that they are unimportant questions and that they make no difference to the world around us. But, doesn't it matter whether or not there is a God? Wouldn't the world be different depending on which outcome is true? The same goes for questions of morality or innate knowledge or the origin of life.

Confusion occurs when people say that something cannot be proved. Perhaps you have said that God's existence cannot be proved or there is no way to prove whether there are innate ideas or whether a particular action is moral or immoral. The confusion here is well explained by James Rachels in a book called *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. In the book he distinguishes between "proving an opinion to be correct" and "persuading someone to accept your proof." Don't think that you are failing to prove your opinion correct by presenting an argument for it just because you are failing to persuade someone to accept your proof. There is a difference.

Proof is itself a misunderstood word and one I would discourage using in the context of philosophical argumentation. The reason is because the word "proof" is taken to mean demonstrated with 100% accuracy never to be refuted ever. If this is your notion of proof then nothing can be proved. But, in the real world of argumentation this is not a realistic standard to demand of any argument except perhaps for mathematical proofs. The standard we should rely on is an inductive standard asking what conclusion is most probable given the available evidence. We'll discuss the notion of proof in more detail in the chapter on logic.

# Chapter 4

## New Chapter

Philosophy is, in the main, the study of ideas. One might wonder whether this is worth doing. I will try to maintain throughout the book that the study of ideas is extremely important. Why? So much of what we are as individual human beings and as a community depends on ideas. Our actions are based, in part, on our beliefs which are structured sets of ideas. Ideas, in fact, are very powerful things and it is mainly because of that power that we should study them and attempt to understand them, both their origins and their implications.

The statement that ideas are powerful may not be obvious right away. Sure, we think about ideas but do they really have any effect on how we live our lives. In fact, they do have quite a powerful effect. This is true whether we consider them individually or, as I will do here, in combination. Ideas as discoveries lead to new inventions and developments which in turn lead to new ideas and the process continues. Permit me to illustrate with the following story. I leave out quite a few details and only mean to illustrate the idea (!) that ideas are powerful things.

In 1905 Albert Einstein wondered what it might be like to ride on a beam of light. This question gave rise to an idea which rewrote the laws of physics. In a fundamental way, Einstein changed how we thought about the universe and our place in it with his theory of relativity. In a much more tangible way he helped change the way we use energy with his famous equation  $E=mc^2$  because his theory helped pave the way for the atomic bomb.

When Einstein published his theory he was working in the Swiss patent office. Patents, of course, are society's legal way of codifying the importance of ideas. It is important to protect ideas because of their immense power and in some cases immense power to make money. The law and

making money have always been important concerns but the two together created a problem in Europe after the fall of Rome. As historian James Burke points out, the legal problem in the middle ages was not a lack of law, it was that there was too much law. There was no standardized way to codify and understand the various forms of law from local custom to tribal law.

The problem was solved, in part, in 1076 when a liberal arts teacher named Irnerius found a copy of Roman law written by the emperor Justinian, lost since 603. I say the problem was solved in part because, having found the law, they still had to understand it. The technique they developed to help understand the law was called glossing. This was a way of interpreting the text by adding notes and analyses to the text which were often used as lecture notes by teachers. A great idea which led to the modern institution designed to communicate ideas: the University.

Of course, a university is no good without a curriculum. The solution to this problem was offered by none other than a lawyer! His name was Martianus Capella and the book he published shortly after the fall of the Roman Empire in 410 was to become the standard for learning during the middle-ages. He condensed into nine volumes the important subjects of learning which were to become the seven liberal arts. First were the more fundamental subjects such as grammar, rhetoric, and logic. To these he added more practical subjects like music theory, geometry, arithmetic, and astronomy.

Logic itself was the idea of a Greek philosopher named Aristotle. He designed it to help solve practical problems and in 1310 a German Dominican named Theodoric of Freiburg used it to design an experiment. In doing so he helped usher in the scientific method. The irony of this was that the experiment he designed, to explain the rainbow, involved looking into crystal balls!

Another example of the practical application of science came in 1436. At the time Florence was looking for a landmark; something to distinguish their city and put it on the map as a center of cosmopolitan activity. An architect named Filippo Brunelleschi had an idea to put the largest dome ever constructed on top of the unfinished cathedral. The problem was how to do it. A university friend of his named Toscanelli helped with the

answer by appealing to a very old idea dreamed up by the Greek mathematician Ptolemy. The idea was to use geometrical grid lines. The principles of perspective geometry helped Brunelleschi complete his dome but it did more than that. Perspective allows you to map a three dimensional surface on a two dimensional piece of paper. Great for creating maps of the earth or anywhere else you care to explore. Thus allowing us to put Florence, and every other city in the world, on the map, literally. In fact we used those principles to land a man on the moon in 1969 and put a rover on Mars just last year. In Brunelleschi's day another explorer used them to attempt to make it to India by traveling west. He failed. But in doing so Columbus discovered America.

The nation of America itself was founded on an idea. The idea, expressed by Thomas Jefferson, that all human beings are endowed by their creator with inalienable rights, was derived in part from the philosopher John Locke. He was just one example of a philosophical idea that led to a revolution. In 1789, the year we were ratifying our Constitution, another revolution was taking place in France, aided by the writing of a French philosopher named Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The essence of the new French republic, and its motto, was a triad of ideas: liberty, equality, fraternity.

The power of ideas to cause revolutions was in part the product of an idea that was to change everything in the 1450s. Gutenberg's printing press allowed for the swift and accurate dissemination of ideas including religious ideas. In particular, the religious ideas of Martin Luther and his reformation.

Three revolutions and at the heart of each is an idea. Revolutions represent, to say the least, the most radical changes that ideas can create. But not everyone is a fan of change. In 1752 a biologist named Linneaus set out to show that the one thing that plant and animal species never did was change. Ironically enough the series of ideas he set in motion with his book on nature changed our understanding of nature forever and forever made change an important part of that understanding.

The story of change in nature, and the changes that this story created were begun in 1859 with the publication of Charles Darwin's Origin of Species. The inspiration for Darwin's theory came, in part, from a geologist named Charles Lyell who said that yes, contrary to Linneaus, things

do change but the rate of change is painfully slow.

Darwin himself was often accused of being against religion. Certainly many of his most zealous advocates were. Darwin himself held a degree in theology which makes you wonder just how anti-religious he actually was. But, as I say, some of his biggest fans were against religion. In particular a philosopher named Karl Marx who himself was the philosophical inspiration for yet another revolution in 1917; this one in Russia.

Religion has always been at the heart of change; as early as 1300 BC, in fact, when the pharaoh Amenophis IV ascended the throne. Upon being crowned pharaoh he promptly changed his name to Akhenaton, declared that the only god worth worshipping was the Aten, and ushered in the religious institution of monotheism that three major religions today adhere to.

Einstein himself was very impressed with God's role in the cosmos claiming that the one thing God would never do is "play dice with the universe." The story comes full circle then, with a return to Einstein's theory of relativity. The theory depends, in part, on the fact that the speed of light is a universal constant; it never changes. Current research in physics is beginning to call this fact into question. The ramifications of this we have yet to see but may involve another change and another example of the power of ideas to shape the world around us.

As I said in the beginning philosophy is essentially the study of ideas. In the course of this book, we'll look at such familiar ideas as God, the self, freedom, good, evil, faith, substance, reality. While the ideas we'll look at may be familiar what we say about them and do with them may at times seem strange. The reason for this is due to the fact that when we look at ideas philosophically, we are looking at them with a critical eye. We look at ideas not merely to state them but to state why we believe them. We'll look at the assumptions we make about our ideas and beliefs and, importantly, we'll look at the justification for believing them. This may, from time to time, lead you to question the practicality of what we're doing.

The Greek philosopher Epicurus once said "empty is the argument of the philosopher which does not relieve any human suffering." Philosophy addresses what, for lack of a better term, we can call the "big questions"

in life. How can I deal with change? Does my being here have any meaning? How I can I deal with ethical conflict and moral dilemmas? How can I deal with suffering? How can I live a happy life? These too are important and inherently philosophical questions. The ability to reason and reflect may not solve these problems but it can be helpful. In this sense philosophy can be, not only enjoyable, but also therapeutic.

A final word is in order by way of introducing the subject of philosophy. The word itself means literally "love of wisdom." This puts many people in mind of something very subjective. One person's wisdom is another person's folly. So we may be tempted to conclude that philosophy is nothing but various people's opinions; unsubstantiated opinions at that. If this were true, philosophy would simply not be worth our time to investigate it and learn about it. After all, we all have opinions and some may turn out to be true. Socrates famously made a distinction between true opinion and knowledge. Some opinions may be true though we may not know why or what makes them true. This is why knowledge is to be preferred. Knowledge must be justified.

This is what makes philosophy more than just so many people's opinions. We will see philosophers expressing their opinions but in order to take them seriously we will also demand that they justify them. That is we will want to see whether a philosopher can back up their opinion with facts to defend it. This is what we mean in philosophy by constructing an argument for something. We require this of scientists and will not accept anything less from philosophers. What we will be investigating throughout this course are various philosophical arguments (or theories if you prefer) concerning the questions I mentioned above. It will be our job to consider the arguments and determine whether they can stand up to critical scrutiny. In subjecting them to critical reasoning we will be strengthening our own philosophical ideas as well which is one of the many practical benefits to doing philosophy.

The important thing to remember about analyzing theories is what counts as evidence. We sometimes approach theories of past philosophers with a sense of wonder that they could have been so ignorant as to have come up with such crazy ideas in the first place; especially when there is so little evidence in favor of them.

In response to this consider the following story. Someone once asked the

philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (who we'll be studying later) if he didn't think that people in the middle ages must have been awfully stupid to have thought that the sun goes around the Earth when as any school kid knows the Earth goes around the sun and it doesn't take too many brains to figure that out. Wittgenstein responded, "Well, perhaps but I wonder what it would have looked like if the sun had been going around the Earth?" The point of course is that it would have looked exactly the same. It's not the evidence that guides the theory but rather the theory that guides the evidence. Theory creation always precedes the search for evidence because without theory we would not know what evidence to search for.

Please remember as we look at philosophical theories of the past that people back then weren't stupid; far from it. We do know different things than they did and in many cases we have advanced far from them. But we can gain insight into our thinking today if we can understand their thinking in the past. After all, we live with parts of the past today. We have in essence taken the best of ideas in the past and developed them. Philosophy is in essence the study of ideas and this course can be thought of as a course in the history of ideas. And so without further hesitation we will turn to a consideration of a theory whose fundamental component is the Idea: Plato's theory of Forms.

# Chapter 5

## New Chapter

Someone once said that the rest of philosophy after Plato is merely a footnote to his. There is no question as to the significance of Plato to the rest of philosophy inasmuch as many of the questions we now consider were first dealt with in a systematic way by Plato. This is not to say that Plato was the first to ask such questions; far from it. In fact by the time Plato arrived on the scene philosophy was already a fairly developed field with many advocates of many diverse positions. What Plato did was to offer an attempt to systematically answer the various questions then being asked.

Besides his own insights in philosophy, Plato's other major contribution is to give us some knowledge of his teacher, Socrates, who himself did not write anything. Socrates was interested in knowledge as a way to guide one's life. In his view to know the Good was to do the Good, so obviously, knowledge was very important. Plato's theory begins as an attempt to answer the question of the origin of knowledge; a question of epistemology. In answering this question Plato not only formulates a theory of knowledge but also a metaphysical theory. Before considering the theory itself we should spend some time providing a context for it. Without this context Plato's theory is likely to seem very strange.

As mentioned above, Plato is working within the framework of Socrates' ideas about knowledge. In fact, Socrates was a major inspiration for Plato's theory. Socrates believed that the important thing in philosophy was to arrive at clear concepts. In order to understand a concept we need to arrive at its true definition, what Socrates called the essence of the concept. In the dialogue titled "Euthyphro," Socrates illustrates his method by attempting to answer the question "What is piety?" While failing to come to a definite answer the dialogue illustrates the method Socrates became famous for. He would profess ignorance of a subject and attempt

to elicit from his dialogue partner an adequate answer to the question at hand. The process can be outlined in six steps:

1. Arrive at a statement of the definition of a concept.
2. Try to find examples that would show the original statement is false (this is very important in theorizing; what this step illustrates is the need to search for evidence against one's theory in order to take account of it).
3. If any exceptions are found the original definition must be false or at least imprecise.
4. The definition should then be reformulated.
5. Again we should attempt to find exceptions and continue refining the definition.
6. What we arrive at after repeated attempts is a precise definition of the concept in question.

The result of this method is a much deeper understanding of the concept whether it be piety, truth, justice, good, or whatever.

What fascinated Socrates was our ability to think in terms of abstract ideas. We can observe individual human beings but can think of the general concept of human being as well. The insight that Plato drew from this and the Socratic method was the idea that concepts have reality. This may seem very strange to say but in Plato's view if a concept can be defined it must have a real existence. What kind of existence do ideas (concepts) have? We will address this below. The important thing here is that if something can be thought it must be real. Concepts are not just imaginary creations of the human mind. These concepts which are the source of knowledge have a real separate existence.

Socrates was not the only philosopher Plato learned from. In particular, Plato was inspired by two philosophers with whom he disagreed. One of the most prominent Sophists (wise men who would teach for a fee) of the day was Protagoras. Like many of the Sophists he was a relativist. He believed that each individual decides for himself what is true and what is false. He once said "man is the measure of all things," meaning that each person decides for himself what truth is. For Plato this was completely unworkable as a theory of knowledge. If knowledge were relative and up to each individual to decide upon, then knowledge would be impossible. Consider for example mathematics. Suppose that knowledge were relative. Perhaps for me  $2+3=7$  is true. You would probably

disagree with this but then that would just be your opinion. Now, if this were the case would knowledge of mathematics be possible? Of course not! From this Plato deduces that knowledge must be objective. That is, it must be separate from individual opinion. Remember that!

A second philosopher with whom Plato disagreed was Heraclitus. Greek philosophers were very interested in the nature of change and his theory of change was very popular at the time. In a very common sense fashion, he observed that everything changes; everything is in a constant state of flux. "You can't step into the same river twice." Again for Plato this idea led to impossible conclusions. Knowledge must be about what is, not what is not. That is knowledge must be something we can define (remember Socrates?). Suppose everything is in a constant state of flux. That must mean that our knowledge is in a constant state of flux as well with nothing remaining the same. So again, to use a mathematical example  $2+3=5$  might be true today but since knowledge constantly changes,  $2+3=7$  tomorrow! Clearly for knowledge to be possible some things must be unchanging. Plato did not want to say that everything is unchanging. Clearly Heraclitus is on to something with his observation of change. However, for Plato, knowledge cannot be connected to things that change, otherwise knowledge would be impossible.

OK so where are we. Plato's line of reasoning can be summed up as follows:

1. Knowledge is possible. We do have knowledge so this is not in dispute.
2. Knowledge must be "of something." Plato picked up this little idea from Parmenides a philosopher who preceded Socrates (Socrates himself probably got the idea of essence partially from Parmenides!)
3. The "something" knowledge must be connected to has to be objective (remember the problems with Protagoras' view?)
4. The "something" knowledge must be connected to cannot be changing (remember Heraclitus?)

So where do we go from here? Clearly, we need to learn more about this "something" that knowledge is connected to, since this is the source of our knowledge. We know it must be objective and unchanging. Question: Are there any objects in this world that are BOTH objective and unchanging? For Plato the answer to this question was no. I mean, just look

around, you can't find any unchanging objects. So from this Plato deduced that the source of knowledge must be separate from this world. There must be another world! A transcendent world to be precise. By transcendent we mean separate from space and time. If you think this is a little strange, just pause to consider whether you believe in a heaven or something after this life. If you do then you already believe in a transcendent world so Plato's idea should not be all that foreign to you.

OK. So we know that the source of our knowledge is transcendent which means it is not subject to space and time and we know that the source of our knowledge is unchanging. This must mean that these objects are eternal; that is they have no beginning or ending. Why? Because coming into being and going out of existence are both forms of change and these objects do not change. But how do we know about them if they aren't here in this world.

Clearly, these are not run of the mill everyday objects we are dealing with here. For one thing we can't sense them. So our knowledge of them doesn't come from sense experience. But remember, we do have knowledge. So how do we explain that? It must be the case, says Plato, that our knowledge of these objects is intelligible; that is we learn about them through the intellect not our senses.

A central image that Plato uses to describe his metaphysics and epistemology is the divided line. What this illustrates is that there are different levels of knowledge and reality. If you imagine a vertical line divided into two unequal halves (the bottom half is smaller to reflect the lesser reality and knowledge) the realm below the dividing line is the realm of becoming while the realm above is the realm of Being. From an epistemology perspective the bottom half is opinion while the top half is knowledge.

The metaphysics side is represented on the left while the epistemology is represented on the right. By mathematical forms Plato means things like the triangle or any other perfect geometrical figure. What we illustrate when we draw a triangle is only an imperfect representation of what we conceive of as the perfect triangle. At the top of the line are the true objects of knowledge. These objective, unchanging, transcendent, eternal, intelligible objects Plato called the Forms. They are the source of all our knowledge and more than that they are the source for everything that

exists. To understand the forms better we can address several questions the answers to some of which may already be clear.

1. What are the Forms? Forms for Plato are the most real objects that exist. They function as patterns for the objects and concepts that we have knowledge of in this world. For instance, we can have knowledge of Justice but this knowledge does not come from particular examples of justice that we observe. Rather, the Form of Justice is what allows us to identify particular instances of justice here. The same goes for objects as well. We can observe individual instances of chairs, human beings, trees, etc. But our knowledge of these things, and their very existence, comes from their respective Forms. In this respect, Plato often refers to the Forms as a model (or pattern) for objects.

2. How do Forms interact with objects? Plato also says that the Form causes the object to exist. Objects, on the other hand, participate in the Forms. So the origin of our knowledge comes from the Forms, but more importantly, the origin of things themselves, comes from the Forms. While each class of objects participates in its own Form, Plato is not exactly clear as to how detailed this schema is. He does say that there are not forms for every individual object but it is unclear, for example, whether there are forms not only for each type of animal (dog, cat, fish) but also for each species or breed (of dog, or cat or whatever). The important point is that the Form is the cause and the object is the effect or in the case of concepts, the Form is the cause of our concept (of justice, piety, beauty) and the concept is the effect.

3. How do Forms interact with each other? This gets a little complicated and again, Plato never adequately fills in the details of the theory. But it is clear that just as our concepts exist in a hierarchy so do the Forms. For example, there is a Form for Chair and a Form for Desk. But chairs and desks are types of furniture so there is also a Form Furniture. The hierarchy extends all the way up to higher Forms (such as mathematical forms and abstract concepts. The highest Form is the Form of the Good.

4. Where are the Forms? As we illustrated above, Plato deduces that the Forms are transcendent. So the Forms are definitely not in this world of space and time. The question of where is difficult for Forms since they do not occupy space. Plato does allude from time to time to an eternal realm of Forms but the details of this are necessarily scant. It's kind of like

asking "Where is heaven?" It may not be a place in the conventional sense of the term.

So how do we gain knowledge of the forms? Well, we've said that the Forms are intelligible which means we can only learn of them through the intellect. But for Plato, it is somewhat incorrect to say we learn of them (at least in the ordinary sense of that word). Part of Plato's theory is that the soul is immortal; it not only survives the death of the body it preceded the birth of the body as well. Given this, Plato says that the soul was in contact with the Forms prior to birth. So our knowledge is innate. For Plato this means ALL knowledge. Learning, then, is recollection. Granted, it takes sense experience to trigger the recollection but the knowledge itself does not come from the sense experience. How could it? Sense experience only gives us information about things which are constantly changing and knowledge, as we have shown, cannot be connected to things that are in constant flux.

Plato's theory may sound very alien to our ears. He asks us to believe things we may find hard to believe; especially in the absence of concrete evidence. While it is true that Plato does not offer us concrete evidence this does not necessarily mean his theory is flawed. In epistemology Plato is a rationalist which is a term that means that knowledge comes from reason not sense experience. So it would not seem appropriate to Plato to offer us sense experience as evidence for his theory. Plato's approach is to deduce his conclusions from rational principles. Still, Plato did have his critics. Not everyone agreed with his theory. One particularly eloquent opponent was one of Plato's best students named Aristotle. It is to the philosophy of Aristotle that we turn next.

# Chapter 6

## Aristotle

Plato's theory of the Forms was not without its critics. In particular, Plato's student Aristotle, was a vocal critic of the theory though not with the concept of form entirely. The questions Plato had raised and attempted to answer were worth pursuing and the concept of form was a valuable contribution. But from Aristotle's perspective there were refinements needed in the theory. There were many criticisms that Aristotle put forward but for our purposes we will discuss the three most important.

1. The third man problem
2. The problem of separation
3. The problem of accounting for change

1. To begin with, let's consider the claims made by Plato and see how Aristotle deals with them. Plato's theory claims to account for similarities among groups of objects. The Form explains our ability to see that different human beings (for example) are really examples of the same idea (the Form Human Being). Aristotle, however, disagrees. The only explanation Plato seems to give of the Form explaining similarity is that if you have two people (let's call them James and Jennifer) the Form Human Being will explain what it is that is similar about them.

Does the Form really do this? Aristotle says no and here's why. Suppose I pointed to James and Jennifer and asked whether you think they are similar. You may say yes (or you may say no) but you will probably want me to clarify what makes them similar. To do this, suppose I point to Paul and say that he explains what is similar about James and Jennifer. Have I really answered the question of similarity? It seems that I haven't. In fact, what I've done is raise another similarity that needs explaining,

in this case, the similarity between the pair James and Jennifer, and Paul. In other words, all I have done is offer a third man to explain the original similarity. The problem is that the explanation doesn't do what it claims to do; it just adds more that needs explaining. This could go on forever! I could point to Shelly to explain the similarity between James/Jennifer and Paul but that wouldn't help either. This is the third man problem.

2. Again let's consider a claim Plato makes about the Forms. They are the cause of objects and our knowledge of them. OK, how does causality usually work? One thing causes another to happen but in order for this to occur the first thing must be in contact with the second. For example, if I say I am going to cause the lights to go out in the room, I need to turn off the light switch (or cut the power or something). In any case, I have to make contact with something to generate the effect of the lights going out. If I just stand there and say that I am going to cause the lights to go out, nothing happens. There must be contact between cause and effect.

But according to Plato the Forms and objects are NEVER in contact. Remember, the Forms are transcendent, so they are separate from the world of objects. So how could they be the cause of objects? Aristotle says that they couldn't. Unless... Here's where it's important to remember that Aristotle does not completely dismiss the idea of form. In fact, he agrees with Plato that forms are a cause of objects. But Aristotle maintains that forms cannot be the cause if they are separate from the objects. Conclusion: Forms are not separate from the objects. Instead of postulating that the forms are transcendent Aristotle says that they are immanent; that is that are in the objects themselves. Just as well, we have a hard enough time explaining things in this world without having to worry about a transcendent world of Forms! This insight, that Forms are in the object, has some important implications that we will come to in a moment.

3. The problem of accounting for change may be the most damaging to Plato's theory and, by the same token, gives Aristotle the most important insight into his own theory. The one thing Plato knew about knowledge is that it must be connected to objects which don't change. But these objects (the Forms) are at the same time the cause of objects which do change. Plato has left us with two worlds (the world of Being which doesn't change and the world of becoming which does) but has not explained how they relate. Plato's image of the divided line is very clear

that the world of becoming is less real than the world of Being and that the cause of the becoming is the Being. That must mean that the change in the world of becoming can be explained by the world of being. How this is done remains a mystery in Plato's theory.

To explain this we need to understand the nature of causality in greater detail. This is Aristotle's contribution to metaphysics. While it is true that forms are a cause of physical objects, they are not the cause. In fact, says Aristotle there are four distinct causes of objects which can be understood as answers to questions we may have about the nature of any object.

1. What is the object? This question can be answered by the formal cause (the form).
2. How was the object made? This question requires a different answer. What we are after here is the actual agent of change itself, and this, Aristotle refers to as the efficient cause.
3. What is the object made of? This refers to the "stuff" that the object is composed of; the material cause.
4. What is the object's purpose? For the Greeks things existed for a reason and this was an important component of understanding the cause of any object; this is the final cause.

These four causes actually arise out of two fundamental principles that all objects are composed of: matter and form. These two principles are inseparable. In the natural world there cannot be matter without form and there cannot be form without matter. This is the theory of hylomorphic composition. Hylomorphic is the Greek word for matter and form and reminds us that in the natural world they are inseparable. Notice I said in the natural world which implies that there is an exception to this rule, which we will come back to in a moment.

One of the benefits of this new theory of metaphysics is that it provides an explanation for change. While form explains what an object is, or in Aristotle's words, it is the principle of actuality, matter explains what an object can become. Matter is the principle of potentiality and provides the key for understanding change. Given that each object contains both principles we can understand both what an object is and what it might change to become.

Perhaps an example will help illustrate what Aristotle had in mind. Consider an acorn. We know what it is by its form (the form of an acorn) but we also know what it has the potential to become: an oak tree. The potential is contained in the matter of the acorn (as opposed to the form). Now, we have an interesting question. Is this a complete explanation of the cause of the oak tree? Obviously not since we need to explain the cause of the acorn and this must be another oak tree. Before you accuse Aristotle of going around in circles, remember that the cause of the acorn cannot be the oak tree that comes from it! It has to be a prior oak tree, which means we're not going in a circle, rather backwards, in a straight line. Which raises another question: How far back does this series go?

The causal series we have considered here cannot go on forever. If it did we would never observe the final event in the series. In our example, the final oak tree, the one we're looking at now. Another way of thinking about this is as follows. A causal series cannot be infinite because you cannot go through an infinite series. For example, if I said "don't come back to class until you read an infinite number of books" will you ever come back to class? No! You can't complete an infinite reading assignment just as you cannot pass through an infinite causal series. So the causal series must be finite. There must be a first cause. The question is what is this first cause like? We have three possibilities. 1. a combination of matter and form. 2. Pure matter. 3. Pure form. Now, the first two possibilities cannot be correct because they contain potential which must arise from something prior to it. But if there is anything prior, then it's not the first. So Aristotle deduced that the first cause must be pure form without any matter. Remember the exception mentioned earlier to the theory of hylomorphic composition? This is it. Aristotle called this the unmoved mover. Centuries later, St. Thomas Aquinas would reinterpret this into the familiar form we now use today: God.

Let's consider some final interesting implications of Aristotle's theory. As we've seen he does not entirely reject Plato's concept of the form though Aristotle's version is much different. One of the clearest differences is how many forms there are. For Plato there was one form which gave rise to many objects. No matter how many human beings there are there is only one Form Human Being. On the other hand, for Aristotle, the form is in the object itself which means that there are as many forms as there are objects. It also implies that the way we gain knowledge of the form is much different. For Plato, Forms were intelligible and so we had to gain

knowledge of them through reason. In fact our knowledge was innate which is why Plato was considered a rationalist. However, under Aristotle's theory forms can be observed through the senses. In fact, the mind at birth is like a blank tablet (tabula rasa) upon which sense experience writes knowledge. It was Aristotle who invented this metaphor and, given his denial of innate knowledge, is what makes him an empiricist. It was also Aristotle who claims to have invented logic. It might be more accurate to say that he systematized the ideas into the science we know today. We will now proceed to look at the basic principles of logic.

## Logic

Given that philosophy is conducted through the use of argument and reason, it follows that we need a method for evaluating arguments. This is where need for logic arises. But, the study of logic itself can be difficult and may seem irrelevant especially in the way it is taught in college level logic classes. Thus, I am often confronted with the question: What is the point of studying logic? Before examining the basic elements of logic, let me address this question. This is a very common and quite understandable question especially given the difficulty of the subject and the abstract nature of much of formal logic. What possible purpose could be served in learning logic? When will you ever use logic? Let's look at some reasons and attempt to make the case for the importance of learning logic.

I think there are several distinct arguments that can be made.

1. The relevance argument
2. The argument from the nature of logic
3. The mental exercise argument
4. The general knowledge argument

A common question concerning logic is how it could possibly be relevant to the major of the student or his career. This is a stunning point if one thinks about it in light of the nature of logic which we'll address below. However, one consideration is offered by the economist Thomas Sowell. Relevance is something you can only assess after you've learned a subject. You can't tell until then whether something is relevant to your life or not. Closely related to this point is the fact that none of us knows for sure what will happen next in their life and so we can never be absolutely sure that a subject, any subject, will not be relevant. Think about it. As a 20 year old, you might say "I know I'm never going to use this in my

career or life." Assuming (which is a safe assumption) that you'll live for 50-70 more years, how can you say this? How do you know for that length of time what will be relevant to your life and what won't? I took logic as a sophomore majoring in telecommunications and could have easily believed at the time that I might never use logic again. Who knew I'd end up teaching it!?

Logic is concerned with training the mind to think clearly. Given this, let's ask the question again: When will I ever need logic? OK, so you're really asking: When will I ever need clear thinking? Now, the importance of learning logic should be crystal clear. There isn't a single area of life where clear thinking wouldn't be beneficial to some degree. The real issue here is not whether logic is useful, but how can logic and what we do in a formal logic class help improve our thinking. The real question is not whether clear thinking is needed but how can learning about the categorical syllogism, truth tables, and natural deduction improve our ability to think clearly. I think I have some answers to those questions.

One of the reasons such questions come up in the first place is the apparent strangeness of formal logic. It looks so different than our ordinary use of language because it is a formal symbolic system abstracted from ordinary language. In fact, what we are attempting to analyze in logic is the underlying nature of inferential thinking and to do so we must inspect the form of our reasoning by separating it from its content. Doing so makes it look irrelevant for the same reason that looking at a car engine out of context looks irrelevant to the working of the car. Think about it. If you looked at the engine of a car without ever addressing the purpose or context you would never connect that mechanism with driving your car. If you never bothered to look under the hood you might not even know there is such a thing as an engine! For all you know there's nothing under the hood. So, if you look at the engine for the first time it looks strange. So too does the inner workings of thinking and reasoning. It's only after studying formal logic that you begin to see that the principles of logic are connected with ordinary thinking. So by studying the underlying depth of the subject you can get a greater appreciation of the ordinary application and in the process become better at that application.

Let's look at what formal logic (or symbolic logic) is forcing us to do not from the standpoint of using the principles of formal logic directly, but

from the standpoint of the underlying skills these principles are drawing on. In categorical logic you have to read statements carefully to make distinctions between terms that on the surface sound similar. You have to recognize general rules by looking at specific cases. In propositional logic you have to recognize the general rules underlying the use of certain words and recognize these principles in different situations. Finally, in natural deduction you have to take a set of rules and apply it in an orderly method to solve a problem. OK, look at the skills being used here: rule recognition, abstraction, planning, problem-solving, making distinctions. It is these skills that logic is training you to improve and it is these skills that represent the real practical benefits of learning logic.

Perhaps an analogy will help. Some people go to the gym to workout. They lift weights, do stair climbing, walking machines, etc. Do they do these things to improve their ability to lift weights, climb stairs, and walk? No, they do them for some other benefit which these exercises indirectly lead to. It's the same with the mind. We need some form of exercise for the mind and that's what logic is. The benefits to logic are indirect. That is, what we do in logic is improving our ability to do something else.

So, why don't we just practice the thing itself instead of practicing the skills indirectly by learning logic? Well, the answer is that we do this as well but logic represents a more rigorous form of exercise. Look at it like this. When you walk to your car or to class you are getting some exercise benefit. But, you may also go to the gym. When you carry groceries from the store to your car you are getting some exercise benefit. But, you may also lift weights. Why? Because the more causal form of the exercise isn't really vigorous enough to get the true benefit of doing the exercise. It's the same with logic. When you read a book or magazine you are getting some benefit to your mental exercise. But, you need to train your mind in a more rigorous fashion forcing it to do more involved thinking. Like all exercise your muscles are sore at first until you get used to the exertion. In time you find you are better able to handle the exercise and your general thinking skills improve as a result.

Learning is a funny thing in how it works. The more you know, the more you can learn and the more you know the easier it is to learn something new. Learning, then, is about making connections. The more general knowledge you have the easier it is to make connections. So, in this vein

logic adds one more subject of knowledge to your mind allowing you to make more connections thus making the learning of anything else easier. Not only that, since the subject matter of logic is based on inferential reasoning the very skill of making connections is being learned as you go through your training in logic.

If you know something about psychology, understanding philosophy is easier because they're connected. That's an easy one to see. But there are so many ways that one field of knowledge is connected to another that we don't see immediately. Learning about logic makes it easier to learn about computers. How so? Computer programs are nothing more than logic commands. OK, but what if you're not programming a computer, only using it? Still, there is a benefit to understanding the method of following rules; thinking in an orderly fashion, recognizing that one step follows from another. All these are skills that logic teaches. There are other connections to consider as well but too numerous to list here. However, you might consider that others have thought about these issues long before you got into the classroom. It is not to punish you that they have decided you should take such classes as logic. Their experience in life (sometimes 20, 30, or 40 more years of experience than you have) has shown them that there are benefits to learning about subjects such as logic. You can benefit from their experience. Of course, the alternative is to learn about the benefits the hard way. That is, by forgoing these skills now and discovering that you need them at the worst possible moment.

Given that you don't know what might be useful later in life, and the obvious utility of logic in training the mind, and the connections between different subjects which make learning easier, it only makes sense to obtain as much knowledge as you can while you can get it. There's no better time than right now to add to your knowledge. Even knowledge which has no direct benefits now might be useful to you later on in a direct way, and is certainly useful to you now in indirect ways. Some students come to logic class (and perhaps many others) with the attitude of just wanting to get the grade. That's unfortunate. First, you're paying for something you're not taking delivery on which doesn't make a lot of sense. Like going to the store and purchasing a new big screen plasma TV and paying for it but not picking it up! Students have told me that once they leave the class they'll forget everything they've learned. That's unfortunate too. Again, you're paying for something and not taking

delivery. But also you're missing out on something that WILL benefit you in the near future and MAY benefit you later in life as well.

Are you really willing to discard useful information so quickly? Think twice before doing that. Not only with logic but with every other subject you encounter. Besides, it costs you nothing to hang on to knowledge. The brain is not a sieve leaking out old information to make room for new or a small container, which must be cleared out to make room for new information. The brain is a complex organ capable of making connections between different knowledge sets, and the more connections you make the more knowledgeable you become. Imagine how much better at information processing and using you'd be if you learned the basis of making connections, inferences, arguments, and deductions. Guess what, Logic teaches all of those skills!

In academia we've known for years that people with limited knowledge are easy targets for scam artists, tricksters, politicians, and demagogues. What you need to know is that the scam artists, tricksters, politicians, and demagogues know this too. Francis Bacon was right; knowledge is power. And protection. You spend money to protect your computer against viruses, your cars against theft, your health against illness. You're also spending money to protect your mind against harm. The product you purchase to do this is NOT a grade. It is NOT a piece of paper called a degree. It's the knowledge behind them that will help you. You paid for it. Take it!

"A great many people think they are thinking when they are merely re-arranging their own prejudices." William James

After our discussion of logic it might not come as a shock that philosophers are often accused of ignoring emotion or being unconcerned with emotion which is patently untrue. All throughout the history of philosophy there have been philosophers who have written about emotions in an effort to understand, and in some cases, control them. Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, Epicurus, Descartes, Hume, Sartre are just a few who have inquired into the nature of emotions. In ethics there is a theory which claims that moral statements are nothing but the expressions of one's emotions.

But, the point of this essay is not to defend the philosophical

investigation of emotions. Instead, I would like to encourage a distinction between thinking and emotion in one limited sense. While philosophers investigate many questions, in their formulation of theories they are usually attempting to tell us what they think about a subject not how they feel. There is a good reason for this which I would advocate when you write about philosophy or any other academic subject. As you write an academic paper bear in mind that in most cases the assignment is to formulate your thoughts and defend them. It is not to tell your professor how you feel. It is certainly not to tell your professor how others feel.

This may seem like a purely semantic point. Perhaps when you use the word feel you're really meaning to state what you think. But, words do have meanings and it is important to recognize important distinctions, such as the distinction between thinking and feeling. The most important difference between the two words and the sentiments behind them is that one requires justification and the other does not. When I tell someone what I think it is fair for them to ask me why I think this. What evidence am I presenting to back up my opinion? Is the evidence persuasive and complete or is it inadequate to verify the claim I am making? This is not the case with feelings. If I tell someone I feel hot I do not have to justify this feeling. In fact, it would seem strange for someone to demand of me any justification for this or any other feeling. My feelings are what they are. And as many psychologists will tell you, they are neither good nor bad and neither true nor false.

The problem with referring to feelings in philosophy in the way I am criticizing is twofold. First, it is likely inaccurate. When you say something like "Plato felt that there was a realm of the forms" you are not really accurately depicting Plato's feelings at all. How could you? We don't know what Plato felt about the Forms since he never told us! However, we do know some of what he thought about the Forms and if I ask you an exam question about Plato's theory that is what I want you to tell me: what Plato thought, not what he felt. Second, to claim that Plato merely felt a certain way about the Forms is to diminish the philosophical exercise the philosopher was engaged in. The attempt to formulate a theory about something is simply an attempt to take the available evidence and provide the best possible explanation for it. In doing so, the philosopher attempts to anticipate possible objections to his explanation and address them. The philosopher is also prepared to defend his theory in the court of public opinion and allow his theory to be subjected to criticism and

debate. If it were nothing more than a feeling, there would be no need to scrutinize it at all. In fact, there would be no interest in it at all!

When you write a philosophy exam or paper (or any other paper) you will be asked to explain your views or opinions. You will not be asked to describe how you feel. So, as harsh as this sounds, don't tell me how you feel! Don't tell me how the philosophers you are writing about feel either. Tell me what they thought and why they thought it. Tell me what you think and why you think it.

It is fine to express opinions but you must also explain why you hold these opinions and, more than that, explain why you think your opinions are correct. Many seem to confuse what philosophers do by saying that they just express their opinions. In fact, philosophers do more than this by backing up their opinions with reason. This is the crucial distinction between arguments and opinions. Arguments can contain opinions but to argue for something is to do more than simply express an opinion or a feeling about something.

I find it remarkable how some people can be very tentative with regard to their opinions. This occurs most often in the realm of opinions concerning morality. Someone believes abortion is immoral but doesn't think others should believe this as well. Students will say that everyone has their own beliefs. Of course, this is quite true but the question is, "Are these beliefs justified?" This is why we need to examine the reasons behind the opinions. If the opinions are not justified then no one should hold them. On the other hand, if the opinions are justified and backed up by good reasons, shouldn't everyone agree with them?

To this many will respond by asking "But, who am I to tell someone else their beliefs are wrong?" The point is that you are not telling them because you are not examining their beliefs; they are! One of the useful skills you can take from any philosophy course is a method for examining your beliefs and justification for them. The point of the examination is not necessarily to change your beliefs although if you discover they cannot be justified perhaps they need to be changed. It could easily be the case that you find a stronger justification for them than you suspected even existed. In any case, it is the examination that is valuable. We are always being encouraged to examine our feelings. While philosophy is not unconcerned with feelings, the main point of philosophy is to

allow us to examine our thinking.

Another way of looking at this is that the examination of one's beliefs is done by appealing to objective criteria we can use to determine whether our beliefs are justified. They are important to understand in order to successfully examine one's beliefs and opinions and quite easy to understand with a little work. However, the fact that this takes work at all probably explains why many prefer to simply talk about feelings. There's no work involved in justifying feelings because feelings don't need justification!

Logic is defined as the science of evaluating arguments. This may be a little misleading because of the specific use of the word argument. In philosophy, argument does not simply mean disagreement. If you were to say that Ford produces better cars than Toyota and I were to say that Toyota produces better cars than Ford we would be disagreeing but not necessarily arguing. An argument must contain two elements. First, there must be the main point that is being argued for. This is called the conclusion. Arguments are sometimes confused with opinions because the conclusion of many arguments is an opinion. However, arguments are more than opinions because they contain a second element; the premises. In an argument, facts must be presented to support the conclusion and these facts are the premises. So now it should be clear why the example above is not an argument. While you may state that Ford produces better cars than Toyota in order for this to be an argument you must present reasons why Ford produces better cars than Toyota.

So we've established that arguments contain two parts. The purpose of the premises is to provide support for the conclusion. This support can be provided in two ways giving rise to two types of arguments. In deductive arguments, the premises support the conclusion as a matter of necessity. Another way of thinking about this is that if the premises in a good deductive argument are true, then the conclusion must also be true. On the other hand, in inductive arguments the premises support the conclusion as a matter of probability. So, in a good inductive argument, if the premises are true the conclusion will probably be true.

This distinction becomes very important when we begin evaluating arguments. If an argument is, in fact, inductive (as most arguments in philosophy are) then saying that the premises do not necessarily support

the conclusion will be an unfair criticism. After all, the intent of inductive arguments is only to provide probable support. This may cause you to ask whether inductive arguments aren't always inferior to deductive arguments. This may be one way of thinking about it. However, there are many kinds of arguments that cannot be deductive. For example, if we want to make predictions or use statistical reasoning in an argument, we are arguing inductively. The very nature of some arguments is inductive. While we may wish it to be otherwise, there's little that can be done about this. We have to evaluate arguments within their proper context. This goes for all arguments and, as we'll see, is an important point to keep in mind when we consider various philosophical arguments.

Another important consideration with respect to evaluating arguments is the notion of proof. Throughout this book we will be looking at various philosophical arguments which purport to prove a certain conclusion; for example, the existence of God. People often misunderstand the concept of proof by thinking that proving something demonstrates conclusively that something must be true. While this may be the case for deductive arguments, as we've seen it cannot be that way for inductive arguments. Since most philosophical (and scientific) arguments are inductive, it is impossible to conclusively prove the conclusion of these arguments true. That is, we will not be able to preclude evidence that may arise in the future to count against our conclusion. This being the case proofs in philosophy tended to be attempts to find the most probable conclusion that fits the available evidence.

"We cannot pretend to offer proofs. Proof is an idol before whom the pure mathematician tortures himself: In physics, we are generally content to sacrifice before the lesser shrine of plausibility." Arthur Stanley Eddington

Proof is a seriously misunderstood word. This probably accounts for its rare usage in the natural sciences. In one important sense no one can "prove" the theory of evolution, or the big bang theory, or relativity, or string theory, or whatever theory you want to talk about. But, and this is an important but, that does not mean that there is not sufficient evidence to warrant thinking these are good theories. To use Eddington's word, we can say they are plausible. In some cases, very plausible. What makes the word proof tricky is that it is sometimes used in philosophy in the one area you'd think everyone would be wary of using it: to prove the

existence of God. Many people believe that God's existence cannot be proven. Let's stipulate to that for the sake of argument and vow only to use the word proof in areas where certainty appears attainable, like mathematics. The parallel postulate can be proven.

So what do we do with areas of empirical research? What do we do about God? Let's look for evidence and evaluate theories based on their plausibility and efficacy in explaining and accounting for that evidence. We need a set of criteria to evaluate theories to determine which best account for the evidence we have. A good suggestion comes from a critical thinking text titled *How to Think About Weird Things* by Theodore Schick and Lewis Vaughn. In it, they outline five points to use in the evaluation of theories. Let's look at them.

First a theory should be testable. If you can't even figure out how to go about determining if your theory explains the evidence you don't have a good theory. As they point out testable means your hypothesis "predicts something more than what is predicted by the background theory alone." In short, we need this criterion because if there's no way to tell whether a theory is true or false it's really no good to us.

Second, a theory should be fruitful. What this means is that a good theory should make novel predictions. It should not only account for the evidence at hand but be able to address evidence that comes in later and even predict such new evidence. They point out that Einstein's theory of relativity is a good example of a fruitful theory because it made the novel prediction that light would be visible from a star behind the sun because the light would be bent by the gravitational field around the sun to be visible on earth. And, with reference to criterion number one this was a testable claim. Once tested, it was verified.

Third, a theory should have a wide scope. That is, a good theory explains a wide field of evidence. One of the differences between theories and hypotheses is their scope. Hypotheses address specific questions whereas theories attempt to provide a broad explanatory device. Theories that can explain a wide array of things are preferred, other things being equal, to more narrow theories.

Fourth, a theory should be simple. This term should not be confused with simplistic. Many scientific theories are complex in terms of our

ability to understand them but simple in the sense that they postulate fewer underlying entities or assumptions. A good example of this is the difference between Copernicus and Ptolemy. Ptolemy's geocentric theory could explain the orbits of the planets but it was quite complex whereas Copernicus' theory explained the same observable phenomena with less complexity. So, other things being equal, that theory was the better theory. Think of it this way. Suppose I come up with a theory to explain how the lights in my house work but it involves little gremlins running inside the light bulbs. Someone else is able to explain the same phenomenon but without postulating gremlins. So, their theory is simpler than mine. It should also be pointed out that my gremlin theory may fail on other criteria as well such as being testable.

Finally, a theory should be conservative. Not in the political sense of the word. Rather, it should fit in with other things we know. If we have an explanation for something that we think is fairly certain and accurate then a new theory should fit in with that prior explanation. If it doesn't fit that may indicate our prior knowledge is flawed. We have to be open to that possibility but the burden of proof is on the new theory. An interesting examination of how this process works is offered by Thomas Kuhn's book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Now, for the payoff. While many may hate to hear this, judging by the criteria above, the theory of evolution and the big bang theory do quite well. In fact, as the philosopher Daniel Dennett puts it "evolution is about as well established as the fact that water is H<sub>2</sub>O." This doesn't mean that the theory isn't open to revision. But, all available evidence seems to point in favor of it. A similar statement could be made about the big bang theory again, with the proviso, "at this time." So far as we know now. This will always be the case for any theory in science. As Karl Popper pointed out, "the demand for scientific objectivity makes it inevitable that every scientific statement must remain tentative forever."

So, why do people find this a hard pill to swallow about the theories I mentioned above. I suspect it's because they do not know about them and based on this lack of knowledge they conclude that these theories do damage to some of their cherished beliefs. No book has been more reviled since its publication than Darwin's *Origin of Species*. But, I suspect no book has been left unread as often! Scientists have no problem with entertaining objections to their theories, but the objections should be based on some knowledge of the theory. I cannot devote myself here to

explaining in sufficient detail the theories I'm addressing though I could if put to the test. But that is not the point of this essay.

My point, as a philosopher, is to encourage learning and inquiry. But first comes the learning. As you'll see in this book, philosophers are all too willing to subject other philosophers to criticism. But they do so from the standpoint of understanding their opponent's theory. We owe the same to any theory be it in philosophy, theology, or science. It does no good to criticize or dismiss a theory out of hand without a thorough understanding of what the theory says and what phenomena it is attempting to explain.

Many say they do not believe in the theory of evolution or the big bang. But the word "believe," like the word "proof," is being misused here. A theory is not something to be believed or disbelieved. The question is whether the evidence warrants our tentative acceptance of the theory. Does the theory do what it claims to do? That is, does it provide us with an adequate explanation of the evidence at hand? If so, it's a good theory. You are certainly free to think otherwise but this doesn't change the fact that the theory is supported by the evidence.

Of course any theory may turn out to be wrong but as David Hume said "the wise man proportions his belief to the evidence." If the evidence warrants it, the theory should be accepted. This does not amount to conceding everything to the world of science because there are many questions science cannot answer. These include questions of value and meaning such as:

Does my life have a purpose?

Does the universe's existence have a purpose?

Is abortion immoral?

Is it ever right to lie?

Here is where the value of philosophy lies because it is philosophy that attempts to examine these questions and reason to useful answers. Not necessarily definitive answers. There may be no definitive answers to these questions. But, we can examine them in the light of reason and come to some interesting conclusions. But, these conclusions can be furthered by the work scientists do as they attempt to explain the natural world in which we live. After all, asking about the purpose of our lives is

a question that can be dealt with much better if we have some understanding of life. To ask whether the universe's existence has a purpose can be answered in a clearer way if we have some understanding of the universe itself. It is misguided to reject the information that science gives us which may pertain to these and other questions. The scientific method is, after all, the most reliable means we have of gaining information about the natural world. Information, without which, we would not be able to philosophize with any sophistication at all.

Finally, don't accept the conclusion of an argument just because you like it and don't reject the conclusion just because you dislike it. In each case, you need to consider the reasoning used and determine whether the conclusion is supported by the premises and whether the premises are true. Wanting something to be true does not make it true and wanting something to be false does not make it false. The questions we examine can be difficult questions but applying the rules of reason can make our job of evaluating philosophical arguments easier and more fruitful.

No good system of reasoning would be complete without a foundation and in logic this foundation consists of three laws of thought. In essence, these laws represent the fundamental principles from which all our reasoning proceeds. They are considered self-evident which means that merely understanding them should be enough to recognize their truth. Because of their self-evident nature they can be used to deduce other important philosophical principles. Before considering these principles (and while we're still on the subject of proof) we should recognize that these laws of thought cannot, themselves, be proven. As Aristotle pointed out in his *Metaphysics* with reference to one of these laws: "some indeed demand to have the law proved, but this is because they lack education; for it shows lack of education not to know of what we should require proof and of what we should not. For it is quite impossible that everything should have a proof; the process would go on to infinity, so that even so there would be no proof."

The first of these laws of thought is called the law of non-contradiction. What this says is that nothing can both be and not be at the same time and in the same respect. This may not seem very interesting but, in fact, we can use this law to demonstrate that philosophical arguments are not merely people's differences of opinion. Since we've raised the example of proving the existence of God let's look at this. Some people say that there

is no way to prove the existence of God and, after all, it's just a matter of opinion anyway, so what does it matter. However, we can use the law of non-contradiction to demonstrate that there is something more going on. With respect to God, there are two (and only two) possibilities: God exists. God doesn't exist. They cannot both be true. But if it were just a matter of opinion, they could both be true. So clearly, this is not merely an opinion based question. Not only that from the fact that God cannot both exist and not exist we can deduce something else interesting.

What we can deduce is that either one or the other of these two possibilities must be true. This, as it turns out, is the second law of thought: the law of excluded middle. What this asserts is that something either is or is not. This seems non-controversial however, some people find it confusing. Many mistake this for saying that everything must be either black or white with no in between. But aren't there some gray areas in life; never mind in philosophy? However, a closer inspection of what the law of excluded middle is actually saying should clarify this point. What the law actually asserts, using the black or white example, is that everything is either black or non-black. Put this way, it should be obviously true.

The final law of thought is the law of identity. What this asserts is that something is what it is. Again, this seems non-controversial and uninteresting. However, as we will see, when discussing philosophy of mind, the law of identity will have interesting philosophical implications. I'll elaborate on this in a later chapter but keep this idea in mind. It will become useful.

Before concluding our remarks on logic, we need to consider some common mistakes in reasoning; what we call fallacies. We should attend to these for two reasons. First, we want to be able to identify these mistakes if they occur in the philosophical arguments we will be analyzing. In fact, identifying fallacies may come in handy when considering non-philosophical arguments as well. Second, we should familiarize ourselves with fallacies to avoid committing them ourselves.

Aristotle originally identified many of these fallacies and later philosophers added to the list. We will not be addressing every fallacy but I will mention some of the more philosophically relevant ones.

1. Begging the question: this fallacy occurs when the conclusion of an

argument is used as one of the premises. So, it seems as if you're proving something when in reality you're restating your premise as the conclusion. For example, if I were to argue as follows: Of course God exists because only God could create the immensely complex universe.

2. Equivocation: this fallacy occurs when the meaning of a critical word is changed within the argument. In other words, we use one word in two different ways. Example: Any law can be repealed by the legislative authority. So, since the law of gravity is a law, it too can be repealed by the legislative authority.

3. Composition: occurs when an attribute is transferred from a part of a whole to the whole when the attribute cannot really transfer. For example: Atoms are invisible so a piece of chalk which is composed of atoms must be invisible.

4. Division: is the reverse of composition. It occurs when an attribute is transferred from the whole to the parts when the attribute cannot really transfer. Example: Salt is non-poisonous and salt is composed of sodium and chlorine. Therefore, sodium and chlorine are non-poisonous.

5. Appeal to authority: this fallacy occurs when an unqualified expert or irrelevant authority is used to support the conclusion of an argument, for instance, if I were to cite an economist's expertise to support my argument in physics.

Appeal to authority is particularly relevant to Aristotle who, in the Middle-Ages, was considered an important authority in philosophy and learning in general. So much so, in fact, that Aquinas referred to him as The Philosopher. Aristotle's influence extended so far and wide that many subjects he wrote about were not advanced for centuries because of his perceived authority. So, while Aristotle was Plato's best student and most vocal critic, many of Aristotle's students, and many who were influenced by him, were less critical. Indeed, unlike Plato, Aristotle's most prominent student was not a vocal critic of Aristotle's theory. In fact, he was not as much interested in metaphysics as he was the implications of such speculation. Instead of being concerned about the nature of reality, he was interested in changing it; at least the reality of geopolitics in the ancient world. Alexander the Great, the student I'm talking about, was much more interested in empire building. Naturally, philosophy

was affected by this and other empires as well. In fact within a couple of centuries the philosopher was to become the emperor of the world's most powerful empire. The empire was Rome and the emperor-philosopher was Marcus Aurelius. It is to the story of philosophy during and after the Roman Empire that we turn now.

## Philosophy After Aristotle

When Aristotle died in 322 B.C. he was such an authority on so many subjects that metaphysics and epistemology seemed hardly worth doing any more. In fact, his work on logic was so groundbreaking that no significant developments were made in the field until the late 19th century! The thinking was, well Aristotle had already dealt with these issues and there was nothing left to say. That being the belief, philosophy after Aristotle moved to emphasize different areas. Philosophy, in part, tended to be more practical in its approach to the question of how one ought to live. In particular two schools of thought dealt with this question: the Epicureans and the Stoics. Epicurus put forward the theory that life is about the pursuit of pleasure though this is likely to be misinterpreted. In fact, for Epicurus the pleasures he meant were freedom, friendship, and thought. The Stoics postulated that human beings were free but this freedom had limits. Fate plays a strong part in one's life but we still maintain the freedom to change our attitude about things. So as the Stoic philosopher Epictetus said, "people are not disturbed by things, but by the views which they take of things." This view was to go over particularly well with the Roman emperor whom Epictetus inspired, Marcus Aurelius. He was emperor from 161-180 C.E

The disagreement between Plato and Aristotle over metaphysical issues was bound to give rise to a certain amount of skepticism about our ability to gain knowledge of the fundamental structure of reality and so it was around this time (200 C.E.) that the writings of Sextus Empiricus gained popularity. Given the disagreements between the two great philosophers, and the fact that they seemed to appeal to the same evidence to back up their theories, the skeptics advocated suspending judgment on such questions. This attitude was supposed to achieve a state of mental calm not unlike the Stoic attitude of resignation in the face of fate.

Still, Aristotle did not rule uncontested. Given the serious challenge he put forward against Platonic theory it is also not surprising that a resurgence of Plato's own ideas was to be seen. The great champion of Neo-Platonism in the third century was Plotinus though the more famous figure to defend Platonism and make it fit with the rising new religion of Christianity was, as James Burke puts it, an ex-nightclubber turned bishop named Augustine. Come the fall of the Roman Empire in 410, Augustine was to be important in the perpetuation of Platonic theory for centuries.

With the fall of Rome the emphasis was placed much more on life in the hereafter rather than life here. Civilization was coming to a most inglorious end and life in this world was not nearly as important as gaining a place in the transcendent world. This should sound very much like Plato indeed. But because of this attitude philosophy was to stagnate for centuries. After all what use was there to learn about this world? Just as well since after the fall of Rome, we literally lost much of the knowledge from the Greek and Roman worlds when many of the manuscripts were lost due in large part to the destruction of the great library at Alexandria; Aristotle, tragically, was among the lost. So with a few exceptions darkness fell, at least in the West, the East as we'll see in a moment was a different story.

Things started to take a turn for the so-so on Christmas day 800 when a 26 year old womanizing whiz kid (another James Burke description!) named Charlemagne was crowned the first emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Centuries later Voltaire was to joke that the empire was neither holy nor roman. In any case, a sort of mini renaissance began later named the Carolingian Renaissance. Never heard of it? No surprise there since it didn't last much beyond Charlemagne's lifetime. So back into darkness until something major happened in 1096.

It was in this year that the first Crusade was mounted to save the Holy Land from the Arabs who had taken over. In doing so we discovered two things. First, the Arabs were not the culturally backward people we had taken them for. Quite the opposite. In fact they had kept the flame of learning alive ever since the days of Aristotle with whom they were quite familiar because they had copies of his texts. This was the second thing we discovered, namely much of the knowledge we had given up for lost centuries earlier. It was all there for the taking except for one

problem. We couldn't understand it.

We couldn't understand it for two reasons. First, we couldn't read Arabic. No problem there, just hire translators who could translate the Arabic into Spanish (for example) and then the Spanish could be translated into Latin so the rest of Europe could read it. This led to the second problem which was that we couldn't understand what we were reading because the concepts were light years ahead of what the West knew at the time; knowledge had taken a few steps backward thanks in part to Augustine's attitude of not bothering about the visible world. So in some cases we couldn't even translate the Arabic because we didn't have a word for it. This is when a lot of scientific words from Arabic crept into our language. Words like elixir, algebra, and azimuth. And one really weird mathematical concept no one had ever heard of before; zero!

Naturally with the re-discovery of Aristotle's work his theories were to dominate again though not without a fight. But by 1150 when the University of Paris was up and running, Aristotle was back in the academy full force. His major advocate was a short lived philosopher/theologian nicknamed the dumb ox: Thomas Aquinas. We'll be discussing his proofs for the existence of God later in the book. Ironically, the dominance of Aristotle was to have the same effect this time as it did the first time around. It prevented questioning and new developments. If The Philosopher (this was what they called Aristotle at the time) had said it, it must be true. So Aristotle became the dominant thinker and ruled all areas including Church orthodoxy and scientific thinking. If you're beginning to tire of this unquestioned authority dominating all thinking, don't worry. It came to an end.

The end was to be precipitated, in part, by three major events. We won't be able to deal with all three in depth but I will mention them in passing. The first was the Protestant Reformation which began the end of Aristotle's rule of theology in 1517. The second was the publication in 1543 of a work by a priest named Copernicus who openly questioned Aristotle's cosmology. Just so you know, this kind of thing was dangerous to do, and in 1633 Galileo was put under house arrest for agreeing with Copernicus. The third event, and for our story the most important, was the birth of Rene Descartes in 1596.

Descartes saw it as his purpose to reawaken philosophy from its

centuries-long slumber. Ironic when you consider that Descartes himself never liked to get up before noon! First and foremost Descartes was seeking certainty; in philosophy if not in life. Put yourself in his place. A mere fifty years prior to his birth we make the discovery that Aristotle (and all of science) had been very wrong about the place of the Earth in the cosmos. Once thought the center of the universe it now seemed that the Earth was one planet among many orbiting the sun. Add to this, the religious turmoil that Europe was in because of the Reformation and the counter-reformation the effects of which were felt in Descartes lifetime with the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). Who wouldn't want a little certainty and piece of mind with all this going on! And it was precisely to the mind that Descartes would turn for this certainty.

It has been said that Descartes did not do a stitch of useful work his entire life. He variously described himself as a soldier, scholar, and gentleman. The last probably comes closest to the mark. As I said before he never liked to rise before noon, he lived on a private inheritance (in case you were wondering what philosophers did to earn a living in many cases the answer was nothing!), and did nothing very dramatic at all except for revolutionizing philosophy. Descartes himself claims that he wrote his *Meditations* to make philosophy enticing to women. If this is true he succeeded too well. The Queen of Sweden became enamored of him and wanted Descartes to become her personal tutor. Her only requirement was that she be given her lessons at 5:00 AM. So Descartes was obliged to trudge out in the early morning Swedish winter and you can guess how long that lasted. Within a year he was dead.

Descartes transformed philosophy in several important ways. Instead of appealing to authority as Aquinas did, Descartes' philosophy is written almost entirely in first person. The point is that one can deduce fundamental truths about reality through one's own thinking without appealing to others. Descartes appeals to the commonality of his experiences to explain his philosophical insights. So he invites us to consider how often we have had the same experiences he has had: doubting sense experience, vivid dreams, the idea of God. If we can identify with these experiences we can more fully understand Descartes' philosophy.

In examining the *Meditations on First Philosophy* we will address three components of Cartesian philosophy: the deduction of the mind, the deduction of God, and the deduction of material substance. In doing so it

should become clear that Descartes is proceeding in a partially Platonic fashion. I say partially because even though Descartes is a rationalist he is not as radical as Plato. For Descartes, some knowledge is innate but not all. Clearly, there is a role for sense experience in our knowledge. Also similar to Plato, Descartes is a dualist. He believes in two fundamentally different substances: mind and matter. Again though there are differences between Cartesian and Platonic dualism. While Plato focuses on a dualism of worlds, one transcendent and one here, Descartes focuses on the dualism of human beings who are composed of a mental and a physical substance.

However, Descartes' most famous contribution to philosophy is perhaps his beginning; his method of doubt. It is to this method and the *Meditations* that we now turn.

# Chapter 9

## Rene Descartes

Many people find it strange that Descartes begins his *Meditations on First Philosophy* by doubting. But given his goal this is understandable. He is searching for a foundation for all knowledge that is certain. As we mentioned before Descartes' world was turned upside down by the discovery of Copernicus. For obvious reasons many people are beginning to question their knowledge. After all if Aristotle could be that wrong about something as fundamental as whether the Earth goes round the sun or not what else might he have gotten wrong? This is what Descartes means when he says in the opening sentence of Meditation One "several years have now elapsed since I first became aware that I had accepted, even from my youth, many false opinions for true." In other words, he has good reason to doubt. The foundation for knowledge, if it exists, will be indubitable. So anything that can be doubted must be thrown out.

It is important to recognize that Descartes is very methodic about his doubting. He does not, as many believe, doubt everything. He proceeds slowly and systematically. However, Descartes' standard for doubting is much different than ours. You may have, in a court of law context, heard the phrase "reasonable doubt." This is not the standard Descartes is using; many of the things he calls into question will not seem like things that it is reasonable to doubt. The standard Descartes is using is whether something can be logically doubted. That is, can we doubt the truth of such and such without contradicting ourselves? This is a much broader notion of doubting and because of this we will see that Descartes doubts many things that we would hardly think of as being doubtful. But as Descartes points out in paragraph 2, it will not be necessary to demonstrate something is false in order to call it into question. It will only be necessary to show that something can be doubted. After all what we are searching for is something that cannot, even logically, be doubted.

In paragraph 3 Descartes points out that everything he has learned prior to now he learned through sense experience. So we should begin by asking whether we can doubt the knowledge that comes from sense experience. Descartes in fact offers us three reasons for doubting sense experience. First, the senses do sometimes deceive us. For example, if you've ever placed a stick into a body of water, it appears to be bent. We know the stick is not really bent but our senses tell us it is. We could easily think of other cases of deception but the point is that if the senses deceive us sometimes who's to say they're not deceiving us all the time.

However, not wanting to go too quickly Descartes says that perhaps we need other reasons for doubting the senses. After all, just because they deceive us sometimes it does not necessarily mean they are deceiving us in all cases. In fact, says Descartes, it seems unlikely that my senses are deceiving me about something as fundamental as being awake sitting here typing at my computer (this is my example which is a contemporary version of the Cartesian example in paragraph 4). However, we've all had vivid dreams that seemed so real we were surprised to awake from them. How can we be sure that this is not one of those dreams? Or to offer a more recent example, how can we be sure our life is not the product of some computer simulation like in *The Matrix*? Clearly, says Descartes, we cannot be certain and so must doubt the truth of sense experience.

Clearly then, sense experience can be doubted and so we should not regard it as the certain foundation of our knowledge. Perhaps there is something else to base our knowledge on. After all, even when I dream,  $2+3=5$  and there seems little reason to doubt similar truths of mathematics. As he points out in paragraph 8 it may be that the physical sciences which depend on sense experience are uncertain but sciences like mathematics and geometry are where we have certainty, unless we can think of any possible reason to doubt mathematics.

This is where things get a little strange. Descartes is looking for any reason to logically doubt. So, he reasons, we believe in a God who is very powerful and good but what if God is in fact is deceiving me? This seems contrary to God's nature and so Descartes offers another, even stranger, possibility in paragraph 12. What if some malignant demon "who is at once exceedingly potent and deceitful, has employed all his artifice to deceive me?" This would certainly cause me to doubt the truths of mathematics and also give me a third reason for doubting sense

experience. After all, any being capable of deceiving me about mathematics could also cause me to be deceived about my senses. Maybe we are in the matrix!

So Descartes concludes the first meditation by doubting "the sky, the air, the earth, colors, figures, sounds, and all external things." Also he says "I will consider myself as without hands, eyes, flesh, blood, or any of the senses." And he resolves to continue in this doubt until something certain can be found. But before we continue our search for this certainty let's consider something interesting. Descartes seems to doubt among other things that he has a body. This is what he means after all by saying "I will consider myself as without hands..." How is this possible? Does this accord with Descartes' standard of doubt? Can we logically doubt the body? Well, certainly if I were the same thing as my body this would seem to be impossible (more on this below). The only way that I can doubt the existence of my body is if I am different from my body. This is very significant because we have here already a hint of Cartesian dualism. Clearly, I can doubt my body which must mean I am different from my body. Whatever "I" am is not entirely, if at all, connected to my body. As it turns out this gives Descartes the clue not only to his metaphysics, but also, the certainty he is searching for.

He begins Meditation Two in despair of ever finding the certainty he seeks. But he resolves to continue looking for it or at least discover there is no such certainty. So he continues to think remembering that yesterday (when he first meditated) he doubted all that could be doubted and was postulating that he was being deceived. So he thinks to himself "I doubt," "I am being deceived." But wait! Don't I have to exist for these things to be possible? How could I be deceived if I didn't exist? Could I doubt my own existence? No! No matter how much someone is deceiving me I cannot be made to doubt my own existence. "Doubtless, then, I exist, since I am being deceived." So this is the certainty we have been searching for: I exist. How do I know this? I merely have to think. My thinking tells me with certainty that I exist, giving rise to Descartes' most famous insight. Perhaps the most famous sound bite in philosophy: *Cogito ergo sum*. I think, therefore I am.

So where do we go from here? The next question we should address is the nature of this "I." What am I Descartes asks in paragraph 5 of the second meditation. After some reflection he arrives at the simplest

definition he can think of in paragraph 8. I am "a thinking thing." And what is a thinking thing? Easy, it's a thing that thinks! But what is this precisely. Descartes enumerates: "It is a thing that doubts, understands, conceives, affirms, denies, wills, refuses; that imagines also, and perceives."

One aspect of this definition will no doubt seem strange to you given what we have doubted. That is the last part; perceiving. How can thinking be connected with perceiving since we doubted our senses and, even more, the body that gives us these perceptions through the senses? The answer turns out to be a key element in Descartes' notion of the mind. He calls this the faculty of judgment.

To illustrate what he means by the faculty of judgment Descartes offers us an example in paragraph 11. Let's examine a piece of wax. We perceive its attributes through the senses: it has a certain shape, smell, taste, texture, etc. If we hold it close to the fire all these attributes change. The shape changes, the smell, the texture, etc. Now, is it the same piece of wax? We would surely say that it is but how can we say this? We are not making this claim based on sense experience since all the sense experiences we get from the wax have changed. We must be making this claim based on a mental inspection of the wax. That is, we must be judging that it is the same piece of wax.

Still, this example may not suffice so Descartes offers us a second and if this doesn't help I will offer a third example. In paragraph 13 Descartes asks us to consider the people we see "passing on in the street below, as observed from a window." We say that we see people passing by when in fact all we really see are "hats and cloaks that might cover artificial machines." How do we know they are people? We judge that they are. Or better, if you don't like supposing that the people you see may be robots consider this example. Have you ever been to the mall or some other public place walking behind someone and you think you recognize who it is? So you call out to them "hey Jim!" But when the person turns around it's not who you thought it was. You made a judgment (based on limited sense experience) that it was your friend. The point of all of these examples is that perception is governed by an important mental component. The sense experiences are meaningless unless they are processed by this act of thinking, this faculty of judgment.

So at the end of the second meditation what do we know? We know one thing for certain: I exist. And we know by deduction what this "I" is: a thinking thing. From here we might like to make inferences about the objects of sense experience; that is the world around us. But we must not go too fast. Remember, we are still maintaining that we are being deceived by some evil demon. So what we need to do is prove the existence of God and show that He is not a deceiver. This will, at least to Descartes' satisfaction, eliminate the problem of deception and allow us to investigate the external world. We will examine Descartes' proof for the existence of God in the third meditation.

It may sound strange to you that we will be attempting to prove the existence of God. In fact, as we will see in the philosophy of religion section of the class, this is a very important issue and one that has occupied many philosophers. Like many who attempt to prove God's existence, Descartes already believes in God. Given this you may wonder, what's the point in the exercise of proof? For Descartes the point is twofold. First, it is helpful to provide philosophical justification for the things we believe. This gives us good reasons for our beliefs and, other things being equal, it seems better to have justified beliefs than unjustified ones. Secondly, for Descartes' project to work we'll need to establish not only that God exists but is not a deceiver. Otherwise, we will be unable to make any judgments about the external world without being susceptible to doubt.

It is important to begin with a word about the kind of evidence Descartes will be offering to prove God's existence. Since we currently doubt the truth of sense experience we cannot use this evidence. We must use only the evidence at our disposal based on what we know for certain. I exist as a thinking thing. So we must begin with thoughts.

In paragraph 5 Descartes enumerates three types of thoughts. First, there are ideas, which are, strictly speaking, pictures in the mind. We can picture things to ourselves and these are ideas. Second, our emotions or what Descartes calls volitions or affections. And third, Judgments which we have already discussed with reference to perception. One important example of a judgment which we will investigate later is the judgment that our ideas of physical objects actually come from the objects themselves. As Descartes points out judgments are the only thoughts that can be either true or false. Ideas are simply pictures and so cannot be true or

false. If we say that one of these ideas corresponds to a particular object then we are making a judgment which is, of course, either true or false. We are either correct or incorrect about the judgment that such an idea represents such an object.

The next question is what are the possible sources of our ideas? There are three: the ideas could come from external objects in which case they are called "adventitious," the ideas could be invented by me in which case they are called "factitious," and finally they could be inborn in which case they are called "innate." For all we know all the ideas that we have could be invented. As of now we have no justification for making judgments about the source of ideas. What we need is a method for making such a judgment and then we will need to make a judgment about the source of one idea in particular; namely the idea of God. This will constitute our proof for God's existence.

We'll begin with a self evident proposition which Descartes describes in paragraph 14 where he says "it is manifest by the natural light that there must be at least as much reality in the efficient and total cause as in its effect." Simply put this means that an effect cannot have more reality than its cause. An effect cannot arise out of something which cannot be its cause. Perhaps an example will help. Consider a piece of wood. If we want to heat up the piece of wood we have three choices to use: a piece of ice, another piece of wood, or fire. Obviously we can't use ice it; doesn't have nearly as much heat as the piece of wood. We can't use another piece of wood either. What we need is something with more heat than the piece of wood; we need fire. Another way of thinking about this is the fire possesses the reality of heat in greater quantity than the piece of wood and so it can be the cause of the piece of wood heating up.

OK if that's clear let's address how Descartes describes this. In paragraph 13 he refers to two kinds of reality: formal and objective. He's using a type of vocabulary familiar to his audience. The scholastic philosophers of the middle ages talked this way as well. Strangely enough, when he refers to "objective reality" he's talking about the reality of ideas. When Descartes refers to "formal reality" he's talking about the reality of objects.

The proof for God's existence depends on the nature of the idea of God. Descartes defines this idea in paragraph 22 where he says "by the name

God, I understand a substance infinite, eternal, immutable, independent, all-knowing, all-powerful, and by which I myself, and every other thing that exists, if any such there be, were created." This idea, says Descartes, has more objective reality than we do formal reality. Why does he say this? In particular the attribute of God being infinite concerns him. We are finite but our idea of God is of an infinite substance. The finite is less real than the infinite so our idea of God has greater reality (as an idea) than we have. We cannot be the cause of our idea of God. There is only one possible cause for the idea of God and that is God himself. Therefore, God exists.

Here is a summary of the proof.

1. There must be at least as much reality in the efficient and total cause as in its effect.
  2. The idea of God is a substance infinite, eternal, immutable, independent, all-knowing, all-powerful, and by which I myself, and every other thing that exists, if any such there be, were created.
  3. This idea contains more objective reality than we contain formal reality.
  4. The cause of my idea of God cannot be me.
  5. The cause of the idea of God must contain as much (or more) formal reality as the idea itself.
- THEREFORE: God exists.

In paragraph 37 Descartes considers "the way in which I received this idea from God." Clearly, the idea cannot be gained from sense experience (remember we are still doubting it) and we could not invent the idea ourselves (because of the proof we have just considered. An important implication of this is that the idea cannot come from any human mind. Human beings, including our parents or others, could not have given us the idea of God. Even if they did, we would still need to answer where they got the idea from. The only option left, as Descartes points out, is that the idea of God is innate, implanted in me "that it might serve, as it were, for the mark of the workman on his work."

Having proved that God exists as a being with all perfections we turn briefly to consider whether God could be a deceiver. It seems that this is impossible given the fact, as Descartes points out in paragraph 2 of the fourth meditation. Since deception is itself an imperfection and God has

no imperfections, God could not be a deceiver. This of course raises a question which we need to address which is quite simply if God is not responsible for our errors what is. This will be addressed in Meditation Four.

To discover the source of error we need to consider two faculties of thought. The first Descartes variously refers to as the faculty of understanding or the faculty of cognition. The second we have encountered before is the faculty of judgment which he sometimes refers to as the faculty of will or the "power of free choice." In paragraph 8 of the fourth meditation Descartes offers us an explanation of these faculties and how they generate error.

The faculty of cognition simply refers to our capacity to have ideas in our mind. As Descartes puts it this faculty "neither affirms nor denies anything but merely apprehend[s] the ideas regarding which I may form a judgment." You can think of this faculty as the ability to picture ideas in our mind, be they ideas of objects or concepts. This faculty is limited inasmuch as we do not apprehend every idea that can be thought. However, it is not its limit that causes our errors. After all, there is no reason to think that God should have given us an infinite faculty of cognition. So this limit is not due to a lack of something we should have. In Descartes' words we do not lack knowledge as a privation but merely a negation. Again he is speaking to an audience familiar with scholastic terminology. To lack something as a privation is to lack something one is supposed to have whereas to lack something as a negation is simply to not have something. For example, the lack of the ability to see is shared by both a stone and a blind man. But they lack the ability to see in different ways. After all, the blind man is supposed to be able to see (people are supposed to be able to see after all!) but the stone was never meant to see. So we say that the blind man lacks sight as a privation but the stone lacks it as a negation. Applied to our faculty of cognition its finite nature is merely a negation.

On the other hand, our faculty of will is infinite. Descartes says that if we examine it carefully we will find it to be "so great that I am unable to conceive the idea of another that shall be more and extended." Of course, God's faculty of will is "incomparably greater" than ours but this is due, in large part, to God's infinite knowledge. So as an infinite faculty our power of free choice cannot be the source of our error.

In fact the source of our error can be found in the difference between the two faculties. Our faculty of cognition is finite but our faculty of will is infinite. Think of it this way. The faculty of cognition allows me to hold ideas in my mind. The faculty of will allows me to decide, or in Descartes' words to affirm or deny, whether those ideas are true or false. It goes without saying that if I have knowledge of the ideas I apprehend in my mind I will be in a much better position to affirm or deny their truth. However, if I affirm or deny an idea without such knowledge my chances for error increase greatly. The thing is my affirming or denying (that is my power of free choice) is not constrained by my knowledge of an idea. That's what it means for the faculty of will to be infinite. So I can affirm or deny the truth of an idea without actually knowing whether it's true or false. And that is the source of error. If you find this strange just think about this. I will give you a statement that you will understand (i.e. it will be in your faculty of cognition) though you may not know whether it's true or false. Never mind that though I will then ask you to affirm or deny it. You will be able to do so without any trouble at all but since you don't really know whether it's true or false you will likely as not be in error about your judgment.

OK here goes. Soren Kierkegaard was an 18th century Austrian philosopher. Now you should understand what that sentence says even if you're not quite sure whether it's true or false. So it's in your faculty of cognition; you apprehend it as an idea. Now make a judgment about it: true or false? If you don't know who Kierkegaard is you have a fifty-fifty chance of being correct. Those are not good odds and just prove the point Descartes is making. Our chance for error goes up if we make judgments which go beyond what we have knowledge of.

The moral of the story is that there are two ways to decrease our chance for making judgments in error. The first is to restrict our judgments to things we have certain knowledge of. If we're not sure we should suspend judgment. The second is to increase our knowledge. The more we know the better our judgments will be. It must be true what Bacon said: "knowledge is power." Oh by the way Kierkegaard, he was from Denmark and lived in the 19th century.

Having discovered the source of error we can proceed to investigate the rest of the world; the existence of material things. But first we need to

make one small philosophical detour in Meditation Five. We need to consider the essence of material things. The reason for this is actually quite simple. As of now we are still in doubt about the source of our ideas of material objects; they may be adventitious or they may be factitious (remember what those words mean?). In any case, we are still contemplating the ideas. Now, if it turns out that the very concept of material object is inherently contradictory then we need not wonder whether any such things actually exist because it will be impossible for them to exist. So if their essence is impossible so too their existence will be impossible.

By essence Descartes means those attributes which you cannot help but think about when conceiving of any given object. Take a triangle, for instance. When you think of a triangle you quite naturally think of three sides and 180 degrees of angles. You can't help but think of these attributes. We have, in Descartes' words, a clear and distinct idea of these attributes being attached to the object "triangle." As he points out in paragraph 7 of the fifth meditation "whatever is clearly and distinctly known is true."

The interesting turn in Meditation Five occurs in paragraph 8 where Descartes says "if because I can draw from my thought the idea of an object, it follows that all I clearly and distinctly apprehend to pertain to this object, does in truth belong to it, may I not from this derive an argument for the existence of God?" That's right Descartes is going to give us another proof for the existence of God. Why? Many scholars have speculated on this and since Descartes does not clearly tell us we may never know for sure. However, in a series of replies to objections that Descartes wrote he does give us a clue. While the first proof deals with the cause of the idea of God, this second proof allows us to focus more on the attributes of God. So its not that this proof provides stronger evidence or that this proof is meant to succeed where the other proof failed. They are simply providing different perspectives on the existence of God.

This proof also turns out to be simpler to relate as well. We can basically state it as a three stage argument (in logic these are called syllogisms). Premise one: God is a being who contains all perfections. Premise two: Existence is a perfection. Conclusion: God must exist.

Many people find this proof very elegant in its simplicity but perhaps

just as many find it deeply flawed. Since it is not our purpose here to deal with philosophy of religion questions I will not go into too much detail but I will share one particular objection offered by Immanuel Kant.

The proof seems to hinge on the second premise that existence is a perfection. But this can only be true (says Kant) if existence is some kind of attribute. This, however, seems to be untrue. Of course, existence appears to be an attribute. Consider the following sentences:

That table is red.

That table is.

They both appear grammatically similar and clearly the first one is attributing red to the table. So "red" is an attribute. It seems as if the second one is doing the same thing but with existence. However, this is not what is going on. As Kant points out in his Critique of Pure Reason "being is obviously not a real predicate." That is his way of saying existence is not an attribute. As Kant puts it "it is merely the positing of a thing, or of certain determinations, as existing in themselves." It is simply a logical fallacy to go from the "logical possibility of concepts to the real possibility of objects." This is what Descartes seems to be doing.

To see the force of this objection consider the following example. Suppose I say "I hope to have a son someday." You certainly understand what this means and it's not strange at all. Also if I were to say "I hope my future son likes to play golf" nothing strange seems to be going on there (unless you happen not to like golf!). But suppose I were to say "I hope my future son exists." What could this possibly mean? It seems very strange to say precisely because existence is not a real attribute. Of course my future son will exist. That is, if I have a son in the future his existence is implied. That's what Kant means by saying that being is "merely the positing of a thing."

Alas for us this is where we will have to leave things with God and essence and existence. Descartes' consideration of essence has been to establish that the essence of material things is comprehensible. And based on what we've said so far and, with a few additions in the sixth meditation, it will turn out to be perfectly comprehensible, thus opening the door for us to infer, actually deduce, the existence of material things. It is to this task that we will turn next.

We can now proceed to the deduction of material things. As Descartes says in the first paragraph of the sixth meditation "I at least know with certainty that such things may exist." We know this because we have examined their essence and in the example of the triangle have discovered that there is nothing contradictory to lead us to suppose that these things cannot exist. But since essence is different than existence (except as in the case of God whose essence is to exist) we need to consider their existence separately.

Descartes begins by making a distinction between the imagination and what he calls pure intellect. In many cases these faculties are used together but to show their difference he suggests that we conceive of a chiliogon which is a thousand-sided figure. While it is possible to conceive it, we cannot imagine it by which Descartes means to view it "with the eyes of my mind." Imagination requires a special separate faculty from thinking and this faculty is what gives us the clue to the deduction of material substance. The way he puts it is that "a special effort of mind is necessary to the act of imagination, which is not required to conceiving or understanding." This special faculty he refers to, in paragraph 10 as the "passive faculty of perception." Before getting to this Descartes provides us with a brief summary of the previous meditations in paragraphs 5 through 9.

In paragraph 10 Descartes clarifies what he means by the passive faculty of perception. There are many perceptions which we have that we are not choosing to have. In fact, the vast majority of our sense experiences are not of our choosing. For example, if you look out your window you have no choice but to see what is there. It's not like you can make up your own scene to view. So what could explain this fact? There are, in Descartes' view two possible explanations. 1. God is causing these scenes. That is, the scenes (the perceptions) are not really there but just put into our mind by God. 2. The external objects themselves are causing our perceptions of them. You may believe that there is a third option namely that we ourselves are creating the perceptions but remember they are passive; involuntary. If we were causing them you'd think we would have control over them. So of the two options above we need to figure out which is the correct one. The first is a problem because it makes God a deceiver which we have established is impossible. So there is only one option left. It must be that the external objects themselves are

causing our perceptions. Therefore, material things exist. This, then, is the deduction of material things.

So Descartes has deduced the existence of the self, God, and material things; in that order. And to come full circle we conclude with some considerations of the self more informed than when we began our investigation. In paragraph 12 Descartes says that "there is nothing which that nature teaches me more expressly or more sensibly than that I have a body." We alluded to this earlier that in Descartes' view we are not the same as our body. What we are can be described as a thinking thing; a thinking thing which has a body not a thinking thing which is a body. This is an important distinction and is a distinct element in Cartesian metaphysics. Descartes is a dualist which means he believes that there are two distinct substances in the world: mental substance (the mind) and physical substance (the body). They have fundamentally different attributes. The mind is characterized by the attribute of thought. The body is characterized by the attribute of extension; that is taking up space.

The next step is taken in paragraph 13 where Descartes says "nature likewise teaches me by these sensations of pain, hunger, thirst, etc., that I am not only lodged in my body as a pilot in a vessel, but that I am besides so intimately conjoined, and as it were intermixed with it, that my mind and body compose a certain unity." Herein is perhaps Descartes' greatest contribution to modern philosophy; a problem! If mind and body are so radically different how can they compose a unity? Another way of thinking about this is as follows. Descartes claims that there is an interaction between mind and body. But, given their differences, how is this interaction possible? This is the mind-body problem. It has literally occupied philosophers ever since Descartes' time.

Descartes himself provides an answer that is nothing short of shocking in its inadequacy. This has led many scholars to speculate that Descartes never saw this for the problem it really is. We will address his attempted solution and then consider some solutions offered by contemporaries of Descartes. Descartes points out, in paragraph 20, that the mind and body do not interact at every point in the body. In fact the locus of interaction is in the brain. It is very important to remember that for Descartes the mind is NOT the brain. The mind is a non-physical substance whereas the brain is part of the body. So the mind and body interact in the brain.

To be specific Descartes says that the location of this interaction is the pineal gland. There were two reasons for postulating this as the location. First, it is centrally located in the brain and the only part not divided into halves; like the two hemispheres of the brain. Second, it was anybody's guess what the pineal gland did at the time and so this is a good a job as any for it.

The problem with this answer, of course, is that it doesn't address the question of how the mind and body interact, but rather, where they interact. We are still left wondering how to explain interaction and this is where Descartes leaves it.

There are basically two ways to deal with the mind body problem; that is, the problem of interaction. We can try to explain the interaction or we can simply deny that there is any interaction. Surprisingly enough, the latter has been the more common approach. The reason for this is understandable. Explaining exactly how mind and body interact turns out to be very difficult. It is much easier to simply deny interaction entirely since on this approach there is nothing left to explain. Well, nothing except why there appears to be interaction. Three of Descartes' contemporaries attempted to do this while still preserving dualism.

The first was a philosopher named Nicolas Malbranche. He agreed with Descartes' dualism of mind and matter. However, he denied that the two substances interacted. Granted, mind and body appear to interact but this appearance is misleading. The real story is much different; and much stranger. The mind and body actually operate according to two separate causal series. We are in control of our mental faculties and so have some control over the causes and effects of the mental. But when the mental "causes" the physical it is nothing more than an "occasional" cause. That is to say it is not the direct cause of what happens in the body. Rather, it is the signal if you will for the cause to take effect. In this case the ultimate cause is God. So on the occasion when I will to act in a certain way God causes my body to so behave. I told you it was weird. But believe it or not Malbranche's philosophy was "a considerable success." So says the historian Frederich Coppleston in his definitive nine-volume history of philosophy. This success was due in large part to what occasionalism stood against; materialism and empiricism both of which were regarded as damaging to God and religious faith. Sometimes you have to pick the lesser of two evils!

Given our probable reluctance to accept occasionalism we can consider other options. A second attempt to deny interaction was proposed by the German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz. Like Malbranche and Descartes, Leibniz is a dualist so he believes in the fundamental difference between mind and matter. However, he denies the interaction. Again we are left with the task of explaining the apparent interaction of mind and body. To do so Leibniz suggests a metaphor. Consider two clocks exactly alike in every way. We wind them up and set them to the same time. Then we let them work. Do you imagine that they will keep the same time? Within reason of course let's not get too carried away. But yes, they will keep pretty much the same time. Is that because one clock is causing the other to keep the same time? Is there any interaction between the two clocks at all? Of course not. The only reason they seem to interact (i.e. keep the same time) is because they were started at the same time. It's the same with the mind and body. Through what Leibniz terms a "pre-established harmony" the mind and body were set (as it were) to run in sync and do so. Not because of any interaction mind you, but because God set them up at the same time.

This idea also enjoyed quite a wide popularity especially among the scientists of the day who were interested in mechanistic explanations but wanted to preserve a place for God in the grand scheme of things. In particular Sir Isaac Newton used the clock analogy to explain the universe with God as the one who starts the clock and lets it go. This clock analogy was to appear again in 1804 when William Paley used it to prove the existence of God (more on this anon).

A third attempt to solve the problem of interaction was offered by the Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza. He is somewhat different from the previous philosophers in that he immediately disagrees with the Cartesian notion that they are two fundamentally different substances. Wrong says Spinoza. Given the definition of substance as "that which is in itself and is conceived through itself" neither mind nor body are substance. In fact, there can be only one substance. However, this one substance has many attributes, two of which are thought (which characterizes mind) and extension (which characterizes body). Depending on which perspective you take you can perceive the one substance as having either one attribute or the other or some other attribute entirely. So this one substance can be seen from dual aspects. And this is what we

refer to his theory as: the dual aspect theory. This can also be referred to as "property dualism" as opposed to "substance dualism." We say property dualism because Spinoza refers to the dual attributes (or properties) of thought and extension. Descartes, of course, is a substance dualist because he refers to two substances: mind and body. By now you've probably guessed what the one substance is in Spinoza's theory: God.

Aside from these three theories, each of which had strong advocates, there are two other possibilities for dealing with the problem of interaction. These may be termed even more radical than the previous three if you can believe that. What each of the previous theories has in common is their acceptance, in some form, of the basic principle of dualism. But we can also deal with the problem of interaction by denying dualism altogether. What we then end up with is an entirely new metaphysical theory: monism.

Monism is the view that everything is composed of one substance and has two versions. The first version of monism, which we will consider in more detail later in the book, is materialism. This view postulates that everything in the universe is composed solely of physical substance. So when we refer to the mind or soul we are NOT referring to a non-physical entity. The mind, if it exists at all, must be something physical (like the brain). A contemporary of Descartes named Thomas Hobbes advocated this idea. It is very popular in some scientific quarters even to this day.

A second version of monism postulates that everything in the universe is the product of mental substance. On this view, there is no physical substance at all, only minds and the ideas in them. This theory is called idealism and gained some popularity in the 18th century through the work of the Irish philosopher George Berkeley. One of the implications of this view is that for something to exist it must be perceived. In this respect it bears quite a striking similarity to modern quantum physics and it was Werner Heisenberg who recognized this connection and ran with it. Given the applicability of both types of monism to contemporary science it's no small wonder that we're trying to find a way to unify disparate theories today! We'll deal with these issues later as well. Our next task (after taking an exam of course!) will be to look at more recent attempts to deal with the problem of dualism and the nature of the mind.

# Chapter 10

## Philosophy of Mind

In 1949 something significant happened in the world of philosophy which changed forever our view of the concept of the mind. That something was the publication of *The Concept of Mind* by British philosopher Gilbert Ryle. By and large dualism was still, centuries after Descartes, the dominant view in metaphysics. Ryle's work changed that by point out that the Cartesian view was not riddled by a few minor problems (like the problem of interaction) but fatally flawed by one major problem. The irony was that this problem was not a real problem at all but rather a problem with the concept of mind. Ryle called this problem the "category mistake."

The mistake was thinking that "mind" belongs to a category of things that it, in fact, doesn't belong to. To illustrate, Ryle asks us to imagine the following example. Suppose I want to take you on a tour of a local university. So we get on campus and I show you the library, the student center, the science building, and so on. Just then someone asks "when are you going to show me the university?" The mistake implicit in this question is in thinking that the university is a separate thing in addition to the other buildings I have shown you. Ryle is claiming that we make the same mistake with regard to the mind.

The whole Cartesian dogma, which Ryle refers to as "the dogma of the Ghost in the Machine," is based on the idea that the mind is a thing. Since, according to Descartes, the mind is not a physical thing, it must be a mental thing. This belief leads us to try to solve all sorts of problems that are unsolvable. Not to worry though because we can eliminate the problems by eliminating the faulty assumption that minds are things. So what is the mind? Well, let's look at it.

When we make references to the mind are we really referring to a thing?

Is this the way we talk about "the mind." We're looking at language because this is the method that Ryle uses; it's called analytic philosophy. Consider some sentences which contain words referring to mental states.

"I believe that it's going to rain today."

"I feel happy."

"I know how to play the piano."

Now what do these mental state words (believe, feel, know) refer to? Another way to think about this is to ask how do we know whether these sentences are true or false? If Descartes' view is correct these mental state words must be referring to a mental substance (the mind) which is inherently private and hidden from public view. If this is true then only the person saying them can really tell whether they are true or false. After all only you know what you're thinking or feeling.

The problem with this view is that it seems false. When we say something like "I believe" or "I know" we do not think of it as referring to a hidden mental substance; a ghost in the machine. Let's look at the example "I know how to play the piano." What do I really mean when I say this? According to Ryle what I mean is "I am able to play the piano" that is, I can do something. So, mental terms refer to dispositions to behave in a certain way. If I said I knew how to play the piano but couldn't actually play any songs you would conclude that I couldn't play the piano. Knowing refers to a behavior. And this is true for all mental state words. The mind, in Ryle's view is a set of behavioral dispositions.

If you've ever taken a psychology course this may sound familiar to you as the theory of behaviorism. Actually, what Ryle is advocating is a variation of psychological behaviorism called Logical (or philosophical) behaviorism. Essentially what it means is that we can understand mental state words (or define them) in terms of behaviors. It's not that the behaviors are a clue to the mental state. The behavior is the mental state. There is, in this view a strict identity between the two.

Speaking of identity the next step in the philosophy of mind story involves the concept of identity. Ryle himself did not clearly spell out the metaphysical position underlying his view but it is clearly a materialist view. For Ryle there is no mental substance only physical substance. The next step was taken by the Australian philosopher J. J. C. Smart (a good

name for a philosopher!) in 1963. The theory he put forward, called the Identity Theory postulates that there is a strict identity between the mind and the brain. In fact, the mind is nothing more than the brain itself. So when we refer to mental states we are actually referring to physical states in the brain.

To advocates of this view it seemed nothing more than good common sense. It certainly had the benefit of solving, or eliminating, the problems inherent in dualism. But to critics the theory was nothing short of ridiculous speculation. According to these critics there will always be aspects of the mind that cannot be explained by appealing to the physical structure of the mind. What I would like to do now is walk you through some of the criticisms of this identity theory, the responses of the advocates of the theory, and the status of the theory as we have it now. Interestingly enough, the theory as we have it now is a completely new theory of mind called functionalism.

The first objection relates to the concept of identity. According to one definition offered by Leibniz two things can only be identical if they share all the same attributes. By this law of identity the mind and brain cannot be identical. After all, the mind has some attributes that the brain cannot have. For example, you can have a profound thought or you can say that your mental state is happy or sad. But can the brain be profound or happy or sad? It seems not. So clearly, the identity theory is flawed.

The response offered by the advocates of the theory is ingenious if nothing else. What is needed to overcome this objection is one of two things. We could show that the criterion of identity advocated by Leibniz is wrong. The other option is to offer a counterexample which seems to violate the law of identity but in fact does not. This is the approach taken. The example involves the evening star and the morning star. These two different stars could never be identical in a million years. After all they have radically different attributes; one comes out in the morning, one in the evening. However, they are in fact identical. The morning star refers to the planet Venus but so does the evening star. It only seems that they are different things. In reality they are one and the same thing. So, say advocates of the identity theory, though it seems as if the mind and brain could not be identical this is not the case at all.

The second objection also deals with identity but in a different way. To

illustrate this objection, think of the number pi to two decimal places. Now I will think of pi to two decimal places as well. The question is "are our thoughts identical?" Well, it's easy to tell. I was thinking of 3.14 how about you? OK good so they are identical. Now, according to the Identity theory there should be a corresponding physical state in the brain that our thoughts are identical to. So when you think of the number pi what happens is that a C neuron fires in your brain. So your thought just is that neuron firing. Now, would it be possible for my thought of the number pi to be identical with a different neuron firing; perhaps a B neuron? It seems so. So the problem is that although we have identical thoughts our brain states are different.

The response offered to this objection is very simple with one small problem. It leads to an entirely new theory of the mind and a startling implication. Before we get to that though, the response. The only identity that matters is the identity between my thought and my brain state and your thought and your brain state. It's not important whether there is an identity between our brain states or not. This is not the identity that counts. We know there is an identity of mental and physical states but the underlying nature of the physical state is not important; only that there is such an identity.

This seems interesting so we should see where it leads. If the underlying physical state is not so important then it seems that as long as there is thinking going on pretty much anything that causes that would be fine. Let's think of it this way. Could you imagine aliens from another planet being composed of a different physical structure? And also being able to think? That seems reasonable. Let's say that there are aliens on Jupiter whose physical makeup is based on silicon as opposed to our physical makeup which is based on carbon. It seems that as long as the aliens are doing what we're doing when we're thinking then they would also be thinking. This may be a little self-centered to define thinking in terms of what we're doing but since we're the example of thinking beings that we're addressing we'll stick with the comparison. The idea is that we're thinking and we define this not by the underlying physical structure (of course we know there is one) but by the outcome of the structure. This is the theory of functionalism. The difference between it and the Identity Theory should now be clear. In functionalism what defines thinking is the outcome or the function that is being fulfilled. So that's the new theory. What's the startling implication?

If, as we have just conceded, it is possible for a being composed of silicon to think then we don't need to look to Jupiter for a candidate for this being. We have one right here: the computer. Functionalism implies that computers might be able to think! The irony of this is that the idea that computers might be able to think was put forward by the mathematician Alan Turing only one year after Gilbert Ryle wrote *The Concept of Mind*.

In an article titled *Computing Machinery and Intelligence* published in the prestigious journal *Mind* Turing asks us to consider this strange possibility. To do this he constructs a thought experiment called the imitation game. There are three players in this game: a man, a woman, and an interrogator (the sex of this player doesn't matter). The idea is that the interrogator asks questions to determine which player is the woman. Well, you say, how hard can that be after all the interrogator just has to look. So we'll make it a little more difficult by placing each of the players in separate rooms. Still, it might be easy because the interrogator just has to listen for the woman's voice. So we'll make the questions and answers written. But you can always recognize a woman's handwriting so we'll make the responses typed. Now the payoff comes. Suppose we substitute for the man a computer. And suppose further that the computer could fool the interrogator a statistically significant number of times. Wouldn't we have to concede that the computer is thinking? Turing said yes. I should mention at this point that no computer, even the most advanced AI computers we have now, has ever passed this test; now called the Turing test.

Of course not everyone agreed with this implication. In particular the philosopher John Searle took exception to the idea that computers could think and offered his own thought experiment to illustrate the problem with the imitation game. He called his thought experiment the Chinese Room Example. A man, who speaks fluent English, but not Chinese, is in a room. He is given a text written in Chinese and by using a set of rules (written in English) produces another text in Chinese and hands it to observers outside the room. In fact, the first text is a story and a set of questions written in Chinese. The text that the man in the room produces, in Chinese, is a set of answers to the questions. Again, he produces this text by following a set of rules which essentially tell him what Chinese character to write down when he sees a certain Chinese character in the original text. Now, to observers outside the room it looks as if the man

knows Chinese. The problem, of course, is that he doesn't. What this illustrates is the missing element in the Turing test: understanding. While the man is able to manipulate a set of symbols (just as the computer can manipulate binary code) he does not understand what he's doing.

The latest update in the philosophy of mind story is a theory offered by another Australian philosopher named David Chalmers. In his book *The Conscious Mind* he explains that the fundamental aspect of thinking is still unexplained. "Consciousness is the biggest mystery." To explain it he attempts to tread the thin line between materialism and dualism by advocating a version of property dualism where he claims that the mind is an emergent property of the physical structure of the brain. Like a hologram which is caused by a physical system but different from it, the mind is a property of a sufficiently complex physical structure though different from it. There's much more research to do but it is an interesting start. Given the emphasis on physical structure that these theories imply we should probably consider in more detail the metaphysics of materialism.

# Chapter 11

## Metaphysics of Materialism

Materialism is not a new theory of metaphysics. It traces its roots back to the early Greek philosophers before Socrates. When Thales deduced that the fundamental substance of everything was water he was, in essence, giving a materialist answer to that question. The same can be said for Empedocles postulating the existence of four elements: air, earth, fire, and water. The atomists, Leucippus and Democritus, proposed the fundamental material substance with which we are somewhat familiar as the building block for all material substance; the atom.

With the rise of Cartesian metaphysics in the 17th century, however, materialism seemed to be on the way out. Descartes proposed that, at least with respect to human beings, two radically different substances (mind and matter) interacted. This did not go over so well with at least one of his contemporaries, namely, the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes. Descartes gave Hobbes a copy of the manuscript for the *Meditations on First Philosophy* and Hobbes came back with several important criticisms centered on the inherent problems with dualist metaphysics.

Hobbes proposed materialism as a solution to the problem of interaction which was at the heart of Descartes' metaphysics. In brief, Hobbes reasoned that everything in the universe was material substance. The only way something could be a "spirit" (Hobbes' word for the immaterial substance Descartes referred to as the "thinking thing") was to be outside of the universe and there was only one being that fit that description: God.

This version of materialism with God outside the universe went over very well with Isaac Newton whose scientific theory was thoroughly materialist but who kept an open mind about God as the author or creator of the giant mechanistic universe. Newton's universe is often described

as a giant clock with God winding it up. Newton's theory is elegant in its simplicity and universality leaving the workings of nature in the hands of three laws of motion.

The elegance of this theory hardly betrays the underlying philosophical problem. If the universe is like a giant machine obeying intractable laws of nature then everything must be a slave to these laws. There can be no exception for human beings since we too are in the universe. So the implication of this metaphysical position is that there is no freewill. That is everything is caused "in such a way that it could not be otherwise" (Miller, p. 111). This is the problem of determinism.

Many people found this implausible. After all, if everything is really determined, how come we can't predict what will happen? The answer was supplied in part by a gambling epidemic in France during the time of Napoleon. Now, gambling attracts two kinds of people; suckers and mathematicians. It is to the latter that we look for our answer; the French mathematician Pierre Simon de Laplace. He took materialism and determinism to its logical conclusion by saying that if (a big if) we knew everything there was to know about a specific time and place in the universe we could predict with exact accuracy everything else that would happen since everything is determined by previous causes. So how come we can't predict with exact accuracy? Simple, says Laplace, because we don't know everything about a specific time and place in the universe. There are too many variables to account for and our knowledge is always imperfect. But, we can compute with good mathematical accuracy how imperfect our knowledge is and what effect this will have on our accuracy. While this is a useful skill for the gambler it is more importantly for us the basics of probability.

Ironically, for our story, it was probability, i.e. the lack of certainty that was to offer a potential solution to the problem of determinism. But before we get to that we need a little background information on the world of materialism in the 20th century.

Newton's theory itself, or at least the part that dealt with gravity, had an important problem. Gravity was supposed to work at a distance through space to keep everything in its proper place; like the moon revolving around the earth. The trouble is space is empty (well it was for Newton). The question then becomes, how can gravity work through empty space

to exert itself on the moon; or anything else for that matter? This is sort of like Aristotle's problem of separation. Interestingly enough, the answer was to come from a borrowed idea of Aristotle: aether.

We needed aether for another reason as well. Around the turn of the 20th century a scientist named Young discovered that light traveled in waves. This was a problem for Newton as well because light was supposed to travel instantaneously through space (which was empty, remember?). Well, if light traveled in waves it very definitely took time to travel. And, if they traveled in waves what were the waves in? Young called the something aether. Interesting enough, aether was also used by Descartes in his theory on gravitation.

Now all we had to do was find it. Two physicists at the University of Cleveland constructed an experiment to have a go at this. Their names were Michelson and Morley. The experiment they constructed to find the aether failed completely which left everyone startled. If there was no aether then everything was up for grabs. No aether, no light waves, no place for gravity to work, no anything! This would also be a problem for another gentleman named Marconi who was playing with waves; this time radio waves.

It fell to Albert Einstein, working in the Swiss patent office at the time, to solve the problem. It turns out that we only need aether if another of Newton's postulates is true; namely that time and space are absolute. According to Einstein, the speed of light cannot be invariant (i.e. constant) while at the same time space and time are absolute. What the speed of light shows us is that the aether doesn't exist which is not a problem if we postulate that time is relative. In other words if time and space are objective frames of reference then aether is necessary as a reference point for measurement. But if they are not then we don't need aether; which was just fine for Einstein because his theory of relativity implied that time and space are relative to one's frame of reference. So we don't need the aether; just as well since we couldn't find it anyway!

Among its other startling implications Einstein's theory equated matter and energy and, more relevant for our story, equated gravity and acceleration. As a sidebar his theory also implied that everything traveled at the same speed: the speed of light! One other important implication of Einstein's theory was the wave particle duality that led to quantum

physics; a theory Einstein himself never felt comfortable with. In fact, his disagreement with it led him to say "God does not play dice with the universe." But in experiments there is always a small probability of making a mistake and it was due to one such mistake by two physicists, Davisson and Germer, which led to the uncertainty that Einstein didn't like.

The problem with Einstein's theory (there's always a problem!) was that it only worked at the big level; gravity and its effects on big things like planets and galaxies. However, it did not work at the subatomic level where electrons move in fairly strange ways. This arena of the universe was the province of quantum mechanics. This theory was the brainchild of, among others, Max Planck, Niels Bohr, and Werner Heisenberg. Heisenberg, in particular, is relevant for our original problem of determinism. His uncertainty principle implied that there was a limit to how much knowledge we could have at the subatomic level.

Simply put the uncertainty principle says that our knowledge of one attribute comes at the expense of knowledge of another attribute. For example, say you want to know how fast an electron is traveling and you'd also like to know where it's located. Well, you can learn about its velocity but then you won't know where it's at. Or you can find out where it's located but then you won't know how fast it's going. What's worse to measure anything about the little electron (or any other subatomic particle for that matter) you have to see it which means you have to shine a light on it. But the light particles will affect what the electron is doing. So there's no way to tell whether the electron is doing what its doing naturally or because you're observing it.

Einstein, in particular, didn't like the implications of this. It seemed like quantum theory was saying that the reason we couldn't know was because there was no determined reality there to know until we observed it. For Einstein, this implied that the universe was not orderly. It was all just random. But surely, "God doesn't play dice with the universe." Well, perhaps God does.

It turns out that quantum theory is correct. The reason for the limit to our knowledge is not due to the inadequacy of our measuring ability rather it is that at the subatomic level there is a fundamental indeterminism. The fabric of the cosmos is what physicists call "probability waves." In a

sense things don't exist (at least at the subatomic level) until their probability wave collapses; that is until we observe them and in doing so make them actual. As we'll see in another chapter, the philosophical roots of this are in 18th century idealism.

With regard to the problem of determinism the question then becomes: If there is a fundamental indeterminism at the subatomic level, couldn't it be possible that there is a level of indeterminism at the macroscopic level? In other words if there is no "observable causal determinism at the level of atomic and subatomic particles" then there may be no causal determinism at all! (Miller, p. 116) So our worries are over!

Except for one major problem; as opposed to the somewhat minor problems we have already considered! Einstein's theory of relativity is well tested and confirmed for the level of large objects and gravity. Quantum physics is well tested and confirmed for the level of very small objects. However, the two theories are fundamentally incompatible which leads many scientists to speculate that there's more to the story. It seems intuitively implausible that the fundamental laws of nature would be fundamentally incompatible with one another. Einstein himself postulated that what would need to be found was a theory to unify these two incomplete theories. He called it a unified field theory. These days, scientists call it the grand unification theory and the search is ongoing.

The latest attempt to construct such a G.U.T. is string theory. The most prominent advocate for this is Brian Greene who several years ago authored a book titled *The Elegant Universe* where he outlines the problem which leads to the search for a unified theory and string theory's attempt to do this. The details are complicated, but, simply put, the idea is that the fundamental particles we are familiar with, the electron, the quarks (there are several varieties of these including the charm quark and the strange quark), and the force particles (like the gluon, weak gauge boson, and photon), are all in reality composed of a more fundamental substance. Think of this as a very tiny filament of matter shaped like a rubber band which vibrates. This is called a string. Some of the strings are closed loops while others are simply strands. Each one vibrates at a different frequency and depending on that frequency the string will be either an electron, or a quark, or whatever.

Among its more radical implications, string theory postulates that reality

is composed of ten or eleven dimensions. We are now familiar with four dimensions; three space dimensions and one time dimension. As we'll see, even these seemingly simple concepts have deep philosophical implications. Is space and time real or just abstract concepts we use as a shorthand description of reality? Einstein proposed, and we now have good evidence for the fact, that space and time are intimately connected and form what Greene calls the "fabric of the cosmos." The consequences of this link are quite amazing. "If you look up into the night sky you can see many stars. The light from each of those stars takes time to travel. So you're seeing the stars as they were in the past. The farther away the stars are the further back in time you're looking. Say you look at a star that's 6000 light years away. You're seeing the light from that star as it was 6000 years ago (that's how long it's taken to get to your eyes). Imagine someone on a planet orbiting that star looking at us. They would be seeing us as we were 6000 years ago. Which of those two is now?"<sup>1</sup>

1. This quote was taken from an Alan Parsons Project song titled "Temporalia" on the CD *The Time Machine*.

# Chapter 12

## John Locke & George Berkeley

We have seen several alternatives to Cartesian metaphysics and so now we should turn our attention to an alternative to Cartesian epistemology. Remember that as a rationalist Descartes believes that at least some of our knowledge is innate. In particular, our knowledge of self and God are innate though there may be other aspects of knowledge that are innate as well.

As an advocate of modern empiricism John Locke stands against this idea. Empiricism is the belief that ALL knowledge comes from sense experience and Locke was the first to offer a systematic response to rationalism after Descartes. In order to get this project off the ground he had to first demonstrate the flaw in the theory of innate ideas; a very popular idea in the 18th century due in large part to the influence of Descartes.

To begin let's consider the evidence in favor of innate ideas. If an idea is going to be innate it seems that it has to be universally-held and it has to be something that doesn't have to be taught. But suppose an idea exists that has the traits. Does that mean it's innate? No. As Locke puts it universal consent does not prove innateness. Even if an idea, like the law of identity let's say, were universally held that would not be enough to prove innateness if there were some other, better, explanation. So while universal consent is a necessary condition for innateness, it's not sufficient.

But it gets worse for innate ideas. According to Locke, there aren't even any ideas which are universally held. What about the law of Identity? You could easily find people, children perhaps, who knew nothing of this idea. But if an idea is innate everyone would know it. Rationalists might respond by saying that while the idea is innate it takes sense experience to trigger it. But, Locke asks, how is this any different from the claim that sense experience is where the idea is learned? The only

conclusion that makes sense is that the mind at birth is a blank tablet (or *tabula rasa* like Aristotle said). All our knowledge comes from sense experience.

In fact, according to Locke's theory which he believed was the common sense alternative to rationalism, there are two sources for all our knowledge: sensation and reflection. Sensation is a passive faculty of the mind (sort of like Descartes' passive faculty of perception) where we take in simple ideas through the five senses. These simple ideas, like sound, color, shape, smell, texture, are then combined in the mind by the active faculty of reflection. The results of this reflection are complex ideas.

For example, when you look at an object, a tree let's say, you are directly observing through the faculty of sensation, simple ideas. You see the tree's shape and color. You can feel the texture of the tree. You can sense a smell (and taste if you care to). All of these are simple ideas. They enter through the separate senses and must be combined in the mind. This combination results in the perception you have of the tree; which is a complex idea. This complex idea represents the actual object and this view is called "representative realism." The main point to remember about this theory is that the only things you ever directly perceive are ideas; simple and complex. As we'll see in a moment this leads to a serious problem for Locke's metaphysics as well as his epistemology.

First, however, we should consider in more detail Locke's thoughts on the objects themselves. We perceive them through the medium of ideas but what are the objects themselves composed of? There are two components to all objects: qualities and substance. Qualities are the attributes the object has and are what we perceive as simple ideas. There are two types of qualities: primary and secondary. Primary qualities, things like shape, motion, number, are qualities that are actually in the object itself. Consider, as Locke does, a snowball. It has a certain shape which is actually part of the object just as the fact of it being in motion (or not) is also in the object. On the other hand, color is not really in the object. An object's color is simply its ability to reflect back to our eyes certain parts of the light wave and those parts are the color we see. Because color is not in the object Locke terms it a secondary quality. He defines these as not being in the object except as a power in the object to cause in us a certain sensation. In addition to color, smell and taste would be examples of secondary qualities.

Qualities are what we perceive of the object. But, it's obvious to Locke that the object must be more than that. After all, qualities cannot just be floating in empty space! Shape has to be in something just as texture, motion, or any other quality. So there must be more to the object than its qualities. There must be the "stuff" that the qualities are in; something that "stands under the qualities so to speak. This something Locke termed substance; which in fact simply means "stands under." The funny thing about substance is that it cannot be perceived. After all, it's not a quality it's what the qualities are in. So Locke defines substance as "something we know not of." We can't have direct knowledge of it because we can't have direct perceptions of it. Remember knowledge comes from sense experience so our knowledge of substance must be indirect. For Locke, it's a matter of common sense. Qualities have to be in something so even though we can't see the something, it must be there. This represents another potential problem for Locke's theory.

Speaking of representing let's get back to representative realism and see what problems this leads to. The problems are likely to be more serious now that we have an unobservable substance to deal with. Locke claims that the ideas we get from an object represent it. So the complex ideas I have of a tree look like the tree. Question: Is there any way for me to verify this claim? It would seem not. Remember, the only things we directly perceive are ideas. So I cannot perceive the object itself except through my ideas. So I can't tell whether my idea represents the object since I can't perceive the object! Not only that, Locke's theory depends on the existence of a material substance which cannot, even in principle, be perceived. For an empiricist he sure is appealing to a lot of unobservable entities.

In fact, that's exactly what another empiricist named George Berkeley began to think. If empiricism is the claim that all knowledge comes from sense experience, then Locke has gone far beyond the boundary marked out by that definition. Let's see if we can't figure a way out of this problem by using a simple example. Suppose I said that there was a palm tree in the room you're in. Do you believe me? Likely as not you're saying no. Why? Because you can't perceive it. But suppose I say that this is an unobservable palm tree. That is, it really exists, you just can't perceive it. Now do you believe me? Probably not because you recognize (as Berkeley does) that existence and perception are connected. For something to

exist it must be perceived. If something cannot be perceived, it simply doesn't exist. This is what Berkeley meant when he said "esse est percipi:" to be is to be perceived.

To say that substance exists but cannot be perceived is just nonsense. If something exists then it has to be perceived. So, since substance cannot be perceived, it doesn't exist. This of course is a radical idea and much different than the dualism of Descartes and Locke. In this respect, Locke was like Descartes. They both believed in two substances: a mental substance and a physical substance. But, we've just shown that physical substance can't be perceived. And, only things that can be perceived exist. So we have to conclude that physical substance doesn't exist. That means everything that exists is the product of mental substance. In other words, everything is just a collection of ideas. This metaphysical position, which Berkeley was championing, is called idealism.

Notice that this theory not only deals with the problem of substance (by denying its existence) it also solves the problem of representative realism. We no longer have to suppose that ideas represent objects; ideas are objects. The objects we see are nothing but a collection of ideas.

While this position does overcome the problems of representative realism, it may seem to have a few of its own (like denying the existence of material substance!). The serious problem seems to be what idealism implies. If existence is tied to perception then what happens when nobody perceives an object? Does it just disappear? For example, right now I don't perceive my car and if no one else is either then it seems that it doesn't exist. This is very much like the old question "If a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound?" So, do objects really pop in and out of existence? Well, theoretically yes, unless there is some mind constantly perceiving them. Before we address this we should probably investigate one of the motivations for Berkeley's idealism.

Let's consider the alternatives. We've seen dualism and the problems it entails. While it's tempting to dismiss them out of hand it seems that dualism is inherently problematic and unworkable. The other option is materialism. Granted, it solves the problem of interaction but consider some of its broader effects. In spite of Hobbes' claim that materialism leaves room for God most materialists recognize that, taken to its logical

conclusion, this theory really eliminates the need for God and His existence entirely. This implication was unacceptable to Berkeley. There has to be a way to avoid the problems of dualism and the atheism of materialism. Thus, we arrive at the theory of idealism. So what do we do about the problem of existence? What we need is a universal perceiver who is always assuring the continued existence of objects even when we don't perceive them.

The solution Bishop Berkeley (did I mention he was a Bishop?) was to offer to all these problems was ingenious. According to Berkeley we can infer the continued existence of objects from observation. For example, if I light a candle and then leave the room, when I come back later it's burned down. So it seems that it has been in existence even though we haven't perceived it. But for this to be true someone must be observing it; a universal perceiver. By now, of course, you've guessed that this universal perceiver is God. Quite simply this seems to be the only explanation that consistently works and solves the problems. To be an empiricist in epistemology implies that you must be an idealist in metaphysics. So what is the answer to the tree falling question? Yes, it makes a sound because God perceives it!

Interestingly enough one of the founders of quantum physics recognized that appearance and reality really may be connected. Werner Heisenberg realized that from a quantum standpoint, things really don't exist unless we observe them. This seems to be implied by Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. When we observe subatomic phenomena we change what happens to them. In fact, there's no way for us to tell what subatomic particles are doing when we're not observing them. For all we know they may be doing nothing at all; they may not exist. By observing the particles we may, in fact, bring them into existence. Needless to say, Heisenberg was a big fan of Berkeley! But as we'll see next, things are about to get much worse for empiricism and where it takes us. Stay tuned.

# Chapter 13

## David Hume

So how much worse can it get? Well, as we've seen empiricism does have a few problems which led to the metaphysical position of idealism. For Berkeley, in order to be a consistent empiricist entailed the denial of material substance. As we'll see, Hume shares that belief as well; and more. Before we get to that here are a few preliminary thoughts of David Hume.

As an advocate of empiricism, of course, Hume believes that all knowledge comes from perceptions. There are two types of perceptions: impressions and ideas. The ultimate source of all of our ideas is impressions. "Impressions" is the term Hume gives to sense experience; what Locke referred to as sensations. Impressions give rise to ideas which, in Hume's phrasing, "less lively copies" of impressions.

Hume recognizes that it might be difficult to believe that all ideas arise from impressions. After all, it seems that we can have some ideas without any corresponding impression. Take, for example, a golden mountain. It appears that here we have an idea which cannot possibly come from sense experience. But, consider, says Hume, that we do have a sense experience of gold and a sense experience of mountain. All we've done, in the case of the golden mountain, is to combine in a new way, ideas which arose from prior impressions.

There are two ways the human mind can combine ideas. These Hume calls "relations of ideas" and "matters of fact." "Relations of ideas" is the term Hume uses to refer to ideas which are connected as a matter of necessity as if by definition. A good example of this would be the idea of a triangle and the idea of a three sided object. Clearly, these ideas go together in such a way as to be incapable of being thought of as different. Though we gain these ideas by sense experience we can judge their

necessary connection prior to sense experience.

Matters of fact, as Hume points out in his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, "are not ascertained in the same manner." In fact, since we connect these ideas based on sense experience "the contrary of every matter of fact is still possible." This may sound like a strange thing to say but sense experience cannot tell us what will be only what is. So while I can observe the sun rising today I cannot infer that the sun must always rise. The ideas of "sun" and "rising" are not necessarily connected. So "That the sun will not rise to-morrow is no less intelligible a proposition, and implies no more contradiction than the affirmation, this it will rise."

To gain a better understanding of why denying matters of fact implies no contradiction let's investigate what is the nature of the connection between these ideas. Matters of fact are based on causality. The causal relationship itself has three elements. First is the element of temporal succession. There is a certain order in which cause and effect occur; cause always comes before effect. Second is the element of spatial proximity. Cause and effect have to be in some contact with one another (remember Aristotle's problem of separation?). Now, clearly both of these elements are observable but they are not sufficient to understand causality. Just because two events are in the right time sequence and in the proper spatial proximity we cannot infer that they are causally related. Therefore, there is a third element we need to address: necessary connexion (I'll use Hume's spelling since its unique!). In order for two events to be causally connected we need the idea that the effect could not happen but for the cause. This is the critical element of causality but it gives us a problem.

While we can observe the first two elements, necessary connexion is unobservable. This, of course, spells a problem for the empiricist. And Hume is nothing if not consistent in his empiricism. Since we cannot observe necessary connexion we cannot have knowledge of it. And since we can't have knowledge of it, we can't have knowledge of matters of fact. Thus, the contrary of every matter of fact is still possible.

Perhaps, an example will illustrate. Let's look at a couple of billiard balls; an appropriate example since Hume was a bit of a pool shark. Suppose ALL we know about a pair of billiard balls, labeled A and B is the following: Billiard ball A is moving towards billiard ball B and will make contact with it. Now, as a result of this contact what must happen? The

problem is that we can think of many things that may happen but no one of them must happen. Billiard ball B moves? Why would that be necessary? Suppose it's firmly affixed to the surface of the table. Or perhaps it's ten times heavier than ball A. You might say, well, something has to happen. OK but what exactly. Saying something must happen is tantamount to no knowledge at all.

So empiricism can only tell us what is happening or what has happened. But there is no rational justification for supposing that the future will be like this. All we really have to make this judgment is our previous experience and the habit or custom of expecting the future to be like this. That it always has worked before is no sure sign that it will continue to work. Its no wonder Hume is often considered a skeptic about knowledge. But, as I've been warning, it gets worse.

Clearly, from an empiricist perspective we have to deny material substance. After all, we have no sense experience of it. So on this point, Hume is in agreement with Berkeley. But Hume doesn't want to stop there. In his book *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume asks "from what impression does our idea of the self arise?" Remember that all ideas must arise from impressions; the self is no different. But when I think about it, I can find no impression:

"For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception." So what are we to conclude from this? It seems we have only two options: There is no self. The self just is these perceptions. See, the same logic which required us to deny material substance, leads us to deny mental substance as well. That's just not an option. However, it seems impossible to suppose that there is no self (of course, this is exactly what the Buddhist says but more on that much later!). So we are left with the only possible conclusion. The self just is what Hume, somewhat unromantically, calls "a bundle of perceptions."

This did distress Hume to some degree and he confesses as much in the Appendix of *A Treatise of Human Nature*. However, it was unclear to him how to free himself from this problem. And so this is where he left it. We now have, then, a new metaphysical position. We began with

Cartesian dualism which Locke also adopted. However, due to the problems with material substance we were led, by Bishop Berkeley, to idealism. Now, our position maintains that there is no substance at all; neither material nor mental. This view is called phenomenalism.

So let's sum up. By a consistent application of empiricism (an innocent enough theory when we first considered it) we have eliminated all substance. The self is now a bundle of perceptions and, one supposes that objects are also nothing but a collection of perceptions. We've come a long way towards the complete elimination of an independent objective reality (so a long way from Plato) and we're only in the 18th century! And, as is the case for most philosophers, Hume's greatest contribution to philosophy was a problem. OK, another problem. This one later became known as "Hume's Fork." With regard to epistemology we basically have two options. We can either have certainty in knowledge but it won't be about sense experience (relations of ideas) or we can have knowledge of sense experience but it won't be certain (matters of fact). This problem gave philosophers fits for years and actually caused Immanuel Kant to lose sleep. In this case a good thing because he solved it. Well, sort of.

# Chapter 14

## Immanuel Kant

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Hume's problem caused a great deal of consternation. Kant himself tells us that his "recollection of David Hume was the very thing which many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber." It was his principal objective to solve the problem of skepticism. Some of our philosophical speculations may seem very strange but this was a serious problem which needed to be addressed and solved if possible. In fact, Kant did solve, in large measure, this problem, and in doing so, ushered in a new era of philosophy which gave greater emphasis to the mind and its relationship to the world. Among other things Kant was directly responsible for the rise of perceptual psychology as a scientific discipline.

Before we get to Kant's solution we need to introduce some new terminology. For Kant, there are two kinds of propositions: analytic and synthetic. All propositions contain two parts: the subject and predicate terms. In analytic propositions, the predicate term merely restates the subject term and adds no new information to the subject term. For example, "All triangles are three sided objects." The predicate term here is "three sided objects" but that doesn't tell us anything new about "triangles"; it only restates it in a different way. Synthetic propositions, on the other hand, contain predicate terms which do add new information to the subject term. For example, "That car is silver." The predicate term here is "silver" which tells us something new about the subject term "car," namely its color.

We gain knowledge of propositions in two ways. Clearly, we can determine the truth of the analytic proposition "All triangles are three sided objects" without actually looking at all triangles. In fact, we don't have to look at any triangles at all to judge the truth of it. We understand the concept and that tells us that the proposition is true. In other words, we

gain knowledge of it prior to sense experience so we say it is known *a priori*. On the other hand, most synthetic propositions, such as "That car is silver," require sense experience to tell whether or not they are true. So they are known *a posteriori*.

So, analytic propositions are *a priori* and synthetic propositions are *a posteriori*. We can now restate Hume's problem in Kantian terms. According to Hume we could not have certainty with respect to matters of fact. In Kantian terms we would say you cannot have synthetic *a priori* knowledge. But is this true? To tell, we first need to think of an example of a synthetic *a priori* proposition and then ask whether we have knowledge of it or not. Kant gives us two examples; one from the realm of mathematics and one from the realm of metaphysics. The mathematical example he gives is  $7+5=12$ . There is some debate as to whether this is in fact a synthetic proposition and since we are not concerned with mathematical insights we'll pass over it to consider the metaphysical example. This, after all, is where the significant contribution of Kant lies.

The example he offers us is "Every event must have a cause." Clearly, this is a synthetic proposition since the predicate term "cause" adds new information to the subject term "event." So would you say that the statement is true or false? If you're like most people you'd say it's true. In other words, we know this. Interestingly enough our knowledge of this has to be *a priori* since we have not experienced every event. So we do have synthetic *a priori* knowledge. The real question is not "Is synthetic *a priori* knowledge possible?" The real question is "How is synthetic *a priori* knowledge possible?"

How could Hume have missed the possibility of synthetic *a priori* knowledge? You remember that Hume began with the empiricist assumption that all knowledge comes from sense experience. Another way of putting this is to say that our knowledge must conform to objects of sense experience. So with respect to causality Hume recognizes, quite correctly, that we have no sense experience of causality. However, he concludes from this, quite incorrectly, that we have no knowledge of causality. The mistake does not lie in his belief that causality cannot be found in sense experience. His mistake lies in his belief that sense experience is all we have.

So Hume was half right. To illustrate this Kant points out in the preface

to his monumental Critique of Pure Reason, "that all our knowledge begins with experience there can be no doubt." The real story, however, is told later, when he adds to this by saying "but although all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it arises from experience." Thus, we are on our way to the solution.

To see exactly how Kant gets there let's consider another problem and solution that impressed Kant very much. If you remember from astronomy the story of Copernicus this will help you understand Kant. The problem, at the time, was how to explain the movements of the planets around the Earth. This turned out to be very difficult to do and so Copernicus thought to try something revolutionary. What if I assume that the Sun is at the center instead of the Earth? Making this change made all the difference and allowed Copernicus to explain planetary motion much easier. This became known as the Copernican Revolution. Kant wanted to do the same in philosophy. He wanted to have his own Copernican Revolution. So, instead of assuming, as Hume did, that our knowledge must conform to objects of sense experience, Kant decided to see what might happen if we assumed that objects of sense experience had to conform to our knowledge.

What happens is that Hume's problem disappears. See Hume proceeded on the basis that sense experience was where knowledge came from and so since causality is not in sense experience we have no knowledge of it. Kant agreed that causality wasn't in sense experience. Causality is one of the conditions for having sense experience. Think of it like this. If you were wearing a pair of rose colored glasses everything in your world would appear rose-colored. Now imagine you were born with those glasses and can never take them off. In some sense, the glasses are not part of your sense experience though they do determine what your sense experience will be like. For Kant, causality is like that pair of glasses. It's a filter, so to speak, through which we view sense experience. There are more of these filters as well; things like space, time, and substance. Kant called them the categories of the mind and they constituted the essence of his "critical philosophy."

This is truly radical thinking. While, other philosophers and scientists were trying to understand the nature of space, time, causality, and substance in objective terms Kant was saying that they were part of the mind's ability to process experience. So, while Newton had said, in

Principia Mathematica, that space and time were absolute frames of reference, Kant was saying that they were subjective conditions governing our perception of reality. Is reality really composed of three space dimensions and one time dimension? Who knows! For Kant, what we do know is that we can only perceive reality in four dimensions. Who's to say that reality really isn't composed on 10 or 11 dimensions? Ironic that this is exactly what some contemporary physicists are saying who defend string theory.

The Kanizsa square is a good example of what Kant was trying to say. When you look at the picture you see a white square, right? There's only one thing. There is no white square there! Your mind filled in the square. That's an example of how the mind organizes sense experience.

What Kant was trying to do was find a middle ground between rationalism and empiricism. Both entail serious problems as we've seen. Rationalism forces us to conclude that some (if not all) ideas are innate while empiricism leads us to skepticism about such fundamental aspects of our knowledge as causality. Both are unacceptable though they do have useful elements. For Kant, the optimal solution is to take the best aspects of each epistemology and combine them. This is what he called critical philosophy. So, Kant denies innate ideas and says knowledge comes from sense experience. But, he does believe that the mind contains innate structures which govern how sense experience is processed (the categories). Of course, no good theory is without problems and Kant's is no different.

By way of considering these problems let's address a few other points about Kant's critical philosophy. One of the implications of the categories of the mind is that we do not perceive objects independent of them. All our sense experience is filtered through these categories so there is a difference between the objects of our sense experience and the objects independent of our sense experience of them. Kant terms these objects of sense experience "phenomena" and the objects as they are independent of our sense experience "noumena." There may be nothing too startling here to begin with but some of the implications of this may be problematic. That's not to say they aren't true of course but they may cause us problems.

One of Kant's concerns was to show the limits of human reason. There

are some things that we cannot have knowledge of. For example, almost by definition, we cannot have sense experience of objects as they are when they are not being perceived. These "things-in-themselves" can never be observed and so we can never have knowledge of them. He refers to objects like this, in somewhat Platonic terms, as transcendental. Unfortunately, there are other transcendental elements.

If objects that exist beyond our sense experience are beyond our knowledge this would also seem to include God as well. Certainly, God is transcendental so we are forever precluded from having knowledge of him through pure reason alone. Fortunately, Kant postulates that there are other types of reason through which we can gain knowledge of God. It turns out that God can be known through practical reason which we need as a basis for our understanding of morality. We will be discussing Kant's approach to morality in a later chapter.

There is a further transcendental element that we need to consider. This is the one that gave Hume so many problems. While the categories of mind can be understood as the elements of our sense experience, who is it that's having this experience. In other words, what is the nature of the self? Well, it's not an object of sense experience since the self is what has sense experience. We can infer its existence though through the fact that our sense experience is unified. Something must be doing the unifying and this something is the self; what Kant terms the transcendental unity of perception.

So where does this leave us? We have partially solved Hume's problem of skepticism. We can have certainty about causality since it is a condition for our having sense experience. We can still maintain that knowledge comes from sense experience without buying into the denial of such fundamental knowledge as we have of substance, space, time, and causality. However, we do have to recognize that applying these categories to the transcendental realm of noumena will never be possible. While we gain a better understanding of the workings of the mind through the innate structures it contains, we don't have to postulate that some ideas are innate and fully formed at birth in the mind. So while we have defined very definite limits to our knowledge we have advanced far beyond the limits of rationalism and empiricism. Have we advanced as far as we can? To answer that we'll need to address what happened in philosophy after Kant.

# Chapter 15

## Philosophy After Kant

Kant definitely advanced philosophy by solving Hume's problem of skepticism but as we've seen it was only a partial solution. Kant had drawn definite limits to our knowledge but the way he did so seemed suspicious to some. In this chapter and the next two I want to trace out several lines of thought that arose as a direct result of Kant's critical philosophy. In this chapter we will address the resurgence of idealism and the rise of psychology. In the next we'll address the resurgence of rationalism and in the third of this series we discuss the rise of logical positivism and existentialism.

The resurgence of idealism can be explained, in part, by Kant's limit to pure reason. In saying that our knowledge extends only to objects of sense experience (phenomena) Kant has to postulate a transcendental realm (noumena). Furthermore, he maintains that this noumenal realm causes the phenomena we perceive. However, this seems to violate the very limit on reason Kant has set. Causality cannot extend beyond objects of sense experience. But, in saying that noumena cause phenomena he seems to do precisely that. What's worse, we've set ourselves the same trap that Locke fell into with representative realism. There's no way to test the claim that objects of sense experience correspond to objects independent of our observations. This seems to be an intractable problem of dualism; the metaphysics John Locke was advocating. If you remember, the last time we faced this problem the solution was idealism. Instead of claiming that our ideas were caused by objects, we postulated that our ideas were the objects. We have, in a sense, returned to that position, modified slightly, as German Idealism.

The first attempt to formulate this position was made by Johann Fichte. He recognized the problem we stated above and pointed out, further, that the very claim that noumenal objects exist violates the limits Kant

placed on knowledge. Existence, after all, was merely one of the categories of the mind and could not apply to noumena. The only consistent solution is idealism. Rather than say that objects of sense experience are products of noumena, we have to say that objects of sense experience are products of the mind. Many philosophers in the 19th century saw the promise of this "new idealism" as a way to preserve the gains Kant had made in epistemology while advocating a consistent metaphysics at the same time. Among these were Friedrich Schelling, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. The most significant of these German Idealists was Hegel.

The irony of Hegel's philosophy is that, while it builds on the advances of Kant's critical philosophy, it also does the one thing Kant maintained was impossible. Kant argued that pure reason cannot give us speculative metaphysical knowledge of all reality. This is precisely what Hegel sets out to do with his "Absolute Idealism." In a similar fashion to Berkeley, Hegel postulates that all of reality is the product of an objective mind. It can't be our minds for the same reason Berkeley rejected this possibility. If reality were the product of our minds alone, things would be popping in and out of existence with our perceptions or absence of perceptions. That just isn't born out by our observations. Still, it won't do to say that objects have an independent existence from any mind. To postulate the existence of material substance is equally inconsistent with the facts. No, the only solution is for reality to be the product of an objective, "absolute" mind.

Before you jump to the conclusion that Hegel, like Berkeley, is talking about God let me stop you. This absolute mind is not somehow separate from the reality we perceive. If it were we'd be right back to the problems Kant left us with. It's not that some reality somewhere is causing the appearance of things here. No the appearance here is the reality. So, the absolute mind is reality itself; more precisely, it's the unfolding of itself through the process which Hegel called dialectic. In this respect, Hegel's philosophy is more similar to Spinoza than Berkeley. However, in Hegel's view this one substance (which Spinoza, remember, called God), this Absolute Idea, is constantly unfolding and realizing itself through a dynamic process. As Hegel put it, "the world is a manifestation of absolute spirit."

Very briefly this process involves three stages which can be described in

logical terms which seem appropriate for a process involving an unfolding idea. First in the process is the thesis. Second, is the opposite its antithesis. These two stand in conflict until they resolve themselves into a higher synthesis. This higher synthesis then becomes a new thesis for the process to repeat again constantly building on itself. A good example of this is the process of Being (thesis) and Nothing (antithesis) resolving into the higher synthesis of Becoming. Among other things this dialectic process was to have a major impact on the Romantic Movement in art and literature. It was also to spark (if that's the right word for it!) major developments in our understanding of the basic theory of electromagnetism. At the time we thought they were irreconcilable opposites (thesis-antithesis) until a scientist named Maxwell figured out how to unite them (synthesis).

Hegel also recognized that this dialectical process also applied to history. Given that the nature of reality is a gradual unfolding of the Absolute Idea this seemed natural. So, we can view the progression of events in terms of the thesis-antithesis-synthesis triad. Good examples of this can actually be seen in the history of philosophy. We began with an investigation of Platonic rationalism (thesis) then proceeded to Aristotle's empiricism (antithesis). These conflicting views were resolved into the higher synthesis of Cartesian philosophy. Then Descartes' rationalism became the thesis to compare with the antithesis of British empiricism. The synthesis, of course, was Kant's critical philosophy. And so it goes. This application of dialectics to history was to influence more than just philosophy. It was to have major consequences in the 20th century when it was combined with materialism. The author of this brainchild, Dialectical Materialism, was Karl Marx.

Kant's philosophy also had a profound effect on the formation of psychology. Philosophers have always been concerned about the mind and so it seems natural that psychology would be the outgrowth of that interest. The interesting thing is that, until Kant, philosophy's view of the mind had been, for the most part, transparent. What I mean is that philosophers had never concentrated too much on the actual workings of the mind as an integral part of metaphysics and epistemology. Of course, Descartes had mentioned various faculties of the mind as had Locke and Hume. But for them the mind was mostly like a mirror. Its function was to reflect reality (remember Locke's faculty of reflection?). What's more, for Descartes, the mind was essentially an open book. One could reflect

on the contents of the mind and obtain a clear and distinct picture of the mind's contents. What was missing, and is commonly associated with psychology, is a notion of the unconscious; a part of the mind hidden from immediate inspection. With Kant's emphasis on the actual structure of the mind this was to change.

1859 was a key year for change. In science, Darwin published *The Origin of Species* which forever changed our view of ourselves. We will discuss evolution in a later chapter. That same year, the founder of the 20th century School of philosophy called phenomenology was born named Edmund Husserl. Phenomenology deals with how our perspective on the world is affected by our very being in the world. The connections with Kant will seem clearer when we discuss phenomenology next time. Lastly, 1859 witnessed the birth of the American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey. It is to pragmatism's most famous advocate that we turn to investigate his contribution to our understanding of the mind.

While Dewey was influential, perhaps the most famous exponent of pragmatism was William James. James is important in our story of the mind because of his publication, in 1890, of the first major work in the field: *Principles of Psychology*. While many look to Freud as the founder of psychoanalysis, it was actually James who laid the foundation of psychology in part by discussing the, as yet uninvestigated, unconscious aspect of the mind. Freud, by the way, was born three years prior to the *annis mirabilis* 1859. James' contribution to psychology cannot be underestimated and Kant's influence on James was a contributing factor.

That influence continues to this day with the advances in brain science: neurology. Consider what three neurologists have to say in a book discussing the relationship of brain science to belief in God called *Why God Won't Go Away*. Lest you think philosophy only provides hopeless speculation while science provides all the answers listen to this. "Neurology cannot completely explain how a nonmaterial mind can rise from mere biological functions." What we do know sounds very Kantian. "Nothing enters consciousness whole. There is no direct, objective experience of reality." Our experiences are only "secondhand depictions of what may or may not be real." They continue by explaining causality, among other things, as a function of the mind. So we are now seeing the tangible payoff of Kant's idea that the mind contains innate structures that guide our experience of the world. Along with this, it might not surprise you to

learn that a resurgence of rationalism began and carried forward into the 20th century. It is to this new rationalism that we now turn.

# Chapter 16

## Rationalism

Rationalism, you'll remember, is the idea that at least some of our knowledge is innate. For Plato, all knowledge was innate. For Descartes, some specific ideas were innate such as our idea of God and the self. After Descartes, rationalism seemed to fall very much out of favor with the rise of British empiricism. But after Kant's critical philosophy and after it the rise of idealism, thoughts began to turn once again to the mind's role in knowledge. No longer did it seem unfashionable, or outlandish, to suppose that there might be something to the theory of innateness. Granted we don't talk much these days about innate ideas but rationalism is alive and well and gathering some very intriguing evidence in its favor.

Before we consider some of this evidence we should make a few distinctions. The debate among rationalists has always been about what ideas are innate. With the rise of psychology questions began to be raised about the possibility of instinct being innate. Do humans even have instincts? Some say no. Either way, rationalists have never focused on their innateness. What we are concerned with in philosophy is the existence of innate ideas. Ideas are cognitive and require an active thought process. Instincts, on the other hand, are non-cognitive, mechanistic behaviors. As I mentioned above the debate now, among advocates of rationalism, is over the existence of innate structures or components to knowledge. The evidence I will present falls into this category.

Three further points need to be made before we proceed. First, when rationalists say that there is an innate component to knowledge they are talking about the possibility of gaining knowledge. As the argument goes, if the mind did not have such innate dispositions, we would not be able to gain the knowledge or process it. It's not the ideas per se that are innate but the mental structure to process the ideas. Second, most rationalists today concede that there is room for external factors to play a role

in our knowledge. The debate is largely over how much of a factor each part plays. Some scholars speculate that the innate component may account for anywhere from 40-60%. That leaves 60-40% for the environment. Third, all the evidence I present here is inconclusive and preliminary. In one sense, it has to be this way. It turns out that, by and large, John Locke was right. There's no way to conclusively prove innateness. If we cite evidence from young children (say 3-6 years old) well, they have that many years of sense experience from which they could have gained the knowledge we are speculating is innate. If we cite evidence from younger children (as young as a few months old) they still have some sense experience to draw upon. Even if we were able to cite in utero evidence we would not solve the problem entirely. In all probability, sense experience does play some role in our knowledge. Rationalists just claim that it isn't the whole story.

One of the first pieces of recent evidence for innateness was offered by the linguist and philosopher Noam Chomsky. The basic idea here is that there are certain principles inherent in language which are universal such that no matter what language is learned the way the language is learned is the same. In other words, the mind is set up to learn language in a very specific way and we can observe that in language itself. The way children learn language, the way a language's grammatical structure is set, the very possibility for speaking language are all innate functions of the mind.

There are many examples of this phenomenon but some of them can be very esoteric and interesting only to linguists. By way of illustrating the basic idea let me use a much simpler example. This was not an example Chomsky himself talked about but it does illustrate the idea and may count as another piece of evidence for innateness. Languages have, what linguists call, primary color words. These are not to be confused with primary colors. A primary color word is a word that is used, primarily (that is first and foremost) as a name for a color. On the other hand secondary color words are words whose primary use is to name a thing. For example, silver. It does name a color but its primary use is to name a metal. OK so the maximum number of primary color words is eleven; English has all eleven. Some languages only have two primary color words. This, of course, doesn't mean that the language only has two words for color just that the other words for color are secondary color words. In every case where a language has only two primary color

words they are the same two. Can you guess what they are? Black and white. In languages with three primary color words the third one is always the same: red. It's the fact that this pattern is universal that leads linguists to speculate that it might be innate. Oh, in case you're curious about what the eleven primary color words are: black, white, red, green, yellow, blue, brown, purple, pink, orange, gray.

Another interesting line of research on innateness is being conducted in the area of ethics. There is a tradition in ethics, called the moral sense tradition that reaches back to the 18th century that postulates that there is an innate component to our ability to make moral judgments. Among others who were advocates of this was the famous economist Adam Smith. In the 20th century this theory has been revived by a work called *The Moral Sense* by James Q. Wilson. In this book he offers more recent, psychological evidence that may point to the existence of a moral sense after all. That there might be scientific evidence for this would not have surprised the likes of Charles Darwin who was also an advocate of the moral sense. Oddly enough Smith's book *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* was published exactly 100 years before Darwin's *Origin of Species*. Anyway, in *The Descent of Man*, published in 1871, Darwin remarked that "any animal whatever, endowed with well marked social instincts, the parental and filial affections being here included, would inevitably acquire a moral sense or conscience."

A surprisingly controversial piece of evidence for innateness comes from the study of differences between men and women. While some scholars speculate that these differences can be explained entirely by cultural influences there is a growing body of research which disputes this. Interestingly enough, this is cited in the Wilson book on the moral sense I cited above. In particular he cites the studies done by Melford E. and Audrey Spiro of "a kibbutz, one of the Israeli collective farms." The stated goal of these farms was to eliminate all gender differences so from a very young age the children were housed together, they ate together, played together, took showers together, and worked together. In addition, they were dressed the same and in every conceivable way treated the same to eliminate any differences in gender. For a while this seemed to work. But even from an early age differences seemed to be present and come out; in particular in how the children played. For example, boys would be more likely to play rougher games than girls. As the children grew, the differences increased. The speculation was that the reason

these differences couldn't be eliminated entirely was because of an underlying inherent component to sex roles. More than culture was at work here.

Another area where cultural influence was believed to reign supreme only to be questioned by scientific research is IQ. This too has generated controversy ever since the 1994 publication of *The Bell Curve* by Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray. However, they merely confirm what researchers have known for years about intelligence. In spite of popular opinion to the contrary IQ is: measurable, intractable, and heritable. Again, the debate is largely over what proportion of IQ is innate and again, the range is anywhere from 40-60%. Given our definition of intelligence as the ability to think abstractly and handle concepts, this innateness would not have surprised Immanuel Kant. After all, an important component of any IQ test is the ability to manipulate shapes in two and three dimensional space. Space, of course, was a category of the mind and, for Kant, innate.

My treatment of each of these pieces of evidence for innateness has, of necessity, been brief. I simply mean to show you that the question of innateness is alive and being studied and interesting results are being put forward in defense of some sort of rationalism. If you find any of this interesting, and I hope you do, I encourage you to look into it further. I will mention a few other tantalizing pieces of evidence for innateness and be even briefer in their presentation. In Richard Pipes' book *Property and Freedom*, published in 1999, he addresses the question of whether property, or more correctly, acquisitiveness, is innate. His conclusion is that there is a strong innate component to this which can be observed not only in animals and young children, but also cross culturally as well. Other cross cultural studies have been conducted on attractiveness. It turns out that there are some faces (with particularly good symmetry) that are considered attractive regardless of what culture is judging them.

As we pointed out when discussing John Locke, the key to innateness is universality. Of course, this alone does not prove innateness. In other words, it is a necessary condition but not sufficient. However, the question remains. What accounts for the universal nature of these phenomena? In order to address this from an empiricist standpoint we need to find something common in sense experience which is causing these various phenomena to be universal. What's the common element that

explains why all people are by nature acquisitive? What's the common element in culture which explains sex differences? And so on. Absent any common cultural element we may be forced to reexamine rationalism as a viable option. Certainly, after Kant's critical philosophy we can do so on a firmer basis. Remembering the work I cited in the previous chapter from neurologists concerning how the brain works, it seems that we can conduct this investigation not only from a philosophical, but from a scientific basis. In the 17th century science began to split away from philosophy with the work of Newton. Now we are seeing a reunion of science and philosophy due in large part to the philosophical implications of many scientific theories. However, in the early part of the 20th century it was the philosophers who desired to unite with science and cast off for good the metaphysical speculations of the past. The very metaphysical speculations which are now fascinating scientists all over again!

# Chapter 17

## The Twentieth Century

As we've seen there has been a recurring debate between rationalism and empiricism throughout the history of philosophy. The twentieth century has seen a resurgence of rationalism but not before the empiricism of logical positivism had its say. This twentieth century version of empiricism was in direct reaction to the Hegelian metaphysical system of absolute idealism we addressed earlier. As we discussed then, Hegel believed that the world was "a manifestation of absolute spirit." The reaction of the positivists was, to say the least, puzzled confusion.

Positivism was inspired, in part, by David Hume's empiricism. In particular, one comment from his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* motivated their zeal: "When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hand any volume, of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask 'Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?' No. 'Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence?' No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion." Now, the positivists never actually burned books but they were in favor of the elimination of metaphysics. In fact, this was the title of chapter one of one of the more influential positivist books: A.J. Ayer's *Language Truth and Logic*.

As Ayer's title suggests, the main problem with metaphysics is its use of language. To see the problem let's consider Hegel's claim again. This time look at it with an eye towards finding evidence to either confirm or disconfirm it. "The world is a manifestation of absolute spirit." Now, how might we design an experiment to prove or disprove this? That's the problem. It seems impossible to even think of what would count as a test of this. There seems to be no way to verify this proposition. However, according to the positivists, in order for propositions to be meaningful they

have to be empirically verifiable. Either that or they have to be analytic. This was called the verification theory of meaning. By this criterion metaphysical statements are meaningless. It's not that metaphysical statements are false. Statements that have meaning can be judged true or false. For example, the moon is made of green cheese. This statement is false but meaningful because it is possible to understand what would verify it. On the other hand, statements that are meaningless cannot be either true or false. So what use can these statements have if they convey no meaning? Given their meaninglessness they should be eliminated from philosophy entirely.

This raises the obvious question. If philosophy should not be doing metaphysics, what should it be doing? Being centered in Vienna, the positivists, quite naturally, sought their answer to this question in a work by the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein with the esoteric title *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. The irony of this was that Wittgenstein was never fully on board for the positivist program. In fact within a couple of decades Wittgenstein was to entirely repudiate his own philosophy of the *Tractatus*! Still at the time of publication in 1921 it was a godsend to the verificationists. According to Wittgenstein, philosophy should set the limits for what can and cannot be said. In particular, philosophy should address the logical rules of language thus freeing the scientists to make empirical progress. From Wittgenstein's perspective everything that can be said in philosophy had been said in the seven propositions of the *Tractatus*. The end result of this was succinctly expressed in the final sentence: What we cannot speak of we must pass over in silence. As for the rest of Wittgenstein's philosophy we'll address that later.

Another variation on the verification theory was offered by the philosopher of science Karl Popper. Interestingly Popper had a famous run in with Wittgenstein where, by some accounts, he was attacked by Wittgenstein with a fireplace poker! The details of this strange story have always been in some dispute and have recently been chronicled by David Edmonds and John Eidinow. The dispute was over whether there were real problems in philosophy (Popper) or whether there were just certain puzzles to resolve (Wittgenstein). One of the problems Popper was no doubt thinking of was the problem with verification.

From the very beginning there was always a question as to what exactly

constituted verification of a proposition. Take for example, the proposition "All swans are white." We can imagine what it might take to verify this. Simply observe all swans. However, a moment's reflection reveals that this is not as simple as it sounds. If I could observe every swan now living would that verify it? Not really because it doesn't take into account any future swans that may or may not be white. The simple fact is that the proposition cannot be conclusively verified. The alternative, according to Popper, is to focus on what it would take to falsify a statement. Clearly, the proposition "All swans are white" can be easily falsified if we simply find one black swan. It turns out that falsification can be a more effective criterion to judge meaning. In an interesting turn of history, Popper's criterion not only eliminates the metaphysics of Hegel on the grounds of its meaninglessness, it also eliminates Freudian psychoanalysis and Marx's dialectical materialism. See, the problem with both theories, according to Popper, is that they admit of no way of being rendered false. For a theory to be useful it must be falsifiable.

While the positivists were criticizing Hegel's philosophy for being too metaphysical another school of philosophy was reacting against Hegel's emphasis on the abstract and universal at the expense of the individual. The existentialists were also reacting against the over emphasis of science by the positivists even though the roots of existentialism were, in part, the science inspired philosophy of phenomenology. Some of the issues involved here are complicated and beyond the scope of a single chapter. However, in brief, phenomenology arose as a result of the perceived separation science was encouraging between human beings and the world we observe. In the pursuit of objectivity, science presupposes that we can make observations and inferences about the world without addressing our position in the world or the perspective we take in observing the world.

So the common theme of both phenomenology and existentialism is an emphasis on the individual and the subjectivity of philosophy. What matters, according to one prominent phenomenologist named Martin Heidegger, is our "situatedness" or what he often referred to as our "being-in-the-world." We don't make observations from an independent perspective rather, we relate to the world in terms of our concerns and projects. We see things in terms of our desires to achieve things, the meaning we give events and objects, and importantly, the relationships we form with others.

Given their emphasis on subjectivity, each of the phenomenologists approached the issues differently. Jean-Paul Sartre addressed the issue of human nature, the responsibility and freedom we have to make of our lives what we will and famously, the essence of being. As Sartre put it, "nothingness lies coiled at the heart of being like a worm." Like the positivists, the existentialists were concerned about meaning, but not in the verification (or falsification) sense. The existentialists were concerned with the meaning of individual human beings' lives. Because of this, there was great interest in existentialism as a method of therapy. So, even as Popper was criticizing Freudian psychoanalysis, psychiatrists were embracing some of the basic tenets of existentialism. The best example of this is the approach of holocaust survivor and psychiatrist Viktor Frankl. His logotherapy emphasizes the importance of meaning and how every human life, even one filled with suffering, has meaning.

One of the best examples of the synthesis of these various strands of philosophy was the later philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. After writing the *Tractatus* in the early 20's Wittgenstein left philosophy for many years. When he came back to it in the 30's he had radically changed his approach. His philosophy was immensely influential precisely because he was able to combine the important aspects of diverse philosophical schools of thought such as analytic philosophy, with its interest in language, and existential philosophy, with its interest in the nature of individual human beings. Wittgenstein also investigated the connection between philosophy and psychology and the foundations of mathematics. And as we will see over the course of the next two chapters, he was able to formulate original perspectives on the recurring questions of metaphysics and epistemology that we have been dealing with throughout the book.

But it's not only the scope and influence of Wittgenstein's philosophy that warrants our detailed look at him. It's also his unconventional approach to the subject. He once remarked that a really good work of philosophy could be written that consisted entirely of jokes or questions with no answers. In fact, he uses both in his own philosophy. As an example of that: "Why can't a dog simulate pain? Is he too honest?" In his memoir on Wittgenstein, Norman Malcolm provides an example of the unique perspective Wittgenstein provides:

"At one of the at-homes, Wittgenstein related a riddle for the purpose of throwing some light on the nature of philosophy. It went as follows: Suppose that a cord was stretched tightly around the earth at the equator. Now suppose that a piece one yard long was added to the cord. If the cord was kept taut and circular in form, how much above the surface of the earth would it be? Without stopping to work it out, everyone present was inclined to say that the distance of the cord from the surface of the earth would be so minute that it would be imperceptible. But that is wrong. The actual distance would be nearly six inches. Wittgenstein declared that this is the kind of mistake that occurs in philosophy. It consists in being misled by a picture."

As we will see when we look at certain philosophical problems from Wittgenstein's perspective, it's not the incorrectness of the picture that leads to the problem. It's the wrong conclusions we draw from it. The first problem we will address is the problem of dualism. We will be examining selections from *Philosophical Investigations*, *I* which address one of the central assumptions of dualism and show the flaws inherent in it. Briefly put, dualism implies that only I know what I'm thinking and feeling since the mind is private and hidden from public view. But, if this is true then I should be able to assign words to these thoughts and feelings and refer to them in a language that only I can understand. This, Wittgenstein refers to as a private language. However, as Wittgenstein argues, the notion of a private language is incoherent.

The second problem we will address is in epistemology. We will be examining selections from *On Certainty* which addresses the problems involved in thinking that knowledge and certainty are connected. The search for certainty in knowledge has led to skepticism and one way to avoid this may be to separate the two concepts. As Wittgenstein points out, the logic of knowledge implies doubt, while the logic of certainty precludes doubt.

As you read Wittgenstein one of the first things you'll notice is that his writing style is unlike anything we've discussed so far. He does not give us a neatly outlined, thoroughly argued philosophical theory. Instead, Wittgenstein presents us with various aphorisms which we have to piece together and extract meaning from. This is not merely an affectation or Wittgenstein's inability to write well. The problems Wittgenstein is dealing with require an examination of how language itself is used. And, as Wittgenstein tells us in the preface to *Philosophical Investigations*, "I

should not like my writing to spare other people the trouble of thinking."  
So, let's proceed with that in mind and do some thinking!

## Philosophical Investigations

Before getting to Wittgenstein's main arguments concerning the metaphysical issue of dualism, we need to address some fundamental points about his later views on language. To contrast with the verification approach of the positivists, Wittgenstein uses the metaphor of the language-game throughout the Investigations. This term is meant to illustrate several important points.

1. Language is an activity. Language is not some passive instrument that is used for other purposes or activities. Language itself is an activity or as Wittgenstein puts it at one point: "words are deeds." Consider, for example, making a promise. The act itself is simply saying "I promise." There are other examples of this as well. In any case, as Wittgenstein says in section 23 of the Investigations: "Here the term 'language-game' is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life." He then gives examples of the various kinds of uses of language that he has in mind such as praying, thanking, cursing, greeting; and many more.

2. Language is rule based. The second point of the language-game metaphor is that language is a rule based activity. This may seem obvious and even unimportant but there are several important implications of this point. First, rules must be agreed to by the users of them, in games or in languages. This agreement is central to the ability to use language. As he says in section 224 "The word 'agreement' and the word 'rule' are related to one another, they are cousins." But this agreement is not necessarily arbitrary or relativistic. Consider:

241. "So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?" It is what human beings say that is true and false; and they agree in the language they use. That is not agreement in opinions

but in form of life.

We will discuss the concept of "form of life" in our chapter on certainty. The important point at this time is to remember that without this agreement, language ceases to work. And also, our third point is implied by this. 3. Language is a shared activity. To engage in language, we must be able to use it with others. Language is not a private activity and our use of it is, at least in principle, a public affair. So, Wittgenstein has given us a concept of language which is quite different from the positivist concept of language being a descriptive instrument whose value lies in verification. For Wittgenstein, language is a rule-based, shared, activity.

To illustrate this, and the flaw in the verification approach, Wittgenstein suggests that we look at how ordinary language is used in many varied ways. Consider for example exclamations. Can we really understand these uses of language on the model that tells us language serves to name things? In 27, Wittgenstein asks us to "Think of exclamations alone, with their completely different functions.

Water!  
Away!  
Ow!  
Help!  
Fine!  
No!

Are these uses of language naming anything? If so, what are they naming? Clearly, there are other things going on in language besides descriptive naming. And that's the point. OK, you're saying. So what? Language does many different things. What's so interesting about that? Well, one of the very important implications of this view of language is as follows:

"202. And hence also 'obeying a rule' is a practice. And to think one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule. Hence it is not possible to obey a rule 'privately': otherwise thinking one was obeying a rule would be the same thing as obeying it.

It is not possible to obey a rule privately." For example, if I'm driving down the interstate highway at 80 miles an hour and the police pull me

over for speeding, I can't claim that I was following the speed limit rule only doing it privately. As if I were to say, "But Officer, that's how I obey the speed limit 65 rule!" Thinking you're obeying a rule is not the same as really obeying it! Remember that.

Now, let's move on to the metaphysics. Dualism, as we've seen earlier, implies a distinction between two realms of our self. There is the mind which is private and hidden from the view of others and there is the body which is public and observable. If this distinction is correct, then it's true to say that "only I know what I'm thinking and feeling." However, if this is true, then I should be able to name those thoughts and feelings using words that only I understand. This would be a private language. Here's how Wittgenstein describes this:

"243. A human being can encourage himself, give himself orders, obey, blame and punish himself; he can ask himself a question and answer it. We could even imagine human-beings who spoke only in monologue; who accompanied their activities by talking to themselves. An explorer who watched them and listened to their talk might succeed in translating their language into ours. (This would enable him to predict these people's actions correctly, for he also hears them making resolutions and decisions.)

But could we imagine a language in which a person could write down or give vocal expression to his inner experiences- his feelings, moods, and the rest- for his private use?- Well, can't we do so in our ordinary language? But that is not what I mean. The individual words of this language are to refer to what can only be known to the person speaking; to his immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language."

So, dualism implies a private language. Wittgenstein is essentially going to criticize dualism by criticizing the possibility of a private language. In other words, he will argue that a private language is not possible. If there can be no private language then there must be something wrong with the dualist distinction between mind and body. Let's see what's wrong with the notion of a private language.

We'll begin by considering the claims that "only I know what I'm thinking and feeling." Let's give a very specific example of this as Wittgenstein

does in section 246. "Only I know when I'm in pain." That seems reasonable enough. Who could possibly question that? Well, Wittgenstein does! In fact, he cites two problems with this claim. First, it's wrong. Second, it's nonsense!

The claim that "only I know when I'm in pain" is wrong because other people often do know when I'm in pain. Of course, you say, they don't know all the time and that's part of the point. Knowing something does not mean always being right. In fact, the concept of knowing implies the possibility of being wrong. Other people may be wrong about me being in pain. I, of course, cannot be wrong about being in pain and that's why Wittgenstein says that this claim is nonsense. "It can't be said of me at all (except perhaps as a joke) that I know I am in pain. What is it supposed to mean- except perhaps that I am in pain?"

So, the basis of a private language is questionable at best. Remember, a private language is only possible if I'm the only one who has knowledge of my private sensations. But there's another problem as well. To illustrate this let's look at section 258:

"Let us imagine the following case. I want to keep a diary about the recurrence of a certain sensation. To this end I associate it with the sign 'S' and write this sign in a calendar for every day on which I have the sensation. I will remark first of all that a definition of the sign cannot be formulated. But still I can give myself a kind of ostensive definition. How? Can I point to the sensation? Not in the ordinary sense. But I speak, or write the sign down, and at the same time I concentrate my attention on the sensation- and so as it were, point to it inwardly. But what is this ceremony for? For that is all it seems to be! A definition surely serves to establish the meaning of a sign. Well, that is done precisely by the concentration of my attention; for in this way I impress on myself the connection between the sign and the sensation. But 'I impress it on myself' can only mean: this process brings it about that I remember the connexion right in the future. But in the present case I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we can't talk about 'right'."

To make this clearer, let's use a specific example. I'm going to keep track of a pain in my left foot and to that end every time I have that pain I'll write an "S" in my diary. In fact, I just had a pain there and I'm now

making a mark in my diary: "S." This happens every so often and I make the appropriate mark. Oh, but just then I had a pain in my right hand and so I mark in my diary "S." Did I just make a mistake? You're probably saying, yes, I did. After all, I said the "S" was for a pain in my left foot. But, I say to you I made no mistake! How can that be? Well, who's making the rules in this language? Me. Who's deciding whether the rules are being followed? Me again! So this is what Wittgenstein means when he says "whatever is going to seem right to me is right."

Think about it this way. In the NBA, or any other sport for that matter, why don't we let the players be the referees as well? I mean, they're already on the court. We could save ourselves some money by not hiring additional people to referee. But, clearly, this would cause problems. You can't have the players who are supposed to follow the rules also judge whether they're following the rules correctly. Or, perhaps a better example would be driving. How come we can't let the police officer also be the judge and jury in a criminal case? Again, they're already there! I hope you see the problems with this. As Wittgenstein says in 265 there has to be "something independent" to justify the correct application of rules. This is true for all rule based activities, not just language. But, with regard to language, this notion has definite metaphysical implications.

Sections 265-272 provide further illustrations of this notion that we need objective justification when it comes to judging whether rules have been followed correctly. We can no more agree with ourselves that the rules of private language have been followed than we can give ourselves money (PI 268). Or, suppose I'm reading a book and don't know the meaning of a certain word. I don't feel like getting up to find a dictionary so I look up the word in the dictionary in my mind. That won't work either!

So what does this do to the metaphysics of dualism? Clearly, this view is flawed because it implies such strange consequences. For example, "If I say of myself that it is only from my own case that I know what the word 'pain' means- must I not say the same of other people too? And how can I generalize the one case so irresponsibly?" He continues in section 293 as follows:

"Now someone tells me that he knows what pain is only from his own case! Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a 'beetle'. No one can look into anyone else's box, and everyone says he

knows what a beetle is only by looking at his beetle. Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box. One might even imagine such a thing constantly changing. But suppose the word 'beetle' had a use in these people's language? If so it would not be used as the name of a thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as a something: for the box might even be empty. No, one can 'divide through' by the thing in the box; it cancels out, whatever it is.

That is to say: if we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of 'object and designation' the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant."

It is important to point out that Wittgenstein is not denying the private realm. He's simply pointing out that this private realm cannot be the origin of the meaning of certain words which designate thoughts and feelings. As he points out in 304, it's not that the sensation is a nothing. "Not at all. It is not a something, but not a nothing either! The conclusion was only that a nothing would serve just as well as a something about which nothing could be said. We have only rejected the grammar which tried to force itself on us here." Again, we have been misled by a picture into supposing that something exists which does not necessarily exist in the same way we supposed. Speaking of pictures one of the best analogies for this is in section 297:

"Of course if water boils in a pot, steam comes out of the pot and also pictured steam comes out of the pictured pot. But what if one insisted on saying that there must also be something boiling in the picture of the pot?"

So we are not denying the inner process. We are denying that the words get their meanings by referring to this inner process (PI 305, 306). And if I've explained things well, you now see Wittgenstein's point and his aim in philosophy to free us from our restricted concept; to "shew the fly the way out of the fly-bottle." You feel a certain freedom and liberation now!

# Chapter 19

## On Certainty

Before we can address Wittgenstein's ideas, we need to put his epistemology in context. Wittgenstein is specifically addressing a theory offered by a colleague of his named G. E. Moore. Moore was keen to put an end to the skepticism that empiricism creates about our knowledge. To this end, he offers what he calls a common sense defense of knowledge. There are many things we can know with certainty and these can be listed in a systematic way. Among these things, Moore listed the following:

- I know I am a human being.
- I know I had parents.
- I know the Earth is older than 100 years.
- I know I am a man and not a woman.
- I know I have two hands.

Not only does Moore know these things, but so do all of us. That's part of his point. In spite of empiricist claims to the contrary things like this can be known with certainty. This, of course, seems completely obvious and non-controversial. Who could possibly disagree with our having knowledge of these things? Wittgenstein, that's who!

So what's wrong with the claim that "I know I am a human being?" Well, in Section 4 of *On Certainty* Wittgenstein explains. "In order to see how unclear the sense of this proposition is, consider its negation. At most it might be taken to mean 'I know I have the organs of a human.' (E.g. a brain, which, after all, no one has ever yet seen.) But what about such a proposition as 'I know I have a brain'? Can I doubt it? Grounds for doubt are lacking! Everything speaks in its favour, nothing against it. Nevertheless it is imaginable that my skull should turn out empty when it was operated on."

First, the grammar of the word "know" implies that sentences that deny knowledge of something make as much sense as sentences which claim knowledge. For example, if I say "I know what the capital of California is," that makes perfect sense. So does the claim that "I don't know what the capital of California is." But, although it seems to make sense to say "I know I am a human being," it clearly makes no sense, under normal circumstances (an important qualifier), to say "I don't know I am a human being."

Or consider the seemingly sensical claim that "I know I am a man." Could I really be mistaken about such a thing!? What would a mistake like this imply? It doesn't even make sense.

79. "That I am a man and not a woman can be verified, but if I were to say I was a woman, and then tried to explain the error by saying I hadn't checked the statement, the explanation would not be accepted."

See, the problem is that claims of knowledge imply that you have evidence and that you need to provide evidence. If I were to say "I know all the capitals of all the countries in the entire world," you would probably want me to demonstrate such a claim. I would do so by reciting the world capitals. Your asking for evidence makes sense and my providing the evidence also makes sense. But, what about the claim that "I know I am a man?" Does it make sense for you to ask for proof? Should I be required to provide such proof? Of course not!

As we discussed before, knowledge implies the possibility of being wrong. That was the problem with the claim that "I know I am in pain." Now, Wittgenstein is also making the point that knowledge requires proof and in such cases providing proof must make sense. Additionally, the possibility of doubt must be present. This is how the grammar of the word "know" works. It's much different from being certain.

12. For "I know" seems to describe a state of affairs which guarantees what is known, guarantees it as a fact. One always forgets the expression "I thought I knew".

Knowing does not guarantee certainty. That's why I can't be said to know those things Moore lists. "6. Now, can one enumerate what one knows (like Moore)? Straight off like that, I believe not. For otherwise the

expression "I know" gets misused. And through this misuse a queer and extremely important mental state seems to be revealed."

Let's turn our attention to the issue of doubt and the foundation for knowledge that is certainty. Remember, that Descartes begins his quest for certainty by doubting all that can be doubted. He attempts to doubt everything. Can this really be done? Wittgenstein says no. One cannot doubt everything. Something must be presupposed to be certain in order for doubt to make any sense. As Wittgenstein puts it "if I want the door to turn the hinges must stay put."

It's not only that doubt presupposes certainty (OC 115). Some things cannot even be doubted. I made the point in discussing Descartes, that he doubted the existence of his own body. Why? Because knowledge of the body comes from sense experience and he was questioning sense experience. At the time, this may have struck you as odd. Rightly so! Can we really doubt we have a body? Or, more specifically, could you doubt you had two hands? Wittgenstein seems to be saying no. Something as fundamental as having two hands cannot be doubted and even if it could you wouldn't be able to assuage the doubt. This is what Wittgenstein means when he says:

250. "My having two hands is, in normal circumstances, as certain as anything that I could produce in evidence for it. That is why I am not in a position to take the sight of my hand as evidence for it."

As he puts it elsewhere, the "reasonable man does not have certain doubts." (OC 220) There are certain things that we simply don't doubt. It's part of who we are and how we live our lives. Other peoples may have such doubts. We don't. As we'll see in a moment, this constitutes an important part of the foundation for our knowledge in Wittgenstein's philosophy.

Like Descartes, Wittgenstein was looking for a foundation for our knowledge. But, the foundation is very different. Descartes began with doubt which then led to knowledge we could be certain about. Wittgenstein reverses this relationship. We first begin with certainty and this is the context in which knowledge and doubting exist. We have to learn that some things are doubted but this comes later. Actually, the process begins with belief. "The schoolboy believes his teachers and his schoolbooks" (OC

263). "The child learns by believing the adult. Doubt comes after belief (OC 160). We need a context into which knowledge and doubt arise. This context is what Wittgenstein refers to as a "nest of propositions" about which we are certain. This, of course, must be taught (OC 448).

The interesting question is: What is the nature of this foundation? For Descartes, it was a self evident proposition: "I think, therefore I am." This doesn't seem quite correct to Wittgenstein.

204. "Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end; but the end is not certain propositions' striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of seeing on our part; it is our acting, which lies at the bottom of the language-game."

Yes, we need a foundation and an end to our questioning. But the end is not like the questioning or the knowledge we gain from the questioning. It is qualitatively different. "At the foundation of well founded belief lies belief that is not founded." (OC 253) Notice, he does not say that the foundation is not a "well founded belief." It is not founded at all! This may cause you to think that there is no justification for our certainty; there is no foundation. However, the reality is that the foundation is the context in which we make judgments about true and false. But the context itself is neither true nor false: "If the true is what is grounded, then the ground is not true, nor yet false." (OC 205) The "ground" or foundation is our way of acting. He points this out in sections 110 and 204. "It is our acting which lies at the bottom of the language-game." And this acting is "ungrounded."

Perhaps we can dramatically illustrate this with an example. Stand up. No, I'm serious I want you to stand up for a moment and then sit back down. OK, now why didn't you check to see whether you had two feet before you stood up? I'm sure you didn't, but why didn't you? Wittgenstein's answer in section 148 is very telling. "There is no why. I simply don't. This is how I act." And that's all there is to it!

Clearly, this is a radically different approach to epistemology than we have seen before. The skepticism that has plagued us can be solved if we separate knowledge and certainty. They are different categories and seeing this allows us to avoid the strange implications of empiricism which demands direct sense experience for everything. The absence of this

sense experience means the absence of knowledge. In confronting this, Wittgenstein points out that the basis for our knowledge is not more knowledge. It's something qualitatively different. This is not merely a semantic point. It drastically reorders our cognitive categories and begins to address the connection between the faculties of belief, knowledge, doubt, and certainty. Further work has proceeded on these issues but the foundation, so to speak, was laid by Wittgenstein's important work in *On Certainty*. One question which fascinated Wittgenstein in particular was religious belief. He once said to a friend "I am not a religious man: but I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view." It is to philosophy of religion that we now turn.

# Chapter 20

## Natural Theology 1

Our investigation of philosophy of religion will consist of three areas: proofs for the existence of God, the religious experience, and the problem of evil. Each of these is a central concern of natural theology. Before proceeding, we need to distinguish natural from revealed theology. The term "natural theology" may be misleading. What it's not is an attempt to gain knowledge of God through nature. Natural theology is the attempt to gain knowledge of God through the faculties of reason unaided by any supernatural or divine intervention. That is, using our own natural abilities to gain philosophical insight into the divine. Revealed theology is the gaining of knowledge about God through direct or indirect communication with the divine. This can be from a religious experience (direct) or through the reading of holy books (indirect). Another way to think of this distinction is to cast it in terms of the difference between reason and faith. How compatible or incompatible these two are we'll perhaps see as our investigation proceeds.

We begin, as Aquinas advises us to do with a consideration of the existence of God. As he points out in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, "if we do not demonstrate that God exists, all consideration of divine things is necessarily suppressed." Of course, we have discussed proofs for the existence of God in previous chapters with reference to Descartes' philosophy. These proofs were rational in the sense that they did not depend on sense experience. Aquinas' proof is different. Given his admiration for Aristotle, it should come as no surprise that Aquinas is an empiricist. While he concedes, as many did in the Middle-Ages, that the notion that God exists is self evident, humans require some sort of physical evidence to understand this. In other words, our intellect is not sufficient to understand the self-evident nature of the proposition "God exists." We need empirical evidence.

Aquinas' proof is called the cosmological argument for the existence of God because it's based on the existence of the cosmos; that is the universe. But before we see how the existence of the cosmos can be used as evidence for the existence of God we need to address a fundamental question about the cosmos' existence itself. Question: Was the cosmos created or has it always existed? From Aquinas' viewpoint this question could not be answered philosophically. Sure, we could offer evidence in favor of one or the other view but the evidence would not be conclusive. So either way we begin we must begin with an assumption. The question is which assumption should we take? We could, using revelation, take the assumption that the cosmos was created. After all, the Bible tells us this. But then we run into a problem. We are trying to prove that God exists and we're using the Bible as a basis for this proof? Isn't this suspicious? After all, the Bible is only valid if we can show that it's the inspired word of God which we can only do if we can prove God exists. Using the Bible as evidence for our proof means we're presupposing that God exists. We're begging the question. So in spite of what revealed theology tells us we should not assume the universe was created.

Besides we run into another problem doing this. If we assume the universe was created and it turns out that it really is eternal what happens to our proof based on the assumption of it being created? It's worthless. After all, our proof will probably attempt to show that God created the universe. But if the universe is eternal it doesn't need a creator. No, the best way to begin is by assuming that the universe is eternal. That way we make no theological assumptions of God's existence to begin with and if it turns out that the universe really was created our proof is not ruined. In fact, it becomes stronger. By starting with the more difficult of the two assumptions Aquinas is making his proof stronger. If we can prove that God exists and is the cause of the eternal universe it will be easy to adapt this proof to God's existence if the universe was created. So Aquinas is proving that the universe needs a cause and that cause must be God. Even an eternal thing needs a cause (though not a creator; there's a difference).

OK given all of this the structure of the proof contains four premises. Two of them should be self-evident; the other two can be explained and if all four are true then we can conclude that the cosmos must be caused by something outside of space and time, something uncaused and ultimate. This sounds like God! Here are the four premises:

1. The universe exists. (This is self-evident)
2. It could not be the cause of itself. (This will be easy enough to explain)
3. It could not come from nothing. (This is self evident)
4. It could not be an effect in an infinite series of causes and effects (we'll need to explain this in more detail)

The basic idea is that if we can show that these premises are true we can infer that God must exist. What Aquinas is doing is showing that the universe needs a cause and there are only so many options. 1. It could be the cause of itself. But premise two says this is impossible. The reason why is pretty easy. The cause must always precede the effect. But if the universe was the cause of itself it would have to exist before it existed! This, however, is impossible. Something can't exist before it exists. And given that the universe is eternal before doesn't really apply anyway. 2. It could come from nothing. But premise three says this is impossible. The reason why should be obvious: you can't get something from nothing. As Aquinas put it, *ex nihilo, nihil fit*. "From nothing, nothing comes." It sounds better in Latin! Anyway, the point is that it's impossible for the universe to have arisen from nothing.

Given that we're assuming it's eternal could the universe have been the result of an infinite series of causes and effects? It seems unlikely for the following reason. Suppose I said to you "don't come back to class until you've read an infinite number of books." Are you ever going to return to class? Of course not! You can't read an infinite number of books. The point is it's impossible to get through an infinite series. So if the universe were the result of an infinite series of causes and effects we would never see the final effect (the existence of the universe). We'd be waiting forever for the universe to exist. Given the fact that the universe exists (premise one) we can infer that the series of causes and effects is finite. In other words, there must be a first cause.

This is likely to seem confusing since we've said that Aquinas assumed the universe was eternal. How can an eternal thing have a first cause? The confusion can be clarified if we remember that cause does not necessarily imply creator. Aquinas is not arguing that God created the universe, but that the universe needs a cause for its existence. And more than this, it needs a cause for its continued existence through time. Another way of putting this is to say that the universe needs a sustaining

cause.

There is no objection to the possibility that an infinite series extends backwards in time since Aquinas is assuming that the universe is eternal. But, could there be an infinite series of causes and effects in a single moment in time? This is the problem and the answer is no. So what Aquinas is objecting to is not a temporal series but a hierarchical series. The reason this series cannot be infinite should now be clear. But perhaps the reason why the beginning of this series must be God isn't. For Aquinas this is because the universe is contingent and requires a necessary being to exist to sustain it. Furthermore, as we have seen the cause must also be uncaused and outside of space and time. What other being could this description apply to except for God.

As I said, this derives from Aquinas' supposition that the universe is contingent; meaning it happens to exist but could also not exist. He argues in the following way. Since each thing in the universe is contingent it follows that the universe itself is contingent. Contingent beings come into and go out of existence. So it seems reasonable to suppose that at some point in the past nothing existed in the universe. But, if this were true there would be nothing in existence now; remember you can't get something from nothing. So therefore, there must be a being whose existence is not contingent but necessary and this of course is God.

This point has been the source for considerable criticism of Aquinas' proof. If you remember when we talked about logic we mentioned the fallacy of composition; assigning a trait to the whole because it belongs to the parts. But it doesn't follow that just because something is true of the parts that it must also be true of the whole. It seems that Aquinas is making this inference and it is fallacious. Given that his proof hinges on this point this is a serious problem. Can it be fixed? Perhaps.

In a book titled *How To Think About God*, twentieth century philosopher Mortimer Adler addresses this problem and provides a solution. In fact, he maintains that once this problem is solved Aquinas' proof is solid and provides us with reasonable evidence for the existence of God. So this bears investigation. Simply put, the notion of contingent seems to be that something could possibly cease to exist. But what would become of the matter once the thing did cease existing? Would the matter also cease to exist? Of course, we would say no given our knowledge of the law of

conservation of matter and energy. So, in fact, when one contingent being ceases to exist, it's merely replaced by another contingent being. It is not annihilated. No contingent being can cause the annihilation of another contingent being. It is also worth pointing out that no contingent being can prevent another contingent being from ceasing to exist either.

So is the universe contingent in this way. Adler says no and prefers to say that the universe is "radically contingent." This is not merely semantics. There is a significant difference. The best way to think about it is to ask: What would the universe be replaced with if it ceased to exist? Given that the universe is the sum total of matter and energy the answer would have to be nothing. So the universe ceasing to exist would be an example of annihilation; that is being reduced to nothingness. What prevents this from occurring? No contingent being can do this even as no contingent being can sustain the existence of another contingent being. In other words, no natural cause could do this. But, there are only two kinds of causes: natural and supernatural. So by deduction it must be that the universe (being radically contingent) is sustained by a supernatural cause (God).

This has been a fairly complex proof for the existence of God. But you wouldn't expect any less, given the magnitude of the subject. Ironic to think that such a complex proof could be the brainchild of someone nicknamed the Dumb Ox! However, as we've seen Aquinas' proof is not perfect. It requires a small modification in order to be viable. I should also mention that my synopsis of Aquinas proof has not represented fully his five ways for proving God that he outlines in the *Summa Theologica*. In particular, I have not addressed his fifth way; the argument from design. We will look at this argument in its modern form in the next chapter.

# Chapter 21

## Natural Theology 2

Natural theology was given its clearest modern expression with the 1802 publication of *Natural Theology*, by William Paley. In this work he provides us with an elegant version of the teleological argument for the existence of God; also known as the argument from design.

Suppose, says Paley, we were walking in the forest and happened upon a stone in the path. We probably wouldn't think twice about it and go on about our way. But, suppose that further on we were to happen upon a pocket watch. Clearly our reaction to this would be different. It seems to be out of place. More than that, when we inspect it closely we recognize that it's a mechanism designed to do a specific job. We note its intricate workings and speculate that such intricacy could not have naturally occurred. It must be the product of design and intelligence. The existence of the watch implies the existence of a watchmaker.

Now, "were there no examples in the world of contrivance except that of the eye, it would be alone sufficient to support the conclusion which we draw from it, as to the necessity of an intelligent Creator." In other words, if the watch requires a watchmaker so too the eye must require an intelligent designer. And given the immense complexity of the entire universe and all its intricate working parts, the Creator must be infinitely intelligent and powerful. This constitutes Paley's proof of the existence of God.

In the rest of Paley's work he proceeds to show how each part of the universe, as a separate creation, can be seen as evidence for God. In parts, *Natural Theology* reads like a science textbook but this is simply Paley's attempt to offer as much detailed evidence as possible for his argument. Given the 18th century scientific revolution it seems only natural to apply the reasoning of science to theology.

Still, not everyone was equally taken with his arguments. Interestingly enough one of his most vocal critics published his remarks a quarter of a century earlier. Of course, David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* was not written as a response to Paley himself but to the growing popularity of natural theology (or natural religion in Hume's words). Paley's work can be seen as an attempt to respond to the criticisms offered by Hume and others. In particular Hume offers six arguments against Paley's proof, most of which deal with the problem of causality and our understanding of it. Remember, Hume was very skeptical about our ability to have knowledge of causality.

1. Problem of causality. As we know Hume was skeptical about our ability to gain knowledge of causality. But, he was certain that causality could not extend beyond objects of sense experience. How can we possibly understand the concept of causality applying to God? In this case, we have absolutely no sense experience to go on for our knowledge of this cause. So we are greatly overstepping the limits of our knowledge.

2. Reasoning from effect to cause. Another problem with causal reasoning is using our knowledge of the effect, in this case the universe) to gain knowledge of the cause (God). The fact is that knowledge of the effect cannot tell us anything about the cause (except perhaps that there must be a cause; for the response to that see point 1).

3. Evil effect implies evil cause. OK, so you still want to use this cause and effect reasoning? Well, says Hume, at least be consistent then. The effect has a great deal of pain and suffering in it; in short evil. So mustn't the cause also contain evil? It would seem so. This, in short is the problem of evil which we will discuss in more detail later.

4. The nature of the cause. In response to some of the previous points you might say that although we can't have knowledge of the cause we must at least know that there is a cause. But, Hume asks, why would we infer that there is a cause? Why not several causes? The universe could be the result of a committee of Gods. Given point three this might make sense. Committees have a way of making things that don't turn out exactly perfect!

5. Weak analogy. The comparison of a watch and the universe is simply

too far fetched to actually make a plausible argument. Analogies only work if the things you're comparing are similar. But there are hardly any similarities between a watch and the universe.

6. Hasty generalization. On the subject of analogies let's consider the reasoning involved in Paley's argument. He's using the model of human intelligence to understand the cause of the universe. Sure, human intelligence created the watch but why do we assume that this (or something like it) was the driving force behind the cause of the universe. As Hume points out, there are many principles of nature in the universe. Why assume that the one that works for us here is responsible for the workings of the rest of the universe?

You might think these criticisms would be enough to spell the end of Paley's design argument. But there's one more criticism that, for some, pretty much spelled the end of the game for good. This criticism came, ironically enough, from a man whose only degree was in theology. I say ironically because many believed that it was this man, more than any other, who finally eliminated God from science entirely. Well, at least he tried right? Wrong. As we'll see, it was never Charles Darwin's intent to get rid of God but he did want to explain how things came to be the way they are and his explanation did do damage to natural theology. But don't worry, natural theology recovered and even made friends with Darwin's theory of evolution. To see how let's look at the story from the beginning. Like evolution itself, the development of the theory of evolution was very gradual.

Some evolutionary thinking has been around since the ancient Greeks. But things really began to develop in the 18th century. At the time the major best seller of the day was written by a Swiss botanist called Linnaeus. His *Systema Natura* classified all the plants and flowers in a rigid way for the first time ever and gave us the two name system we still use today. He believed, as did many that each species was a separate creation and that things in the natural world don't change. Everything is where it's been since the beginning which, according to an Anglican bishop called Ussher, was Monday 9:00 AM October 26, 4004 B.C. Every species was a special creation of God and so everything in the natural world was complete; no changes, no gaps.

The problem came when we started finding fossils of animals that didn't

seem to be around anymore. It began to look as if there had been changes and now that these creatures seemed to be extinct there were gaps. The first attempt to explain this was given, in 1778, by the curator of the Paris Zoo named George Louis, Comte de Buffon. He had a look at the evidence, thought about it, and published a few thoughts on the question (44 volumes!). In his *Natural History* he postulated that the age of the earth was more like 150,000 years. In this time, the varieties we see had to arise not by evolutionary means but by degenerating from the original creation. Each species was still thought to be a separate creation, which then degenerated into all the varieties we see today. OK this explained the variety but what about the gaps; what about all the fossil remains of animals (like the dinosaurs) that don't exist now?

The solution was to come from another Frenchman who was running the Paris Natural History Museum, named Georges Cuvier. He postulated that there must have been great catastrophes that occurred throughout history (like floods; in fact Cuvier postulated that there must have been two of them) that would have wiped out the species that are now extinct. This went over well with the Church, in particular an English clergyman named William Buckland. His view was that there had only been the one flood which was mentioned in the Bible. While Buckland was a brilliant defender of the view it was not to survive the next development in the story.

The chief rival to the theory of catastrophism was offered by a geologist named James Hutton. He looked around and concluded that the changes throughout geological history could easily have been made by the same processes at work today. Given enough time wind and water erosion can account for a lot of change. The way things changed in the past is exactly like how they change now. Pretty darn slow! This view was called uniformitarianism and the key to the theory is time. Was there enough time in geological history for these processes to take effect?

The answer was to come from another geologist named Charles Lyell whose *Principles of Geology* published in 1830 made geology the science it is today. In essence he confirmed Hutton's idea and because of his research concluded that the age of the earth must be millions of years. This was the only way to account for the observations he was making.

I'm leaving some details out of the story but the long and short of it was

that Darwin was, in part, inspired by Lyell's work because he recognized that the process of natural selection required geologic scales of time. Given this, you can explain all the variety of animal species through the mechanism of adaptation to the environment.

OK given all of this, where does that leave Paley's argument? Well, if you can explain how things arise naturally, through the process of evolution, then you don't need to postulate a supernatural cause for each instance of creation. But as I mentioned earlier, this doesn't spell the end of natural theology entirely even if it does mean the end of Paley's version. The best way to think of this is to distinguish "narrow teleology" from "wider teleology." Paley's version (narrow) requires a special act of creation for each instance of design. The problem is that evidence suggests we can explain these particular instances of design without appealing to the supernatural. But what we can't explain is the whole system and in particular how the natural mechanisms (like evolution) arose. For this, we do seem to need a supernatural cause. This is the view offered by F.R. Tennant and may allow us to combine theology and science.

But, there are objections to this view as well. Now known as intelligent design theory, this view postulates that because there are certain elements in the natural world that are irreducibly complex they require a supernatural explanation. Also, the probability of this occurring by chance alone is so small that there must be some supernatural cause at work. However, there are several important objections to this view. First, there simply have not been any examples found which are truly irreducibly complex such that they cannot be explained by appeal to gradual, natural processes. As Richard Dawkins puts it: "The creationists are right that, if genuinely irreducible complexity could be properly demonstrated, it would wreck Darwin's theory. Darwin himself said as much: 'If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down. But, I can find no such case.' Darwin could find no such case, and nor has anybody since Darwin's time, despite strenuous indeed desperate, efforts. Many candidates for this holy grail of creationism have been proposed. None has stood up to analysis."

But, a second problem arises from the search for the cause of any case of irreducibly complexity in the supernatural realm. The problem here is

that if you need a cause for something irreducibly complex, it makes no sense to appeal to something even more complex which is what God would be. How can a complex process in need of an explanation arise from a cause even more complex (and presumably even more improbable) than the original phenomena? If the probability of complex organisms arising from natural processes is vanishingly small, how much smaller is the probability that they arose as a result of a supernatural cause?

A third problem is with the claim that the probability of such intricate apparently designed creatures such as are in the animal kingdom arising by chance is vanishingly small. The conclusion then is that they arose due to a supernatural cause. But, this ignores another possible option. In the first place, evolution does not postulate that the complex organisms we observe arose purely by chance but by a gradual, natural process. The best image of this is provided by Richard Dawkins in his book *Climbing Mount Improbable*. In this book he relates the parable of Mount Improbable: "Mount Improbable rears up from the plain, lofting its peaks dizzily to the rarefied sky. The towering, vertical cliffs of Mount Improbable can never, it seems, be climbed. Dwarfed like insects, thwarted mountaineers crawl and scrabble along the foot, gazing hopelessly at the sheer, unattainable heights. They shake their tiny, baffled heads and declare the brooding summit forever unscalable.

"Our mountaineers are too ambitious. So intent are they on the perpendicular drama of the cliffs, they do not think to look round the other side of the mountain. There they would find not vertical cliffs and echoing canyons but gently inclined grassy meadows, graded steadily and easily towards to distant uplands... The sheer height of the peak doesn't matter, so long as you don't try to scale it in a single bound. Locate the mildly sloping path and, if you have unlimited time, the ascent is only as formidable as the next step. The story of Mount Improbable is, of course, a parable." But, the parable illustrates quite nicely the theory of evolution and how apparently designed creatures, can arise through a "non-random," natural process. Given the explanatory power of the theory of evolution, whether you agree or disagree with it, you should at least have a fairly sophisticated knowledge of what the theory is saying. I encourage you to learn as much as you can about the theory before dismissing it out of hand and the seriousness of its implications for philosophy and natural theology.

Some scholars, however, claim that theology does not always capture the entirety of the religious experience or, even, the most important parts. So we now turn to a consideration of the religious experience to see what elements we've been missing in our investigation of natural theology.

# Chapter 22

## The Religious Experience

Having looked at several rational approaches to the religious, we now proceed to look at the religious experience. The difference between the two can be seen in the Danish theologian Soren Kierkegaard's comment that "to stand on one leg and prove God's existence is a very different thing from going on one's knees and thanking him." The religious experience does not necessarily appeal to the philosophical part of the mind. Rather, it is a more immediate experience, a personal connection with the divine. Another way of thinking about this is by using Martin Buber's image of the "I-Thou" relationship. Our relationship to the world around us, which Buber calls "I-It," is characterized by an objective element. We are separate from it and investigate it as such. However, the religious experience brings us into a direct subjective contact with God.

As we look at the religious experience we will address several key points which define it and then proceed to give some examples. We will also consider whether this experience can provide any evidence for the existence of God. In addressing this question we will look at several objections to the religious experience and a possible way of dealing with these objections.

The difficulty of explaining the religious experience can be explained by pointing to one of the most salient elements of it: it's supposed to be ineffable. That is, one cannot adequately put it into words. This is why many people who have had the experience describe it in highly metaphorical and poetic language. The experience defies rational analysis and description. This is partly due to another important element of the experience; its transcendence. You remember the difficulty we had describing the transcendent Forms in Plato's theory. Imagine how difficult it might be to describe it not from the outside looking in, but rather, from the inside. In other words, the religious experience puts those who have had it into

an entirely different perspective. Those of us who have not shared this may be at a loss to understand it.

Understanding, though, is a key element of the experience. To describe this we say that the religious experience is noetic. That is, it conveys a deep sense of illumination. Those who have had the experience come away with a greater understanding, not only of the divine and their relationship to this, but also, the cosmos as a whole. In some cases this experience is so profound that it includes a feeling of unity with all of reality. Needless to say, then, the experience is also ecstatic; filling the soul with a great sense of peace and joy.

There are many of examples of the religious experience throughout history. Perhaps the most famous are related in the Bible. In the Old Testament, we encounter several examples of direct experience with God. Among these is the experience of Abraham and his son Isaac. In this case, God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son. Thankfully, God stops him short but as Kierkegaard once said, when faced with this kind of divine command which flies in the face of our normal considerations, follow the divine. This Kierkegaard called the "teleological suspension of the ethical." A New Testament example is St. Paul's experience on the road to Damascus. In this case Paul has a vision of Christ himself and the changes that take place for Paul as a result of this were nothing short of historical.

The philosophical question concerning the religious experience is: does it prove anything? Can we use this experience to validate our knowledge of God? Reviews are mixed. Needless to say, those who have had such experiences say that they have given them very good evidence. But does this help those who have not had the experience? One criticism is that the religious experience is so subjective that it cannot possibly be used as evidence. After all, evidence needs to be objective. In this respect, the religious experience is unlike other experiences. For example, if I were to say that I saw the most amazing rock formations at the Grand Canyon you would understand what I meant. And more than that, if you put yourself in my position at the Grand Canyon you would have the same experience. Of course, there would be a subjective element to my experience and you may not find the rock formations amazing. But you would experience them which show that there is some objective component there as well. However, the religious experience is not like that. For

example, I could walk along the same road to Damascus as Paul did at the same time of day and reasonably expect to have the same experience. In some sense, the religious experience is entirely subjective and that's the problem.

But that doesn't mean we can't explain the experience. In fact, for critics of the religious experience, this subjectivity is entirely explainable. One of the major breakthroughs of 19th century science and philosophy was a deeper understanding of the human mind and body. Both psychology and biology made significant gains and many of these scientists turned their attention to the religious experience in an effort to explain it. The most popular explanation was that the religious experience was a product of some mental or physical condition. More correctly, the religious experience was explained by appealing to some mental or physical illness. After all, it was said, Paul was an epileptic. That would explain his visions; epileptics have seizures and visions. Saint Teresa was a hysteric. George Fox had a disordered colon. So do these medical conditions explain the religious experience? Not everyone thought so.

In particular one person familiar with both biology and psychology disagreed with this explanation. William James, the eminent American psychologist and medical doctor, was much more sympathetic to the religious experience. In his book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, he offers a cogent defense. First, he criticizes this view that the religious experience can be explained away as some sort of medical or psychological ailment. He refers to this "simpleminded system of thought" as medical materialism. The main problem, in James' view, is that it only addresses the cause of the experience, not the significance of the experience itself.

Let's consider what medical materialism is really saying. A religious experience is the result of some organic cause therefore it can be discounted. But wait a minute! Isn't every experience the result of some organic (that is biological or psychological) cause? Yes. So by this same logic, all experiences are discredited. Even a scientific theory has some organic cause. In fact, thinking about a scientific theory gives us another refutation of medical materialism. While this is not James' example it will serve to explain his point. Suppose we were to discover that Einstein developed his theory of relativity as a result of his having schizophrenia. Would that cause us to reevaluate the theory? It shouldn't. We should evaluate the theory using appropriate scientific methods. If the evidence

is in favor of the theory it doesn't really matter that its cause was a medical condition. What matters is whether the theory can pass certain scientific tests. The same should hold true of the religious experience.

The cause, strictly speaking, is irrelevant. As James points out "Saint Teresa might have had the nervous system of the placidest cow, and it would not now save her theology, if the trail of the theology by other tests should show it to be contemptible." What we need, then, is an appropriate set of criteria to evaluate the experience. In a fit of prolix James gives us just that. "Immediate luminousness, in short, philosophical reasonableness, and moral helpfulness are the only available criteria" to evaluate the religious experience. The experience needs to be reasonable in the sense that it fits in with our intellectual life. It must also fit in with our moral understandings.

But, do these criteria really address what is needed to assess the accuracy of the religious experience? Can't an experience be completely false and morally helpful at the same time? Perhaps, which is why James also says that the experience must be philosophically reasonable (emphasis on reasonable). But, part of being reasonable entails an analysis about the cause of the experience. As I mention below there are several interesting works on this subject including one titled *Why We Believe What We Believe* which seems to relate directly to the cause of the belief and the importance of understanding this. Surely in some sense the accuracy of our beliefs is tied to their cause.

Given this criteria, we can now turn to consider a few experiences that may not immediately seem religious but do have religious implications. I will only touch briefly on these experiences to introduce them. Both of these were popular areas of research in James' day and are being freshly considered today. The first of these is the near death experience. In 1976 another medical doctor, named Raymond Moody, published *Life After Life*; a series of case studies describing the experience of people who had clinically "died" and come back. What struck Moody, and many others, was the uniformity of elements in the experience and the fact that having the experience did not depend on the religious view of the subject. There have been attempts to explain this in purely biological terms but it is, in part, still an open question. Our understanding of the dying process is still developing, even as our understanding of the mind.

The second of these experiences is mediumistic communication. This is where someone purports to be able to communicate with people who have died, or as it is sometimes put crossed over. In fact, this is the title of a popular television show hosted by one of these mediums named John Edward. Now, before you start rolling your eyes, you should know that this has been an area of research for over a century with some very interesting recent findings. The most recent effort to study this was conducted by a psychologist named Gary Schwartz. He published the results of this research in 2002 in a book titled *The Afterlife Experiments*. In this book he claims to prove, he used the "p" word, the validity of these mediums' claims to communicate with those who have died. Clearly, the implication of this is that they have in some sense "survived" the death of their bodies. Schwartz admits that further research is required, and Moody would say the same about the near death experience.

Are these experiences valid or just representative of our longing for something more? As Sir Thomas Browne once said, "the long habit of living indisposeth us to dying." While hope may inspire the research, in order to validate the experiences we'll need hard evidence. What does the hard evidence tell us about the religious experience? We now know quite a bit more than we did in James' day about how the mind works. In particular how it constructs reality and sometimes constructs it in ways that do not bear any connection to the objective world. As Richard Dawkins puts it, "the human brain runs first-class simulation software." Sometimes the simulations are helpful and accurate but not always. Two books in particular provide useful insights into the working of the mind and its ability to construct beliefs. In *Why We Believe What We Believe*, Andrew Newberg illustrates some of the common mistakes the brain makes and how to guard against them in your quest for accurate beliefs. In *Sway*, Ori Brafman illustrates just how prevalent and irresistible irrational behavior really is (in fact that's the subtitle of the book: *The Irresistible Pull of Irrational Behavior*). To truly understand our beliefs and how to assess their accuracy you really need a firm grounding in the science and psychology of the mind.

What does the research and evidence tell us so far about the near death experience and mediumistic communication as evidence for an afterlife? Interestingly enough, many scientists, when confronted with the research that has been done, have to admit that nothing we know about how the universe works precludes the possibility of "survival." Of

course, this doesn't mean that these experiences are valid but actuality has to be preceded by possibility. Only time will tell. Can these experiences be validated by James' criteria? Well, we've briefly addressed the reasonableness of them. Are they morally helpful? Some say yes inasmuch as the possibility of survival would potentially solve a serious moral problem. Why do bad things happen to good people? Why do those who do evil seem to prosper? Perhaps they do so here only to meet a different judgment in the hereafter. Still, the problem of evil is serious and we now turn to consider this.

# Chapter 23

## The Problem of Evil

The problem of evil is, perhaps, the most serious challenge leveled against the religious believer. While it does not constitute a "proof" of atheism, it does call into question the nature of God as most theists understand him. Simply put, the problem of evil asks how we can justify the existence of God, and belief in God, with all the evil there is in the world. In philosophical terms the problem arises for those who accept the following three propositions:

1. God is Omnipotent.
2. God is Omni-benevolent.
3. Evil exists.

It may not be obvious why accepting these three propositions entails a problem and so we should clarify what each one implies. In doing this, and outlining the possible solutions to the problem I will be following the lead of a philosopher named J. L. Mackie, who in 1971 published an important article on the subject titled "Evil and Omnipotence."

Proposition one, at the very least, entails that God has the ability to eliminate evil. While there are things that an omnipotent being is incapable of, such as violating the laws of logic, it doesn't seem to be too much of a leap to suppose that God could eliminate evil. Proposition two, at the very least, seems to entail that God is inclined to eliminate evil. This should clarify the problem at hand. If God is both capable of and inclined to eliminate evil, there should be no evil. But evil does exist which demands an explanation. In clarifying proposition three many philosophers make a distinction between natural and moral evil. Natural evil includes such things as floods, earthquakes, famines, pain, and disease. They are naturally occurring things which have negative effects on human beings. Moral evil includes actions caused by human beings which

have negative effects on other human beings. This would include such acts as murder, rape, genocide, and torture. Some philosophers have suggested that we only deal with moral evils since naturally occurring things, such as floods and earthquakes, are not inherently evil. They are only interpreted as evil if human beings happen to be affected. Still, we are left with the problem of explaining moral evil. We will consider various solutions to the problem which are called "theodicies." Theodicy is from the Latin for justification since we are, in essence, trying to justify God's existence in the face of evil.

Mackie points out that there are three perfectly adequate solutions that completely solve the problem. The trouble with these solutions is that they create problems much greater than the one we're solving and so are usually not accepted. Before explaining these solutions I should point out that the problem of evil only exists for those who believe all three of the propositions stated above. If you do not believe one of them then there is no problem. Any two can be logically coherent. It is only the combination of all three that seems to entail a logical contradiction.

Clearly, one solution is to deny the truth of proposition one. If God is not omnipotent then he may simply be unable to eliminate evil. This solution was suggested by the 19th century English philosopher, John Stuart Mill. You can see how it perfectly solves the problem. Evil exists, at least in part, because of God's inability to eliminate it. You can probably also see why many religious believers reject it.

A second solution is to deny the truth of proposition two. Perhaps God is not Omni-benevolent; that is to say perhaps God is partially evil. This solution was offered by our old friend, David Hume. According to Hume, if you were going to infer the existence of God based on the existence of the universe you would have to infer that God is partially evil. After all, the effect of God's work is partially evil. A variant of this solution goes back to early Christianity. In the first and second centuries of Christianity there was a sect called the Gnostics who believed that the universe was actually created by an evil god. It was only later that a second, good, God sent Christ to redeem the world. Needless to say many Christians then, as now, deny the validity of this solution.

A third possible adequate solution is to deny the existence of evil. This may sound like a very strange thing to say or do. How can we deny that

evil exists? Well, according to some philosophers, such as St Augustine, evil is not really a thing at all. The problem of evil arises from thinking of it as such. What is evil then? Evil is the absence of something; that is, evil is a privation. The very nature of created things is to be imperfect. Since the universe was created by God, it follows that it is imperfect. That is, it lacks something it should have. But this "lack" is not a thing to be contended with. It is the absence of goodness that's the problem. Is this just a question of semantics? Perhaps. While it may solve the logical problem of evil to say that disease is just the absence of health, it probably doesn't make the sick person feel any better. We should probably consider other possible solutions to the problem.

In his article "Evil and Omnipotence," Mackie proceeds to outline several enticing solutions that may seem to work but, in fact, have logical problems. These are different from the solutions considered above because those didn't have logical problems, though they did have reasons for not accepting them. I will address four of these so-called "inadequate solutions."

1. Evil is a contrast to good. This solution proceeds by pointing out that we could not know what good was without comparing it with something not good, that is, evil. We need evil to contrast with good. For example, if everything in the universe were colored blue, we wouldn't know what blue was. Therefore, we need some red to give us a contrast. But there is a problem with this solution. For the purposes of contrast just how much red do we need? Very little. So, with regard to evil as a contrast to good, we should only have a very little evil. But it seems that we have a lot of evil in the world; much more than is needed for simple contrast. So this solution does not seem to explain why there is so much evil in the world.

2. Evil is a necessary cause to good. This solution can be dismissed fairly easily since it represents a severe restriction on God's omnipotence. If good cannot arise at all but for evil then in what sense can God be called all powerful? Perhaps to make this work it needs to be modified as follows:

3. The world is better with evil than without. What this solution postulates is that evil may give rise to a higher good, not as a matter of necessity but as the best means only. In showing how this might work we can

combine it with the first solution of evil as a contrast. So consider that pleasure and pain are contrasting good and evil; we'll call them first order good and first order evil. We do not need to say that one explains the other but we do need to address why there is pain. What we might say is that pain is the best way to give rise to a higher good. If such a higher good exists, and if the evil of pain can give rise to it, then clearly, the universe is better off than it would be without the higher good. So what possible higher good could arise from pain? Well, perhaps compassion or sympathy.

Let's call these second-order goods. But, if there are second-order goods it seems likely that there are second order evils as well. One example of such an evil might be cruelty. In order to explain this second order evil we need to appeal, again, to a higher order good; a third order good. Let's call this justice. Of course, now you see the problem. Every higher order good will imply a higher order evil to contrast and then that evil will need to be explained by an even higher good. The explanation will always be inadequate because it will never fully explain the existence of evil.

4. One of the most popular solutions is called the free-will defense. Evil is the result of free choices made by human beings. God gave us the ability to do that which is good but this also implies that we have the ability to do evil. It is our choice and sometimes we choose evil. As the argument goes God had two alternatives when he created us. 1. God could have created us without freewill and thus we would always do that which is good. 2. God could have created us with freewill which entails the possibility of evil. Clearly option two is the better one and so that explains evil.

Mackie's response to this solution is clever if not completely convincing. Still, it's worth considering. Freewill doesn't imply random action anymore than it precludes doing the same thing each and every time. For example, if I order the same dish every time I go to a certain restaurant that doesn't imply that I have no freewill. It just implies that I'm always freely choosing the same option. With this in mind Mackie suggests that God could have created us such that we always freely choose to do the good. This would solve the problem of evil and it also shows the inadequacy of the freewill defense. Needless to say, many people find his reasoning inadequate! Still, the logic of the problem of evil seems troubling.

Perhaps the problem is in using logic to solve it. Perhaps evil is irrational. This was the approach offered by Albert Camus. In a work titled *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus considered the absurdity of existence and how to live in the face of that absurdity. Part of the problem is in our very attempt to give evil, and life for that matter, a meaning. There is no meaning but we still must face the question of whether to live or not. This Camus calls the "fundamental question of philosophy." We have two options when confronting it and evil. We can give in: suicide. We can turn and face it: conscious revolt. Camus advocates the latter and uses the image of Sisyphus, who was condemned for all eternity to roll a rock up a hill only to have it roll back down and start over, to convey this response. While many see Camus' answer as pessimistic, he himself saw it as optimism. As he points out "one supposes that Sisyphus was happy." We too can be happy if we realize the irrationality of evil and the absurdity of existence.

One last approach may provide a little more comfort though. Perhaps evil is therapy. This may sound as strange as anything I've said so far but stay with me. If you remember a few chapters ago I mentioned Viktor Frankl and his logotherapy which was an attempt to give meaning to life. Clearly this is a much different approach to Camus. Consider an animal being used for medical research. The animal is subjected to painful experiments. From the perspective of that animal, the pain and suffering are meaningless. If the animal could see things from the human perspective it would understand the true meaning of its suffering. How do we know that there isn't a higher realm where our suffering too has a meaning? Perhaps, our suffering here is meant to prepare us for something to come. One of the best examples of this theodicy is given by Malcolm Muggeridge; a twentieth century journalist and eloquent spokesman for Christianity. He relates the following parable:

"Some very humane, rather simpleminded old lady sees the play *King Lear* performed and she is outraged that a poor old man should be so humiliated, made to suffer so. And in the eternal shade she meets Shakespeare, and she says to him, 'What a monstrous thing to make that poor old man go through all that.' And Shakespeare says, 'Yes, I quite agree. It was very painful, and I could have arranged for him to take a sedative at the end of Act I, but then ma'am, there would have been no play.' See my point?"

# Chapter 24

## Challenges to Morality

A common question which prevents many people from taking a stand regarding issues of right and wrong is the question: Who are we to judge others? I've heard this question from students as well as adults serving on jury duty. I suspect it is a quite common question and one to which most who ask it believe they have the answer. Namely, it is not our place to judge others. After all, doesn't the Bible counsel not to make judgments: "judge not lest ye be judged?" But, we cannot live without making judgments. The question philosophy can help with, in particular through the study of ethics, is how to make good judgments.

However, before we can directly address this point, we need to explore some preliminary topics. Why are so many people reluctant to make judgments? I believe this comes from three sources. First, people may believe that judgments are inherently negative. Second, people may believe that judgments imply objective standards, which they believe, do not exist. Third, people may believe that making judgments will cause unnecessary controversy or hurt feelings.

Let's begin by examining the notion of judgment itself. I believe most people's stated reluctance to making judgments (which differs from their action of making judgments) comes from the mistaken belief that judgments are inherently negative. But, judgment itself is a neutral term. Judgments can be negative such as "she's a bad dresser," "he's not a kind person," etc. However, judgments can also be positive as when we favorably evaluate someone's athletic skill, charismatic personality, organizational skills in the office, or cooking skills. In each case, positive or negative, we are making an evaluative claim. My claim is simply that judgments are unavoidable. I sometimes ask my students who are reluctant to make judgments if they are married or in a serious relationship. When they say yes I point out that this fact alone illustrates that they

must have made some judgments. Unless of course they simply choose the first person on the street they saw to marry! But, even in this case they must have made the judgment that this was a good way to pick a mate. Judgments do imply objective standards and the problem many people have with this is their belief that there are no such standards. But, as we'll discuss below in the challenge of relativism, there are good reasons for thinking that there are some objective standards.

A third reason for the reluctance to make judgments is very likely people's fear of causing controversy or hurting others' feelings. Discussing controversial ethical issues can be difficult for many precisely because they have a strong emotional content. While no one suggests completely ignoring one's emotions when addressing these issues, it is beneficial and constructive to be able to distinguish reason from emotion and to allow reason to guide and inform our emotions. This may sound like an impossible task but it can be done. There are several useful philosophical insights that might make this task easier. First, we should distinguish the person making a statement or argument from the person himself. Second, we should distinguish offense and harm. Last, we can benefit from the insights of the Stoic philosophers who have had a strong influence on the psychological school of thought known as rational emotive therapy. I won't be able to address all of these points in sufficient detail here. But perhaps an introduction to each will help clarify the issues and inspire you to learn more about these useful insights so that you can benefit from them, not only in this class, but also in other classes and perhaps in your life in general.

In logic there is a fallacy of reasoning known as argument against the person. The reason this is a logical fallacy (mistake in reasoning) is because there is a difference between the person and what that person says. If you disagree with something I say that doesn't mean you are disagreeing with me as a person. In other words, if you disagree with me it doesn't mean you are insulting me or attacking me personally. You may very well like me as a person but dislike something I think or say. For example, if I say I think golf is a great way to relax you may disagree with that. But does that mean you are insulting me or does that mean you dislike me? No. Now while that is a fairly tame example, logically speaking the same should hold true for other issues as well. Perhaps you disagree with someone's view of capital punishment. You can say that you disagree and argue passionately for your view just as they can. But that

does not mean that you dislike that person or are insulting or attacking them. Recognizing this should allow us to engage in spirited discussions without worry about offending anyone. We just have to remember that we can discuss an issue without personally attacking or insulting someone.

Another useful distinction which will help us is the distinction between offense and harm. A good resource on this subject is Lou Marinoff's book *The Big Questions*. In one chapter he asks the question "if you're offended are you harmed?" The answer turns out to be no. Consider this. Suppose someone walks up to you and steps on your toe. You have no choice about whether that's going to hurt. It is! So, here you are harmed. Being harmed is involuntary, you have no choice about whether to feel pain or not. Now, offense is not like this. If someone walks up to you and says "wow, you have really big feet" you have a choice to make. The choice is how you will react to this comment. I'm sure you've heard the expressions "no offense intended" and "none taken." These are very revealing. Offense is something that can be offered and it's also something that can be taken. But, importantly for us, offense is also something that can be refused. You have a choice in this and that's what distinguishes offense from harm.

As human beings we are emotional beings. But, we are not slaves to our emotions. We have the ability to reason and think and this can aid us in our emotional reactions. This was a very important insight of the ancient Stoic philosophers. The basic idea behind stoicism is that we have no control over external circumstances. What we do have control over is our attitude towards them. As Epictetus once said "it is not things which disturb us, but our attitude towards them." This perfectly sums up the stoic idea as well as how to handle offense. Similarly, the Roman emperor and stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius said "if you are pained by any external thing, it is not the thing that disturbs you, but your judgment about it. And, it is in your power to wipe out this judgment now."

Of course, this takes skill and practice but it can be learned. One good approach to learning this is discussed by the psychologist Albert Ellis who developed something called rational emotive therapy. His approach is very stoic inasmuch as he maintains that what really disturb us are not our emotions themselves but our rational (or more correctly irrational) beliefs. It is our beliefs which in large part determine what our emotional

response to a situation will be. If we can formulate rational beliefs then our emotional responses won't be ones of depression, anxiety, or offense. One way to begin is to reflect on why you're having the emotional reaction that you're having. As Ellis would advise, ask what beliefs you have that are contributing to your emotional response. Then ask whether those beliefs are reasonable. Chances are if the beliefs are unreasonable then your emotional response may be causing you to become unhappy or upset needlessly.

It should go without saying that there is nothing at all wrong with emotions or having them. But, if our emotions are ones of depression and unhappiness then it's good to know that something can be done to address that. Notice as we go through the texts in our class that while we're discussing many emotionally charged issues the attempt is always being made to discuss them from the standpoint of reason. Of course emotions inform our reason just as our reason informs emotions. The trick is not to allow either side to dominate to the exclusion of the benefits of the other.

Another very common question related to ethics regards who is to decide what counts as right and wrong. In large part this question is misguided and reveals a lack of a clear understanding of the basic principles of ethical reasoning. Once again, philosophy can provide useful insight here. In particular, the insights of Wittgenstein prove helpful by illustrating that there are certain ways of living for human beings that all humans share; what Wittgenstein called forms of life. Just as all humans share a need to eat and seek shelter so too all humans have an interest in furthering their interests in terms of what will bring them happiness. But, don't radically different things bring people happiness? Not really. When you seriously investigate what brings happiness you find a great deal of similarity across cultures and time. Epicurus once said that all that is required for happiness is friendship, freedom, and contemplation. Though Epicurus pointed this out centuries ago, these values still provide the basis for happiness today.

It is when we begin to investigate more specific issues that differences seem to occur and tempt people to draw the conclusion that there are no values in common and since ethics is just each person's opinion anyway, we are left with the problem of figuring out who should decide what is right and wrong. But, the mistake occurs in thinking that there are no values in common and ethics is nothing more than opinion. If we look at

ethics as being deeply rooted in how we live as human beings we begin to see that there is much we have in common and far from individuals deciding for themselves, we arrive at ethical principles which naturally further our interests as human beings. I am not simply of the opinion that murder is wrong. It does not further human interests either of the murderer or the victim. Yes, there are many ethical questions which are more difficult to resolve but look closely at the disagreements that seem to be occurring when people discuss such issues as abortion. Are they really disagreeing about fundamental values and interests or how best to preserve these values and further these interests?

We now proceed to consider ethics and morality. These terms are often used synonymously and for good reason. They both have their roots in words which mean custom; one in Latin and the other in Greek. For our purposes we will make an important distinction between these two terms. Ethics will constitute the rules which govern morality. Morality will consist of the beliefs which inform us about good and bad actions. So ethics will tell us how to apply these moral beliefs to action. Ethical theory will attempt to justify the reasons for turning these beliefs into action. Not everyone agrees that this is even possible. In this chapter we will consider some of the main challenges to formulating ethical theory.

Ethical theory is different than theory in science and this point is important to remember because it tells us why some philosophers question the possibility of forming any ethical theory. While scientific theory attempts to take a collection of facts and observations and make predictions from them ethical theory attempts to formulate statements of how we ought to act. Another way of stating this is to say that ethical theory contains "normative" statements. One of the central questions in ethics is whether this is even possible. David Hume, for one, maintained that it was impossible to derive any statement of ought from a statement of what is; that is to say, you cannot derive a statement of value from a statement of fact. This is often called the "is-ought problem."

An example will help illustrate. Suppose there are two people, a man and a woman, in their mid-30s who are sexually active (with each other). The result of this activity is the pregnancy of the woman. Now, they need to answer a question. What should they do about this? Since they are not here we will have to answer the question for them. Based on the facts I gave you what should they do? If you find this question difficult

to answer you can ask for more facts. But, Hume's point is that no amount of facts will allow you to answer the question. One attempt of ethical theory to solve this will be to include a self-evident normative statement as one of the foundations of the theory. We will see how this plays out when we consider specific ethical theories. First, we need to consider four other challenges to morality.

1. The challenge of positivism. If you remember our discussion of logical positivism then this challenge will make sense. Positivism postulated that propositions could only be meaningful if they were analytic or empirically verifiable. This was called the verification theory of meaning. Now, consider how this affects moral propositions. Suppose I say 'murder is wrong.' This sounds like a factual statement but when subjected to the criteria of positivism we see that it's meaningless. After all the statement that murder is wrong is not analytic nor is it empirically verifiable. So, moral statements are inherently meaningless.

Does this mean that ethical theory is "much ado about nothing?" Not exactly. While it is true that ethical theory does not address factually meaningful content that's not the end of the story. According to the positivist when I say "murder is wrong" I am talking factual non-sense but emotionally something very meaningful. I am, in fact, expressing how I feel about murder. So, moral statements are statements about our feelings. This theory is called emotivism and is more popular than you might think. To see how much of a hold it has on us listen to how people talk these days. They spend a lot of time telling you how they feel about issues like abortion, capital punishment, terrorism. The emotivist would say that this is only natural since these statements are nothing more than expressions of emotion.

Unless we can demonstrate that positivism is flawed in some way ethical theory is in serious trouble. Fortunately, we can show some significant problems with positivism. First, emotivism implies that we are infallible with regard to our moral statements; that is we can never be wrong. How could I be wrong about what I feel? Remember Wittgenstein? But the simple fact is that human beings are not infallible. We can be wrong about our moral judgment which shows that it must have a factual component. Second, positivism does not seem to pass its own criterion of meaning. The principle of verification seems to be neither analytic nor empirically verifiable. Positivism seems to be self refuting!

2. The challenge of relativism. This challenge is serious if only because it is a more commonly held sentiment. According to relativism there are no objective moral principles. Instead, moral principles are relative to each individual or the culture you happen to be living in. An example of individual relativism might be the fact that for some individuals, abortion may be wrong but for others it could be right. An example of cultural relativism might be the fact that for one culture infanticide might be right while for another culture it is wrong. The question is whether this is the correct basis for morality.

The most common line of reasoning given in favor of moral relativism is that people (or cultures) have different beliefs (or practices) concerning morality. From this we are tempted to conclude that there are no objective moral principles. But, as James Rachels points out in his book *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* this argument is "quite simply unsound." The trouble is that the conclusion does not follow from the premise. The premise concerns what people believe while the conclusion refers to "what really is the case." It simply does not follow from the mere fact that people disagree that there is no objective truth. That would be like saying that since some people believe the earth is flat while others believe it is round, there is no objective geographical fact about the earth! That is simply and demonstrably false.

In addition to these problems however, the basic assumption of relativism is simply wrong. Relativism begins with the view that people (or cultures) do in fact have fundamentally different moral beliefs (or practices). As Rachels points out, however, this is also false. Yes cultures do have different practices, but these practices are not based on fundamentally different moral principles. In fact, the underlying moral principles are the same; it is their expression in different cultures that is different. The reason for the differences can be traced, as we have done for the differences in religious practice, to the differences in the cultural environment.

Put simply, there are objective moral principles. As Rachels points out "there are some moral rules that all societies must have in common, because those rules are necessary for society to exist." We can, at the very least, formulate three of these principles. All cultures must have a rule which entails that the young be cared for. Also, all cultures must have

some moral principle placing a value on truth telling. Thirdly, there must be some moral prohibition on indiscriminate killing of members of the culture. The precise formulation of these principles may vary from culture to culture but no culture could long continue to survive without these moral rules. Yes, there will be exceptions to the rules. Yes, there will be infractions. But the norm must be in favor of these principles. The exceptions do not disprove the general rule any more than the fact that some people believe that the earth is flat disproves the fact that the earth is round.

3. The challenge of existentialism. Existentialism is a philosophy based on the importance of the individual. Its relationship to morality is somewhat ambiguous. One of the most prominent existentialists was Jean-Paul Sartre. From his point of view there was no such thing as human nature. What this implies is that there is nothing human beings ought to do. We are ultimately free to decide how to live our lives. This freedom includes freedom from universal moral constraints and thus comes the problem. If there is no inherent human nature and we are ultimately free to choose what we make of our lives this must preclude the possibility of ethical theory in some sense.

I said existentialism has an ambiguous relationship to morality because Sartre's view seems to hinge on the very thing he denies; objective moral principles. Sartre points out that with freedom comes responsibility. We are free to make of our lives what we choose but in making these choices we are also choosing for all of humanity. As the Christian existentialist Gabriel Marcel points out, this is contradictory. Sartre says that there is no basis for moral judgments but then judges some actions better than others. But if some actions are better then this implies some basis for such judgments. While Sartre says that values are ultimately created, Marcel maintains that they are simply discovered.

4. The challenge of determinism. Perhaps the most serious challenge to morality is determinism. As Immanuel Kant once pointed out "ought implies can." That is, we cannot be held responsible for things we are not free to do. Determinism, however, denies freewill entirely. We discussed the metaphysics of this in the chapter on materialism. If everything is governed by physical laws then human beings, and our capacity to make decisions, are no different. But the root of any ethical theory is the presumption that people are free to choose how they act. After all, how can

we praise or blame people for actions they are not responsible for?

The most extreme answer to the question is to admit that no one is responsible for his actions. The attorney Clarence Darrow advocated precisely this saying to the prisoners of Cook County Jail that "I do not believe that people are in jail because they deserve to be. They are in jail simply because they cannot avoid it on account of circumstances which are entirely beyond their control and for which they are in no way responsible." So much for morality. Is there any way around this problem?

In his essay "The Dilemma of Determinism," William James points out that there is really no definitive evidence in favor of either side of the debate. However, there are some distressing implications of determinism. Consider a crime that one of those prisoners in Cook County might be accused of: a murder. Ordinarily, we would say that a murder is a bad thing. What could this mean? Among other things this would seem to mean that it shouldn't have happened. But, if determinism is correct it makes no sense to say that it shouldn't have happened. According to determinism, it had to happen. So it seems that we couldn't even make a judgment that murder is bad. We also couldn't explain the human sentiment of regret that the prisoner might feel. Why regret what had to happen? Why regret something you weren't responsible for? James concludes that "our belief in freewill may be instinctive. However, there are some instinctive reactions which I, for one, will not tamper with."

As we can see, there are many criticisms ethical theory must deal with. This will be no less true when we look at specific examples of such theories in the next two chapters. But in spite of all the arguments against formulating such theories we must remember that, at bottom, each ethical theory is attempting to answer a question which demands an answer. It is the oldest of philosophical questions. It is Socrates' question. How should one live?

# Chapter 25

## Utilitarianism

There are two dominant approaches in ethical theory. One approach maintains that we judge actions by their consequences and the other maintains that we judge actions by appeal to rules. The second theory, called deontology, will be addressed in the next chapter. The first theory, utilitarianism, we will consider now.

The idea of applying utility to ethics has its roots in 18th century philosophy. David Hume mentions it in his *Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* and Adam Smith devotes a portion of his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* to the concept. However, as a fully formed ethical theory, utilitarianism was the product of two philosophers in the 19th century. The first of these was British philosopher Jeremy Bentham.

Bentham began with what he considered to be a self evident psychological principle. Human beings act in accordance with two motives: the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. This being the case, the principle of utility can be formulated as "the doctrine that we ought to act so as to promote the greatest balance of pleasure over pain." However, there are two problems with this initial formulation. First, it seems overly concerned with pleasure as opposed to right action or behavior. The second problem is that this principle of utility doesn't address whose pleasure we should be concerned with.

From Bentham's perspective the first problem was not a problem at all. Good, strictly speaking, is equated with pleasure. The pursuit of pleasure simply is the pursuit of good. And as we'll see momentarily, for Bentham what counts is the quantity of pleasure. However, the second problem needs addressing. Bentham was concerned not only with self satisfaction but also with social reform. This being the case, Bentham reformulated the principle of utility to say "that we ought to act so as to

promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number." Note also, the change in terminology from pleasure to happiness. This is to remind us that the utilitarians are not only concerned with physical pleasure and pain, but all types of pleasure.

Bentham's version of utilitarianism emphasized the quantity of pleasure and he actually developed a way of calculating the quantity in order to determine the correctness of any given action. This "hedonic calculus" consisted of seven points which included the intensity of the pleasure, its duration, certainty, and extent. So from a purely quantitative perspective various pleasures were identical as long as their numerical value on the calculus was identical. This is what led Bentham to say that "the game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry. If the game of push-pin furnish more pleasure, it is more valuable than either.

As inviting as it might be to quantify ethical theory there may be problems with this approach. First, how can pleasure or happiness really be quantified? Whatever scale we might use seems inherently arbitrary. Even the choice of which scale to use is arbitrary. Plus, if we were to formulate some objective criteria to evaluate and quantify pleasure and pain, it would seem that this would be the foundation of ethical theory instead of utility. A second problem is that this quantitative approach implies a sort of relativism of values. Between two competing goods, for example reading poetry and playing a game, is there really no way to distinguish them? If so, then there seems to be no way of making sense out of the central normative feature of any ethical theory. For example, if I were to say that you ought to tell the truth, but you get just as much quantitative value out of lying, then you are perfectly justified in lying. To say the least, this seems odd. There may be an alternative.

The alternative was offered by a student of Bentham named John Stuart Mill. While he was deeply impressed by the utilitarian theory of Bentham, he did think that certain modifications were needed. In particular, Mill wanted to de-emphasize quantity in favor of quality with regard to happiness. To illustrate the difference Mill asked whether anyone would rather be a pig satisfied than a human being dissatisfied. The idea is that when it comes to happiness quantity is not enough. It's not the amount of happiness that counts but the kind of happiness. Another way of putting this is to say that some pursuits are inherently better than

others. How can Mill justify this claim?

The answer goes back to an idea developed by Aristotle. To be truly happy, human beings must fulfill their potential. Part of this potential is to be rational agents. So any pursuits which require a rational component are inherently better than those pursuits which do not require such capacity. Here, better means more effective at creating happiness. So Mill's point is that the conditions for human happiness are different and related to our rational capacity. Still, we need clear criteria for deciding which actions to take to achieve happiness. For example, how can we decide between two activities if we've only tried one? The answer, for Mill, is simple. We rely on the expertise of those who have tried both. According to Mill, those who have tried both inevitably choose for the higher pleasure thus illustrating that it is the correct choice.

This leads to a curious problem for Mill's version of utilitarianism. How can we prove the validity of the claim that certain actions are the correct ones to pursue? In short, how can the principle of utility itself be proven? Again, Mill appeals to Aristotle. As he points out, in his short work titled *Utilitarianism*, "questions of ultimate ends do not admit of proof, in the ordinary acceptance of the term." However, we can provide a proof of sorts. "The only proof capable of being given that an object is visible is that people actually see it. The only proof that a sound is audible is that people hear it, and so of the other sources of our experience. In like manner, I apprehend, the sole evidence it is possible to produce that anything is desirable is that people do actually desire it."

Herein lays the problem. Can we really infer that something is desirable from the fact that people desire it? It seems not. This would imply that murder is desirable simply because some people desire it. We could think of worse examples but hopefully you see the point. As we saw in the chapter on challenges to morality, this is simply an instance of the is-ought problem. From a given fact we cannot infer that something ought to be the case. The irony of Mill committing such a basic logical fallacy is that he wrote a work titled *System of Logic*!

Another issue that we need to address is exactly how to apply the principle of utility to making decisions and carrying them out. Remember, the principle of utility says that we ought to act so as to maximize the greatest happiness for the greatest number. The question is whether we

need to apply this to each specific act or simply to formulating ethical rules. Mill himself was somewhat unclear about this but twentieth century utilitarians developed a distinction between two approaches: act utilitarianism and rule utilitarianism. To see what's at issue, consider an example. Suppose you're driving down the street and you get to a light which is yellow and just about to turn red. As it turns you wonder whether you should run the light or stop.

An act utilitarian would say that in each and every case like this you need to apply the principle of utility and decide on a case by case basis. In some cases, it might be justified to run the red light. For example, if you're rushing your sick friend to the hospital. In other cases, like driving to the mall, you would be justified in stopping at the light. The point is that each case is different. On the other hand, a rule utilitarian would say that you should follow the rule in all cases. After all, the rule has been formulated by appealing to the principle of utility. So, to maximize the greatest happiness for the greatest number you follow the rule. Clearly, these are radically different approaches.

Whichever approach you take there are problems with the application of the principle of utility. We've seen that you might be able to justify running a red light with act utilitarianism. However, things might get worse. Since we are simply looking to maximize the greatest happiness for the greatest number, we are still thinking in quantitative terms. This, in spite of Mill's qualitative approach. It would seem, then, that as long as we can insure that we have generated the greatest happiness for the greatest number, a small number might be allowed to be unhappy. In essence, we can purchase the happiness of the majority with the suffering of a minority. By this logic, utilitarianism could be used to justify discrimination of all sorts, or worse actions.

In addition to this, applying the principle of utility requires us to speculate. To judge the correctness of the action we have to await the consequences. Prior to this our analysis of the action's moral worth is somewhat of a guess. Granted, the outcomes of some actions are predictable, but many consequences are not. In fact, economists ever since Adam Smith have known that, for any given action, there will always be consequences that were unintended. Given the fact that we did not intend them, they are difficult to predict. However, we cannot adequately determine the action's moral worth without taking into account all

consequences; intended and otherwise.

But utilitarianism has another problem which is more serious than a question of application. We can illustrate this problem with an example. Suppose I have a very wealthy and very sick relative; an uncle let's say. I don't like this uncle very much (by the way this is just an example!). Truth be told, I don't like going to the hospital either. But, I'm pretty sure I stand to inherit something after my uncle's death. Unless, of course, I do something to make him mad, like not visiting him in the hospital, in which case he'll write me out of the will. So, I decide to visit him. Now, from the standpoint of the principle of utility this is a good action. After all, all the consequences are good. My sick uncle is comforted in his time of need and I get the inheritance. But, isn't there something deeply troubling about this example. Even though utilitarianism justifies it, the action seems immoral. Why? My motivation for acting is immoral. In other words, it's not only consequences that matter when judging an action's moral worth, but also the reasons for acting. We now turn to consider a theory which deals with these reasons: deontology.

# Chapter 26

## Deontology

As we've seen, an ethical theory that focuses solely on consequences leads to serious problems. While consequences are important to consider, there may be another important aspect of ethical theory that needs addressing. For Immanuel Kant, this is motivation. We should judge the moral worth of an action by its motivation and, according to Kant, only those actions motivated by duty are morally praiseworthy. Strangely enough, inclination decreases the moral worth of an action. To see why, let's examine deontology which focuses on the role of duty.

Kant begins with the claim that nothing is good without qualification except the good will. Clearly, there are many things which are good but they can be used for evil purposes. Consider intelligence. This is a good thing but, when put to use by a criminal, can be very dangerous. The same applies to wealth. It can be a good thing but when used to fund drug trafficking or terrorism is, indeed, evil. However, the good will is good in all cases; it's good by definition. What is the good will? By will Kant means our capacity for making decisions. The good will, then, is that will which acts in accordance with the moral law. That should pretty much answer all the questions about Kant's theory except one. What is the moral law?

Kant believes that the moral law is an objective standard by which we judge the correctness of our actions. It does not depend on consequences and is not contextual. Instead, the moral law is universal and should be followed regardless of the consequences. This may sound strange inasmuch as we would hope that following the moral law would, in fact, have good consequences. And, indeed, Kant believed this. However, we should not judge the moral worth of our action by the consequences. Rather, we should follow our duty and doing so will, in the end, generate the best consequences.

The moral law defines what our duty is and is expressed by the categorical imperative. Before addressing this, we should clarify something about imperatives which are simply commands to act in a certain way. There are two types of imperatives: hypothetical and categorical. Hypothetical imperatives take the form of conditional statements. For example, "if you want to be a good musician, you should practice a musical instrument everyday." Now, when I give you this imperative have I obliged you to practice a musical instrument everyday? No. After all, you could say, "I don't care anything about being a musician, good or bad." So you are under no obligation to follow the imperative. All hypothetical imperatives are like this and can be opted out of. They are, in a sense, optional and only hold in cases where you want to achieve the antecedent condition, be it becoming a good musician or whatever.

The interesting question for Kant's theory is whether the moral law could be expressed as a hypothetical imperative. An example of this might be: "If you want to be a good person, you should tell the truth." On the surface this might seem acceptable, but a closer inspection reveals a problem. If the moral law were expressed as a hypothetical imperative, then the moral law would be optional! You could choose to opt out of it. This seems wrong somehow. Certainly, it goes against Kant's claim that the moral law is universally binding. In fact, by virtue of being a rational agent we are all bound by the moral law. It is for this reason that the moral law must be expressed as a categorical imperative.

The categorical imperative itself has two formulations. The first is called the principle of universalizability. This is a complicated term but the idea is pretty simple. The way Kant describes it is to say that we should act such that the maxim of our actions can be made into a universal law. This still probably sounds complex. Consider the following example. I need some money and I'm coming to you for a loan. However, in order to convince you to lend me the money, I need to promise to repay it. The problem is that I have no way of repaying the money. So the question is, "Should I make a promise I know I can't keep?" To test whether this is morally correct I apply the categorical imperative. I ask whether I can make this maxim a universal rule of action: Make promises you know you can't keep. If we consider the logic of this we can see a serious problem. Pretend that we've made this a universal rule of action. Now, I say to you if you need help on the next exam I will be available to talk

tomorrow at 7:00 P.M. You ask if we can meet then and I say I promise to be available. Would you believe my promise? You shouldn't since we've made it a universal rule to make promises you know you can't keep. Promising would be rendered contradictory in such a case. So this rule cannot be made universal and that's what tells us that my original action is immoral.

The second formulation of the categorical imperative is called the principle of respect. Simply stated, this says that we should never treat people, including ourselves, only as a means to an end. The important word in this phrase is "only." We use people as means to an end all the time. When I visit the grocery I use the grocer as a means to an end; the end of getting my groceries. Don't be too alarmed at this, since my grocer is using me to further the end of making a living. You are using me as a means to the end of furthering your education, but don't feel guilty about that since I am using you as a means to further the end of making a living. None of these arrangements are problematic. The trouble occurs when we use people only as means to an end. How can we tell whether we're doing this?

People deserve to be treated with respect simply by virtue of being human beings. People deserve our respect quite apart from what they can do for us. If we only treat them well because of what they can do for us then we are violating this principle. In addition, our interactions with others should be voluntary and uncoerced. However, according to this principle we are obliged to treat ourselves with respect as well. One of the more controversial implications of this that Kant saw was that this renders suicide immoral. For Kant, suicide amounts to using oneself as a means to an end; the end of relieving one's suffering. In addition, suicide implies a "contradiction in a system of nature whose law would be to destroy life by the feeling whose special office is to impel the improvement of life."

As with utilitarianism, there are some problems with Kant's deontology. One of these, of course, is the radical separation from consequences. Kant tells us that the consequences of our action cannot be used to judge the morality of the actions. What counts is the motivation. This, however, leads to a rather strange implication. According to Kant an action is morally praiseworthy if it is done out of respect for the moral law and in accordance with our duty. But what if we are disposed to behave in certain

ways that happen to coincide with our duty? For example, if my duty to my friend requires me to visit him in the hospital. But, since he's my friend I'm already naturally inclined to visit him whether it's my duty or not. And so, I follow my inclination and visit him. In Kant's view, the action has no moral worth. Why not? It was not done out of respect for the moral law. So, it seems that the things we want to do are not moral even if they happen to be the right thing to do! It's not that they're immoral. They simply have no moral worth; a peculiar situation indeed.

Some philosophers speculate that what we need is a unified ethical theory that considers both consequences and duty. One attempt to do this may be an approach developed by Adam Smith in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. He begins with the presumption that there is an important innate component to morality sometimes called the "moral sense." Recent work has been done on this by James Q. Wilson in his work *The Moral Sense*. I briefly alluded to this in the chapter on rationalism. A more systematic approach to this is in a recently published book by Michael Shermer called *The Science of Good and Evil*,<sup>1</sup> *Shermer advocates a scientific approach to ethics which mediates between two fatally flawed extremes in ethics: absolutism and relativism. Like theories in science, he proposes that a theory of ethics must be provisional. "In provisional ethics, moral or immoral means confirmed to such an extent it would be reasonable to offer provisional assent."*

*Frustrating as it may be, we leave ethics in the same way we left metaphysics and epistemology. Our knowledge continues to develop and with it our theories. This does not necessarily mean that there is no answer. As we saw when discussing Wittgenstein, certainty is a more subtle concept than it appears on the surface. This holds true in ethics just as much as any other discipline. Our knowledge is provisional but this does not render it invalid. The mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal once said, "We sail within a vast sphere, ever drifting in uncertainty, driven from end to end." But, even within this vast sphere, some things seem to remain constant. Physicists call these "invariances." Perhaps there are ethical invariances as well which utilitarianism and deontology have allowed us to glimpse. Our understanding of these ethical invariances is, perhaps, still in its infancy. Who knows what answers might arise through further philosophical questioning? We have much to look forward to.*

## Final Thoughts

Stephen Hawking opens his book *A Brief History of Time* with the following story. "A well-known scientist (some say it was Bertrand Russell) once gave a public lecture on astronomy. He described how the earth orbits around the sun and how the sun, in turn, orbits around the center of a vast collection of stars called our galaxy. At the end of the lecture, a little old lady at the back of the room got up and said: 'What you have told us is rubbish. The world is really a flat plate supported on the back of a giant tortoise.' The scientist gave a superior smile before replying, 'What is the tortoise standing on?' 'You're very clever, young man, very clever,' said the old lady. 'But it's turtles all the way down.'"

You may have the feeling that this is the kind of answer philosophy supplies to the questions we've been considering, incomprehensible and unjustified. We've raised quite a lot of questions and offered many different and conflicting answers. But where do we end up? Do we have any sense of closure?

Well, in a word, the answer is no. However, our failure to achieve closure should not be seen as a failure. Philosophy is in the business of asking two kinds of questions. The first are extremely difficult to answer and so it should come as no surprise that we haven't found definitive answers yet. The second are questions that must be asked and answered by each of us throughout our life. Philosophy cannot provide final answers for these questions because, in a sense, there are no final answers to these questions. So what has philosophy given us?

First and foremost philosophy has given us an insight into some very fundamental questions and how to reason through to answers. The answers, in many cases, have not been definitive but the real value of philosophizing lies in the questioning which Heidegger called "the piety of

thought." Sometimes formulating the question is the major obstacle to finding the answer. How one formulates the question often determines the answer so it is useful to focus on questioning. What philosophy provides us is a method for dealing with questions. If we can focus on the process and refine it, the answers will take care of themselves. As Wittgenstein said, "the philosopher's treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness."

We've looked at several questions throughout the semester and perhaps you want to know the answers to these questions. Well, none of them has a definitive answer but I can give you an indication of where the evidence points as of now. While this might not be completely satisfying it's the best we can offer in philosophy. As Robert Frost once said, "anyone with an active mind lives on tentatives rather than tenets."

*Is knowledge innate or learned from sense experience?*

*As you remember, the rationalists believed knowledge was innate to some degree. Plato believed all knowledge was innate, Descartes believed only some was innate. Empiricists believed all knowledge was learned from sense experience with no innate component at all. Kant tried to find the median between these two postulating that knowledge begins with experience but does not arise from it. Instead, it is governed in part by innate structures of the mind. Recent evidence from psychology and neurology seems to be leaning towards Kant as the most correct theory. While there is still work to be done, it is widely conceded that the mind at birth is not a blank slate (so much for empiricism) but is not populated with fully formed ideas either (so much for rationalism). What the mind does seem to possess is a set of structures for gaining and processing knowledge such as those associated with language acquisition, learning about cause and effect, morality, and even quantitative skills.*

*Is the mind independent of the brain?*

Here the issue was cast in terms of dualism versus monism. The most prominent dualist we studied was Descartes whose view probably most closely approximates most people's view of the mind. The mind is a non-physical entity (perhaps the same as the soul) which interacts with the physical brain somehow but we can't say for sure how this works. On the other side was monism with two versions: materialism and idealism. Idealism has not put forward a defined answer to this question except to

postulate that the mind is a non-physical entity as the dualists maintained. For the materialists the fundamental reality is physical and the mind is simply the functioning of the brain. While we are not entirely sure how the brain does everything that it does, it will eventually be shown that the brain is the source of thinking, feeling, and consciousness itself. Recent evidence from neurology indicates that a materialist metaphysics of some kind will turn out to be the right answer. In anticipation of this, almost no philosophers today are dualists of any kind (be it substance dualism or property dualism). This is likely to disappoint many of you to the point of disbelief. However, the evidence points in this direction and continues to be fruitful. What the future may hold is unknown, but that is where we stand today.

*Is there an objective reality independent of appearance and perception?*

*This has been a recurring question for us and concerned Plato, Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume and Kant. Each took a different approach but most shared an underlying intuition (if not concrete proof) that there was an objective reality independent of appearance and perception. We briefly explained how quantum mechanics called this intuition into question. Two important points are worth emphasizing. First, believing something does not make it so. The mere fact that you hold a personal belief does not make it true. The concept of "true for me" is inherently contradictory. What sense could it make to say something such as "for me the earth is flat?" A second point is related. The mere fact that a large group of people believe something does not make it so. There are millions of people that believe the earth is flat, more believe it is not. Do we infer that the earth is round because there are more believers in that statement? No, we infer the earth is round because of tangible, objective evidence. We should appeal to the tangible, objective evidence as the best way to arrive at what is actually the case independent of what we might believe (or want to believe) is the case.*

*Is there a God?*

This is the most difficult question to provide a clear answer to. We've investigated many of the arguments for as well as against the existence of God. Where does the weight of evidence lie? For most of the philosophers we've examined this semester the evidence has steered them towards some form of theism (a belief in God). But, the dictates of reason and evidence maintain that one must follow the evidence wherever it leads and most philosophers today, along with most scientists, are following it

towards atheism or at best some form of deism or Spinoza-like pantheism. But, for those of you who find this conclusion dismaying you can take heart that the pursuit of evidence continues.

The interesting question is whether evidence matters or not. It has long been known in psychology that people who claim that their beliefs are based on evidence will not necessarily change them when evidence is presented which conclusively refutes their belief. In fact, they will often believe even more strongly! One explanation for this is that it represents an attempt to reduce cognitive dissonance. The mind does not like contradictions and holding a belief in the face of refuting evidence represents such a contradiction. So, rather than give up the belief they make changes to account for the evidence or concoct explanations to explain the evidence away. More startling is that psychologists recognize that no one is immune to this process. We must all be on guard against it. Evidence matters but it requires a commitment to the findings of the evidence that many may not be prepared to make. As William James once said "we have to live today by what truth we can get today, and be ready tomorrow to call it falsehood."

Lastly, some of you may have started this class (and ended it as well) with the belief that some questions like these simply cannot be answered. Philosophy like other disciplines is in the business of gaining knowledge and would not knowingly take on questions that could not be answered. The fact that a question is difficult to answer, even the fact that an answer has not been found, does not constitute proof that a question cannot be answered. This claim, like all others we've examined, must be demonstrated. If philosophy has shown anything it is the value of asking questions. If someone tells you that the questions you are asking cannot be answered, you should demand some proof for that assertion! It may be the case that this position is being held by someone because they don't want to know the answer or fear the answer might be one they don't want to hear. But, the search for knowledge is not the search for what we'd like to be true. It is the search for what, in fact, is the case.

I began this book by emphasizing the importance of ideas. Even if we are not familiar with philosophical ideas, they have a profound effect on our lives each and every day. Consider the effect of the ideas we have analyzed; the mind, God, freewill, good, evil. Each of these, and more, are

an implicit part of our everyday framework. The psychologist Alfred Adler correctly pointed out that "a person's behavior springs from his ideas." So, to understand our behavior we'd better understand our ideas. But, as we've also seen, the ideas are not simply ours. They exist within a community and context. Philosophy reminds us of this and invites us to reflect on those elements of our world as well.

Although we have addressed many fundamental questions, philosophical reasoning can be of value in more practical ways. The same process of reflection that led us to critical insights about ideas such as substance, space, and time can also be applied to generate insights concerning more familiar ideas such as love, change, meaning, and purpose. I have alluded to some of these throughout the book but only briefly. In an introductory class, we are, of necessity, constrained to deal with a certain amount of important fundamental material. After all, I am supposed to be introducing you to the world of philosophy. But, focusing on metaphysics and epistemology exclusively makes it hard to remember that philosophy can be useful in dealing with practical concerns. Surely our investigation of philosophy of religion and ethics partially illustrate this practical side of philosophy. However, there are lessons to be gained from the more abstract philosophical subjects as well.

Plato showed us the possibility of a transcendent realm and how we might gain a deeper understanding of it. While his theory may not be entirely satisfying, it does give us a means for addressing the very human desire for access to a world beyond our own. He also makes clear to us that gaining knowledge of the transcendent is entirely our own choice. The desire for wisdom begins with our selves. Descartes reminds us of this as well pointing out that the beginning of certainty, the beginning of knowledge is self knowledge. *Temet Nosce. Know thyself.*

In a world dominated by materialism we sometimes forget the role of the divine. As we've seen, George Berkeley cautions us against this and attempts to show that there is a place for God in the cosmos. In fact, as he and St. Thomas Aquinas illustrated, the existence of the world depends on the existence of God. However, Aquinas and Berkeley do not advocate blind faith. Rather, understanding is a necessity and an aid to faith. Still, we should ask: What about the value of skepticism?

Surely a healthy dose of skepticism is a valuable resource. David Hume

shows us how effectively it can be employed. But, we need not take skepticism to the extreme to benefit from it. At the very least, we can remember Hume's counsel that "a wise man proportions his belief to the evidence." Our search for the truth is, ultimately, provisional and ongoing. While certainty is tempting, it may be more fluid than we realize. Immanuel Kant and Ludwig Wittgenstein showed us that we can have certainty but, thanks to them, we have a more sophisticated view of it.

The ultimate value of philosophy is the insistence that we reflect on our ideas and beliefs. Not for the purpose of overthrowing them. Yes, some ideas and beliefs will not stand up under philosophical scrutiny and so, perhaps, they should be discarded. But, as often as not, we have seen that philosophy can strengthen our views and provide us with good reasons for having certain beliefs. The whole point of Descartes' meditations was to put our intuitive beliefs on a certain foundation; to provide us with a deeper understanding of our beliefs. Understanding has very practical benefits. As Friedrich Nietzsche points out "he who has a why to live for can bear with almost any how."

But the question of "why" can only be answered by understanding; and meaning. Viktor Frankl, the holocaust survivor, psychiatrist, and developer of logotherapy, postulates that the fundamental drive in human beings is "the will to meaning." We need to find a meaning for our lives. As you can well, imagine, this is not a question philosophy can provide a single monolithic answer to. Each person must find meaning in their own way, but we can all equally benefit from the lessons of philosophical reflection. Whether it is Aristotle's logic, Descartes' methodic doubt, Hume's skepticism, or Kant's critical philosophy, the goal is the same. Perhaps Wittgenstein put it best. "There is not a philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies." We should find the one that best suits us or, perhaps, some combination. Don't be afraid to mix and match!

William James once said "there can be no final truth in ethics any more than in physics, until the last man has had his experience and said his say." Philosophy is something we all participate in. The ultimate questions in philosophy are the ultimate questions in life. Everyone must confront them and can have their say in the answer. In fact, if James is correct, to find the ultimate answers we need everyone's participation. We

need you to have your say just as much as anyone. What are you waiting for?

# Chapter 28

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