Finding Happiness While Being Good

Finding Happiness While Being Good

The Challenge of Living Peacefully and Virtuously in a Turbulent World

MARIE FRIQUEGNON

WILLIAM PATERSON UNIVERSITY
WAYNE, NJ

Dedication

Dedicated to Bodhi Kovalenko

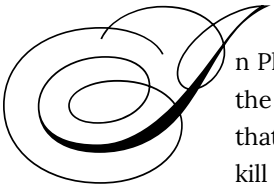
Contents

Acknowledgements

To the following without whom this book would not have been possible: Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal Rinpoche for his wisdom and encouragement, Maris Abelson, Michael Kovalenko, Cathy Allen, Candee Kane, Kathy Sanchez, Gae Sanchez, Lodro Kyle Parker, Isaac Dondrup Spencer, Kev Fairbanks, Majenta Zangmo Loera, and the community at Padma Samye Ling, for their help and support, and for listening tirelessly to my ideas. Thank you to my class in Ethical Well Being Fall 2020 at William Paterson University for their helpful comments. I am very grateful.

I thank William Paterson University for their Academic Release Time Grant, which gave me the leisure to begin this project, and Padmasambhava Buddhist Center, which gave me office space and internet services so I could work safely in the mountains during the COVID virus. I am especially grateful to Lama Lorraine, Lama Dragpa, and Lama Laia for their help in making this possible.

Introduction



n Plato's Republic, the character Glaucon cites the story of a shepherd who, obtaining a ring that would enable him to be invisible, is able to kill his king, marry the queen and become king himself. Glaucon argues that no one could sincerely believe that the use of the ring was not profitable. Plato, through the character of Socrates, argues that the use of the ring did not benefit the shepherd because it tied him to his appetites and desires, rather than leading him to live a virtuous life.

But what makes living a virtuous life so much better than a life filled with the satisfaction of one's desires? Suppose one were to inherit a great deal of money, have a happy childhood surrounded by adoring relatives, marry a rich, kind, intelligent, and attractive mate, have lovely well-behaved children, and spend a life enjoying the best entertainment, food, and sports available along with good health. Then suppose one were to die instantly of a heart attack at the age of seventy, never experiencing old age, sickness, or death? Suppose one were to never have performed an act of kindness towards strangers, but only, because so inclined, had been good to one's delightful family? Could one say that such a person had not had a perfectly satisfying life?

Such a life is an unlikely prospect. The Greek philosopher Aristotle gave an example of someone who may seem to have had a happy life, yet at the time of death something might happen that will make this person feel that his or her life had been a failure. Aristotle's example was that of a prosperous man who had a son he adored. He discovered on his deathbed that his son had never loved him and had betrayed him. Aristotle concluded that the man did not have a happy life. This would be true of successful, happy people who in their golden years had lost everything and had died in a concentration camp. Or more commonly, people who invest in a

fancy retirement community only to find that when their minds begin to fail, they are barred from many activities, even from eating in the common dining room. They may end their lives lonely and bitter.

Many of us take out long-term care insurance policies, but where is one to find an insurance policy that guarantees a satisfying life? And is it possible to escape the cruelties of the end of life and remain in a calm and peaceful mental state until death?

Some religious people seem to succeed in doing just that. My dear Irish Catholic step-grandma refused to stay with her loving children and chose to go to a simple, non-luxurious nursing home to end her days. I often visited her there and she spoke to me of how she had no fear of death but looked forward to being in heaven with her beloved husband Amador. She had faith that no matter what happened, God was taking care of her. This worked well for her because as far as I could see, she had perfect faith. But what of those among us who have no faith, or have a shaky faith at best?

The Primacy of Conscience

Many people substitute conscience for faith. Perhaps the first time many of you may have heard about conscience was in the Disney movie "Pinocchio," in which Jiminy Cricket sings "And always let your conscience be your guide." This advice usually works for us. But on closer examination, it becomes clear that the issue is not so simple. The difficulties implicit in the concept of conscience were shown in Jonathan Bennett's essay "The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn." There is a scene in which Jim, a slave in pre-Civil War Mississippi, is about to be sold by the widow who "owns" him, who is badly in need of money. Jim appeals to his friend Huck, a young white boy, for help. Huck sympathizes with Jim and wants to help him escape, but his conscience troubles him. For Huck, Jim is by white society's standards, considered legal property, and to help

him escape would be morally wrong, as well as a sin. He thinks he might be punished by God. But his feelings of sympathy are stronger than his conscience and he helps Jim anyway. What are we to make of this?

Could we argue that Jim followed his true conscience and that the false conscience that allowed him to see Jim as property was an aberration? Sometimes conscience seems to require that we go against our conditioned instincts, as in the case of Huck.

Where can we find a rational guide to moral behavior? The hallmark of rational behavior is often called 'consistency'. As children, when we harm another child we may well be told, "Would you want this to be done to you?"

This comes from the Golden Rule, perhaps first expressed by Hillel, the Jewish scholar (110 B.C.E.–10 C.E.). A Roman soldier asked Hillel to explain Judaism, but since the soldier was busy, he asked him to explain it in the time Hillel could balance on one foot. Hillel complied saying, "What is hateful to you, don't do to your fellowman; that is the whole Torah, and the rest… is just a commentary. Go then and learn it!"[1] Jesus is said to have invoked the Golden Rule in his Sermon on the Mount when he said, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, ye even so to them."[2]

The ancient Confucians in China expressed it similarly as, "What you do not want others to do to you, do not do to others."[3]

The value of an objective criterion such as the Golden Rule may be understood by the following example: Suppose a math teacher were to come into class dressed in black leather and long black leather boots, carrying a whip, and wrote 4+5=9 on the board. Cracking

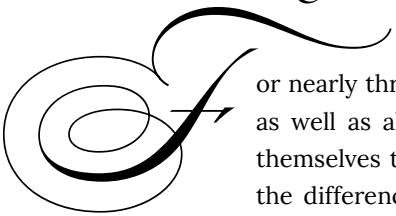
1. In Buxbaum, Y. (2008). The Life and Teachings of Hillel. United Kingdom: Jason Aronson, Incorporated. p. 95
2. Matthew, 7:12
3. Analects, 12:2, in Kong, Q., Confucius. (2007). The analects of Confucius. United Kingdom: Columbia University Press. p. 109

the whip, she said, “Memorize this, or I’ll beat you.” That would be absurd. But the following case would be equally absurd: Suppose the math teacher came into class dressed in flowers, bells, and fringes and said after writing 4+5=9 on the board, “Well class, you know most people say the answer is 9. But if you want to say 6 or 7 or any other number—hey that’s cool. Whatever turns you on.”

What we need is the math teacher to teach the method of addition so that every student can get the same answer without the teacher using any force. Could we have this for morality as well?

As we will see, the eighteenth-century philosopher Immanuel Kant intended to find such a method to use in the discovery of objective moral rules. In the following chapter, we will judge his success. We will also examine rival methods for achieving the same goal.

1. Discovering The Difference Between Right And Wrong



or nearly three thousand years, philosophers as well as all thoughtful people have asked themselves the question, 'How can we know the difference between right and wrong?" I believe this question was most likely asked within a culture exposed to a variety of moral customs. Greece is one important example.

Because the Greek islands served as stepping stones east, west, and south, merchants who could chart the treacherous and almost unpredictable seas were able to carry on a brisk trade. They became very rich and were able to build large homes that overshadowed the palaces of royalty. In their travels, they encountered customs very different from those at home.The historian Herodotus who traveled widely encountered denizens of a country that were compelled to eat their dead relatives for religious reasons.[1] The merchants must have been impressed by the variety of customs they encountered, and foreign customs influenced early Greek philosophers, including how they viewed morality.

The Presocratic philosopher Protagoras said, "Man is the measure," meaning morality then could only be justified by the conventions of society. Socrates however, was the foremost opponent of this view. Socrates viewed morality as independent of the gods yet did not embrace the idea that it was merely a matter of human convention. In Plato's dialogue "The Euthyphro," a young man from a family of priests told Socrates that he planned to accuse his father of murder. When queried by Socrates, Euthyphro explained that his father's slave had killed another slave that his

1. Herodotus Book 3:38

father had borrowed to do some work. Not knowing what to do, Euthyphro's father restrained the guilty slave and went to the oracle at Delphi to inquire from the god what punishment was proper. While he was away, the slave died from negligence. Euthyphro, a religious man, cited Athenian law based on the supposed law of the gods and was going to court to ask that his father be punished. Socrates asked Euthyphro if an action is right because the gods willed it, or if the gods willed it because it was right. In asking this question Socrates introduced the study of ethics in the west. Socrates was seeking a rational basis for morality, a goal that he was not able to reach. But he set it as an ideal that future generations still strive to realize.

A similar development occurred in India, also in the sixth century. Most followers of what we have come to call Hinduism, based morality on sacred utterances called the Vedas, considered divine in origin. Some non-Hindu Indian philosophers, however, the Carvakas or Lokavadas, were skeptics and did not hold any statements, including those about morality, to be true.

Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, rejected religious-based morality, such as defined moral obligations according to the caste system.[2] calling them into question on rational grounds. Why, he asked, should we consider one caste better than another when there are clearly people of great moral stature and intelligence in all of them? Nevertheless, he upheld moral standards, basing them on reason and compassion.

The Enlightenment philosopher Kant, after carefully examining the vast range of human activities, concluded that the only thing that can be considered good without qualification is a good will. Medicine, for example, is usually used for the good. But in the wrong doses given to the wrong people, it can be an instrument of murder. The concept of 'good will' is similar to the Confucian term jen/ren,

2. The traditional Hindu system of dividing society into hereditar y classes.

usually translated as righteousness, or willing to do what is right. In Buddhism, the corollary is bodhicitta, the synthesis of wisdom and compassion.

Given that we want to will what is right, how do we know what is right? There is the commonsense approach, favored by Plato, Aristotle, and Confucius. For Plato and Confucius, morality was based on what they took to be the natural hierarchy within each person. As intelligent beings, we try to discover what is right. We should will it, that is, commit ourselves to doing what is right. Then we must 'order' our emotions and desires to fall into harmony with what is right. This is sometimes called enlightenment ethics. It is exactly opposite to the romantic view of Hume, an eighteenth-century Scot, who argued that reason is and ought to be the slave of the passions. A romantic view might for example, advocate a love affair which is illegal and dangerous to the stability of the family. We see this tension between the rational and passionate over and over again in movies and TV dramas today.

Plato and Aristotle believed that moral wisdom is to be achieved through the 'happy medium,' the juste milieu. For example, the happy medium between cowardliness and fool heartedness is courage, and it is correct to behave courageously. One might disagree about whether this approach is always successful. It is hard to say for example, what extremes would determine patience to be the mean in a given scenario.

Kant argued that the proper way to act can be known by applying the categorical imperative: "Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."[3]

Kant meant that rules should be adoptable by all people regardless of their religion, ethnicity, culture, etc. Let's suppose that a group of people are cast by a storm onto a desert island.

3. Critique of Practical Reason. translated by Lewis White Beck. Librar y of Liberal Arts, 1956

The storm has been so horrific that they suffered permanent and total amnesia. But they can still reason. They need to settle on a set of rules that will enable them to live together. No one wants to be killed, so on the basis of consistency they settle on the rule 'Don't kill'. The same method leads to the rules 'Don't steal', 'Don't lie', Don't break promises'. Having adopted these rules, they are likely to manage everyday living. The categorical imperative does the same job. Through it, one generates commands that are categorical, because there are no 'ifs' involved. One does not steal, period. (Not just IF one is not hungry for someone's food, etc.) It is a command, an imperative; it embodies a universal principle, given not only to others but to oneself as well.

This is a brilliant solution to the problem of finding a set of rules that elicits universal agreement without being a command given by any authority except reason itself. It is not however without its faults. Sometimes following a rule may lead to horrendous consequences. Suppose during the Nazi era, one was hiding Jewish friends. If the Nazis asked, "Have you seen any Jews?", to tell the truth would be to bring death on your friends. It seems clear that here, lying is ethically required. Also, it is not clear that in every case all people, even those aiming at the good, would necessarily universalize the same rules. For example, when I was a student in Catholic school, I was told never to have sex before marriage. But in my freshman year at Barnard, I was told by my sex hygiene teacher that one should always do so. Otherwise one would be trapping one's partner into a relationship that might prove to be sexually unsatisfactory for both parties. Both teachers were universalizing a rule but in opposite ways.

Kant was a quiet man, so much a creature of habit that the townspeople set their timepieces in accordance with when he took his walk. (He gave up his walk only on the day when he was waiting for news of the French revolution.) He never married.His views are often contrasted with those of John Stuart Mill who was not concerned with rules, but rather with the consequences of actions. Mill was actively involved in the English women's suffrage

movement and was madly in love with the British philosopher Harriet Taylor, whom he was finally able to marry when her husband died. Mill was a lively man who loved romantic poetry, especially Wordsworth. One might ask how much their personalities influenced their views.

Mill's guiding principle was to always act so that the results of one's actions would maximize happiness and minimize pain for the greatest number of people. The following example may clarify the difference between Kant and Mill. Suppose after many years of celebrating Thanksgiving at your aunt Agnes' house and having recently been promoted to vice-president of your company with a nice salary, you offer to host the Thanksgiving dinner and invite all the relatives. Many years ago, Uncle Harry came to the dinner drunk and beat up two relatives who had to be hospitalized. After that, he disappeared for ten years. Just before Thanksgiving, Uncle Harry calls you, saying he is in town and would like to have dinner with the family for Thanksgiving.

Kant would probably want you to tell him the truth. If you do and tell him he can't come, Uncle Harry may become furious and cause trouble. Mill would first consider how many people might be distressed and possibly harmed if Uncle Harry came to the dinner or found out he was not invited. Suppose Uncle Harry said he had been sober for ten years and had been attending AA meetings regularly. Should you take a chance on him? Suppose he said he might be in town but was not sure if he would come. Would this make a difference? For Mill, one would have to put on an imaginary scale all the real and possible benefits for all involved on one side, and all the real and possible pains on the other. If the pains tipped the scale, one should lie to Uncle Harry.

This seems like good common sense, certainly in the example given. But the general principle of acting for the benefit of the greatest number does pose difficulties. First and foremost, what role if any does justice play in this utilitarian position? What if a city was composed mainly of two ethnic groups that hated one another? (Let's call them A and B.) Suppose someone from group

A was murdered. If the perpetrator had been from group B, the population from group A might decide to go on a rampage, slaughtering as many members of group B as possible. The mayor of the city, knowing that outcome was likely to happen, decides to frame an innocent member of group A for the crime, and thus avoid the deaths of hundreds of people. According to the utilitarian view, this would be okay as long as no one discovered the truth. But many people might think that framing an innocent person was wrong no matter what the benefit.

There are more problems. Some utilitarians believe that one has no special obligations to anyone, including family members. Suppose a good swimmer took her child to the beach. Strong waves arose threatening her child on the far left as well as two children on her far right. A utilitarian might not be willing to claim that it would be right for the mother to save her one child rather than the two strangers. This may seem to be so contrary to natural feelings as to be an impossible moral position.

Further, there is a problem in deciding what population is to be included in the utilitarian calculus. We face problems like this every day when we, for example, receive brochures in the mail describing in vivid detail the plight of starving children in far-off places. Suppose we must choose between answering this plea for help, and providing our children with luxuries such as tennis lessons. How do we decide? I once heard of a clerk in London on a small salary who gave to Oxfam every penny he had, above what he needed for necessities. When questioned about this he said, "If I can save even one life in so doing, isn't it worth it?"

The British twentieth-century philosopher Derek Parfit (1942–2017), offered a compromise position. He argued that while ideally, we should help all equally, someone who does not have a special love for family is unlikely to care for anyone else. So, it is

actually in the interest of society to encourage family ties while also stressing the importance of helping others.[4]

Some utilitarians, such as Peter Singer argue that animals should be included in the calculus because they feel pain. If so, should we allow a child to die in order to save the lives of a few animals?[5] There is also the problem of climate change to consider. One might argue that we have no obligations whatever to non-existent people, such as generations yet to come. But is there a difference between possible people who never come to be, and those who will in fact be born? We may have obligations to the latter but not the former.

Another way to define what is morally right is virtue ethics. A version of this was suggested many centuries ago by the Chinese philosopher Confucius. One might call his view the contagion theory of ethics: One should admire and emulate good people and we ourselves will become good. The problem with this and all forms of virtue ethics is that we must be able to recognize goodness when we see it. To do that, we must have a criterion for deciding what it is. So we are back to square one, unable to justify our judgments.

But perhaps we don't have to choose between the competing and problematic theories of Kantians, utilitarians, and those who accept virtue ethics. Ancient Buddhists seem to have found a way to incorporate all three in a system of checks and balances.

Here I will offer a bit of an extended focus on Buddhist ethics, the area of study I have focused on most extensively in my career. It presents an illustrative compromise between competing ethical views. Buddhist ethics is based squarely upon the doctrines of anicca and anatta. Anicca, the belief that all things are interdependent and therefore have no independent existence, implies anatta, the view that there is no independent, permanent self or ego. Everything is part of an ever-changing flux. This belief holds that the names we give to things are mere conveniences. The

4. Parfit, D. (1987). Reasons and persons. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
5. Singer, P. (1975) ANIMAL LIBERATION New York: Harper Collins

chair one sits on for example, is never the same from moment to moment. But of course, it is impossible to have a different name for how things are at every instant. So names are convenient designations of sets of similar states.

For Buddhists, the situation is the same with the self. There is no separate, permanent self. There is only the flow of mental and bodily experiences. This point was illustrated in the Milindapanha (The Questions of King Milinda) when King Milinda (Menander in the West), a Greek king ruling in India, confronted the Buddhist monk Nagasena. He accused Nagasena of contradicting himself when he, on one hand, denied the self and the idea that he was equivalent to any of his bodily parts (fingernails, etc.), yet asserted that monks could acquire merit and demerit for their actions. Milinda said, "If someone were to kill you, there would be no murder"[6] and insisted further that if there is no self, no one achieves merit or demerit. Nagasena replied, "Did you come on foot or in a vehicle?" The king said, "I came in a chariot." Nagasena asked, "Are the wheels the chariot? The axle? etc.?" To each question, Milinda replied it was not. Then Nagasena said "Sir, you are king over all India, a mighty monarch. Of whom are you afraid that you speak a lie?... This King Milinda says, 'I have come by chariot,' but on being asked to show the chariot, he does not show it."[7] Milinda answered that he had because the word chariot was a convenient designation for all the parts taken together. Nagasena replied that his name "Nagasena" similarly was a convenient designation for all his skandhas, (bodily parts, volitions, ideas, etc.) taken together.

In Buddhist philosophy, words are just conventions, practical designations that impose an unreal permanence on things. The pie

6. Mendis, N. K. G. (1993). The Questions of King Milinda: An Abridgement of the Milindapañha. Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society. p. 29
7. Ibid, p. 30

of reality can be cut in different ways. We as human beings, because of our practical needs, cut it up into objects and persons.

To Buddhists, this is not wrong, – in fact it is necessary. How could we function without using names? The Buddhists believed that these names do not stand for what is ultimately real. If the self has no substantiality, then we are all in the same cosmic flow as everyone else. Surely, we are more similar to our peers than we are to the zygotes we once were. As the early Buddhist philosopher Santideva said in the Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, "Just as you formed a sense of self-identity with regard to the drops of blood and semen of others, contemplate others in the same way."[8] If one views one's own interest as equal to those of others, then in realizing that no one wishes to suffer, one should wish to free all people from suffering. Compassion arises along with a sense of equality and identity with others.

The goal of Buddhist morality is the cessation of suffering. There are two types of ethics designed for two types of people: ordinary ethics and path ethics. Understanding that most people are mainly concerned about what they consider their self-interest to be, ordinary ethics sets out to convince people that they will have better lives if they live decently. For example, Santideva argued that if you control your anger, people will be less likely to become angry with you; so, they will be nice to you and it will be easier for you to be happy:

> *Those tormented by the pain of anger*
> *Will never know tranquility of mind-*
> *Strangers they will be to every pleasure;*
> *Sleep departs them, they can never rest.*
> *…*
> *From family and friends estranged,*

8. A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life. (1997). United Kingdom: Snow Lion Publications. p. 109

And shunned by those attracted by their bounty,
Men of anger have no joy,
Forsaken by all happiness and peace.[9]

For people on the Buddhist path of dharma, ethical behavior is exactly that way of acting which will lead them and all beings to enlightenment (peace and a cessation of suffering). The concept of path ethics makes possible the transformation of all experiences into something positive. Santideva delineated this beautifully. An enemy, for example, comes to be seen as a friend because when someone harms us, he or she affords us an opportunity for practicing patience.

Within the context of modern philosophical concerns, one may ask whether following rules (deontological ethics), considering consequences (teleological ethics), or virtue ethics, is a correct ground of ethical judgment from the point of view of Buddhist philosophy. Since Buddhist ethics is a practical path aiming at enlightenment, or perfect peace and happiness for all, it might seem one would opt for consequentialism (teleological ethics).

On the other hand, Buddhists have always believed in the usefulness of following rules. The five prohibitions of the eightfold path regarding moral conduct (not to kill, steal, lie, misuse sex, or become intoxicated), seem to endorse rule-following. Could one then characterize Buddhist ethics as a form of rule utilitarianism, where one should follow the rules chosen, in relation to the goal of helping all sentient beings to achieve enlightenment, and thereby the cessation of suffering?

This is partly accurate, but Buddhism holds that rules can be broken out of compassion to avoid very bad consequences. So for example, a Buddhist could lie to save a life. There is even a story

9. The Way of the Bodhisattva, Patience: 3 and 5 in Chodron, P. (2007). No Time to Lose: A Timely Guide to the Way of the Bodhisattva. United States: Shambhala. pgs. 162–163

of a Buddhist saint (a "bodhisattva"), who killed a pirate to save five hundred people from shipwreck.

But for Buddhists, rules should be broken only with great caution. It is too easy to fall into what Kant called "the natural dialectic," that is, to set up a smokescreen of apparently ethical reasons to cover up one's motive of self-interest. One can, for example, wind up verbally abusing or even harming someone one dislikes, on the pretext of protecting someone who really does not need protection at all or at least not that much.

Buddhists believe rules must not only be broken with great caution, but also with wisdom and compassion. One must not practice stupid compassion, such as shielding a vicious murderer from the authorities. In order to become the kind of person who will have both the wisdom and the lack of selfishness to know when it is best to break rules, one has to develop one's character through acquiring virtuous habits. The development of a strong moral character is excellent preparation for dealing with moral dilemmas.

The virtues that have been traditionally enjoined in Buddhism are generosity, patience, effort, good conduct, concentration, and wisdom. Each of the virtues is described by Santideva as having both a practical and a dharmic aspect. Patience, for example, is seen at the ordinary level as useful for achieving one's goals. At the Buddhist path level, it is seen as a method of overcoming clinging. At the highest level, it is practiced as a result of the insight that all that exists is a manifestation of enlightenment. Generosity at the ordinary level is practiced in order to make one's own life and the lives of others more pleasant. On the path level, it is a reflection of the conviction that there is no sharp distinction between oneself and others. On the highest level, it is a reflection of the wisdom and compassion that is the basis of all that is.

These virtues, of course, are at least at the beginning not easy to live by. The Four Immeasurables are designed to make virtuous activity easier. They can be seen as forming a balanced quatrad:

	COMPASSION	
ACTS OF LOVING-KINDNESS		JOY IN THE JOY OF OTHERS
	EQUANIMITY	

Deeply felt compassion can be unbearably painful. Sometimes just reading stories in the newspaper about all the atrocities in the world, can make one want to scream. In Buddhism, compassion is balanced by equanimity. This equanimity is a result of the calm and insight achieved in meditation. This allows the practitioner to be completely compassionate without being overwhelmed with despair.

The concept of selflessness in Buddhism is meant to lead Buddhists to want to work unceasingly for others and fill all their days with acts of loving-kindness. In practical terms, this can be exhausting. Practitioners are warned not to commit themselves to more than they can handle, so that they will not become bored and tired, and give up. One method of avoiding this is to become accustomed to rejoicing in the joy of others. For example, a mother may slave over holiday preparations, shopping for gifts, and cooking. Yet she is well-rewarded by the joy in the faces of her children and relatives. This unselfish joy is invaluable in preserving motivation. The nuns of Mother Teresa's order are seen to have this joy. They labor unceasingly for others and seem very happy.

In Buddhism, the highest source of virtuous behavior, however, is the concept of bodhicitta itself; this is when the enlightened mind experiences spontaneously the overwhelming sweetness of the welling up of compassion mixed with wisdom. In this state, no effort is needed to do good. The enlightened person intuits the best thing to be done in every circumstance and does it as unconsciously as breathing, without any motive whatever. How is this possible?

The answer comes from an examination of the deepest ethical questions in Buddhism. In the collection of Buddha's teachings, the Dhammapada, it is said that the enlightened being is beyond good and evil. The discerning "eye" of enlightenment goes beyond

distinctions. The question arises: Then why doesn't a Buddhist dispense with ethics? As long as one does no harm out of excessive attachment and bears no ill will out of ego-centeredness, why not just enjoy Nirvana and not lift a finger to help anyone? Why cannot one just feel helpful if this is useful to one's own salvation, but not do anything about it? Why cannot one just experience the oneness of all being and not act on this at all?

The key is in the experience itself. An analogy can be made between a mother and her only child. The mother will spontaneously help the child. Is this selfish or unselfish? The situation transcends the distinction between selfishness and altruism. Buddha said to treat all beings as one's only child. It seems as if the realization producing the awareness of the interconnectedness of all beings, simultaneously produces the impetus to help them, and thus to see them as being our cherished child.

Buddhist ethics offers a compromise between always following rules, acting to produce the most favorable consequences for oneself and others, and acting in accordance with virtues, such as patience. This view, however, can be pulled from its Buddhist roots and appreciated as a secular philosophy. Buddhists value accepting the importance of rules, which represent a kind of shorthand that one can use when forced to act quickly. "Don't lie," for example, is an important guide when one is tempted to get out of a difficult situation by speaking an untruth. But when one knows telling a lie may save a life, the truth is not the best option. In this case, consequences count. Buddhists view that if one has trained oneself both in the virtues of honesty and compassion, one is more likely to respond ethically.[10]

10. "Buddhist Ethics: A System of Checks and Balances" in Buddhism in the 21st Century. Delhi: Government of India, 2012

Summary and Further Considerations

Let us return to a more detailed consideration of rules, virtues, and consequences. Rational absolutism, introduced by Immanuel Kant, was an attempt to make morality both objective and discoverable through the intellectual effort of each person. It could be compared to a mathematical system like Euclidean geometry. If you understand the system, you will arrive at the same answers to geometry problems as every other student who solves the problem. As in mathematics, the key notion in Kant's ethics was consistency. Kant believed that if a person wants to know what is moral, he or she need only ask what can be willed consistently for all rational beings. For example, if one wants to know if stealing is acceptable, one needs to decide whether everyone may steal or not. One need merely imagine how one would feel about having others steal from oneself. Clearly, it is more rational to will that no one steals. Kant formulated this principle of consistency in the following way: "Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."[11]

To return to the problems previously mentioned, (a) moral rules can conflict and, (b) carrying out the rules can sometimes have terrible consequences. For example, what if one must lie to save someone's life? Or, what if one must break a promise in order to avoid causing someone's death? Kant's theory does not seem to allow one to do this. The rules are always binding. Further, if the moral agent universalizing the rule is not a good person, the rule that he or she decides should be followed may be different than the rule a good person will derive.

Utilitarianism, introduced by Jeremy Bentham, accepts only one

11. In Paton, H. J. (1971). The categorical imperative : a study in Kant's moral philosophy. United Kingdom: University of Pennsylvania Press, Incorporated. p. 136

moral rule: So act so that for the greatest number, pleasure is maximized and pain is minimized. This view is supposed to be close to common sense but there are difficulties. Suppose, for example, torturing one person to death gave great pleasure to 10,000 people. The happiness of the "audience" of 10,000 might outweigh the unhappiness of the tortured victim. And as previously mentioned, there is no room for justice in Bentham's view. Consequences in terms of pleasure and pain are the only factors to be considered.

Much of contemporary ethics attempts to derive a moral theory that preserves the good elements of Kant's and Bentham's views without the difficulties these views imply. One of these compromises is rule utilitarianism. As stated before, this is the view that the point of having moral rules is to benefit human beings because following these rules generally results in increasing happiness or decreasing suffering. This, however, still does not tell us what to do in a particular case when we know that following a rule might cause great suffering. We seem to need a rule to tell us when we may break rules.

Buddhist ethics represents a compromise between rule-following and concern with consequences in terms of human suffering and happiness, a compromise achieved by means of an ethics of virtue. The ultimate goal of Buddhist ethics is the overcoming of suffering. Yet human beings cannot always know what will overcome suffering in the long run. We are limited by (a) ignorance of all the circumstances involved in a moral decision, and, (b) our own tendencies toward self-deception. For this reason, Buddhist ethics has always recognized the importance of moral rules, such as those forbidding killing, theft, lying, sexual misconduct, etc. These rules are meant to protect us from our own ignorance and protect others from our mistakes in judgment. Thus, moral rules are to be respected in Buddhism.

There are of course, as I mentioned before, cases where moral rules must be broken – cases where considerations of compassion may require that they be broken. We must sometimes lie to prevent dire consequences. In such cases, however, Buddhist philosophy

holds that the rules should be broken reluctantly because one cannot be absolutely sure that one has correctly judged the consequences.

Practices in any society must be judged by whether or not they are consistent with virtues such as generosity, and whether they can be practiced compassionately. They must be fair in the sense that they are in accordance with explicit or implicit agreements among the people affected. But the practices considered acceptable may nonetheless vary from society to society. In a European country, for example, women may insist on performing the same tasks as men. In other societies, women may not on the whole wish to do this. There is room for tolerance towards different cultural traditions while opposing those that violate the spirit of compassion. Surely kindness and compassion are the saving nectar for our turbulent age.

2. Moral Responsibility And Free Will — Arguments For And Against

How often do we ask ourselves, "I wish I had done otherwise"? But would that have been possible? We are accustomed to thinking that there is a cause for every event and given all the causes and causal conditions at a given time, the result must occur. For example, if one plants an acorn in good soil with sunlight and moisture and no adverse conditions occur (e.g. a squirrel eats the acorn, or a steam roller crushes it), then an oak tree will grow. If we go to a doctor and are diagnosed with an unknown disease and we ask the cause, we will not expect a good doctor to tell us "There is no cause." We may accept, however, his response that he does not know what the cause is.[1]

It should be the same with actions. Given the causes and conditions present at time 1, then a given action will occur at time 2.

This argument may be put in the following way:

> Every event has a cause.
> Causes and conditions bring about their effects necessarily.
> Actions are events.
> Therefore, actions occur necessarily.
> What occurs of necessity is not free.
> Therefore, actions are not free.

1. Note: Part of this chapter was published in Repetti, Rick ed. Buddhist Perspectives on Free Will: Agentless Agency? London: Routledge, 2017

This is the argument for hard determinism, a view proposed by Baron D'Holbach in the eighteenth century. For D'Holbach, free will was an illusion. He likened the illusion to someone swimming downstream in a strong current, mistakenly believing he could turn around and swim upstream. But that is impossible. D'Holbach compared our daily choices to a scale. Our strongest desires would determine what we chose. (For a modern example, if James Bond is abandoned in a Saharan desert at high noon and Dr. No lowers a canister of icy cold martinis, shaken not stirred and labeled 'poison', poor James must weigh fear of dying with the pain of thirst.) D'Holbach would have argued that he would decide whether or not to drink the poison, depending on which was more tolerable, the fear or the pain of thirst.

This issue concerning the causes of actions was debated in the middle ages via an example attributed to the philosopher Buridan (c. 1295–1356), called the case of Buridan's Ass.[2] Imagine a hungry donkey standing in a crosswalk, in a situation that is exactly symmetrical left and right. On its left and right are bales of hay. If there is no extra causal factor on either side to result in the donkey turning left or right, it would seem that the donkey would starve to death, unable to eat the hay. One might try to argue that this is never the case. There would always be a slight difference between the sides. But for the sake of argument, we are allowed to assume that the situation is indeed the same on both sides and we do not have either a right hoofed or left hoofed donkey for the example.

One might argue that in the case of intelligent sentient beings the choice could be made independently of causality. Indeterminists argue that free actions are not causally necessitated. There are many forms of indeterminism. William James (1842–1910) argued that an uncaused choice could be made if there was no overriding motive. If he, a professor at Harvard, could go home either by

2. (Donkey)

Divinity Street or Oxford Street, he would be able to decide to take either route.

But then what would prevent us from describing the event as random? Perhaps one could appeal to the consideration that in the case of equally desirable outcomes, the best choice is to choose either one. And even if events were not caused, they would be random. What is random is not free. For example, if while I was teaching a class, and something randomly happened to me (e.g., I turned into a rabbit) that would not be something I did. Therefore, it would not be a free action. Charles Goodman following C.D. Broad and Peter van Inwagen, put this point very well: "After all, if what you do is caused by some random quantum-mechanical event in your brain, how can you be responsible for it?"[3] However, if an event is intended, a hard determinist would insist that the intention was just another cause in a long chain of causes.

A modern variety of indeterminism would limit the use of the word "cause" to what is statistically predictable. Causal laws are in fact just those generalizations about the past that reflect "invariant concomitance," one type of event always having been found to follow another. But human action is often unpredictable. So, we have no evidence that it is always necessitated by causes. The determinist might argue that future findings in science might make it possible to predict the outcome of all choices. But the indeterminist would reply that to say this would be to beg the question; that is, to think there is a hidden cause when it is the very existence of a cause that is in question. The determinist might accuse the indeterminist of assuming there is no cause and is also begging the question. This is a dead-end. No wonder this has been a subject of debate for thousands of years!

Although most of us are convinced that every event has a cause,

3. Goodman, C. (2014). Consequences of Compassion: An Interpretation and Defense of Buddhist Ethics. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press. p. 146

the view that all we do is determined and not free makes many uneasy. It would seem to follow that no one has control over his or her actions, and that no one can be blamed for anything. People who like to blame others, and themselves, for their bad actions find this disquieting, while others find it to be the basis of compassion. It used to be said, "There but for the grace of God go I," and in more contemporary terms, "There but for a different set of genetic and environmental conditions go I."[4]

There is another theory about free will called 'soft determinism'. Before explaining it, I would like to recount a little story from my childhood. I was told as a small child that Santa brought my presents every year. I began to doubt this, so to reinforce my belief, my mom put Pyrex bowls of oatmeal on the windowsill for the reindeer on Christmas Eve. This was rather dangerous since we lived in a fourth-floor walk-up apartment overlooking the street. I assumed she would just wash the bowls to make it look like the oatmeal had been eaten. But when I woke up, it looked like the oatmeal had been licked out. I couldn't imagine my mother doing this, so I believed in Santa a bit longer. Finally, after I spied presents on the top shelf of the closet, I confronted my dad. He said, "There is no old man with a beard on a sleigh. The real Santa Claus is the feeling of love we have for one another at Christmas time." Notice what he had done, substituting a fantasy for something believable.

In my view, that is what the soft determinist theory of free will has done. Hard determinists and indeterminists agree on how free will should be understood. A free action must 1) be motivated, and 2) be uncaused. They disagree because the hard determinists claim that free will is impossible and the indeterminists say that it is possible. Just as my father changed my understanding of Santa Claus, the soft determinists (such as the philosopher Nowell-Smith), say that a free action is uncoerced by external forces (such as having a gun put to

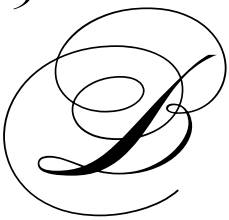
4. The repercussions of this view for punishment will be discussed later in the book.

your head, or mental disease such as kleptomania, dementia, etc.). They do not claim it is uncaused. Rather it is caused by motivations that are rationally acceptable. Note what they are giving up here, avoidability in the strictest sense (that one would have had the choice to do otherwise). If you are willing to 'bite the bullet' on the idea that your actions could never have really been different than what they were, that may solve the problem for you. Many people are not. They are deeply disturbed by the possibility that nothing they have ever done could have been determined by anything other than free will.

To return to Buridan's Ass, even if it is possible for a sentient being to make a random choice between two alternatives that are equally appealing, this may only be true for the class of actions labeled by philosopher John Hospers, "vanilla-flavored acts." Hospers argued that most of our acts are actually compelled. Only the comparatively "vanilla-flavored" aspects of our lives (obviously, Hospers didn't like vanilla very much), such as our behavior toward people who don't really matter to us, are exempt from this rule.[5] For the non "vanilla-flavored" acts (choices made with a strong motivation), we would really value a choice. In summary, just in case the argument of for or against free will is undecidable, what is the non-philosopher to think? My best guess is that we should opt for compassion rather than blame because we can't be sure if the person committing the fault could have done otherwise. Of course, we need to protect ourselves and others from evil actions, but we can hold people accountable for bad actions without implying that they could have done otherwise.

5. "Freewill and Psychoanalysis", Hosper, John. In Readings in Ethical Theory, ed. Wilfrid Sellars and John Hospers. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts. 1952. p.574

3. Practical Ethics



efore leaving the lofty plane of the theoretical, I need to discuss the nature of personhood, because understanding (or trying to understand) what a person is, is essential to making a decision some about major issues in practical ethics: whether or not abortion, capital punishment, and euthanasia (mercy killing) are morally permissible.

Abortion

To begin, it is important to distinguish between person and human. Anything conceived by human parents is human. No human gets pregnant with a cat. But 'human' is not the same as 'person'. We speak of non-human persons, such as gods, angels, aliens from other planets, etc. Historically a person has been defined as a being possessing intellect and will.

The medieval definition of a soul was 'a non-material substance possessing intellect and will'. Does a fetus have a soul? There is no evidence fertilized eggs have intellect and will. Perhaps a late-stage fetus might, but how would we know?

The existence of a soul has been debated for centuries. Many people don't believe in the soul at all. Is a fertilized egg a person? When I told my three-year-old daughter how babies are born, I said, "Just think, you were once a tiny little egg." She replied angrily, "I was never an egg." My son at the same age, by contrast, had no problem thinking he had once been an egg. He was concerned, however, that he might have stayed an egg. The disagreement between my children may shed some light on the pro-abortion and anti-abortion views of so many people. Do you think you were ever an egg?

According to the medievalists, a soul was in the body relatively soon after conception. For Saint Thomas Aquinas (following Aristotle), ninety days after for a female fetus, and forty days for a male.[1] This was based on Aristotle's view that a soul was the source of activity, and you couldn't have a soul in an unusable body. It wasn't until 1869 that the Catholic church insisted the soul was present from the moment of conception.[2] This creates problems such as in the case of identical twins when the egg does not split until later in pregnancy. Before that, are there two souls?

One philosopher, Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia (1596–1662), argued that since a non-material soul would not occupy space, it could not interact with our material bodies. This seems to be a real problem. When I am trying, without result to solve a difficult math problem, I may get a headache. If I break my leg, I may consider this to be permanently disabling, and become seriously depressed. My mind may affect my body. My body may affect my mind. Considerations like this have led some philosophers to deny the existence of a soul because a nonmaterial/non-spatial thing cannot interact with a body in space.

Other philosophers such as David Hume (1711–1776), argued that since we are always changing, there is nothing permanent about us that we can identify as ourselves; we are just a bundle of ever-changing states.

The controversy concerning the nature of the self makes it very difficult to establish whether or not the unborn child has a self at all. So how are we going to make decisions about abortion? Is it right or wrong? I suggest we divide the problem in three ways: Religious, moral, and legal.

1. Aquinas, commentary on the book of Sentences, III, 3, 5, 2.
2. https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/religion-and-beliefs/catholic-church-teaching-on-abortion-dates-from-1869-1.1449517

Religious

I have already mentioned the Catholic position which refuses to allow directly killing the fetus, even if both mother and child will die. The 'double effect' is permitted in the case of cancer of the uterus when the uterus is removed with the fetus inside, and the fetus subsequently dies. It should be noted that killing the fetus is understood by Catholics to be the killing of an actual person and not just a potential person because the fetus has a soul. Some other religions form a spectrum of more or less liberal positions, usually accepting abortion as moral when the life or welfare of mother and child are endangered.

Moral

Apart from religious considerations, other factors may or may not determine the morality of abortion. There is the question of the slippery slope. Where do you draw the line? Maybe it is always okay to dispose of a fertilized egg. Maybe it is okay to dispose of a fetus that has not yet developed a brain. Perhaps it is impossible to draw the line clearly. If it is wrong to kill a baby born at 5 ½ months, why is it morally okay to kill a fetus of the same age?

There are also utilitarian considerations. We consider it wrong, except in the cases of eating meat and medical research, to cause pain to any sentient being. There seems to be some evidence that late-term fetuses feel pain.[3] If so, one ought not to cause them or any other sentient being, such as an animal, unnecessary pain.

3. Lee SJ, Ralston HJP, Drey EA, Partridge JC, Rosen MA. Fetal Pain: A Systematic Multidisciplinary Review of the Evidence. JAMA. 2005;294(8):947–954. doi:10.1001/jama.294.8.947

On the other hand, we do have the right to self-defense. We can kill a person deranged by disease, who is trying to kill us, even if that person is innocent because of insanity. Therefore, a mother in danger of death from pregnancy should be allowed to abort at any stage.

The philosopher Judy Jarvis Thompson has argued further that even if the fetus is a person, a woman has the right to refuse to let this person occupy her body. She compares this to an imaginary case of a musician who needs to be hooked up to someone else's kidneys for nine months to stay alive. We are not, she argues, morally obliged to let him or her stay.[4]

There are also very devastating consequences of an unwanted pregnancy. Some mothers may not have enough money to feed a baby, especially if they already have others. Some married women become pregnant with someone other than their husband, and they are afraid they will be killed if the husband finds out. Other women become pregnant because of rape or incest when they are young. Still others cannot easily survive the birth of a child. In such cases, the kindest thing to do might be to abort the fetus, especially if it is not long-term.

Legal

Many countries have legalized abortion to protect the rights of women because historically, many women, when not allowed to have abortions, were so desperate, they endangered their lives with illegal abortions. Many women who got pregnant through adultery

4. Judith Jarvis Thomson, 'A Defense, of Abortion', Philosophy & Public Affairs I, No. I (Fall 1971). Copyright © 1971 by Princeton University Press

were often killed by their jealous husbands, so abortion was for them, was an act of survival.

Although not a supporter of abortion in any way, Saint Thomas Aquinas made an important point about the limits of governmental power. He held that because the obligation of the state was to the whole population, there should not always be laws forbidding morally evil acts if those laws would jeopardize the integrity of the body politic. He stated that when one part of the body politic was a threat to the whole, it should be amputated, as one amputates a gangrenous leg to save a life.[5]

In the case of abortion, laws forbidding the practices were eliminated in many nations because they seemed to cause more harm than good. However, several countries continue to outlaw abortion today, based on moral reasons.

Capital Punishment

Capital punishment, like abortion, involves killing, but in this case, killing what is clearly a person. To understand capital punishment, it is useful to consider the nature of punishment. There are two classic theories about this: retribution and deterrence.

Retribution

This is probably the oldest idea about punishment. Most of us have

5. Bandman, B. (2003). The Moral Development of Health Care Professionals: Rational Decisionmaking in Health Care Ethics. United Kingdom: Praeger. p.41

heard the saying, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."[6] You kill my brother. I'll kill your brother. This view has certain advantages. For example, the guilty person is the one to be punished.

Consider this, however, in the light of the section on free will in chapter two: We usually say that no one should be punished for doing something they could not help doing. This is why we usually excuse people from the consequences of crimes if their lives are threatened at gunpoint, if they, for example, steal, or shoot someone. There are also considerations with regard to insanity. If one is deranged and kills someone he or she thinks is a homicidal demon, we may not hold him or her responsible for premeditated murder. Further, if we assume that free will doesn't exist, it is impossible to hold anyone morally culpable/guilty for anything.

Retribution also carries with it the extra baggage of having to be sure one is really punishing the person guilty of the crime. We have only to consider the vast number of cases that have been overturned due to the discovery of DNA evidence showing that the convicted person is innocent.

The theory of retributive punishment has advantages and disadvantages. It has been argued that the execution of a murderer brings closure to the families of the victims. Others have argued that it spares the state the expense of housing and feeding the guilty. It also ensures that the person executed will not commit any more crimes.

Retributive theory, however, is not without difficulties. As recent cases involving DNA have shown, it is extremely difficult to be sure of knowing who committed a crime. The film "Twelve Angry Men"[7] dramatically shows how almost all the evidence may point to guilt when a person is innocent. Once a person is dead, one cannot make

6. A phrase coined in the ancient Mesopotamian Code of Hammurabi
7. Lumet, S., & Rose, R. (1957). Twelve angry men. Los Angeles: Orion-Nova Twelve Angry Men.

up for the devastating financial and psychological blows he or she has suffered should they be found to be innocent posthumously.

Others have argued that two wrongs do not make a right and that killing a helpless person is always wrong. In the eighteenth century, the Marquis de Beccaria argued that capital punishment is harmful to the character of both the executioner and society and that it promotes a callous attitude toward human life [8]His argument was so forceful that it prompted Catherine the Great of Russia to abolish capital punishment in her country except for treason.[9]

Deterrence

Deterrence theory is closely linked to utilitarianism discussed in chapter one. Utilitarians argue that it is not important if the guilty are punished, but only that crime be stopped. A common example: parking tickets. Once a relative of mine, Michael, parked in what he thought was a legal spot. Unfortunately, a fire hydrant had been covered by garbage. When he left the car, the garbage was cleared, the hydrant became visible, and the police put a ticket on his windshield. His complaints to the city were useless. He had to pay, although he was certainly not guilty of voluntarily breaking the law. This is known as strict liability. Fines are imposed not as punishment, but only as a means of deterrence. (In this case, Michael's little son tried to make sure that his dad never parked in front of a hidden hydrant again.)

This view is of course, subject to the same problems associated

8. Beccaria, Cesare, Jeremy Parzen, Aaron A Thomas, and Voltaire. On Crimes and Punishments and Other Writings. P. 56
9. Shatz, Marshall S., and Kliuchevsky, Vasili O.. A Course in Russian History: The Time of Catherine the Great. United Kingdom, Taylor & Francis, 2015. P.14

with utilitarianism discussed in chapter two. A utilitarian might argue that it would be morally okay to punish an innocent person of one ethnic group for killing a person of the same ethnic group, to avoid ethnic strife if the citizens of a city thought the murdered person was the victim of a hate crime. In this case, one would go to illegal means, even a travesty of justice, to prevent further violence. Would you think that this grave injustice was justified because it benefited the majority?

The greatest advantage of the deterrence theory when applied to capital punishment, would be that executions of criminals benefited society (if the death penalty really prevented future capital crimes).

There are no studies, however, that show that executions deter crimes. Some indicate that when capital punishment becomes legal, murders actually increase. How can this be? Some psychological studies indicate that murderers find a perverse, even sexual pleasure in the expectation that they will be executed. Some people want to die without committing suicide: One example is when people who wanted to commit suicide but could not do it themselves, have pointed a gun at a police officer in order to be shot and killed.

Arthur Koestler, in Reflections on Hanging, mentions that when pickpocketing was a public offense and executions were public, the best time for pickpockets to ply their trade was when everyone was busy watching a pickpocketer being hanged.[10]

Who should be considered for capital punishment? In many societies, children are tried as adults for capital crimes. The first problem with that practice is that it is not clear when adulthood is reached. Different societies have had different ideas on this. In the European Middle Ages, the age of full responsibility was generally thought to be fourteen. Many people married at that age. It seemed,

10. Koestler, A. (2019). Reflections on Hanging. Greece: University of Georgia Press. p.53

therefore, only reasonable to hold young parents responsible for their actions.

Today, however, there is mounting evidence in neuropsychology that the brain may not develop fully until the age of twenty-five.[11] The growth of the amygdala, for example, may be delayed, and that is a key factor in moral development, as it plays a role in processing emotions involved in moral judgment. Many modern societies would not agree that a fourteen-year-old is an adult.

If we decide that children should not be penalized in the same manner as adults, where are the boundaries of remediation? Children in many countries are treated as psychiatric patients when they commit a crime. Should this method be applied to adults as well? The psychologist Karl Menninger believed that criminality is a disease, and criminals should be treated as patients in hospitals.[12] This sounds like a reasonable and compassionate view.

Unfortunately, this would-be compassionate view toward criminal punishment was misused by a tyrannical regime under Stalin to persecute scientists and political freethinkers. When the government decides to decide who is insane, it may lead to the incarceration and 'treatment' of anyone who disagrees with the government. On the other hand, prison reforms such as those in Finland, which adopted a therapeutic view, saw a huge reduction in crime.

There is of course another disadvantage. A clever criminal could pretend to be cured, and be released, posing a risk to society.

11. Abad, A. and Dupeée, S. "Empirical Research and Legal Implications of Child and Adolescent Development", in my book Reflections on Childhood. Binghamton: Global Scholarly Publications, December 2004. See also, Stringer, H. (2017, October). Justice for teens. Monitor on Psychology, 48(9), https://www.apa.org/monitor/2017/10/justice-teens, and http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1878929316301074
12. https://books.google.com/books/about/The_Human_Mind.html

Further thoughts on capital punishment

I suggested in chapter one that a balance could be struck in ethical theory between rules, consequences, and virtues. Perhaps this is also true about punishment. Perhaps the advantages of retribution, deterrence, and therapy need to be combined in order to have a successful theory of punishment. What are your thoughts on this?

Euthanasia (Mercy Killing)

Mercy killing can be understood in various ways. The most common is the right of a terminally ill patient in great pain to choose to have a doctor end his or her life. Sometimes this can be broadened to include someone not terminally ill but in uncurable, endless pain. Some consider it a right of anyone, no matter what one's state of health, to end his or her life if one is desperately unhappy, or simply does not want to live. Most advocates would restrict this right to adults, leaving the problem of what to do with children who are in similar states.

If Euthanasia were legalized, terrible suffering would be relieved. Huge medical expenses would be avoided, and the population would decrease.

There are, however, some disadvantages to mercy killing being legal:

a. People may choose death rather than endure painful treatments that may cure them, while those who choose the treatments and survive, may be glad they chose life. In order to avoid this, some proposed programs would insist that the benefits of death be attested to by a medical and/or judicial panel, and only allowed if so approved.
b. People suffering from intense negative emotions, such as the death of a loved one, or the painful ending of a love

relationship would lose the possibility that time will heal, and that there may be new loving experiences in the future.

c. Families unwilling to use their resources to help their infirm or aged relatives, may encourage them to 'take a walk to the mercy killing clinic'. Obviously, free quality healthcare could solve that problem.

The philosopher Philippa Foot suggested the reverse problem in a paper given at New York University. She said that her mother was always berating her for not visiting enough. Foot feared that if mercy killing was legal, her mom could threaten that she'll just take a walk to the euthanasia clinic, thereby forcing the guilt-prone Philippa to visit her more.

A striking example of unrestricted mercy killing is presented in the film "Soylent Green." In a society where most are desperately poor, people are encouraged to go to a very attractive and well-liked euthanasia clinic (with coveted air conditioning in a burning hot city) and end it all, viewing beautiful pictures and listening to their favorite music. Take a look at the film, and decide if you find the idea of such a clinic to be a good thing.

4. Finding A Form Of Government Conducive To Justice, Prosperity, And Happiness

mid the current pandemic, economic turmoil, and political discord, it is a good idea to reflect on the nature of government with the aim of figuring out which model is most likely to bring justice, prosperity, and happiness.

How do we measure happiness? Is it wealth, freedom, peace? All of the above? Everyone has their own definition of happiness, but we can agree on many factors that contribute to general happiness. The United Nations publishes The World Happiness Report every year, where respondents rank the general evaluation of happiness in their lives on a scale of 0 to 10.[1] Last year, Finland, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, and The Netherlands ranked at the top.

We will examine some forms of government and see how effective they might be at supporting happiness.

Meritocracy

Plato considered the direct democracy of Athens to be a form of chaotic mob rule, a disastrous system which led the Athenian Assembly to vote to put to death the innocent Socrates. Plato

1. https://worldhappiness.report/

argued in The Republic that he had found a fool-proof system for avoiding the chaos of democracy. He suggested that we give both boys and girls a good education. [2]

Plato's reason for wanting to educate women was philosophical. He believed that all humans, male and female, have a soul which enables them to gain wisdom. In his dialogue, "The Meno," a boy who cannot read or write is asked questions about the Pythagorean theorem. (You probably remember that from high school. In modern algebraic terms, it is: a squared plus b squared equals c squared, when a and b are the two short sides of a right-angle triangle.)

The boy figured out the theorem just by reasoning in his mind. This led Plato to believe that since the Pythagorean theorem was not a material thing, the boy (and everyone else), must have a nonmaterial mind (a mind or soul aside from just a brain) in order to know this. Since girls could reason too, Plato concluded that they also had souls, and should be educated. Ultimately, he believed, since people have souls, they can develop their understanding and achieve true wisdom (the knowledge of eternal reality), and hence become immortal.

Plato believed that wisdom was true liberation. In his famed "Allegory of the Cave,"[3] he likened the human condition to that of people chained in a cave, only able to see shadows cast on the back of the cave from fires behind them. One person escapes and sees the outside world with all of its beautiful forms and colors. Out of compassion, he goes back into the cave to tell the others what is outside. But when he enters the dark cave from the sunlight he is blinded and cannot see even the shadows. The captives mock him

2. This was revolutionary in his day, because girls did not go to school, and were only taught household tasks such as weaving. In the hilariously funny play "Lysistrata" by Aristophanes, the heroine remarks that nevertheless they listen to what the men say, and they learn.
3. Waterfield, R. (1993). Republic. United Kingdom: OUP Oxford. p. 240

and refuse to believe what he says. They refuse to try to attain what will bring them true happiness.

Plato thought true happiness was to be found not in ordinary things like money and fame, but in developing the mind so as to experience eternal, nonmaterial reality. This view influenced the mystical traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. All three religions believe that God is beyond our understanding and is the source of true happiness. This concept underlies Plato's ideal government.

For Plato, education was ultimately designed for spiritual development, although in his view, not all were capable of excelling in education. The system he designed was truly unique. It began with a plan for what resembles a kindergarten. Plato believed that small children should begin their education non-verbally. They should learn gymnastics to develop their bodies (which involves both courage and skill), and music to develop their minds. (Scientists today have discovered that learning music increases intelligence.)

Imagine an upside-down ice cream cone. At the bottom are the boys and girls in kindergarten. Afterward, they learn reading, writing, and arithmetic. Along the way, those who become bored or cannot do the work drop out. (They would have jobs Plato considered to be less important, such as soldiers, producer of goods and services, etc.) The cone narrowed. Some would learn sciences, architecture, etc. At the top of the cone, those who remained, would study philosophy. It is from this elite group that the wise Guardian Kings and Queens would be chosen.

Plato was well aware that intelligence and learning were not enough to make someone a good person. Rulers could be greedy for money and possessions, and so emotionally attached to their children that they would give them more benefits than others (nepotism). Plato sought to avoid this by insisting that the rulers remain in a state of financial poverty. Further, children would be produced in mating festivals and when born, would be separated from their parents. The rulers would not know who their children

were! Do you think such a system would work? Do you think it would be a good idea today to insist that politicians take a vow of poverty?

The Republic describes a type of meritocracy. The form envisioned by Plato has never been attempted. Two criticisms that have been leveled at this idea of governance are the following: First, the rulers would be so far removed from the desires and needs of ordinary people, they would not be able to legislate in such a way that would make the people happy. For example, Plato wanted to ban popular plays on the ground that seeing horror and murder would hamper moral and spiritual development. Second, Plato had a plan for curbing financial greed and nepotism, yet he seemed blind to the fact that the desire for power could lead to more abuses than anything else.

Another model of government using merit as its base was suggested by the Chinese philosopher Confucius c. 500 BCE. Confucius believed, like Plato, that education should be the basis for developing leadership. Unlike Plato, Confucius' ideas for doing this did not include women. Confucius himself had to overcome great poverty. He was the child of a nobleman who, in his seventies and longing for a healthy son, took as his mistress a sixteen-year-old girl (a worker on his estate). When the nobleman died, his angry and jealous family cast off the three-year-old Confucius and his mother. They went to a nearby city and nearly died of hunger. Confucius helped his mother by cleaning houses and doing errands. The brilliantly gifted child managed to acquire an education. He became a teacher.

Having suffered from poverty, Confucius sympathized with young people who longed for an education and were without funds. He never demanded payment for more than his students could afford. He believed that government should not be run by the nobility, but rather by educated men of good character (shih)Confucius' view could be termed a contagion theory of good government. If the rulers were good, then the people they ruled would be inspired by them and would be good themselves.

Can you imagine a form of meritocracy conducive to justice, prosperity, and happiness?

Virtue ethics is used in a different manner in religious governments. The danger of self-serving governments being able to abuse their power led the Islamist political theorist Al Mawdudi (1908–1979) to believe limits must be set on democracy. He lived in India during the rise of Hitler and was shocked to see racism and genocide supersede democracy in Germany. His solution was to establish the authority of the Koran, which mandated care for the poor and forbade genocide, among other things.

From the point of view of many people, Mawdudi argued against women's freedom and equality, stating that this threatens to bring about the fall of civilization in the west. Many religious states have been accused of ignoring the rights of minorities (women, other religions, LGBTQ, etc.) However, some other religious governments have been very tolerant.

If a religious government does not suit you as a way of limiting elements of corruption in democracy, what does? My late husband Raziel Abelson and I used to argue about this. I suggested writing the Bill of Rights in stone, so it could never be changed by a vote. Raziel replied that times change, and changes may need to be made. For example, some have argued that the right to bear arms is not good at all. What do you think?

Democracy

Our government is a republic, but not the virtue-based one of which Plato wrote. Our American republic is a representative democracy, where we elect legislators to represent us in government. This is a step divorced from the direct democracy of ancient Athens. A strong streak of libertarianism runs through our democratic culture. This can be traced back to philosophers such as the utilitarian John Stuart Mill. Mill, like Plato, believed that good government depends

on the populace being well educated. In addition, he was convinced that involving people in government, and in the voting process in particular, was a means of educating them. This is one of the reasons he gave for fighting for women's right to vote.

However, Mill argued (unlike Plato), that if people were allowed to vote in such a way that their desires would be met, the happiness of all would increase. He believed that democratic procedures provided ways to bring people's needs and desires to the government's attention.

For Mill, liberty enabled a human being to develop in new and creative ways. "Human nature is not a machine to be built after a model, and set to do exactly the work prescribed for it, but a tree, which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing."[4]

In Mill's view, there should be some limits governing permissible behavior. No one should be allowed to do what would physically harm another. This includes financial harm. Let me give examples of my own. Following Mills's view, you would be allowed to insult someone, and you could walk around naked because this would not physically harm anyone. You might, however, be required to sit on a paper towel so as not to spread germs. You could not punch out a person who insulted you. In Mill's words:

> "The sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection… The only purpose for which power can be rightly exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others."[5]

This is an intoxicating vision of an almost totally free society. What

4. Mill, John Stuart, 1806–1873. On liberty. London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1869, p. 107.
5. Ibid., pgs 21–22.

fun! Sobering up, however, we may see problems. Do you remember that old slogan from childhood, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me"? Is that really true? Look at the harm that bullying on the internet does to people. Cruel words can completely threaten one's self-image, and even lead to suicide.

In addition, as Mill discovered, failing to 'rein in' greedy people, such as capitalists whose wealth has given them too much power over their workers, may actually enslave people. (Later on in life he became a socialist.) Unbridled freedom for some may take away freedom for others. In our democracy, we constantly read about the corruption of elected officials, and there's a lack of meaningful campaign finance laws to prevent it from happening. What occurs when elected representatives no longer represent the interest of their constituents? Does this remind you of the Athenian assembly that demanded the death of Socrates?

Social democracies are known for strong regulation of corruption (though they don't always succeed), and reining in the influence of corporations in politics, while maintaining a capitalist system. When government enacts policies that cut healthcare or worker benefits, the people take to the streets, even blocking roads, and usually come out victorious. We'll talk more about democratic socialism at the end of the chapter.

Communism

Marx (1818–1883), born in Germany, began his intellectual life as a follower of the philosopher G.W.F. Hegel (1770–1831), who argued that everything that we know and everything that happens, is a result of what we have thought. Thought is the source of history. And history develops through a process of dialectic (from the Greek, 'change'). Hegel argued there are many dialectics that determine the course of history. The initial step in the dialectic is the thesis (from Greek, meaning place/the place where you start). For Hegel,

that was the Age of Religion when everything was explained as due to the will of God. Eventually, with the development of science, people began to doubt religion, and became alienated/estranged from it. This alienation produced a reaction resulting in the Age of Science, the antithesis, or contradiction to religion. This was the age in which Hegel found himself. But he did not believe that was the end of history. He predicted that people would become alienated from science. This would produce the Age of Philosophical Religion, the synthesis (merging) of science and religion. There would be no more alienation, and this would be a golden age. And the process would go on and on...

It has been said that the philosophers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels turned Hegel on his head. They kept the dialectic of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, but argued that the real source of change was economic, and not mind.[6] They examined feudalism in the middle ages as a thesis, where society was based on the need for security and food. Small warring states protected themselves by organizing into three classes: nobility, clergy, and peasants. The peasants provided the food as well as the labor needed to build protective walls around the cities. In Marx's view, clergy kept everyone in their place, insisting that they were nobility or peasants because of the will of God. The only way to escape being a peasant was to become a priest or nun, study hard and rise to the rank of abbot or abbess. Then, even the high lords and ladies of the land would show you respect.

Times changed, however, and danger from barbarians, Vikings, etc., decreased. It was possible to travel from place to place and not be robbed or killed on the way. Roads were built and trade developed. The need for a centralized government regulating currency and relations with foreign countries was needed. This

6. https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Dialectical_materialism

became an antithesis to the small, feudal state, and an age of absolute monarchs ruling countries like Spain and France began.

Problems soon developed. The monarchs became greedier and sought more and more power over the people. The people were taxed beyond endurance to build fancier and fancier palaces, jewelry, etc. In France, the affair of Queen Marie Antoinette's costly diamond necklace added fuel to a fire that resulted in the French revolution.[7] The alienation was so overwhelming that blood flowed in the streets of Paris, where countless members of the nobility were decapitated. Many innocent people died this way. The form of these changes varied from country to country. In general, in Europe and America, democracy was established and prevailed. Even where there were monarchs, they became subject to congressional bodies or parliaments. Financial success, not nobility, was the theme of the day, and industrialization led to a dominant bourgeoisie (owners of the means of production) that eclipsed the power of the old nobility.

Democracy in a capitalist system became the new thesis. Marx viewed capitalism as a necessary step toward liberation. The industrial revolution had broken the social power of the nobility. Marx wrote that the goal of capitalism was to provide an ever-increasing profit to the owners of the factories, at the expense of the workers. According to Marx, only the bourgeoisie were truly free. Society was divided into four classes: The bourgeoisie, who owned the means of production (factories and mines), the proletariat (who worked in city factories and in mines), the lumpenproletariat (helpless people like orphans, the disabled and prostitutes), and finally the rural peasants. The bourgeoisie wielded power over the other three, who had very little freedom. The government was no help. For example, in England, they passed the Enclosure Act which took away from farmers the ability to use land

7. https://www.britannica.com/event/Affair-of-the-Diamond-Necklace

owned by the rich. This, as was the intention, forced them out of the farms and into the polluted factory towns.

The workers in the factories and the mines were only nominally free, and sometimes not free at all. This occurred, according to Marx, because they had been robbed of the fruit of their labor. For example, in medieval times, if a family skilled in making furniture produced a chair, they could sell it for a fair price or trade it for something they needed. This was not the case in the factories, where tasks were simplified, making workers easily replaceable. The result of this was general terrible working conditions and depressed wages. A factory worker repeated the same task over and over. For a tragic-comic take on this see the film by Charlie Chaplin, "Modern Times."

Because these tasks were so simple, even a child could do it. Hungry families sent their children to join the adults working in the factories. In England, children could be chained to their workplaces, and sexual assault was not uncommon.[8]

This life was unforgiving. If a worker fell sick and could not pay rent to the company-owned housing, or owed money for food to the company store, they became officially in bondage, and could not leave the company until the debt was paid. This was true in the mines too. There was a song popular in the U.S. in the fifties:

> *You dig sixteen tons*
> *And what do you get?*
> *Another day older and deeper in debt.*
> *St. Peter don't you call me*
> *Cause I can't go.*
> *I owe my soul to the company store.*[9]

8. Honeyman, K. (2016). Child Workers in England, 1780–1820: Parish Apprentices and the Making of the Early Industrial Labour Force. (n.p.): Taylor & Francis. pgs. 185–186
9. Merle Travis, "Sixteen Tons," 1946

Marx argued that if the workers revolted and seized the factories and the government, they could liberate themselves from capitalism and create a society where all were equal (Communism). He labeled this seizure of power, or antithesis, "The dictatorship of the proletariat." The slogan was, "Workers unite. You have nothing to lose but your chains."[10] Where the revolutions in the 18th century were the antithesis to feudalism and monarchy, Marx saw workers' revolutions in the industrial age as antithesis to capitalism, leading to a new synthesis in the form of communism, a workers' utopia, where all would equal. Under this regime, Marx argued, private property would be abolished, and everyone would naturally share.

There's a fun limerick about this notion: "According to Marx, All the trees want to be parks." Silly as this may sound, it presents a much-overlooked aspect of Marx's philosophy: the notion that people, who are naturally social, like to share, and that capitalism distorts their true nature. Marx called his envisioned end result the "Classless Society." In this society, the state and the party would become useless, and government would "wither away." People would willingly share and work to keep the farms and factories functioning efficiently. This would take about four hours a day and the rest of the time people could paint pictures, write poetry, etc. The arts would flourish. The disabled would be cared for: "From each according to his ability. To each according to his needs."[11]

Years ago, there was a TV show called "Family Ties," in which a hippy, non-competitive mom and dad had a son (played by Michael J. Fox), who was very politically conservative, and thought competition was important and healthy. He became very upset when his parents sent his little brother Andy to a non-competitive preschool. Down he went to the school with a copy of the Wall

10. Marx, K., & Engels, F. (2011). The communist manifesto. New York: Penguin Books. Chap 4
11. Marx, Karl. Critique of the Gotha Programme. N.p., Wildside Press, 2008, pg. 27.

Street Journal tucked under his arm. He tried to talk the children into being competitive, but they only praised him for sharing his ideas. At the end of the day, he was helping and sharing too. Could this be what Marx envisioned for society? Do you think it would work with adults?

Marx's philosophy was very popular and led to communist revolutions in Russia, China, and Vietnam, among others, but it did not lead to a utopian state in any of them. One primary reason is that communist revolutions occurred in countries that had not yet undergone industrialization, so the revolutionary governments had to force the people to industrialize, which caused great suffering for millions. These governments also had to fight off threats from pro-capitalist countries like the U.S., which saw communism as a threat to freedom and democracy. As a result, free speech was often left by the wayside in state efforts to keep power.

In addition, while communist revolutions did create a great deal of economic equality and drastically improved education and access to healthcare, it turned out that people were not very content with the elimination of private property and huge restrictions on political freedom.

Most importantly, Marx's vision had a fatal flaw. When people have power, they usually want to hang on to it. Unusual exceptions were the powerful leaders of two Buddhist countries, Tibet and Bhutan. Both the Dalai Lama and the king of Bhutan abolished their power by decree and established democratic systems. This, however, did not happen with the governments in Russia and China. People were not granted political freedom in Russia until the Soviet Union collapsed in the late 1980s, and while in recent decades, China welcomed elements of capitalism into its system, its citizens still do not have political freedom. China's current communist/capitalist hybrid is also an important example of how nepotism can lead to abuse of power. Many of China's rulers have amassed private fortunes which they use to benefit their children and establish them in important positions.

Democratic Socialism

In Chapter One, I suggested that instead of choosing between rule-following, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics, we look for the good points in each, and try to use one to check the other. Could this be possible in government too?

Considering what role government plays in happiness, it is interesting to note that the countries at the top of the United Nations' World Happiness Report are democratic socialist ones. In these nations, government is run democratically but industries, while free to compete in the economy, are strongly regulated and taxed in order to provide a clean environment and social services for all citizens. People pay high taxes, yet are able to have private businesses and profit from them.

When evaluating a government's contribution to its citizens' happiness, one could consider how people are faring in a particular country during the COVID-19 crisis. Do they have jobs, housing, and healthcare? Certainly, citizens of the above democratic socialist countries have less to worry about in all three of those categories.

One social-democratic model, adopting some forms of meritocracy, was used in France. Free education is available to all from the age of 2½. At about age 16, students take an exam called 'the bac' (baccalaureate). If they pass, they go on to college, medical school, law school, etc., for free. They can take tests which will land them a position for life in the government or education. (Vocational training is available as an alternative, and unions are still relatively strong, so most workers have good wages and benefits.) Nevertheless, positions like president or mayor of a town are gained through election, so anyone can run for office.

What about our own country? The United States has some elements of democratic socialism (social security, the 8-hour workday, and Medicare) but our system does not offer the same level of government-sponsored programs as many of our Western European counterparts. We also have a two-party system. (Most

European governments are formed by coalitions of a number of parties.) But generally speaking, most modern democracies are republics, where elected representatives serve the interest of thousands of citizens. The ancient Greeks practiced direct democracy[12] but perhaps the United States is too large for direct democracy to be practiced. Or is it? Could we use modern technology to enable all voters to participate in legislative votes? Would voters have time to focus that much on politics?

In conclusion, how should we envision a good government? Many models might work but as philosophers, we can evaluate systems to assess if they are really benefiting citizens. Consistency is foremost. Our Declaration of Independence calls for "Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." How we envision that has changed over the years in America, and will certainly change in the years to come.

Additional reading: The economist Thomas Piketty recently published Capital in the Twenty-First Century, widely considered to be one of the most important political books of our times. It was praised by progressives and conservatives alike.

Here is a link to a Harvard Gazette interview with him about the book, where he discusses the link between economics and political participation, and how it's integral to the strength of democracy:

https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2020/03/pikettys-new-book-explores-how-economic-inequality-is-perpetuated/

12. Where (male) citizens could participate.

5. How To Lead An Ethical And Happy Life When The World Around You Is Difficult (But Manageable)

any cultures and religions look back with longing to what they believed was a golden age. Perhaps the most famous was the Garden of Eden, where there was no pain and suffering, and where survival was not dependent on hard work. In China, many believed there had been an ancient golden age, presided over by a benevolent monarch. Some Tibetan Buddhists look forward to a golden age that will come about when the karma causing degenerate times will be exhausted. (The Tibetans believe this golden age may have already existed in the past and has been lost because of so many evil deeds.)

Some writers have envisioned perfect societies called utopias, where people live in peace with one another and enjoy prosperity. Some of these utopias are permissive and allow great personal freedom. Others, such as that described in the novel Brave New World[1], are dystopian (the opposite of a utopia), where personal freedom is considered a threat to one's own happiness and that of others.

Our world in the 21st century is certainly not a golden age nor a utopia. Yet up to now at least, and with the (hopefully) passing of the virus and slowing of climate change, it is possible to live a decent life, not harming others, and achieving some degree of happiness.

1. Huxley, A. (1998). Brave New World. Germany: HarperCollins.

In this chapter, let's consider some of the best ways of doing this. We will begin by taking a look at how some philosophers of the past envisioned a good life. Then we'll discuss current problems that threaten health and happiness around the world.

Epicurus lived from 341–270 BCE. He was born on the island of Samos in Greece and taught in Athens. He was a materialist who held that all certainty must be based on sense experience. He did not believe in God, nor in an afterlife. This led him to state that there was no punishment for one's sins after death.

Epicurus believed that much of the suffering in life was due to the fear of death. In his Letter to Menoeceus, he wrote that this fear was irrational: "Accustom thyself to believe that death is nothing to us, for good and evil imply sentience, and death is the privation of all sentience;... Death, therefore, the most awful of evils, is nothing to us, seeing that, when we are, death is not come, and, when death is come, we are not."[2]

Many people have the idea that Epicurus advocated a wild life, filled with orgies and feasts. His view, however, was quite the opposite. Although he identified good with pleasure (specifically the absence of suffering), and evil with pain, he believed the perfect life was one of balance. For example, we all look forward to a Thanksgiving feast. In my family, everyone is known for a special dish, which each brings. Mine is chocolate nutmeg cream pie. Your arteries curl just looking at it. But imagine having to eat that dinner once or twice every day. You would soon feel sick and your health would suffer. You can only enjoy that feast if you have it on rare occasions.

He believed that intellectual pleasures offered more lasting benefits than physical ones. He never married, knowing that married life is often filled with great difficulties. He said, "The pleasant life is produced not by a string of drinking bouts and

2. In Greek and Roman Philosophy After Aristotle. (1994). United Kingdom: Free Press. p. 50

revelries, nor by the enjoyment of boys and women, nor by fish and the other items on an expensive menu, but by sober reasoning."[3] To him, a good piece of cheese was just as enjoyable as a great feast. And the greatest pleasure was to be found in good company, friendship, and in intellectual pursuits such as the study of science and philosophy.[4]

Epicurus founded a school in Athens called "The Garden," where he taught these ideas. The school was opened to women (as well as courtesans), and even included one slave. Kindness, temperance, and friendship were encouraged. How far from the misunderstanding that led people to label Epicureanism a philosophy for pigs!

Epicurus considered certain kinds of desires dangerous, such as the desire for power, wealth, and fame, because one always craves more and is never satisfied. The ultimate goal was to achieve ataraxia, a state of mind that is completely untroubled.

Had Epicurus discovered the secret to a happy life? Maybe. It seems happy life in The Garden was dependent on the availability of simple good food, comfortable though not luxurious living conditions, and a healthy body and mind. The friendship of good people was also considered essential, as were intellectual pursuits because engaging the mind was thought to be one of the greatest of pleasures.

Aristotle 384–322 BCE

Aristotle was born in the small town of Stagira in northern Greece.

3. Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus"
4. He suggested that it was better for your well-being to stay out of politics, being that one's life could be made very uncomfortable by one's political enemies.

His father was the doctor of King Amyntas of Macedon. In his early twenties, he moved to Athens and became a student at Plato's Academy. He stayed in Athens for twenty years, writing and teaching philosophy, political theory, and science. He left after the death of Plato in 347 BCE.

In 342 BCE, he became tutor to Alexander, the son of King Philip II of Macedon. (Alexander later became known as Alexander the Great.) In 335 Aristotle returned to Athens where he stayed until the death of King Philip. There were anti-Macedonian forces in Athens that made it prudent for him to leave in 322 BCE. He later died on the island of Euboea. Aristotle did not think of pleasure as the key to a happy life. He did see it as good because it is the opposite of pain, which was bad. But to him, pleasure, such as eating, was good because it was a process towards fullness; it was not a good in itself.[5]

Until the end, when he met with dangers from political enemies, Aristotle's life was on the whole peaceful and prosperous. One could say that in his own terms, he had been happy: "Success in life, the best possible good for man, is … living one's whole life in a rational way, under the guidance of the best virtues of the rational soul."[6] Let us unpack that statement.

Aristotle divided beings into the animate (alive) and the inanimate (like a rock). All living beings had souls. (By soul he meant that which gives that being its power.) Plants had the power to grow, nourish themselves, and reproduce. Animals had these powers and could also move about by themselves. Humans (rational animals), could also think and will things to be and to be otherwise.

To be fully human, according to Aristotle, one had to be virtuous, which meant living "excellently," in terms of fulfilling one's potential. Each form of animate life had its own virtue. An apple, for example,

5. The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle ed. Jonathan Barnes. p. 211. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995
6. Barnes p. 202

would be excellent if it were colorful and juicy. A cheetah if it could run quickly. A human if he or she could think well and make rational decisions.

For Aristotle, living a virtuous life was finding a balance between extremes. Courage for example, was the mean between being reckless and being a coward. What were considered the best virtues? Those which characterize a rational being were the intellectual virtues. For Aristotle, reasoning should lead us eventually to contemplation of the eternal. In this, he was a true student of Plato.

It is not clear what Aristotle meant by the eternal. Some scholars interpret his ideas about the prime mover, as a belief in gods. The argument goes like this: Things are naturally at rest (we now know this is not true), therefore there have to be prime movers to start the world moving. The American philosopher John Herman Randall disagreed with this interpretation and believed Aristotle thought of his prime movers as natural objects, such as the fixed stars.[7]

To return to the virtues, since humans have these special abilities (intellect, and will), Aristotle claimed that each person should develop potentialities to the fullest. This could be interpreted as choosing wisely between many different careers or choosing that which one is best suited for by nature. This type of choice comes up in our daily lives. For example, what if a young person is a brilliant mathematician or chess player? Perhaps his or her parents are hoping for fame and fortune if their son or daughter becomes top in the world. However, this young person may prefer to play music in a rock band. Is this necessarily a lesser choice?

There is also the competition factor. Sometimes young people do not like to compete in the field for which they have great talent. They just want to enjoy what they do. (Check out the movie "Searching for Bobby Fisher" for a sensitive study of this problem.)

7. Randall, J. H., Owens, J. (1990). Aristotle. United States: Easton Press.

Aristotle himself seems to have thought of the contemplation of the highest truths as the most satisfying, for we can contemplate the truth more continuously than anything else. He must have thought of this when he was forced to end his days on an island far from his friendships and intellectual pursuits in Athens.

He held that the nature of man was to live in a political community. This is similar to Marx's view that man is a social animal. But he did not think that a big state like Persia was a true community or polis, because people were too far removed from one another and from the government. But even in a small state, it is not easy to live happily. Aristotle thought it required practical wisdom. (what is good or bad for us at the highest level). This includes political wisdom. Similar to Confucius' ideas on government, Aristotle argued that a good state provides an environment that encourages virtue among rulers and subjects, and in young people in particular. If young people do not have their characters formed correctly by those who raised them, they are unlikely to be happy or virtuous.

He believed lip service to virtues is not enough: "It is possible to have the right values without knowing how to achieve them in practice, a sort of moral clumsiness"[8] An example of this is a popular criticism of people who "knock people over the head with their peace signs." I had an etiquette teacher in high school who said, "You can say anything to anyone if you say it the right way." It's an exaggeration, surely, but indeed, framing the content of what you say in a skillful way can make all the difference.

Finally, Aristotle was aware that fortune plays a significant role in happiness: "A man will be a happy man if he lives his life virtuously, and enjoys moderate good fortune, and is destined to do so until the end of his days."[9] Recall the example from the introduction, where a man who dedicated himself to his beloved son's happiness, only to discover on his deathbed that his son had always despised him.

8. Barnes, p. 208
9. Barnes, p. 204

Of the perils of Fortune, Aristotle said, "One swallow does not make spring, nor does one fine day."[10]

Dr. Wendy Suzuki

Let's move to our own age and the scientific examination of happiness. The neuroscientist Dr. Wendy Suzuki talks about how to use the body and the mind together to have a peaceful, healthy, and happy life. I first encountered Dr. Suzuki when I just happened to wake up at three in the morning and turned on Channel 13. Suzuki, a distinguished neuroscientist at New York University was addressing a group of mostly elderly women. She told them how at the top of her very successful career, she realized that she was very unhappy. Her relationships with people were strained and painful. She was overweight and not in good health. She decided to turn her scientific expertise on her own problems, and discovered, after experimenting both with humans and lab animals, that exercise energized the test subjects and also increased their ability to solve problems. Many members of the audience did not have access to a gym or exercise equipment but she taught them a fifteen-minute routine that could be done in a living room. She had discovered that these exercises if done every day, would increase their flexibility and health, and claimed she had proven that if the exercises were done with positive thoughts, the benefits were even greater.[11]

Fascinated, I bought her book. In addition to what she had said on the program, she provided details of the scientific experiments

10. Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, H. Rackham, Ed. p. 1098a.1. http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0086.tlg010.perseus-eng1:1098a.1
11. Suzuki, Wendy Healthy Brain, Happy Life with Billy Fitzpatrick. New York: Harper Collins, 2015. P.251

that led her to these results. Her lab is concentrated on the impact of exercise on the brain, trying to determine what amount and type of exercise is needed to maximize brain activity for learning, remembering, focusing, and keeping a positive mind.[12] So far, she has discovered that intense aerobic exercise, even for fifteen minutes daily, can improve the part of the brain that causes personality development, the prefrontal cortex. Even traumatic brain injury can be helped through exercise, combined with positive thoughts about oneself and others. This can also enhance patients' cognitive abilities.

Dr. Suzuki is working with a group of scientists to discover exactly what amount of exercise is needed to enhance the brain. They are concentrating on changes due to exercise, that affect learning and mental well-being. They have discovered that both meditation and exercise increase brain health and have positive effects on attention.

But it is not only our bodies and minds that we need to nourish in order to live a happy life. We need to nourish the world around us.

Sustainability

One important factor in global health is a sustainable population. There is a limit on how many people the planet can maintain. Think for a minute about exponential growth. Here is a famous example: Imagine there is a pond that is filling with algae. It will do this for

12. Basso, Julia C.; Shang, Andrea; Elman, Meredith; Karmouta, Ryan; Suzuki, Wendy A. (November 2015). "Acute Exercise Improves Prefrontal Cortex but not Hippocampal Function in Healthy Adults". Journal of the International Neuropsychological Society: JINS. 21 (10): 791–801.

100 days. Every day the amount of algae in the pond doubles in size. On what day will it be only half full? You guessed it. The 99th day.

Now imagine a country that has an average of nine children per family. How soon do you think the country will not have enough room for everyone? What to do? The ecologist Garrett Hardin suggested we view this in an analogy with a lifeboat.[13] A cruise ship sinks, and the lifeboat is full. If any more people are taken aboard, the lifeboat will overturn and all of the passengers will drown. Should we push away the people who are trying to board the lifeboat? Similarly, should we let people in overcrowded countries starve to death rather than feed them, thus preventing them from having more children? No.

Many countries, such as Germany and Italy, have restructured society in such a way that people will choose not to have so many children. They are concerned about not having enough children. How did this happen?

Population

Ways of reducing population without harming anyone

One way is to reduce deaths of newborns and infants. This may seem counterintuitive, but it leads to a decrease in the number of children people think they need to have. Parents in some countries fear that they may not have children to care for them in their old age because so many children die as babies or toddlers. Health care for children will enable them to advance to adulthood, and be there to care for their aging parents.

In countries like Switzerland, there are lovely places for the

13. Hardin G. Living on a lifeboat. Bioscience. 1974 Oct;24(10):561–8. PMID: 11661143.

elderly to live. These are state-financed. People living in these homes do not need children to support them.

When women become educated about the possibility of using birth control techniques, they usually have fewer children. This is especially effective when there is no religious ban on such practices. In Italy however, a Catholic country in which the church forbade contraceptive techniques such as pills and condoms, the population rebelled and used them anyway.

Climate

The Challenge of Climate Change

Another issue affecting global health is climate change and its connection to food production. The warming of the oceans and the climate due to carbon emissions, is causing icebergs to melt and water levels to rise. Some countries will soon become uninhabitable due to flooding. Other areas of the earth facing unprecedented drought are becoming incapable of growing crops. The result has been mass migrations, causing further upheaval and political conflict.

There are many practical and ethical solutions to these problems that only require political will, public participation, and good governance.

Agriculture is the world's second-largest greenhouse gas emitter, after the energy sector. Our current method of growing crops involves soil tillage, which releases tons of carbon into the air. One solution, no-till agriculture, represents one of the most effective carbon capture techniques available. (This practice has actually been in use since 3,000 BCE.) Over one hundred million farmers across the world currently engage in no-till agriculture. It not only prevents more carbon from being released from the ground, as part of a regenerative farming system of crop rotation and other time-tested techniques, it is very effective at sucking carbon dioxide out

of the air. Estimates of how much CO2 could be removed from the atmosphere from no-till and regenerative farming, range from 322 billion tons to one trillion tons.[14] (See the film "Kiss the Ground" for more information on this topic.)[15]

The philosopher Peter Singer said that we are not in a lifeboat. We are in a luxury yacht. If we grow food in a sustainable way and control climate change, there would be enough food for everyone.

Industrial animal farming also contributes to climate change. Cows and pigs emit tons of methane, which is 25 times more powerful than CO2, in terms of global warming. A natural grass diet in lieu of corn (which leads to e Coli infections in cows), can cause them to emit less gas and live a happier life by grazing.

Aside from being the primary cause of climate change, the burning of fossil fuels in factories also creates air pollution. This is a threat to a healthy and happy life for hundreds of millions around the globe. There are new methods of industrial carbon capture, such as a technology that seizes the carbon emissions as they leave the smokestacks and turns them into usable protein. These methods are expensive, however. This practice also does not reduce the CO2 emissions that arise from the extraction, transportation, and refining of fossil fuels before they are burned.

A more straightforward method is reliance on wind energy, which has become less expensive and is widely used in states like Texas and Kansas. There is enough wind energy potential in three U.S. states to power the entire country[16], and there are enough wind-rich states to meet the nation's energy needs sixteen times over.[17]

14. https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/can-regenerative-agriculture-reverse-climate-change-big-food-banking-it-n1072941
15. https://www.netflix.com/gb/title/81321999
16. Xi Lu, Michael B. McElroy, and Juha Kiviluoma, "Global Potential for Wind-Generated Electricity," Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, vol. 106, no. 27 (7 July 2009)
17. National Renewable Energy Laboratory, "U.S. Renewable Energy

An article in The Economist from March 14, 2020, illustrates just how widespread this method has become, even with some political opposition:

> Curt Morgan, the CEO of Vistra Energy, one of Texas's biggest electricity firms, which both generates and sells electricity, says his firm has moved from relying on coal for around 70% of its generation to less than half that now. All of Vistra's new investments are in renewable energy, and the firm now backs a carbon tax, which Mr Morgan says is the best way to incentivize firms like his to move away from polluting carbon.[18]

Solar energy and developments in battery storage[19] are also growing exponentially in the U.S and around the world. Global solar panel production is expected to triple between 2020 and 2050,[20] and the U.S. has enough solar energy potential to generate 100 times the energy we currently currently consume.[21]

While there are emissions associated with the production of solar panels, the levels are lower than that of fossil fuels. Similarly, the

Technical Potentials: A GIS-Based Analysis" Anthony Lopez, Billy Roberts, Donna Heimiller, Nate Blair, and Gian Porro.

18. "Green Texas: A renewable-energy boom is changing the politics of global warming". The Economist, 3/14/2020, https://www.economist.com/united-states/2020/03/14/a-renewable-energy-boom-is-changing-the-politics-of-global-warming
19. https://e360.yale.edu/features/in-boost-for-renewables-grid-scale-battery-storage-is-on-the-rise
20. https://www.forbes.com/sites/joshuarhodes/2020/02/03/the-us-solar-industry-in-2020/
21. National Renewable Energy Laboratory, "U.S. Renewable Energy Technical Potentials: A GIS-Based Analysis" Anthony Lopez, Billy Roberts, Donna Heimiller, Nate Blair, and Gian Porro.

pollution caused by battery production may be a necessary byproduct on the road to combating climate change while more ecological batteries are in development.[22]

Young people, such as Greta Thunberg are leading the call for improved environmental regulations, arguing that children's rights to a safe and sustainable future are being threatened. Children around the world are suing their governments for the right to a clean environment.[23] They are too young to vote or hold office, but the judicial systems are open to them. If they win these suits or succeed in exerting enough political pressure on elected officials, policies addressing climate change will have to be implemented.

There are also many organizations, led by children and adults alike, who are planting millions of trees to extract CO2 from the atmosphere. Wangari Maathai, a Kenyan activist, won a Nobel Prize in 2004 for organizing the planting of over 30 million trees,[24] and nine-year-old Felix Finkbeiner founded a tree-planting organization that has planted millions of trees around the world, and aims to plant a trillion more.[25]

Global interdependence: Is free trade a hindrance to global health and happiness?

It is a good thing for countries to interact with one another; many historical examples indicate that if countries have financial stakes in each other, it will be beneficial for keeping the peace. The European Union is an example of this. The main problem is that free trade has allowed large corporations to benefit from low wages and poor working conditions in other nations. Apple's use of Uyghur slave

22. https://www.engadget.com/2019-09-30-aluminum-batteries-now-more-practical.html
23. https://www.ourchildrenstrust.org/
24. https://www.un.org/africarenewal/web-features/wangari-maathai-woman-trees-dies
25. https://www.plant-for-the-planet.org/en/about-us/who-we-are-2

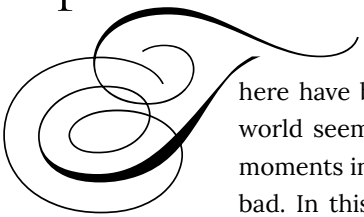
labor in China and maquiladoras in Mexico are examples of this. Free trade has weakened union bargaining power and depressed wages in the U.S. It has also taken a toll on the local economies of other participating nations. Many farmers in other nations, for example, often can't compete with cheap[26], agricultural products introduced from America. This threatens local agriculture and food security in those countries. In such cases, global interdependence may do more harm than good.

It seems there must be a political global solution arising out of compassion and good conscience. Instead of nationalistic tariffs that cause political friction, we should seek global labor standards, and countries should support locally-produced goods.

So there is hope for the future. But while life is good for many of us, we must work very hard to protect those things that support health and happiness for all, and be wary of policies that undermine the public good.

26. From subsidies

6. Surviving When The World Around You Is Falling Apart



There have been moments in history when the world seemed to fall to pieces. There may be moments in the future which may be equally as bad. In this chapter, we'll examine how some famous historical figures managed to find a way to cope with dire circumstances when facing danger and the risk of death.

Mother Teresa 1910–1997

Mother Teresa, an Albanian, was born in Skopia, capital of present-day Macedonia. She became a nun and taught at St. Mary's school in Calcutta, India. Mother Teresa became aware of the terrible poverty around her in India and longed to help. She obtained permission to leave the order so she could found the Missionaries of Charity, dedicated to serving the poorest of the poor. These nuns vow to live in extreme poverty and work with unremitting hard labor for the most destitute. She began by picking up one sick person from the street, then another and another. Some of these people had leprosy or were dying. She rescued orphans, caring for both their material and spiritual needs.

She based her mission on the words of Christ in the gospels, "Whatever you do for one of these, the least of my little ones,

you do for me."[1] So, she was not just seeing the poor person she was helping, but she believed she was seeing Christ as well. The nuns' meditations and prayers at the beginning of the day were an inspiration for their difficult lives. As a result, they reported being very joyful. In her book, In the Heart of the World: Thoughts, Stories, and Prayers, she wrote:

> A joyful heart is the normal result of a heart burning with love. Joy is not simply a matter of temperament; it is always hard to remain joyful—which is all the more reason why we should acquire it and make it grow in our hearts.[2]

I have seen some of the Missionaries of Charity in places like airports, and they do seem to glow with happiness. Mother Teresa was awarded a Nobel peace prize for her humanitarian work in 1979. Within impoverished areas of Calcutta and then globally, the order she founded brought help to hundreds of people.

Noor Inayat Khan 1914–1944

A lesson on one way to face danger and death is to be found in the short life of Noor Inayat Khan. She was born in Moscow, the child of a Moslem Sufi spiritual leader and an American mother. They moved to Paris and lived a peaceful, happy life among her father's religious community. She loved music and wrote children's books, including one based on the Buddhist Jataka Tales (stories about the

1. "And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." King James Bible, Matthew 25:40 https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Matthew-25–40
2. Teresa, M. (2010). In the Heart of the World: Thoughts, Stories & Prayers. United States: New World Library. p. 27

previous lives of the Buddha). After her father's sudden death and her mother's subsequent depression, she took charge of bringing up her younger brothers and sisters.

When the Germans invaded France, the family fled to England. Noor joined the war effort and became a radio operator, skilled in decoding and sending secret messages to the British underground in France. She volunteered for the most dangerous mission, to do this work secretly in France. None of the radio operators doing this task lived for more than six weeks. She survived for three months, risking captivity every day. She was finally caught, and revealed nothing to the Germans, even under torture. She was finally shot to death in the Dachau concentration camp.

In an interview with the New York Times, her cousin Mahmood attributed her inner strength in the face of German aggression, to her Sufi upbringing.[3] When asked how she could face death every day, she said she believed all beings were part of a divine, benevolent reality.[4]

Mahatma Gandhi 1869–1948

Mahatma Gandhi was born in India to Hindu parents. His mother was a follower of the Vedanta tradition which understood God to be inseparable from the universe. Gandhi endorsed this view later in life.

Gandhi's views were not without contradictions. Although an avowed pacifist, he supported the British in World War I. But in India, he always promoted the concept of ahimsa (non-harming).

3. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/28/obituaries/noor-inayat-khan-overlooked.html
4. https://www.pbs.org/show/enemy-reich-noor-inayat-khan-story/

When his followers defied oppressive British colonial laws by attempting to get salt from the British-run salt works (Indians were not allowed to make their own salt), he insisted on non-violence. Thousands of marchers were beaten by police. No one fought back. This dramatic incident, published in the press, so influenced the British that they released their relinquished colonial control over India.[5]

In 1931 Gandhi was arrested. In prison, he suffered from malaria and was completely isolated. He often wrote about Satyagraha, or holding on to the truth.[6] Civil disobedience and non-co-operation as practiced under Satyagraha are based on the "law of suffering," a doctrine that the endurance of suffering is a means to an end.[7] Gandhi used satyagraha politically, in order to make peace with and purify an oppressor.

Satyagraha did not represent inaction for Gandhi but rather determined passive resistance and non-co-operation where, in the words of the historian Arthur Herman, "love conquers hate."[8] It is also termed a "universal force," as it essentially "makes no distinction between kinsmen and strangers, young and old, man and woman, friend and foe."[9] Gandhi wrote, "There must be no impatience, no barbarity, no insolence, no undue pressure. If we

5. https://www.britannica.com/event/Salt-March
6. The composer Philip Glass recently composed an opera with that name. The opera references his debt to Tolstoy, the Russian writer, for inspiring his views on non-violence.
7. Gandhi, M. K. (1982) [Young India, 16 June 1920]. "The Law of Suffering". Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi. New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India. pp. 396–99.
8. Herman, Arthur. Gandhi and Churchill: The Epic Rivalry that Destroyed an Empire and Forged Our Age New York Random House. 2008 p. 176.
9. Gandhi, M.K. "Some Rules of Satyagraha" Young India, Feb.1930

want to cultivate a true spirit of democracy, we cannot afford to be intolerant. Intolerance betrays want of faith in one's cause."[10]

He attempted to reconcile the political and religious needs of Muslims in India with those of Hindus, but failed. He was assassinated in 1948 by a Hindu radical who resented his attempts to bring peace between the two religions. The failure of Gandhi's peace-making efforts led to the division of India into Hindu-majority India and a Muslim-majority Pakistan.

Gandhi in turn, influenced Martin Luther King, who studied his ideas and adopted many of his views. This can be seen clearly in Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech:

> But there is something that I must say to my people, who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice: In the process of gaining our rightful place, we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again, we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.[11], [12]

Nelson Mandela 1918–2013

Nelson Mandela was born in Umtata, South Africa, which was in

10. Prabhu, R.K. and Rao, U.R. The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi. Navajivan Publishing House (January 1, 1967)
11. Sometimes used as a synonym for satyagraha
12. King, Martin L., Jr. "I Have a Dream." Speech. Lincoln Memorial, Washington, D. C. 28 Aug. 1963. P.2

the grip of Apartheid (where blacks lived in a state of oppression by whites). Mandela spent his life fighting apartheid and was imprisoned for 18 years. The prisoners had to spend their days breaking stones into gravel. It was blistering hot in summer and freezing in winter when they were given only a thin jacket. Despite these hardships, Mandela endured with patience and goodwill. He wrote from prison:

…[T]he cell is an ideal place to learn to know yourself, to search realistically and regularly the process of your own mind and feelings… Honesty*, sincerity, simplicity, humility, pure generosity absence of vanity, readiness to serve others—qualities which are within the reach of every soul—are the foundations of one's spiritual life… Regular meditation, say about 15 minutes a day before you turn in, can be very fruitful in this regard. You may find it difficult at first to pinpoint the negative features in your life, but the 10th attempt may yield rich rewards. Never forget that a saint is a sinner that keeps trying.[13]

The Dalai Lama 1935-Present

The Dalai Lama is the leader of Tibet, which was conquered by China in 1959. He lives in exile in India. Millions of Tibetans suffered under Chinese rule, but the Dalai Lama has always advocated loving kindness and forgiveness for all. In his book, The Wisdom of Forgiveness, he writes of a fellow monk who was imprisoned by the Chinese government for eighteen years:

He told me the Chinese forced him to denounce his religion. They tortured him many times in prison. I asked him whether he was ever afraid. Lopon-la then told me: 'Yes, there was one thing I was afraid of. I was afraid I may lose compassion for the Chinese.'

13. Letter to Winnie Mandela from Kroonstad Prison dated Feb. 1, 1975

I was very moved by this, and very inspired.[14]

Victor Frankl 1905–1997

Victor Frankl, a Jewish psychiatrist living under the Nazis, was given an opportunity to flee Germany and thus avoid imprisonment and death, but he refused to leave his family. He was sent to Auschwitz concentration camp where he had to perform hard labor and was starved and beaten. Through all of this, he kept a positive mind.[15] Sometimes he would plan what books he would write when he was released. As an analyst, he used the horrors he witnessed as raw material for understanding what the human mind will undergo under stress, and he took solace in the small amounts of acts of kindness he was able to perform.

He often concentrated his mind on loving thoughts of his wife whom he longed to see again. Sadly, when he was freed, he learned she had been murdered in the camps, along with his mother, father, and brother. He began to write with the intention that the experiences he endured and his understanding of them would be helpful to others. His most important discovery was that prisoners would stay alive as long as there was meaning in their lives. Those who lacked that soon died.

A friend of mine had an uncle who suffered terribly under the Nazis. Once they came into his home where he lived with his many children, The SS told him to pick out one of his children to be killed. If he did not, they threatened to kill all the children. He picked a child, and then the Nazis killed all the children. Finally, when this man was free he came to America, remarried, and had children. My

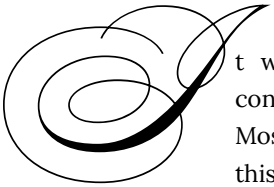
14. Chan, V., Lama, D. (2005). The Wisdom of Forgiveness: Intimate Conversations and Journeys. United States: Riverhead Books. p. 48
15. Frankl, Viktor Man's Search for Meaning Boston: Beacon, 2006

friend asked his uncle how he had the strength to begin a new life. He replied, "I refuse to give Hitler another victim."

My sister-in-law Carmel found a way to find meaning in life without religion, despite her own family tragedy. She and her husband Manny were very successful. She was a vice president of a large corporation and he was editor-in-chief of Collier's Encyclopedia. They had a beautiful home and a brilliant daughter, April, who adored the Beatles and loved writing poetry. April became valedictorian of her high school and was headed to college.

At age 18, April suddenly developed brain cancer. She died two years later. Carmel knew that her daughter had never approved of her mother's corporate career. So, Carmel quit her job and went back to school to become a teacher of gifted children. She did this in her daughter's honor. At the age of 65, she became the oldest graduate of the Ph.D. program at Columbia University Teachers College. She went on to teach in college for twenty years. Like Victor Frankl, she was able to transform tragedy into something positive.

7. How to Have a Stable and Tranquil Mind When You Are Facing Death With No Way Out



t would seem the significance of death is connected with one's beliefs about the afterlife. Most contemporary philosophers have rejected this as a possibility. Here's why: Materialist philosophers argue that all we are is a body. When that dies, there is nothing left. That is why Epicurus said not to fear death because, "When we are, death is not come, and when death is come, we are not."[1]

That does not help too much with the process of dying itself, which can sometimes be very painful. Because of this, many argue for the reasonableness of mercy killing so that the hopelessly or terminally ill will be able to end their suffering.

Many, perhaps most people, believe that their consciousness will continue after death. How could this be possible? With the brain gone, burned, or buried, how can there be thoughts, memories or emotions?

The 12th century Hindu philosopher Ramanuja thought he had a solution. He believed we always have two bodies, the ordinary or gross body, and the subtle body which is within the gross body. The subtle body cannot be perceived by ordinary means. It carries the seeds of good and bad karma. It can be developed by yogic practices.

1. Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus"

It is believed that when we die, the subtle body continues on to either heaven or is reincarnated into another body.

Ramanuja's followers believe the yogic body cannot be perceived by anyone who has not developed the power of yogic perception, so it cannot be proved to exist. Nevertheless, they believe, it may exist, and thus offers for them a coherent idea of survival after death.

Buddhists, Taoists, and Stoics like Seneca, believe that we never were a separate thing apart from the universe; The separate self is an illusion. All of us are constantly changing, instant by instant. Thus, how can we say, "what is the real 'me'"? Is it the baby of two weeks, or the elderly person of a hundred? And all of us are physically intermingled with the state of the universe at any moment. These thinkers urge us not to fear death because they believe that, with meditative awareness at the time of death, we can come to experience unity with all things, and melt into a clear blissful experience of light.

Some hospice workers use similar meditative concepts to help the dying. They encourage patients to relax, sometimes using massage therapy. They recommend thinking loving thoughts, to rejoice in the positive things patients have done in their lives, and that they visualize an all-encompassing, loving clear light.

Some dying people consider this refuge to be God. Others consider it to be nature itself. Some, like many Buddhists, prefer not to give it a name. Here are some examples of how heroic people have faced imprisonment and death with great strength of character.

Seneca 3 BCE-65 CE

The Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca The Younger, was born in Cordoba, Spain which at that time was part of the Roman Empire. He was a sickly child and worries about him prompted his aunt to

take him to Rome, where there were better doctors. He survived childhood and became a brilliant lawyer.

Unfortunately, he became involved with political problems stemming from a suspected (but unproven) adulterous affair with Julia, the youngest daughter of Emperor Claudius. He was exiled from Rome for twenty years and spent his time studying and writing.

Eight years later, Agrippina, the current empress and mother of Nero, requested he return to Rome, to become the tutor of her eleven-year-old son, Nero. At this time, Seneca had become widely known for his brilliance, kindness, and forgiveness.

When Nero inherited the throne after the death of Claudius, Seneca and another political leader, the prefect, Burros, ruled Rome as Nero's regents for nine years. This was a time of prosperity and good order for Rome.

Seneca did his best to guide the boy into becoming a good person, but ultimately failed. As he grew older and began to govern Rome himself, Nero's true colors began to show. He became a vicious tyrant, torturing and killing his political enemies, and he executed Christians who refused to burn incense before his statues.

Seneca tried to resign from the government, offering his considerable fortune to Nero. But Nero refused his resignation, promising he would never harm his beloved tutor. Nevertheless, when he (probably falsely), suspected Seneca of treason, Nero ordered him to commit suicide, which he did, with calm and dignity. His beloved wife tried to die with him but was prevented from doing so.

Seneca was an important philosopher, playwright, poet, political theorist, and humorist. He owes a debt to early Greek Stoicism, particularly the teachings of philosopher Heraclitus:

Heraclitus, one of the early Stoics, saw the universe as being in constant flux or change. (You cannot step into the same river twice.) Individuals were subject to the laws of nature and the universe, and the creative force of reason was embedded in the universe as well as within individuals. The Stoics were monists (the concept that all is

one); they saw no difference between God and the universe. God for the Stoics, was "a rational spirit having itself no shape, but making itself into all things."[2] They believed everything emerged from God, and evil was essential to the perfection of the whole.[3] They held that the universe is benevolent, and that when one realized this, one would have peace of mind and be able to accept whatever comes. These views of Heraclitus were the foundation of Seneca's philosophy.

Seneca's main aim was to convince people to lead a life of virtue, for to him this was to live in accordance with the divine universe. To be wise and good, we must harmonize ourselves with the divine will (nature itself). This would enable us to accept whatever happened with wisdom and dignity. To do this, the passions had to be brought under control.

One example of how Seneca advised doing this was his analysis of anger. Seneca believed that we become angry because we falsely expect things to go the way we want. When they do not, we are surprised and hurt and become enraged.

Seneca was at times a very rich man. He did not see this as a problem, however. For him, a problem would arise only if one lusted after riches or anything else that one could not have. Seneca supported the philosopher Epicurus' views on the virtues of moderation.[4]

Here are some sayings of Seneca:

2. Encyclopedia of Philosophy ed. P. Edwards New York Macmillan, 1967. Vol 8 p. 21
3. Leibniz, the 17th-century philosopher explained this concept as "the best of all possible worlds." Leibniz, Gottfried. Theodicy (1710) Chicago: Open Court, 1986
4. (Contrary to a common misinterpretation that Epicurus promoted gluttony and other forms of extreme sensual indulgence, i.e. "Epicureanism")

> The acquisition of riches has been for many men, not an end, but a change, of troubles.[5]
>
> What difference does it make how much you have? There is so much more that you do not have.[6]
>
> No one is laughable who laughs at himself.[7]
>
> It is quality rather than quantity that matters.[8]

Seneca's beliefs served him well when he was exiled from Rome. He asked his mother not to be sad for him because what happened was the will of the gods. This is possibly why when Nero ordered him to commit suicide, he did so calmly and with peace of mind.

Boethius circa 480–524 B.C.E.

Boethius is a good role model in our search to find a way to handle death. He was an important Roman statesman, who loved Greek and Roman philosophy but was also a Christian. Despite general hostility to Christians, he held a high position in the Roman government, due in part to his wealthy and powerful family. He had a loving wife and two sons and was content writing a remarkable number of books, considering that he had so many governmental duties.

In 524 he was falsely accused of treason by the emperor Theodoric and was thrown into prison. At first, he despaired,

5. Seneca, Lucius Annaeus, and Gummere, Richard Mott. Seneca's Letters from a Stoic. United Kingdom, Dover Publications, 2016. p. 39
6. Star, Christopher. Seneca. United Kingdom, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016. P. 130
7. Motto, Anna Lydia. Additional Essays on Seneca. Austria, Peter Lang, 2009. p.4
8. Mott. P.100

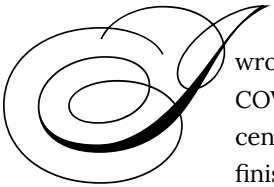
correctly foreseeing his execution. Then, he claims in his book, The Consolation of Philosophy, he had a vision of a beautiful woman, Lady Philosophy, who scolded him for his mental anguish.[9] She entered into a dialogue with him and argued that all of life was dominated by the goddess Fortune ("Fortuna").[10] The wheel of Fortune turned, raising people up, then crushing them with the loss of what they cherished, and finally death.

The only escape from this, he believed, was to find solace in one's understanding. He held that nature is the embodiment of divine wisdom; as such nothing could really harm one, and Fortune herself was also part of the divine plan. Because of this, Boethius calmly met his death. He was able to find happiness because of his faith in divine wisdom. The Consolation of Philosophy became one of the most influential books in history; Queen Elizabeth I wrote her own translation from Latin into English.

Although these historical figures faced terrible situations, they were able to keep their courage and peace of mind. Each found a different way to do this, but all of them can inspire people experiencing pain and suffering to do the same.

9. Boethius. (2012). The Consolation of Philosophy. United States: Dover Publications. Book II, p. 18
10. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Fortuna-Roman-goddess

Epilogue



I wrote this book for my students, during the COVID-19 lockdown. I was living at a Buddhist center upstate, teaching remotely. When I was finished with the manuscript draft, I showed it to Lodro, a monk who lives at the center. He was touched by the book, and offered to write a conclusion. It seemed to suit the purpose of the book quite beautifully, so I've included it below:

> These stories of great men and women who faced adversity show us how it is in the mind that we find our solace. Our mind always has the space and capacity for compassion; this is the ultimate freedom. We are not bound by what others say to us, what they do to us, or where they send us.
>
> So, when we are confronted with obstacles and challenges, we can recognize that this compassion, this caring, is already part of our life. If we look at the examples above, those who have experienced various adversities all responded with some recognition of shared humanity, and acted from values that uplifted this shared humanity. Even beset by injustice, this caring was still there. All of us carry this compassion with us.
>
> Now we can give this many names. A recognition of common humanity doesn't take one form or one name. This recognition is always responsive to the circumstances we find ourselves in. Simply reviewing the chapters of this book, we can see that there are many ways to derive meaning from life, and many ways to confront challenges. Yet, if we look at what is common, we will start to understand for ourselves that freedom is found not in having some sense of outer control, but the choice of what attitude we will take when encountering our challenges. From this we realize that no matter our circumstances, there is always freedom.

In this freedom, we find our sense of caring for something larger than our ideas about ourselves, and we also find our strength.

What we see from these assembled examples is that this is not necessarily a religious position. The Dalai Lama uses the word secular, not in a way that is absent of religion, but in a manner that encompasses a commonality, one might say a common humanity. Compassion is not just within the purview of religion; it is the greatest human inheritance.

Viktor Frankl spoke of the great power that came from having a space between the challenge, and our reaction. This stopping and sitting with uncertainty, takes us past our conceptions and into the larger view. In this ground, we find our sense of connection to others and our world, and it is here that we find the strength to discover what is meaningful in a way that is unique to us, but also grounds us in our bond with our fellow human beings.

—Ven Kyle Lodro Parker