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Introduction to Philosophy

SENIOR CONTRIBUTING AUTHOR

NATHAN SMITH, HOUSTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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OpenStax
Rice University
6100 Main Street MS-375
Houston, Texas 77005

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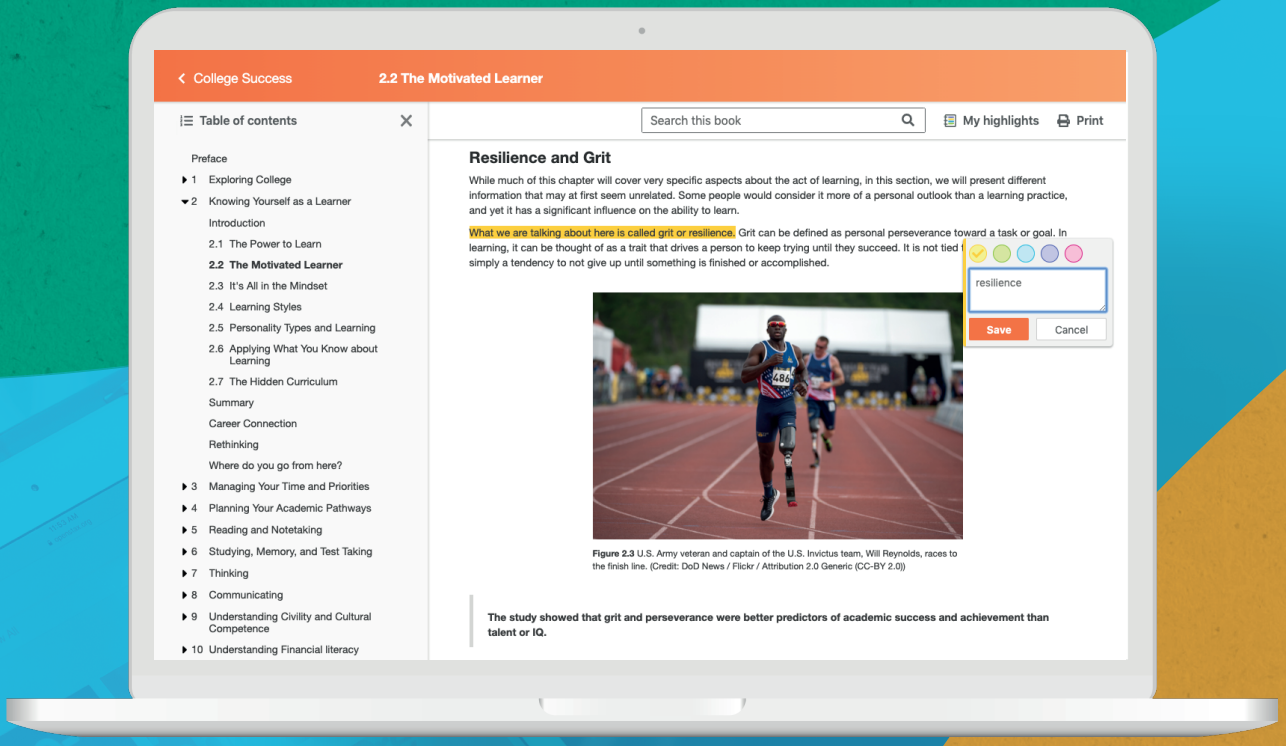

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Preface

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About *Introduction to Philosophy*

Introduction to Philosophy provides an overview of a common range of philosophical topics for a first- or second-year general education philosophy course. It is organized thematically, following the principal categories of academic philosophy (logic, metaphysics, epistemology, theories of value, and history of philosophy). A recurring theme of *Introduction to Philosophy* is its incorporation of multicultural and global perspectives. Texts, thinkers, and concepts from Middle Eastern, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Latin American, Indigenous, and African philosophy are fully integrated into discussions of concepts and topics, broadening the study of philosophy beyond the Western tradition. Another goal of the text is to help students develop critical thinking, reading, and writing skills.

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Reflecting the Full Diversity of Human Understanding

A multicultural and global perspective is a central organizing principle of *Introduction to Philosophy*. This text explores Eastern, African, and Indigenous perspectives in concert with and, in some cases, in juxtaposition to classical Western thinkers. Additionally, the authors have made a special effort to highlight the philosophical work of women, who have made important contributions to the history of philosophy in numerous traditions. This broader emphasis introduces students to approaches that open up traditional philosophical questions in provocative ways, offering fresh possibilities for social and individual understanding. As just one example, alongside discussion of the individualistic ways that Hume and Locke attempted to answer the question "what is the self" appears discussion of the African concept of *ubuntu*, sometimes translated as "a person is a person through other persons." Discussions of the four noble truths of Buddhism as a path to achieve liberation from suffering, the four interrelated concepts at the heart of Mohist ethical theory, and Carol Gilligan's care ethics are other examples of well-established answers to deep philosophical questions that provide fresh additions to classical Western ways of thinking.

Providing Students with Transferable Skills

Introduction to Philosophy is intentionally organized to develop critical thinking, research, reading, and writing skills. There is an entire chapter devoted to these transferrable skills associated with philosophy. Another chapter addresses logic and reasoning. Additionally, interspersed throughout the text are features providing guidance on how to read philosophy effectively, how to conduct research and evaluate sources, and how to write philosophy papers. These features aim to be very explicit about the habits and practices that enable one to be a good student of philosophy and, by extension, a good critical thinker.

Reminding Readers that Philosophy Is a Living Discipline

Calling attention to the fact that philosophy is not just a feature of our human past, *Introduction to Philosophy* discusses the ways contemporary academic philosophers address some of our most pressing ethical and moral issues. Examples include discussions of bioethics, emerging issues surrounding genetic engineering and communication technologies, what brain science can and cannot tell us about human consciousness, and morality pertaining to human treatment of the natural world. Through discussion of these topics and others, readers will gain awareness of the range of answers that contemporary philosophers offer to current issues and learn to appreciate the type of reasoning that philosophers use. Throughout the text, students are also encouraged to critically reflect on philosophical points of view and develop their own philosophical positions.

Enriching and Engaging Features

"Doing" Philosophy

While there is certainly not one method of "doing" philosophy, there are practices and habits that make someone a better reader, writer, researcher, and thinker in philosophy. A set of recurring features makes these skills explicit and concrete, with guidance geared toward the introductory student.

- **Think Like a Philosopher**. These features adopt one of two approaches. Some instances prompt students to engage with concepts key to philosophical argument, and thus to critical thinking, either in the form of interactive online exercises or as written guidance. Others guide students in formulating their own approaches to philosophical questions.
- **Write Like a Philosopher**. These features challenge the reader to articulate their own written responses to philosophical prompts or to craft their own philosophical arguments. Clear guidance is given on both the considerations that should appear in the response and the most effective structure for written philosophical discourse.
- **Read Like a Philosopher**. These features prompt students to engage with portions of key primary texts, such as Plato's *Apology* or the *Daodejing*. Clear structure is provided, guiding the reader on what elements of the text to pay close attention to and what questions they should hold in their minds while reading.

"How It All Hangs Together"

Philosophy is an inherently interconnected undertaking that speaks to universal human concerns. The broad questions philosophers ask (e.g., what makes a good life, how does one define morality, how should people treat one another, what rights should be accorded individuals within society) touch many aspects of our social and individual existences. A number of features address the interconnectedness of philosophical inquiry and philosophical thought, as well as its relevance to all lives.

- **Connections features**. Throughout the text, callouts direct students to additional coverage of both important theories and key thinkers in other chapters.
- **Videos**. Video features provide supplemental information from trusted contemporary sources, such as the BBC Radio 4 series *A History of Ideas* and the e-series *Wi-Phi Philosophy*.
- **Podcasts**. Podcast links are provided from engaging series, such as *The History of Philosophy without Any Gaps* and *Philosophy Bites*.

Pedagogical Framework

An effective pedagogical framework helps students structure their learning and retain information.

- **Chapter Outlines.** Each chapter opens with an outline and introduction, familiarizing students with the material that will follow. Throughout the chapter, material is chunked into manageable sections of content within each of the larger main heads.
- **Learning Objectives.** Every main section begins with two to five clear, concise, and measurable learning objectives, tagged to Bloom's levels. These objectives are designed to help the instructor decide what content to include or assign and to guide student expectations. After completing the textual sections and end-of-chapter exercises, students should be able to demonstrate mastery of the learning objectives.
- **Chapter Summaries.** Organized by section heads, chapter summaries distill the information presented in each chapter to key, concise points.
- **Key Terms.** Key terms are bolded and followed by in-text definitions. A glossary of key terms also appears at the end of each chapter.
- **Critical Thinking Questions.** Each chapter ends with 10 to 20 critical thinking questions, also organized by section head. Some of these questions assess recall of key concepts, while others ask students to think, read, and write like a philosopher. These more complex questions might prompt students to formulate thoughtful critiques of existing philosophical positions or to begin to articulate their own thoughts on philosophical questions. Any of these components can be used by instructors to build assessments and assignments for their courses.
- **"Further Reading" Suggestions.** Each chapter ends with suggested resources for students who wish to dive deeper into the thinkers and thoughts discussed in the chapters.

About the Authors

Senior Contributing Author

Nathan Smith, Houston Community College

Nathan Smith has a PhD in philosophy from Boston College and the University of Paris, Sorbonne. His dissertation was on René Descartes's early scientific and mathematical work. He has been a full-time instructor of philosophy at Houston Community College (HCC) since 2008. He has published on Descartes, phenomenology, and topics in Open Educational Resources (OER), including chapter contributions to an OER textbook through the Rebus Foundation. At HCC, he served as Chair of the Philosophy, Humanities, and Library Sciences Department from 2015 to 2017 and has served as the Open Educational Resources Coordinator since 2017. In this capacity he has secured and managed over $500,000 in grants for the institution and leads a cross-disciplinary, district-wide effort to provide "zero cost books" courses and degree plans for students.

Contributing Authors

Gregory Browne, Eastern Michigan University
Parish Conkling, Houston Community College
Naomi Friedman, University of North Carolina, Asheville
Allison Fritz, Chadron State College
Daniel Garro, Rider University
Jeremy Gallegos, Friends University
Jon Gill, Gustavus Adolphus College
Gayle Horton, Santa Fe College
Maryellen Lo Bosco, Suffolk Community College
Rebecca A. Longtin, State University of New York, New Paltz
Corey McCall, The Cornell Prison Education Program
Kurt Stuke, New England College

Reviewers

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Kyle Hirsch, Community College of Aurora

Catherine Homan, Mount Mary University
Jason Jenson, Houston Community College
Andrew Law, University of Southern California
Jeremy Proulx, Eastern Michigan University
Valérie Racine, Western New England University
Ellyn Ritterskamp, University of North Carolina, Charlotte
Jessica Roisen, Saint Ambrose University
Kris Sealey, Fairfield University
Gregory Stoutenburg, York College of Pennsylvania
Adam Thompson, University of Nebraska, Lincoln
Drew Thompson, Loyola University
Antione Tomlin, Anne Arundel Community College
Mike VanQuickenborne, Everett Community College
Steve Wyre, American Public University
Jongbok Yi, Stockton University

Additional Resources

Student and Instructor Resources

We've compiled additional resources for both students and instructors, including an instructor's manual, test bank, and lecture slides. Instructor resources require a verified instructor account, which you can apply for when you log in or create your account on OpenStax.org. Take advantage of these resources to supplement *Introduction to Philosophy*.

- **Comprehensive Instructor's Manual.** Designed to provide maximum guidance for delivering content in an interesting and dynamic manner, each chapter of the instructor's manual includes an in-depth lecture outline, a key terms list, a set of "questions for further thought," and a list of recommended resources for further reading and exploration. Authored by Kyle Hirsh, *Community College of Aurora*.
- **Test Bank.** With 500 true/false and multiple-choice questions in our test bank, instructors can customize tests to support a variety of course objectives. The test bank is available in Word format. Authored by Steve Wyre, *American Public University*.
- **PowerPoint Lecture Slides.** The PowerPoint slides provide outlines, images, and an overview of chapter topics as a starting place for instructors to build their lectures. Authored by Gregory Browne, *Eastern Michigan University*.

Academic Integrity

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Introduction to Philosophy 1

FIGURE 1.1 Philosophy begins with dialogue—with friends, with yourself, with other philosophers, and with the past. (credit: "Conversations Time moves slowly when talking with old friends" by Sagar/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

CHAPTER OUTLINE

1.1 What Is Philosophy?
1.2 How Do Philosophers Arrive at Truth?
1.3 Socrates as a Paradigmatic Historical Philosopher
1.4 An Overview of Contemporary Philosophy

INTRODUCTION For most college students, an Introduction to Philosophy course is their first encounter with the study of **philosophy**. Unlike most of your other courses, philosophy is not something usually covered in high school. Yet you are probably familiar with the term *philosophy* and may have some preconceived notion about what philosophy is and what philosophers do. Perhaps you have stayed up late at night talking with friends or family about topics like free will or the existence of God. Maybe you have a friend who always talks about big ideas or asks tough questions that sound like riddles. Perhaps you think of them as "philosophical"; you might be right.

In this chapter, we will provide a brief introduction to the field of philosophy as a historical and academic discipline. This first chapter should prepare you for your philosophy course and give you a better idea of what it means to be a philosopher. As with all introductions, this one is just a start. Your job is to explore more, think more, read more, and write more like a philosopher. Soon you may even find that you are doing philosophy.

1.1 What Is Philosophy?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify sages (early philosophers) across historical traditions.
- Explain the connection between ancient philosophy and the origin of the sciences.
- Describe philosophy as a discipline that makes coherent sense of a whole.
- Summarize the broad and diverse origins of philosophy.

It is difficult to define philosophy. In fact, to do so is itself a philosophical activity, since philosophers are attempting to gain the broadest and most fundamental conception of the world as it exists. The world includes nature, consciousness, morality, beauty, and social organizations. So the content available for philosophy is both broad and deep. Because of its very nature, philosophy considers a range of subjects, and philosophers cannot automatically rule anything out. Whereas other disciplines allow for basic assumptions, philosophers cannot be bound by such assumptions. This open-endedness makes philosophy a somewhat awkward and confusing subject for students. There are no easy answers to the questions of what philosophy studies or how one does philosophy. Nevertheless, in this chapter, we can make some progress on these questions by (1) looking at past examples of philosophers, (2) considering one compelling definition of philosophy, and (3) looking at the way academic philosophers today actually practice philosophy.

Historical Origins of Philosophy

One way to begin to understand philosophy is to look at its history. The historical origins of philosophical thinking and exploration vary around the globe. The word *philosophy* derives from ancient Greek, in which the philosopher is a lover or pursuer (*philia*) of wisdom (*sophia*). But the earliest Greek philosophers were not known as philosophers; they were simply known as **sages**. The sage tradition provides an early glimpse of philosophical thought in action. Sages are sometimes associated with mathematical and scientific discoveries and at other times with their political impact. What unites these figures is that they demonstrate a willingness to be skeptical of traditions, a curiosity about the natural world and our place in it, and a commitment to applying reason to understand nature, human nature, and society better. The overview of the sage tradition that follows will give you a taste of philosophy's broad ambitions as well as its focus on complex relations between different areas of human knowledge. There are some examples of women who made contributions to philosophy and the sage tradition in Greece, India, and China, but these were patriarchal societies that did not provide many opportunities for women to participate in philosophical and political discussions.

The Sages of India, China, Africa, and Greece

In classical Indian philosophy and religion, sages play a central role in both religious mythology and in the practice of passing down teaching and instruction through generations. The Seven Sages, or Saptarishi (seven rishis in the Sanskrit language), play an important role in ***sanatana dharma***, the eternal duties that have come to be identified with Hinduism but that predate the establishment of the religion. The Seven Sages are partially considered wise men and are said to be the authors of the ancient Indian texts known as the Vedas. But they are partly mythic figures as well, who are said to have descended from the gods and whose reincarnation marks the passing of each age of Manu (age of man or epoch of humanity). The rishis tended to live monastic lives, and together they are thought of as the spiritual and practical forerunners of Indian gurus or teachers, even up to today. They derive their wisdom, in part, from spiritual forces, but also from *tapas*, or the meditative, ascetic, and spiritual practices they perform to gain control over their bodies and minds. The stories of the rishis are part of the teachings that constitute spiritual and philosophical practice in contemporary Hinduism.

Figure 1.2 depicts a scene from the Matsya Purana, where Manu, the first man whose succession marks the prehistorical ages of Earth, sits with the Seven Sages in a boat to protect them from a mythic flood that is said to have submerged the world. The king of serpents guides the boat, which is said to have also contained seeds,

plants, and animals saved by Manu from the flood.

FIGURE 1.2 This painting, from the late eighteenth century, depicts the first man, Manu, guiding seven sages through floodwaters, with the aid of the king of serpents. (credit: "Manu and Saptarishi" by unknown author/ Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain)

Despite the fact that classical Indian culture is patriarchal, women figures play an important role in the earliest writings of the Vedic tradition (the classical Indian religious and philosophical tradition). These women figures are partly connected to the Indian conception of the fundamental forces of nature—energy, ability, strength, effort, and power—as feminine. This aspect of God was thought to be present at the creation of the world. The Rig Veda, the oldest Vedic writings, contains hymns that tell the story of Ghosha, a daughter of Rishi Kakshivan, who had a debilitating skin condition (probably leprosy) but devoted herself to spiritual practices to learn how to heal herself and eventually marry. Another woman, Maitreyi, is said to have married the Rishi Yajnavalkya (himself a god who was cast into mortality by a rival) for the purpose of continuing her spiritual training. She was a devoted ascetic and is said to have composed 10 of the hymns in the Rig Veda. Additionally, there is a famous dialogue between Maitreyi and Yajnavalkya in the Upanishads (another early, foundational collection of texts in the Vedic tradition) about attachment to material possessions, which cannot give a person happiness, and the achievement of ultimate bliss through knowledge of the Absolute (God).

Another woman sage named Gargi also participates in a celebrated dialogue with Yajnavalkya on natural philosophy and the fundamental elements and forces of the universe. Gargi is characterized as one of the most knowledgeable sages on the topic, though she ultimately concedes that Yajnavalkya has greater knowledge. In these brief episodes, these ancient Indian texts record instances of key women who attained a level of enlightenment and learning similar to their male counterparts. Unfortunately, this early equality between the sexes did not last. Over time Indian culture became more patriarchal, confining women to a dependent and subservient role. Perhaps the most dramatic and cruel example of the effects of Indian patriarchy was the ritual practice of *sati*, in which a widow would sometimes immolate herself, partly in recognition of the "fact" that following the death of her husband, her current life on Earth served no further purpose (Rout 2016). Neither a widow's in-laws nor society recognized her value.

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In similar fashion to the Indian tradition, the sage (*sheng*) tradition is important for Chinese philosophy. Confucius, one of the greatest Chinese writers, often refers to ancient sages, emphasizing their importance for their discovery of technical skills essential to human civilization, for their role as rulers and wise leaders, and for their wisdom. This emphasis is in alignment with the Confucian appeal to a well-ordered state under the guidance of a "philosopher-king." This point of view can be seen in early sage figures identified by one of the greatest classical authors in the Chinese tradition, as the "Nest Builder" and "Fire Maker" or, in another case, the "Flood Controller." These names identify wise individuals with early technological discoveries. *The Book of Changes*, a classical Chinese text, identifies the Five (mythic) Emperors as sages, including Yao and Shun, who are said to have built canoes and oars, attached carts to oxen, built double gates for defense, and fashioned bows and arrows (Cheng 1983). Emperor Shun is also said to have ruled during the time of a great flood, when all of China was submerged. Yü is credited with having saved civilization by building canals and dams.

FIGURE 1.3 The Chinese philosopher and historian Han Feizi identified sages with technological discoveries. (credit: "Portrait of Han Fei" by unknown author/Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain)

These figures are praised not only for their political wisdom and long rule, but also for their filial piety and devotion to work. For instance, Mencius, a Confucian philosopher, relates a story of Shun's care for his blind father and wicked stepmother, while Yü is praised for his selfless devotion to work. In these ways, the Chinese philosophical traditions, such as Confucianism and Mohism, associate key values of their philosophical enterprises with the great sages of their history. Whether the sages were, in fact, actual people or, as many scholars have concluded, mythical forebearers, they possessed the essential human virtue of listening and responding to divine voices. This attribute can be inferred from the Chinese script for *sheng*, which bears the symbol of an ear as a prominent feature. So the sage is one who listens to insight from the heavens and then is capable of sharing that wisdom or acting upon it to the benefit of his society (Cheng 1983). This idea is similar to one found in the Indian tradition, where the most important texts, the Vedas, are known as *shruti*, or works that were heard through divine revelation and only later written down.

Although Confucianism is a venerable world philosophy, it is also highly patriarchal and resulted in the widespread subordination of women. The position of women in China began to change only after the Communist Revolution (1945–1952). While some accounts of Confucianism characterize men and women as

emblematic of two opposing forces in the natural world, the Yin and Yang, this view of the sexes developed over time and was not consistently applied. Chinese women did see a measure of independence and freedom with the influence of Buddhism and Daoism, each of which had a more liberal view of the role of women (Adler 2006).

A detailed and important study of the sage tradition in Africa is provided by Henry Odera Oruka (1990), who makes the case that prominent folk sages in African tribal history developed complex philosophical ideas. Oruka interviewed tribal Africans identified by their communities as sages, and he recorded their sayings and ideas, confining himself to those sayings that demonstrated "a rational method of inquiry into the real nature of things" (Oruka 1990, 150). He recognized a tension in what made these sages philosophically interesting: they articulated the received wisdom of their tradition and culture while at the same time maintaining a critical distance from that culture, seeking a rational justification for the beliefs held by the culture.

CONNECTIONS

The chapter on the early history of philosophy covers this topic in greater detail.

FIGURE 1.4 Engraving of Greek historian Diogenes Laërtius from a 1688 edition of his *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*. (credit: "Diogenes Laërtius, ancient Greek writer" by Unidentified engraver/Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain)

Among the ancient Greeks, it is common to identify seven sages. The best-known account is provided by Diogenes Laërtius, whose text *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* is a canonical resource on early Greek philosophy. The first and most important sage is Thales of Miletus. Thales traveled to Egypt to study with the Egyptian priests, where he became one of the first Greeks to learn astronomy. He is known for bringing back to Greece knowledge of the calendar, dividing the year into 365 days, tracking the progress of the sun from solstice to solstice, and—somewhat dramatically—predicting a solar eclipse in 585 BCE. The eclipse occurred on the day of a battle between the Medes and Lydians. It is possible that Thales used knowledge of Babylonian astronomical records to guess the year and location of the eclipse. This mathematical and astronomical feat is one of Thales's several claims to sagacity. In addition, he is said to have calculated the

height of the pyramids using the basic geometry of similar triangles and measuring shadows at a certain time of day. He is also reported to have predicted a particularly good year for olives: he bought up all the olive presses and then made a fortune selling those presses to farmers wanting to turn their olives into oil. Together, these scientific and technical achievements suggest that at least part of Thales's wisdom can be attributed to a very practical, scientific, and mathematical knowledge of the natural world. If that were all Thales was known for, he might be called the first scientist or engineer. But he also made more basic claims about the nature and composition of the universe; for instance, he claimed that all matter was fundamentally made of up water. He also argued that everything that moved on its own possessed a soul and that the soul itself was immortal. These claims demonstrate a concern about the fundamental nature of reality.

Another of the seven sages was Solon, a famed political leader. He introduced the "Law of Release" to Athens, which cancelled all personal debts and freed indentured servants, or "debt-slaves" who had been consigned to service based on a personal debt they were unable to repay. In addition, he established a constitutional government in Athens with a representative body, a procedure for taxation, and a series of economic reforms. He was widely admired as a political leader but voluntarily stepped down so that he would not become a tyrant. He was finally forced to flee Athens when he was unable to persuade the members of the Assembly (the ruling body) to resist the rising tyranny of one of his relatives, Pisistratus. When he arrived in exile, he was reportedly asked whom he considered to be happy, to which he replied, "One ought to count no man happy until he is dead." Aristotle interpreted this statement to mean that happiness was not a momentary experience, but a quality reflective of someone's entire life.

Beginnings of Natural Philosophy

The sage tradition is a largely prehistoric tradition that provides a narrative about how intellect, wisdom, piety, and virtue led to the innovations central to flourishing of ancient civilizations. Particularly in Greece, the sage tradition blends into a period of natural philosophy, where ancient scientists or philosophers try to explain nature using rational methods. Several of the early Greek schools of philosophy were centered on their respective views of nature. Followers of Thales, known as the **Milesians**, were particularly interested in the underlying causes of natural change. Why does water turn to ice? What happens when winter passes into spring? Why does it seem like the stars and planets orbit Earth in predictable patterns? From Aristotle we know that Thales thought there was a difference between material elements that participate in change and elements that contain their own source of motion. This early use of the term *element* did not have the same meaning as the scientific meaning of the word today in a field like chemistry. But Thales thought material elements bear some fundamental connection to water in that they have the capacity to move and alter their state. By contrast, other elements had their own internal source of motion, of which he cites the magnet and amber (which exhibits forces of static electricity when rubbed against other materials). He said that these elements have "soul." This notion of soul, as a principle of internal motion, was influential across ancient and medieval natural philosophy. In fact, the English language words *animal* and *animation* are derived from the Latin word for soul (*anima*).

Similarly, early thinkers like Xenophanes began to formulate explanations for natural phenomena. For instance, he explained rainbows, the sun, the moon, and St. Elmo's fire (luminous, electrical discharges) as apparitions of the clouds. This form of explanation, describing some apparent phenomenon as the result of an underlying mechanism, is paradigmatic of scientific explanation even today. Parmenides, the founder of the Eleatic school of philosophy, used logic to conclude that whatever fundamentally exists must be unchanging because if it ever did change, then at least some aspect of it would cease to exist. But that would imply that what exists could not exist—which seems to defy logic. Parmenides is not saying that there is no change, but that the changes we observe are a kind of illusion. Indeed, this point of view was highly influential, not only for Plato and Aristotle, but also for the early atomists, like Democritus, who held that all perceived qualities are merely human conventions. Underlying all these appearances, Democritus reasoned, are only atomic, unchanging bits of matter flowing through a void. While this ancient Greek view of atoms is quite different from the modern model of atoms, the very idea that every observable phenomenon has a basis in underlying

pieces of matter in various configurations clearly connects modern science to the earliest Greek philosophers.

Along these lines, the Pythagoreans provide a very interesting example of a community of philosophers engaged in understanding the natural world and how best to live in it. You may be familiar with Pythagoras from his Pythagorean theorem, a key principle in geometry establishing a relationship between the sides of a right-angled triangle. Specifically, the square formed by the hypotenuse (the side opposite the right angle) is equal to the sum of the two squares formed by the remaining two sides. In the figure below, the area of the square formed by c is equal to the sum of the areas of the squares formed by a and b. The figure represents how Pythagoras would have conceptualized the theorem.

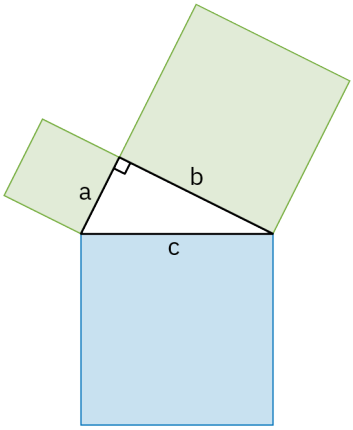

FIGURE 1.5 The Pythagorean Theorem describes the relationship between the sides of a right-angled triangle as demonstrated by the ancient Greek philosopher, Pythagoras. (credit: modification of "Pythagorean right angle" by Marianov/Wikimedia Commons, CC0)

The Pythagoreans were excellent mathematicians, but they were more interested in how mathematics explained the natural world. In particular, Pythagoras recognized relationships between line segments and shapes, such as the Pythagorean theorem describes, but also between numbers and sounds, by virtue of harmonics and the intervals between notes. Similar regularities can be found in astronomy. As a result, Pythagoras reasoned that all of nature is generated according to mathematical regularities. This view led the Pythagoreans to believe that there was a unified, rational structure to the universe, that the planets and stars exhibit harmonic properties and may even produce music, that musical tones and harmonies could have healing powers, that the soul is immortal and continuously reincarnated, and that animals possess souls that ought to be respected and valued. As a result, the Pythagorean community was defined by serious scholarship as well as strict rules about diet, clothing, and behavior.

Additionally, in the early Pythagorean communities, it was possible for women to participate and contribute to philosophical thought and discovery. Pythagoras himself was said to have been inspired to study philosophy by the Delphic priestess Themistoclea. His wife Theano is credited with contributing to important discoveries in the realms of numbers and optics. She is said to have written a treatise, *On Piety*, which further applies Pythagorean philosophy to various aspects of practical life (Waithe 1987). Myia, the daughter of this illustrious couple, was also an active and productive part of the community. At least one of her letters has survived in which she discusses the application of Pythagorean philosophy to motherhood. The Pythagorean school is an example of how early philosophical and scientific thinking combines with religious, cultural, and ethical beliefs and practices to embrace many different aspects of life.

How It All Hangs Together

Closer to the present day, in 1962, Wilfrid Sellars, a highly influential 20th-century American philosopher, wrote a chapter called “Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man” in *Frontiers of Science and Philosophy*. He opens the essay with a dramatic and concise description of philosophy: “The aim of philosophy, abstractly formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the

broadest possible sense of the term." If we spend some time trying to understand what Sellars means by this definition, we will be in a better position to understand the academic discipline of philosophy. First, Sellars emphasizes that philosophy's goal is to understand a very wide range of topics—in fact, the widest possible range. That is to say, philosophers are committed to understanding everything insofar as it can be understood. This is important because it means that, on principle, philosophers cannot rule out any topic of study. However, for a philosopher not every topic of study deserves equal attention. Some things, like conspiracy theories or paranoid delusions, are not worth studying because they are not real. It may be worth understanding why some people are prone to paranoid delusions or conspiratorial thinking, but the content of these ideas is not worth investigating. Other things may be factually true, such as the daily change in number of the grains of sand on a particular stretch of beach, but they are not worth studying because knowing that information will not teach us about how things hang together. So a philosopher chooses to study things that are informative and interesting—things that provide a better understanding of the world and our place in it.

To make judgments about which areas are interesting or worthy of study, philosophers need to cultivate a special skill. Sellars describes this philosophical skill as a kind of know-how (a practical, engaged type of knowledge, similar to riding a bike or learning to swim). Philosophical know-how, Sellars says, has to do with knowing your way around the world of concepts and being able to understand and think about how concepts connect, link up, support, and rely upon one another—in short, how things hang together. Knowing one's way around the world of concepts also involves knowing where to look to find interesting discoveries and which places to avoid, much like a good fisherman knows where to cast his line. Sellars acknowledges that other academics and scientists know their way around the concepts in their field of study much like philosophers do. The difference is that these other inquirers confine themselves to a specific field of study or a particular subject matter, while philosophers want to understand the whole. Sellars thinks that this philosophical skill is most clearly demonstrated when we try to understand the connection between the natural world as we experience it directly (the "manifest image") and the natural world as science explains it (the "scientific image"). He suggests that we gain an understanding of the nature of philosophy by trying to reconcile these two pictures of the world that most people understand independently.

READ LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

"Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man"

This essay, "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man (https://openstax.org/r/psim)" by Wilfrid Sellars, has been republished several times and can be found online. Read through the essay with particular focus on the first section. Consider the following study questions:

- What is the difference between knowing how and knowing that? Are these concepts always distinct? What does it mean for philosophical knowledge to be a kind of know-how?
- What do you think Sellars means when he says that philosophers "have turned other special subject-matters to non-philosophers over the past 2500 years"?
- Sellars describes philosophy as "bringing a picture into focus," but he is also careful to recognize challenges with this metaphor as it relates to the body of human knowledge. What are those challenges? Why is it difficult to imagine all of human knowledge as a picture or image?
- What is the scientific image of man in the world? What is the manifest image of man in the world? How are they different? And why are these two images the primary images that need to be brought into focus so that philosophy may have an eye on the whole?

Unlike other subjects that have clearly defined subject matter boundaries and relatively clear methods of exploration and analysis, philosophy intentionally lacks clear boundaries or methods. For instance, your biology textbook will tell you that biology is the "science of life." The boundaries of biology are fairly clear: it is an experimental science that studies living things and the associated material necessary for life. Similarly,

biology has relatively well-defined methods. Biologists, like other experimental scientists, broadly follow something called the "scientific method." This is a bit of a misnomer, unfortunately, because there is no single method that all the experimental sciences follow. Nevertheless, biologists have a range of methods and practices, including observation, experimentation, and theory comparison and analysis, that are fairly well established and well known among practitioners. Philosophy doesn't have such easy prescriptions—and for good reason. Philosophers are interested in gaining the broadest possible understanding of things, whether that be nature, what is possible, morals, aesthetics, political organizations, or any other field or concept.

1.2 How Do Philosophers Arrive at Truth?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify philosophical methods of inquiry.
- Explain the role of logical consequences in assessing a philosophical position.
- Define conceptual analysis, coherence, argument, intuition, and experimental philosophy.
- Explain the importance of trade-offs in establishing a philosophical position.

We have seen some examples of how philosophy emerged in antiquity, its relationship to natural philosophy and modern science, and one goal of philosophy, specifically—to provide a coherent story of how the world as it appears to us can be explained in a way that also makes sense of what the sciences tells us. In this section, we describe in greater detail the specific strategies and tools that philosophers use to arrive at truth.

Sources of Evidence

Even though philosophy is not an empirical science, philosophical claims require evidence, and philosophers ought to have reasons for the claims they make. There are many different types of philosophical evidence, some of which follow.

History

A basic but underappreciated source of evidence in philosophy is the history of philosophy. As we have already seen, philosophical thinking has its origins around the world, from the beginning of recorded history. Historical philosophers, sages, natural philosophers, and religious thinkers are often a source of insight, inspiration, and argument that can help us understand contemporary philosophical questions. For instance, the Greeks recognized early on that there is a difference between the way we use language to talk about things, with generic terms that apply to many different things at the same time (like cat, tree, or house), and the things as they actually exist—namely, as specific, individual beings or objects. Philosophers ask, what is the relationship between the general terms we use and the specific things that exist in the world? This sort of question is a perennial philosophical question. Today's philosophers have their own response to this sort of question, and their answers often respond to and are informed by the historical treatment of these issues.

FIGURE 1.6 European philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau influenced the framing of the United States Constitution. (credit: "Jean Jacques Rousseau. Né en Genêve en 1708 (https://openstax.org/r/digitalcollections)" by Maurice Quentin de La Tour/New York Public Library)

While you may expect questions about the natural world to change over time (and certainly they have changed due to scientific progress), questions of morality and social organization do not change as much. What constitutes the good life? How should communities be organized to benefit all the members of that community? These sorts of questions stay with us throughout time. In the United States, it is common for political leaders to appeal to the "founding fathers" of the US Constitution. People like Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and George Washington were heavily influenced by early modern European philosophers like John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Thomas Hobbes. In similar fashion, the current Chinese leader, Xi Jinping, is fond of reading and citing the foundational philosopher Confucius. Most of Xi's addresses include quotations from Confucius, and Xi stresses the importance of reading classical Chinese philosophers (Zhang 2015). For Chinese political leaders, Confucius provides an important reminder of the role of virtue and a sense of belonging among the Chinese people. There is a widespread belief among the Chinese political class that their intellectual heritage is an important factor in their contemporary political success, in much the same way as American political leaders trace their success back to the founding fathers. Given the influence of philosophy on world history, it is worthwhile to engage with the writings of past philosophers to inform our understanding of pressing philosophical questions of today.

Intuition

One of the hallmarks of philosophical thinking is an appeal to **intuition**. What philosophers today mean by intuition can best be traced back to Plato, for whom intuition (*nous*) involved a kind of insight into the very nature of things. This notion has had religious connotations, as if the knowledge gained through intuition is like catching a glimpse of divine light. But intuition does not have to involve faith. René Descartes defined intuition in the following manner: "By intuition [I mean] . . . the conception of a clear and attentive mind, which is so easy and distinct that there can be no room for doubt about what we are understanding" (Descartes 1985, 14). This concept of intuition is clearest in mathematical examples. Importantly, it is quite different from the way that many people use the word *intuition* today to mean something like "gut feeling" or "hunch." When philosophers talk about intuition, they mean something much more definite. Consider the equation 2 + 2 = 4.

Examine the equation in your mind. Could it possibly be false? So long as we operate under the assumption that these numbers represent counting numbers, it seems impossible that this equation could be false. More than that, there is a kind of clarity and certainty about the equation. It is not just that you have learned 2 + 2 = 4 by habit. You could easily perform the counting operation in your head and verify that the answer is correct. The truth of this mathematical sentence is so clear that if it turned out to be wrong, you would have to give up core beliefs about the nature of numbers, addition, and equality. This kind of clarity is a paradigm of intuition.

Intuition operates in other realms besides mathematics, such as in the use of language. For instance, it is obvious that a three-legged stool has three legs or that the tallest building is taller than any other building. These statements are true in an obvious way that is similar to the mathematical sentence above. We can branch out further, to say, for instance, that a camel is a mammal. We might intuitively know this statement is true, but we may also recognize that we are on slightly less certain ground. After all, whether a camel is a mammal is based on some understanding of the anatomy of a camel as well as the biological classification system that assigns animals to different classes. So the definition of *camel* as "a mammal" is not the same as "a three-legged stool has three legs." Here, we can see that some statements are intuitively true by virtue of their definition. Others are intuitively true by virtue of some mental operation that we can perform very easily. Still others are intuitively true in that they rely on a body of knowledge that is commonly accepted and foundational for our understanding of the world.

There are many other places outside of pure linguistic analysis and mathematics where intuitions are helpful. Consider morality: the proposition that "it is better to be good than to be bad" may seem similar to the statement that "a three-legged stool has three legs," but the former introduces the words *good* and *bad*, which are fraught terms that produce disagreement among people. Nonetheless, while it may be difficult to agree on what constitutes "good" or "bad," everyone probably recognizes that whatever is good ought to be better than what is bad. That seems intuitively true. On this basis, we might imagine that there are intuitive truths even in morality. As we gain confidence in the ability of intuition to reveal truth, we might be tempted to extend intuitions even further. However, when intuitions extend into areas where there is no consensus on what is true, we have to be cautious. At that point, we might be using the term *intuition* to stand in for *belief* or *perspective*. Such "intuitions" do not have the same force as the intuition that 2 + 2 = 4. It is not always easy to distinguish between intuitions that are certain and evident and those that are mere feelings or hunches; recognizing that distinction is part of the practical know-how philosophers try to develop.

Common Sense

We ought not to neglect a third source of evidence in philosophy, namely, common sense. The idea of **common sense** is frequently used to describe a basic set of facts or common knowledge that any adult human being ought to possess. But common sense is rarely defined. When philosophers talk about common sense, they mean specific claims based on direct sense perception, which are true in a relatively fundamental sense. In other words, philosophical champions of common sense deny that one can be skeptical of certain basic claims of sense perception.

Famously, early-20th-century British philosopher G. E. Moore argued that a perfectly rigorous proof of the external world could be given by simply making the appropriate gesture toward his right hand and saying, "Here is one hand." So long as it is granted that the sensory perception of a hand is evidence of the existence of a hand and that there is such a thing as a hand in the external world, then it must be granted that there is an external world. Such an argument trades on the idea that knowledge of the existence of one's own hands is something that does not need further proof; it is something we can know without proof. This idea is not something that all philosophers accept, but it is, in many cases, an important source of evidence in philosophical inquiry. At a certain point, it may be necessary to stop demanding proofs for the things we can plainly see, such as the fact that this is a hand (as we hold a hand in front of our faces and examine it). Common sense may be questioned by further philosophical interrogation, but the common-sense philosopher may respond that such interrogation is either unnecessary, excessive, or misses the point.

Experimental Philosophy

Experimental philosophy is a relatively recent movement in philosophy by which philosophers engage in empirical methods of investigation, similar to those used by psychologists or cognitive scientists. The basic idea motivating experimental philosophy is that philosophers use terms and concepts that can be tested in a laboratory. For instance, when philosophers talk about free will, they frequently cite the idea that free will is necessary to assign moral responsibility; thus, moral responsibility is one reason to believe in the existence of free will. Consequently, you might wonder whether most people do, in fact, believe that the existence of free will is necessary to assign moral responsibility. This claim can be tested, for instance, by posing problems or scenarios to research subjects and asking them whether the absence of free choice removes moral responsibility. Similar strategies have been applied to causation, philosophy of biology, consciousness, personal identity, and so forth. In these areas, philosophers use experimental methods to find out what average people think about philosophical issues. Since common sense and intuition are already a source of evidence in philosophical reasoning, it makes sense to confirm that what philosophers ascribe to common sense or intuition aligns with what people generally think about these things.

Such experimental research is subject to many of the same issues that confront experimentation in the social sciences. These studies need to be replicable and ought to fall within a psychological or biological theory that helps explain them. When philosophers tread into experimental philosophy, they behave a lot more like scientists than philosophers, and they are held to the same rigorous standards as other researchers in similar experimental disciplines.

Results from Other Disciplines

The relevance of experimental methods for philosophy suggests a broader source of evidence for philosophical claims, namely, the results of scientific disciplines. When philosophers make claims about the natural world, they ought to be aware of what the natural sciences say. When philosophers make claims about human nature, they ought to be aware of what biology and the social sciences say. As we have already seen, there is an important difference between philosophical investigation and these various disciplines. Yet, given that philosophers attempt to gain some understanding of truth as a whole, they ought to welcome evidence from other disciplines that can help them better understand portions of that whole truth.

Table 1.1 summarizes these different types of philosophical evidence.

Type of Evidence	Description	Example
History	The insights of historical philosophers, sages, natural philosophers, and religious thinkers can help us understand contemporary philosophical questions.	The question “What is a good life?” is a perennial philosophical concern; attempts at answers from the past continue to have relevance for contemporary people.
Intuition	The philosophical meaning of intuition can best be traced back to Plato, for whom intuition involved a kind if insight into the very nature of things.	The truth of a mathematical sentence like “2+2=4” is so clear that if it turned out to be wrong, you would have to give up core beliefs about the nature of numbers, addition, and equality.

TABLE 1.1 Types of Philosophical Evidence

Type of Evidence	Description	Example
Common sense	When philosophers talk about common sense, they mean specific claims based on direct sense perception.	Someone who is holding their hand in front of their face can rightly claim "this is my hand" without having to resort to any further proofs.
Experimental philosophy	The basic idea motivating experimental philosophy is that philosophers use terms and concepts that can be tested in a laboratory.	A philosopher might pose scenarios to research subjects and ask them whether they believe an absence of free choice would remove moral responsibility in these scenarios, in order to test a philosophical claim about moral responsibility and free will.
Results from other disciplines	Evidence from other disciplines can help philosophers better understand portions of philosophical inquiries.	Information provided by other social scientists (e.g., sociologists, historians, anthropologists) can be used to inform philosophical claims about human nature.

TABLE 1.1 Types of Philosophical Evidence

Logic

One of the first and most reliable ways that philosophers have of verifying and analyzing claims is by using **logic**, which is, in some sense, the science of reasoning. Logic attempts to formalize the process that we use or ought to use when we provide reasons for some claims. By interpreting the claims we make using logic, we can assess whether those claims are well founded and consistent or whether they are poorly reasoned. The chapter on logic and reasoning will provide much more detail about the nature of logic and how it is used by philosophers to arrive at truth.

CONNECTIONS

The chapter on logic and reasoning covers this topic of logic in greater detail.

Argument

The first and most important move in logic is to recognize that claims are the product of **arguments**. In particular, a claim is just the conclusion of a series of sentences, where the preceding sentences (called premises) provide evidence for the conclusion. In logic, an argument is just a way of formalizing reasons to support a claim, where the claim is the conclusion and the reasons given are the premises. In normal conversation and even philosophical writing, arguments are rarely written so clearly that one can easily identify the premises and the conclusion. Nevertheless, it is possible to reconstruct any argument as a series of sentences with clearly identified premises and conclusions. This process is the first step in analyzing an argument: identify the claim that is being made, then identify the sentences that provide supporting evidence for the argument. This process will necessarily require some interpretation on the part of the reader. Therefore, it is important to try to remain faithful to the original intention of the argument and outline the premises and conclusions in such a way that they display the reasoning of the person making that claim.

Once the premises and conclusion are identified and written in order, it is possible to use formal techniques to evaluate the argument. Formal techniques will be covered in the chapter on logic and reasoning. For now, it is sufficient to note that there is a process for evaluating whether claims are well supported by using the techniques of logic. Poorly supported claims may be true, but without good reasons to accept those claims, a

person's support of them is irrational. In philosophy, we want to understand and evaluate the reasons for a claim. Just as a house that is built without a solid foundation will rapidly deteriorate and eventually fall, the philosopher who accepts claims without good reasons is likely to hold a system of beliefs that will crumble.

Explanation

While arguments can be thought of as building blocks to construct a solid foundation for beliefs about the world, arguments can also be understood as explanations for phenomena that are evident but not well understood. To generate well-founded beliefs, we start with evidence in the form of premises and infer a conclusion from that evidence. To explain observed phenomena, we start with a conclusion in the form of some observation and reason backward to the evidence that explains why the observation is true. For example, we infer that there is a fire based on the appearance of smoke, or we infer lightning when we hear thunder, even if we do not see the lightning. We can compare the way we reason about explanations to the way a detective might reconstruct a crime based on the evidence found at a crime scene. By reconstructing the premises that led to a given conclusion, a philosopher can explain the reasons for a conclusion that are evident through observation. In summary, logical reconstruction can be used to investigate the world around us, providing a rational explanation for why the world is the way it appears.

Coherence

Finally, logic provides philosophers with a powerful technique for assessing a set of claims or beliefs. We can ask whether a set of beliefs is logically consistent with one another. Given that we expect our beliefs to present to us a world that makes rational sense, we want those beliefs to be internally consistent. A set of beliefs or statements is **coherent**, or logically consistent, if it is possible for them to all be true at the same time. If it is not possible for statements or beliefs to be true at the same time, then they are contradictory. It seems unreasonable for a person to accept contradictory claims because a contradiction is a logical impossibility. If a person holds contradictory beliefs, then they must be wrong about at least some of their beliefs. Metaphorically, the house of beliefs in which they live must be poorly founded, at least in some places. When you are reading philosophy, you should be aware of places where the author says things that appear to be inconsistent. If you discover inconsistencies, that is a good indication that at least one of their claims is false. You may not know which claim is false, but you can know it is logically impossible for all claims to be true.

When faced with the possibility of incoherent beliefs, the philosopher will need to either revise those beliefs so that they become consistent, or they will need to give up some beliefs to preserve others. Logical consistency cannot tell us that a set of beliefs is true; a complete fiction might be logically consistent. But logical consistency can tell us what is not true. It is impossible for a logically inconsistent set of beliefs to be wholly true.

Conceptual Analysis

One of the techniques that philosophers use to clarify and understand philosophical statements (either premises or conclusions) is **conceptual analysis**. Conceptual analysis involves the analysis of concepts, notions, or ideas as they are presented in statements or sentences. The term *analysis* has been a part of philosophical terminology and methodology since its beginning. In its most basic sense, analysis refers to the process of breaking apart complex ideas into simpler ones. Analysis also involves a cluster of related strategies that philosophers use to discover truths. Each of these techniques attempts to arrive at a clearer and more workable definition of the concepts in question.

When students are asked to give a definition of some concept or term, they frequently go to a dictionary. But a dictionary provides only a description of how a concept is used in ordinary speech. A dictionary cannot tell us what the word means in a fundamental sense because dictionary definitions never ask whether that common usage is coherent, accurate, or precise. It is up to the person engaged in reflection on the concept to figure out what the term means and whether that meaning fits within a larger understanding of the world. The next section illustrates four methods of analysis.

Predicates

When philosophers today talk about concepts, they are usually referring to a notion that comes from the work on logic done by German philosopher Gottlob Frege. Frege demonstrated that any sentence in natural language could be translated into a formal, symbolic language, provided that we consider the sentence to be a kind of function that describes a relationship between names (or objects) and concepts. This symbolic language is what has become modern logic. Frege modeled his logic on mathematics, with the idea that he could eliminate the ambiguity and vagueness of natural language by translating it into a purely symbolic notation. Following Frege, we can break sentences into parts, including names, or object identifiers, and concepts, or predicates.

FIGURE 1.7 Young Gottlob Frege in about 1879. (credit: "Young Frege" by Unknown author/Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain)

Predicates are descriptive terms, like "yellow," "six feet tall," or "faster than a speeding bullet." Simple sentences like "the flower is yellow," or "Superman is faster than a speeding bullet" can be easily analyzed into object terms and predicates. But any sentence can be analyzed in multiple ways. And some sentences express multiple relations between predicates and objects. So the role of conceptual analysis is to identify the right predicates for analysis and to clarify the relationship between them. Predicates can help us clarify statements. For any sentence, we can ask, what is being predicated, and how is it being predicated?

Descriptions

While the concepts that describe or categorize objects can be analyzed using predicates, the objects themselves can be analyzed by using descriptions. Bertrand Russell identified definite descriptions as the way to analyze proper names or objects. His idea is that in a sentence like "the flower is yellow" or "my dog likes naps," the subject term—"flower" or "dog"—can be substituted with a descriptive sentence that uniquely identifies this particular flower or dog. There are unique characteristics that differentiate my dog from all others, for instance: my dog was born on a certain day, lives in a certain city, belongs to me, or occupies a specific location. Similarly, the flower can be identified by its position in a garden, field, or particular geographical location. One of Russell's insights was that proper names, such as "Max" (suppose it is the name I

use to call my dog), are definite descriptions in disguise. That is, any proper name can be substituted with a description that identifies the one and only thing named.

A **definite description** is a way of analyzing names and object terms for the purpose of making them more like predicates. This way we can clarify what we are talking about without resorting to gestures, context, or direct experience. You probably do this in your everyday life when you encounter confusion about a name. For instance, suppose a coworker says, "Kevin used up all the paper in the printer." If there is more than one Kevin in the office, you might answer, "Which Kevin?" And your coworker may then respond, "The one with brown hair whose workspace is right next to the entrance." "Oh," you might reply, "You mean the one with the picture of his kids on his desk?" In a sense, this process of disambiguating the reference for the name "Kevin" is a process of seeking a more definite description to supplement the proper name. Understanding that language is composed of definite descriptions and predicates can help us remove some of the ambiguity and vagueness that is a natural part of speech.

Enumeration

Sometimes, to understand the meaning of a concept, it is helpful to enumerate its component parts. For instance, we may say that a governmental body is composed of its legislature, its executive, and its judicial branches. Or we might recognize that a cell is composed of a nucleus, a cell wall, and organelles. The process of **enumeration** can help us specify the nature of the thing we are talking about. In effect, we are identifying the parts that make up a whole. Since claims about the whole can be analyzed as claims about its parts and claims about how the parts pertain to the whole, it is helpful to enumerate the parts and consider how claims about the whole relate to claims about the parts.

Just as enumeration is helpful in understanding material things, it can be used to understand abstract concepts. For example, Aristotle says that wisdom is composed of scientific knowledge, plus understanding, where understanding is the grasp of first principles and scientific knowledge is the grasp of demonstrated reasoning that follows from first principles. Whether or not Aristotle is correct, his enumeration may help us understand the nature of wisdom.

Thought Experiments

When philosophers want to clarify the relationship between concepts, they often consider hypothetical scenarios meant to isolate one or more features of a concept and place it in the appropriate relationship with other concepts. Such hypothetical scenarios are called **thought experiments**. These imaginative scenarios allow us to test or compare concepts to better understand their connections and logical consequences. Philosophers have used thought experiments for as long as we have a written record of philosophical thought. For instance, Plato devised an elaborate thought experiment in *The Republic*, in which he depicts Socrates and several of his friends describing an ideal city. The premise of this thought experiment is that if the philosophers could describe an ideal city in detail, they would be able to identify which part of the city gives rise to justice.

Aristotle, a Greek philosopher who followed Plato, arrives at the famous claim that "nature abhors a vacuum" (i.e., nature would not allow empty space between matter) by constructing a thought experiment. To argue for this conclusion, Aristotle assumes that there is such a void and then asks, how could one know the distance between two points in a vacuum? If there is any distance between two points, Aristotle reasons, that distance would have to be the property of something. But, by hypothesis, there is nothing between the two points: it is a pure void. Aristotle bases his reasoning on the idea that it is impossible for properties to exist without something they are the property of. This argument reveals that Aristotle thinks distance is a property of matter. Accordingly, it is impossible to measure distance in a pure void. Therefore, Aristotle reasons, it is not possible for a void to exist because it would occupy a distance that has no measure. Puzzles like this one can prompt fruitful philosophical reflection. What do you think about it?

Thought experiments are also common in ethics as a way of testing out moral theories. A moral theory could

be supported by a thought experiment if the result of applying the theory to a hypothetical case made good moral sense. On the other hand, the thought experiment might undermine the moral theory by demonstrating that when the theory is applied, it results in an absurd or immoral outcome. In any case, thought experiments can help us clarify the relationship between our concepts and theories.

Table 1.2 summarizes these four methods of conceptual analysis.

Type of Conceptual Analysis	Description	Application
Predicates	Predicates are descriptive terms, like "yellow" or "six feet tall". The role of conceptual analysis is to identify the right predicates for analysis and to clarify the relationship between them.	Predicates can help us clarify statements. For any sentence, we can ask, what is being predicated, and how is it being predicated?
Descriptions	A definite description is a way of analyzing names and object terms for the purpose of making them more like predicates. This way we can clarify what we are talking about without resorting to gestures, context, or direct experience.	Understanding that language is composed of definite descriptions and predicates can help us remove some of the ambiguity and vagueness that is a natural part of speech.
Enumeration	The process of enumeration can help us specify the nature of the thing we are talking about. In effect, we are identifying the parts that make up a whole.	Since claims about the whole can be analyzed as claims about its parts and claims about how the parts pertain to the whole, it is helpful to enumerate the parts and consider how claims about the whole relate to claims about the parts.
Thought experiments	Thought experiments are hypothetical scenarios meant to isolate one or more features of a concept and place it in the appropriate relationship with other concepts.	Thought experiments allow us to test or compare concepts to better understand their connections and logical consequences.

TABLE 1.2 Four Methods of Conceptual Analysis

Trade-offs

Conceptual analysis, logic, and sources of evidence together help philosophers compose a picture of the world that helps them get a better grasp of truth. Recall that philosophers are attempting to understand how things hang together in the broadest possible sense. However, it is unlikely that any single philosophical picture of the world will turn out to be so obviously compelling that it completely satisfies all criteria of logic, evidence, and conceptual analysis. It is much more likely that there will be competing pictures, each with strong reasons for believing in it. This situation is the basis for philosophical discussions. No one picture is so obviously true that all others can be discarded. Instead, we have to evaluate each picture of the world and understand the trade-offs that these pictures impose on us. We have to consider the practical and logical implications of the beliefs we hold to fully understand whether those beliefs are true and right.

READ LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Excerpt from "Thinking and Moral Considerations" by Hannah Arendt

Hannah Arendt was a German-Jewish philosopher who fled Germany in the 1930s and eventually settled in New York City, where she became a prominent public intellectual. She is best known for her work on totalitarianism, power, and the notion of evil. She coined the phrase "the banality of evil" when reporting for the *New Yorker* magazine on the Nuremberg trial of Nazi bureaucrat Adolf Eichmann. The Nuremberg trials were a series of trials held in Nuremberg, Germany, after World War II in which Nazi leaders were held accountable for their war crimes before the international community. Subsequently, Arendt wrote the article "Thinking and Moral Considerations," in which she describes the ways that Eichmann's inability or unwillingness to consider the real, moral consequences of his actions caused him to behave in radically immoral ways. Arendt diagnoses the core problem of a person like Eichmann as "not stupidity but a curious, quite authentic inability to think." She considers thought to involve aesthetic and moral judgments; thus, for a person to engage in evil action, they must necessarily disregard self-reflection and conscientious thought.

Read this article, particularly focusing on the first two paragraphs and the last four paragraphs. You may be able to obtain a copy of the article through JSTOR (https://openstax.org/r/jstor) if you access this database through your college library. Then consider the following questions:

- In what sense does thinking require consideration of moral and aesthetic concerns? What is the relationship between thought and judgment?
- How does the word *conscience* function in Arendt's analysis? What is important about this word for understanding the nature of thought?
- How does the figure of Socrates function in Arendt's analysis to reveal the role of thinking?
- Why is thinking, in the sense that Arendt considers it, so easily disregarded by society? When does thinking matter most?

"Biting the Bullet"

Sometimes when weighing the trade-offs of a particular view and its logical consequences, you may decide to "bite the bullet." This means that you are willing to accept the negative consequences of the view because you find the view attractive for other reasons. For instance, on the topic of free will, a philosopher might be committed to the idea that past events fully determine the future. In such a case, the philosopher is willing to accept the negative implication that free will is an illusion. In ethics, some philosophers are committed to the view that morality is entirely determined by the total quantity of effects caused by an action. Such philosophers may be willing to accept things that would otherwise seem immoral, like harming an individual person, if that action results in a greater quantity of positive effects in the end. No view is going to be perfect, and it is difficult to make sense of the world in terms that we can explain and understand. Nonetheless, we must be honest about the logical and moral consequences of the views we hold. If you are ultimately willing to accept those consequences to maintain the view, then you can bite the bullet.

Reflective Equilibrium

Another method for assessing the logical and moral consequences of our thinking is to use judgments about particular cases to revise principles, rules, or theories about general cases. This process of going back and forth between an assessment of the coherence of the theory and judgments about practical, applied cases is called **reflective equilibrium**. This process requires the revision of a theoretical and principled stance based on practical judgments about particular cases. Reflective equilibrium is achieved when you are able to establish some coherence between your theoretical and practical beliefs. Reflective equilibrium is a kind of coherence method: that is, reflective equilibrium justifies beliefs by assessing their logical consistency. As opposed to a traditional coherence approach, however, reflective equilibrium encourages the use of practical

and applied judgments about cases as part of the set of beliefs that is logically consistent. Reflective equilibrium is an important method for introductory students to understand because students are frequently tempted to think they need to solve theoretical issues first before they can consider applications. Or they may choose a theory and then try to apply it to cases. Reflective equilibrium emphasizes that this procedure is likely neither possible nor desirable. Instead, a philosopher should be aware of both the theoretical commitments and the practical concerns of their position and use their understanding of each to inform the final analysis of their beliefs.

1.3 Socrates as a Paradigmatic Historical Philosopher

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain Socrates's appreciation for the limits of human knowledge.
- Identify Socrates's primary moral principles.
- Describe Socrates's life, death, and philosophical interests.
- Compare Socrates's moral philosophy with classical Indian philosophy.

Socrates is a foundational figure for Western philosophy. Even though he did not write any works himself, his life and thought are captured by three different, contemporary sources whose works we still have. Socrates is depicted in several of Aristophanes's comedic plays. Aristophanes, an accomplished Athenian playwright, won several dramatic competitions of his day. Eleven of his 40 plays survive, and in three of them—*The Clouds, The Frogs,* and *The Birds*—Socrates appears as a main character. Aristophanes's depiction of Socrates is ridiculous, and Plato appears to think that this depiction is partially responsible for Socrates's ultimate trial and death. Another contemporary of Socrates, the historian Xenophon, wrote an account of Socrates's trial and death in his *Memorabilia*. Finally, and most important, Socrates's student and friend Plato made Socrates the central figure in nearly all of his dialogues. Plato and Aristotle are the most influential of the Athenian philosophers and have had a profound influence on the development of Western philosophy. Plato wrote exclusively in the form of dialogues, where his characters engage in discussion centered on philosophical issues. Most of what we know about Socrates is derived from Plato's depiction of him as the primary questioner in most of the dialogues. Therefore, even though Socrates did not write works of his own, his life—and death—remain a testament to his profound and impactful philosophical life. For that reason, it is useful for us to consider the figure of Socrates as a paradigm of the philosophical life.

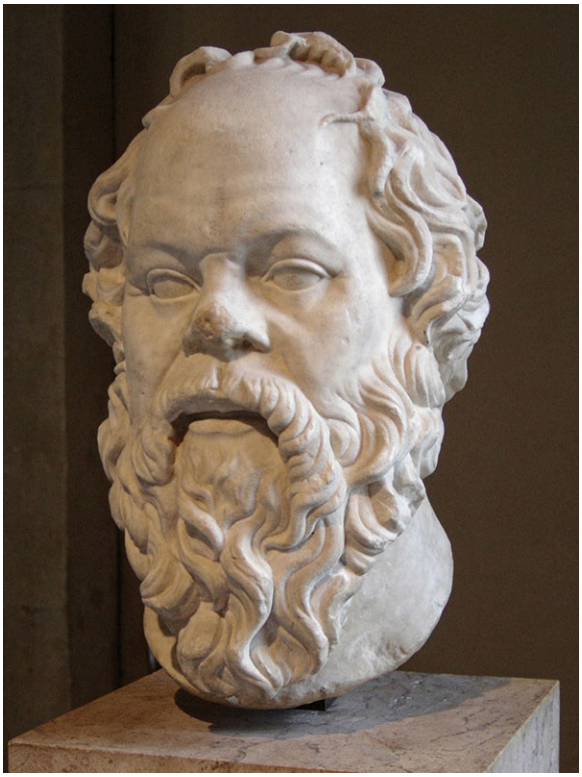

FIGURE 1.8 Roman 1st century marble sculpture of Socrates, which is perhaps a copy of a lost bronze statue made by Lysippos. (credit: "Head of Socrates, 1st Century, A.D." by Nathan Hughes Hamilton/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

In particular, Socrates's defense of himself during his trial is in many ways a defense of the philosophical life. Socrates was accused by a young, upstart politician named Meletus of corrupting the youth and undermining the gods of the city. These crimes were considered to be a kind of treason that undermined the legitimacy and future of Athenian democracy. The speech Socrates gave in his own defense to the Athenians, as recorded by Plato, remains a vivid and compelling defense of the sort of life he lived. In the end, his defense was not successful. He was convicted, imprisoned, and killed in 399 BCE. Plato provides accounts of the trial and death, not only in the *Apology*, but also in the *Crito*, where Socrates argues with his friend Crito that it would be unjust for him to escape from prison, and in the *Phaedo*, where Socrates engages in a debate with several close friends, arguing in his jail cell just before he dies that the soul is immortal.

READ LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

This excerpt from Plato's *Apology* (https://openstax.org/r/platosapology), translated by Benjamin Jowett, records one account of Socrates's defense at his trial. He is responding to accusations made against him in front of the Assembly, which was the main governing body and jury for trials in Athens. This body was composed of 500 citizens.

> I dare say, Athenians, that someone among you will reply, "Why is this, Socrates, and what is the origin of these accusations of you: for there must have been something strange which you have been doing? All this great fame and talk about you would never have arisen if you had been like other men: tell us, then, why this is, as we should be sorry to judge hastily of you." Now I regard this as a fair challenge, and I will endeavor to explain to you the origin of this name of "wise," and of this evil fame. . . . I will refer you to a witness who is worthy of credit, and will tell you about my wisdom—whether I have any, and of what sort—and that witness shall be the god of Delphi. You must have known Chaerephon; he was early a friend of mine, and also a friend of yours, for he shared in the exile of the people, and returned with you. Well, Chaerephon, as you know, was very impetuous in all his doings, and he went to Delphi and boldly asked the

oracle to tell him whether—as I was saying, I must beg you not to interrupt—he asked the oracle to tell him whether there was anyone wiser than I was, and the Pythian prophetess answered that there was no man wiser. Chaerephon is dead himself, but his brother, who is in court, will confirm the truth of this story.

Why do I mention this? Because I am going to explain to you why I have such an evil name. When I heard the answer, I said to myself, "What can the god mean? and what is the interpretation of this riddle? for I know that I have no wisdom, small or great. What can he mean when he says that I am the wisest of men? And yet he is a god and cannot lie; that would be against his nature." After a long consideration, I at last thought of a method of trying the question. I reflected that if I could only find a man wiser than myself, then I might go to the god with a refutation in my hand. I should say to him, "Here is a man who is wiser than I am; but you said that I was the wisest." Accordingly I went to one who had the reputation of wisdom, and observed to him—his name I need not mention; he was a politician whom I selected for examination—and the result was as follows: When I began to talk with him, I could not help thinking that he was not really wise, although he was thought wise by many, and wiser still by himself; and I went and tried to explain to him that he thought himself wise, but was not really wise; and the consequence was that he hated me, and his enmity was shared by several who were present and heard me. So I left him, saying to myself, as I went away: "Well, although I do not suppose that either of us knows anything really beautiful and good, I am better off than he is—for he knows nothing, and thinks that he knows. I neither know nor think that I know. In this latter particular, then, I seem to have slightly the advantage of him." Then I went to another, who had still higher philosophical pretensions, and my conclusion was exactly the same. I made another enemy of him, and of many others besides him.

After this I went to one man after another, being not unconscious of the enmity which I provoked, and I lamented and feared this: but necessity was laid upon me—the word of God, I thought, ought to be considered first. And I said to myself, "Go I must to all who appear to know, and find out the meaning of the oracle." And I swear to you, Athenians, by the dog I swear!—for I must tell you the truth—the result of my mission was just this: I found that the men most in repute were all but the most foolish; and that some inferior men were really wiser and better. I will tell you the tale of my wanderings and of the "Herculean" labors, as I may call them, which I endured only to find at last the oracle irrefutable. When I left the politicians, I went to the poets; tragic, dithyrambic, and all sorts. And there, I said to myself, you will be detected; now you will find out that you are more ignorant than they are. Accordingly, I took them some of the most elaborate passages in their own writings, and asked what was the meaning of them—thinking that they would teach me something. Will you believe me? I am almost ashamed to speak of this, but still I must say that there is hardly a person present who would not have talked better about their poetry than they did themselves. That showed me in an instant that not by wisdom do poets write poetry, but by a sort of genius and inspiration; they are like diviners or soothsayers who also say many fine things, but do not understand the meaning of them. And the poets appeared to me to be much in the same case; and I further observed that upon the strength of their poetry they believed themselves to be the wisest of men in other things in which they were not wise. So I departed, conceiving myself to be superior to them for the same reason that I was superior to the politicians.

At last I went to the artisans, for I was conscious that I knew nothing at all, as I may say, and I was sure that they knew many fine things; and in this I was not mistaken, for they did know many things of which I was ignorant, and in this they certainly were wiser than I was. But I observed that even the good artisans fell into the same error as the poets; because they were good workmen they thought that they also knew all sorts of high matters, and this defect in them overshadowed their wisdom—therefore I asked myself on behalf of the oracle, whether I would like to be as I was, neither having their knowledge nor their ignorance, or like them in both; and I made answer to myself and the oracle that I was better off as I was.

This investigation has led to my having many enemies of the worst and most dangerous kind, and has given occasion also to many calumnies, and I am called wise, for my hearers always imagine that I myself

> possess the wisdom which I find wanting in others: but the truth is, O men of Athens, that God only is wise; and in this oracle he means to say that the wisdom of men is little or nothing; he is not speaking of Socrates, he is only using my name as an illustration, as if he said, "He, O men, is the wisest, who, like Socrates, knows that his wisdom is in truth worth nothing." And so I go my way, obedient to the god, and make inquisition into the wisdom of anyone, whether citizen or stranger, who appears to be wise; and if he is not wise, then in vindication of the oracle I show him that he is not wise; and this occupation quite absorbs me, and I have no time to give either to any public matter of interest or to any concern of my own, but I am in utter poverty by reason of my devotion to the god.

"The Life Which Is Unexamined Is Not Worth Living"

After Socrates is convicted and has a chance to address the jury to persuade them to offer him a sentence or punishment other than death, he considers and then rejects the idea of exile. If he lived in exile, Socrates believed he would no longer be able to carry on his work as a philosopher because a foreign city would be even less welcoming of his strange questioning than his hometown. In speaking about this alternative, he says the following:

> Someone will say: "Yes, Socrates, but cannot you hold your tongue, and then you may go into a foreign city, and no one will interfere with you?" Now I have great difficulty in making you understand my answer to this. For if I tell you that this would be a disobedience to a divine command, and therefore that I cannot hold my tongue, you will not believe that I am serious; and if I say again that the greatest good of man is daily to converse about virtue, and all that concerning which you hear me examining myself and others, and that the life which is unexamined is not worth living—that you are still less likely to believe. (Plato, *Apology*)

This idea—that a life that is "unexamined" is not worth living—strikes at the heart of what Socrates tells us motivates him to live a philosophical life. The statement ought to make us pause and reflect, not only because Socrates himself demonstrates his commitment to a particular kind of life, to the point of accepting death, but also because the charge that an unexamined life is not worth living rightly seems like such a serious thing. To have lived a life that is not worth living: What could be worse? Given the stakes, we ought to wonder, what does Socrates mean by an unexamined life? Or, alternatively, what would it look like to examine one's life in the appropriate way?

Examination of the Self

The first form of examination that Socrates clearly advises is self-examination. At the temple to the oracle at Delphi, one of three maxims engraved in stone is the phrase "know thyself." Like most oracular statements, it is not clear what is meant by this phrase. Plato suggests it may be a kind of warning to those who enter the oracle: "Know your position relative to the gods!" Alternatively, it may be a command to understand your own nature and your own mind before you seek to understand other people or the things of the world. Based on our reading of Socrates's life and works, we can assume that he considers this saying to be a command to investigate our beliefs and knowledge, to appreciate the limits of our own knowledge, and to strive to eliminate inconsistencies. After all, Socrates's method of questioning as it is described in Plato's dialogues (and as Socrates himself describes in the excerpted passage) is exactly such an inquiry.

Socrates questions others about whether their beliefs are consistent and whether they have adequate justification for the beliefs they hold. This line of questioning suggests that Socrates holds such consistency and internal justification in high regard. We can imagine that Socrates considers an unexamined life to be one in which a person holds beliefs without justification or holds beliefs that are inconsistent with one another. We may then speculate that an unexamined is not worth living because it is dictated by beliefs and ideas that have never been tested, justified, or accounted for. You might respond that endless questioning is boring or difficult, or you may respond that "ignorance is bliss." For a philosopher, this attitude is not only undesirable, but it also

approaches irrationality. It seems that, whatever makes life worth living for creatures capable of rational thought, a minimum requirement is that we believe things worth believing in, hold positions we can defend, and understand why we do what we do. To do that, we need to engage in self-examination.

FIGURE 1.9 This image depicts Socrates in deep conversation with Athenian statesman Alciabiades, Athenian politician and orator Pericles, and Aspasia, a well-known Milesian woman who gained political and philosophical influence as Pericles' romantic partner. (credit: "Drawing, Socrates, Pericles, Alcibiades, Aspasia in Discussion" by Felice Giani/Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum, Public Domain)

Examination of Nature

Even though Socrates himself did not develop an account of nature and the cosmos like many of the pre-Socratic philosophers, we may imagine that living an examined life requires us to understand the world around us. Socrates himself was well aware of the various natural philosophical accounts that were prominent in his day. Plato frequently records Socrates quoting or citing another philosopher's account of the planets and stars, natural change, or other natural phenomenon when he is questioning others. Indeed, several of the dialogues place Socrates in conversations about the nature of the soul, the nature of causality, the classification of animals and plants, and so forth, all of which could fall under the examination of nature. Why might such a process of examination be important for a life worth living? We might speculate that it is important for us remain curious. The capacity to reason gives human beings the ability to investigate how things work—to discover truths about the world around them. Neglecting that drive to understand the world around us is like neglecting a natural skill. Methods of philosophical reflection can help us make sense of the world around us. Such investigation is characteristic of the ancient philosophers and may be considered part of a life worth living.

Human Wisdom Is Worth Little or Nothing

In the excerpt from Plato's *Apology*, Socrates investigates the oracle's strange response that he is the wisest of men. First, Socrates attempts to prove the oracle wrong by finding someone wiser than he. But, after a time, he comes to realize that the oracle's response was a kind of riddle. He interprets the oracle as saying that Socrates is wisest because he alone realizes that human wisdom is worth little or nothing. This realization is important for Socrates's own self-examination and provides an important lesson for philosophy students.

Understanding the Limits of Knowledge

Perhaps one of the greatest lessons you can learn from a well-rounded college education is just how much more there is to know about the world. Even the most respected scientists, philosophers, mathematicians, and historians recognize that the scope of their expertise is extremely limited. A lifetime of study can, at best, give a person deep insight into a tiny fraction of the universe of human knowledge. Beyond that, there is a vast domain of things that no human has yet discovered or understood. Consequently, it is a good idea to practice Socrates's advice: to be aware of what you do not know and not to assert knowledge where you lack it. People are often resistant to taking this position because they want answers. Someone who can convince others that they know the solution to their problems or personal dilemmas can exert a great deal of power over them. But we ought to recognize the dangers of asserting knowledge where we lack it. In technical areas, a refusal to admit ignorance can result in the failure of equipment, the malfunctioning of machines, and in the worst cases, injury and loss of life. In the moral and political arenas, asserting knowledge where you lack it may lead to unnecessary disagreements and polarization, or it may result in ill-considered actions that result in ethical mistakes or harm to others. Most importantly, if you are not aware when you lack knowledge, you will not seek to acquire the knowledge you lack. If you believe you already know something, you will not listen to the evidence that disproves what you believe. As a result, you will miss out on learning the truth.

The Socratic Method

Socrates engaged in a particular method of questioning, sometimes known as the **Socratic method**, that was characterized by his asking questions of others rather than explaining his own beliefs. Socrates is typically hesitant to offer his own ideas about the topic under discussion. Instead, he asks the people he is questioning to supply the subject matter for their discussion. Socrates's use of this strategy may be puzzling. One explanation may be that he is following the god's command, as he says in the *Apology*. Another explanation is that he does not claim to have knowledge about the topic in question and is genuinely happy to learn from others. Yet another possibility is that Socrates feigns ignorance and is being insincere. Perhaps his true goal is to trap or humiliate the other person by discovering some inconsistency or obvious falsehood in what they believe. It is hard to know which of these is the most likely explanation, but we will focus for a moment on a fourth possibility, namely, a pedagogical one.

In two different Platonic dialogues, Socrates explains what he is doing by using an analogy: he compares his method of questioning to the role taken by a midwife during childbirth. In fact, Plato tells us that Socrates's mother was a midwife and that he assumes her role in philosophical conversation. The goal of Socratic questioning, then, is to assist the person being questioned in discovering the truth on their own. By asking questions and examining the claims made by another person, Socrates allows that person to go through a process of self-discovery. This method provides an interesting lesson for teaching and learning. Often, students believe that their role is to simply receive knowledge from the teacher. But Socrates reminds us that real learning comes only through self-discovery and that the role of the teacher is to be an assistant, providing the kind of critical examination and evaluation necessary to help the student discover truth on their own.

The Importance of Doing No Harm

Even though many early philosophers were concerned with understanding nature, Socrates is much more concerned with ethics, or how to live a good life. He considers the primary purpose of philosophy to make one's life better by making the philosopher a better person. Even though Socrates rarely claims to have knowledge about anything at all, the few instances where he does profess knowledge relate directly to morality. In particular, Socrates asserts a pair of moral principles that are quite controversial and may appear at first glance false. However, upon closer inspection, you may find that these principles bear some truth that is worth consideration.

Socrates's Harm Principle

Socrates's harm principle claims the following:

1. No one willingly chooses what is harmful to themselves.
2. When a person does harm to others, they actually harm themselves.

The first principle is sometimes stated as "no one intentionally chooses evil," but for the purposes of this discussion, it will be clearer to consider the above formulation. The important thing to understand about the first principle is that Socrates believes that when people choose bad things, they do so out of ignorance. The reason he thinks so is that he believes all people desire what is good. For Socrates, it is intuitively true that whatever someone desires, that desire is always directed at something that appears good to them, which means a person cannot choose what is harmful for its own sake. Instead, Socrates reasons, when individuals do harmful things, they believe that what they are doing will bring about some good for them. In other words, when people choose evil, they do so in the belief that it is good or will bring about something good. If, in fact, they are wrong, then that was the fault of ignorance, not a desire to do evil. If they had better understood the consequences of their actions, Socrates reasons, they would not have chosen something harmful.

The second principle derives from the fact that Socrates thinks the greatest harm that can come to anyone is for their soul—or their character—to become corrupted. Since a corrupted soul is the result of making the kinds of choices that produce harm, it follows that whenever someone does something harmful, they corrupt their soul, so they harm themselves. At the end of the *Apology*, Socrates argues that it is not possible to harm a good man because, even though you might kill him, you cannot harm his character or make him do evil. Socrates seems to regard physical suffering, and even death, as a temporary and minor harm. Moreover, he regards the harm to one's character by living a life of ignorance or malevolence as far worse than physical death.

THINK LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

- Do you agree with the first principle of Socrates, which leads him to claim that no one willingly does harm? Why do you agree or disagree with him?
- Can you think of examples from your own life or experience that demonstrate that people deliberately do harm for harm's sake?
- Is the second claim true or false? Can you think of examples to prove the second claim true? False?
- Why might Socrates believe that harm to one's character is more significant than even death? Is Socrates mistaken? If you believe he is mistaken, on what do you base your claim?

When you answer these questions, be sure to give Socrates the benefit of the doubt. After all, there is no question that Socrates was a smart person. He lived at a different time and may appear strange to you, but you will find that his ideas are still relevant if you give them some consideration. After you take Socrates seriously, can you still find an error in Socrates's thinking?

Comparison of Socrates's Harm Principle with *Ahimsa* in the Indian Tradition

It may be instructive to consider the possible connection between the core concept of ***ahimsa*** in classical Indian philosophy and Socrates's harm principle as discussed above. Etymologically, the word *ahimsa*, in Sanskrit, literally means "the absence of doing injury or harm." The concept is found throughout Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist texts and likely has its origins deep in classical Indian thought. A well-known illustration of *ahimsa* comes from Jainism, where the concept is taken to what most of us would consider to be extreme measures—at least in the case of Jain ascetics observing *ahimsa* as one of the "great vows." Such ascetic Jains must take the greatest possible care not to cause harm, intentionally or unintentionally, to any creature, including insects, plants, and microbes. At the end of their lives, a devout Jain may even fast to death (stop eating) in one final renunciation of doing harm. Another well-known example of *ahimsa* can be seen the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, who used the concept to establish a nonviolent civil disobedience movement that some say helped speed the colonial British departure from India.

Ahimsa is identified as one of the highest virtues in the Vedic tradition (the Vedas are the most sacred scriptures of India) and is one of the loftiest teachings in Indian philosophy. The idea of *ahimsa* informs animal ethics, just-war theory, and interpersonal relations. On a metaphysical level, *ahimsa* is connected with karma—the causal law that links causes to effects, even across lifetimes. This informs the belief that an individual will bear a future burden for harms committed in the present through the process of *samsara*, or transmigration and rebirth of the soul. According to this religious and philosophical theory, the soul brings both its good and bad karma (fruit of action) with it from life to life and will either enjoy the fruits of prior good actions or suffer the consequences of bad ones. Because of the laws of karma and reincarnation, any action resulting in violence, injury, or harm has the direct consequence of chaining an individual's soul to a process of rebirth and material suffering. Insofar as a person causes injury and suffering to others, they increase the total negative effects in nature. In summary, the individual creates bad effects for themselves by acting badly. From the perspective of Indian philosophy, there is a natural connection among all beings, so causing harm or injury to one entity is like harming a family member or even a part of oneself. Additionally, because individual experience is governed by the laws of karma, harm and injury to others has the result of causing injury to oneself.

However, *ahimsa* does not focus only on the problem of causing harm. The practice of *ahimsa* also calls for the practice of love and compassion toward all beings. Following the same principles of karma and samsara, acts of love, kindness, and generosity have the effect of increasing the total amount of good in the world, of recognizing that we are, in the words of Martin Luther King Jr., "caught in an inescapable network of mutuality" and "tied in a single garment of destiny" (1963). The practice of love and compassion increases the possibility of liberation from material suffering.

It may be useful to consider possible comparisons between the Indian notion of *ahimsa* and Socrates's harm principle. Both doctrines teach that by causing harm, acting through violence, or causing suffering to others, we actually harm ourselves. They describe different mechanisms for how that harm comes to us. Which do you think sounds more likely to be true? Are there other advantages or disadvantages to either view?

Additionally, Socrates says that no one directly desires to cause harm or do evil; harm is the product of ignorance. For Indian philosophers, there is a connection between harm or suffering and ignorance as well. For them, suffering is caused by attachment to temporary things, both material and immaterial, including feelings, goals, or ideals. The remedy for attachment is enlightenment, which comes from recognizing that all perceptions, feelings, and desires emerge from prior causes and that the chain of causes continues without end. All things that are part of the chain of causes, according to Indian philosophers, are temporary. Once a person has this realization, they ought to recognize the harm that comes from attachment, from trying to hold on to any product of the unending chain of causes. The connection between ignorance and harm is quite different for each philosophy, but it may be worthwhile to consider how and why they are different. It may also be worthwhile to reflect on whether there is a connection between harm and ignorance and what it might be.

1.4 An Overview of Contemporary Philosophy

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify the role of professional philosophers in academics and beyond.
- Identify the structure, organization, and thematic goals of the textbook.

Contemporary academic philosophy bears minimal resemblance to the classical traditions we have discussed in the previous sections. Philosophers today, like other academics, focus on specific areas of research expertise with the goal of producing new research that advances our philosophical understanding of specific problems or topic areas. That said, philosophical investigation is still motivated by the same desire to make sense of things in the most general way possible. In this section, we will introduce you to what philosophy majors do. Additionally, we will provide a brief summary of the themes and organization of the textbook.

What Can You Do with a Philosophy Major?

Majoring in philosophy is a great way to complete a liberal arts degree. Philosophy will introduce you to fascinating ideas and teach you to think analytically and creatively. If you enjoy the topics in this book, you should consider a philosophy major.

Becoming a Philosophy Teacher

To pursue a career in academic philosophy, you must major in philosophy as an undergraduate and continue your studies in the field by doing some graduate work. Community colleges and some four-year schools employ instructors with a master's degree in philosophy. However, it is very common for these jobs to be occupied almost entirely by people with PhDs. Academic jobs, particularly in the humanities and liberal arts, are extremely competitive. Even with a PhD, it will be difficult to find a job in an academic department. That said, it is much more common to find jobs teaching than doing research, but many teaching jobs still require some research. A philosophy professor or instructor may be asked to teach on a wide variety of subjects, depending on the needs of the school. By contrast, when doing research, academic philosophers tend to focus on a very specific area with the goal of becoming an expert in that topic. Expertise is generally marked by the production of research work, such as a dissertation, book, or several research articles on the topic. Academic research jobs are typically secured with tenure, meaning that there are strong protections against unjustified firing. However, recent studies of federal data show that 73 percent of all academic jobs are not on the tenure track (meaning there is no chance to secure tenure). Additionally, 40 percent of all academic teaching positions are occupied by part-time faculty. The distribution of tenured, tenure-track, non-tenure track, and part-time employees varies greatly by institution type, with community colleges employing far more part-time instructors and far fewer tenured and tenure-track instructors. Meanwhile, research universities employ more tenured and tenure-track faculty and fewer part-time faculty (AAUP 2018).

Alternatives to Academic Philosophy

Philosophy undergraduate and graduate degree majors have many options outside of teaching and research in an academic environment. There is a widespread and somewhat mistaken belief that the purpose of selecting a college major is to prepare you for a specific career. While that may be true for some technical degrees, like engineering or nursing, it is generally not true for degrees in the liberal arts and sciences. Many students enter college with a desire to pursue a career in some area of business or commerce. Others plan to go on to a professional graduate school in medicine or law. While it may seem like the best career decision would be to major in business, premed, or prelaw, this notion is probably misguided.

The original idea behind a liberal arts and sciences education was that high school graduates could study a broad range of fields in the core areas of knowledge that are foundational for our culture, society, and civilization—areas like the natural and social sciences, literature, history, religion, and philosophy. By studying these fields, students gain insights into the key ideas, methods of investigation, questions, and discoveries that underlie modern civilization. Those insights give you a perspective on the world today that is informed by the history and learning that make today's world possible. And that perspective can have a transformative effect that goes far beyond job preparation.

When philosophy majors are compared to other majors in terms of their long-term career earnings, it appears that philosophy majors do very well. While the starting salaries of philosophy majors are lower than some other majors, their mid-career salaries compare very favorably with majors in areas like finance, engineering, and math.

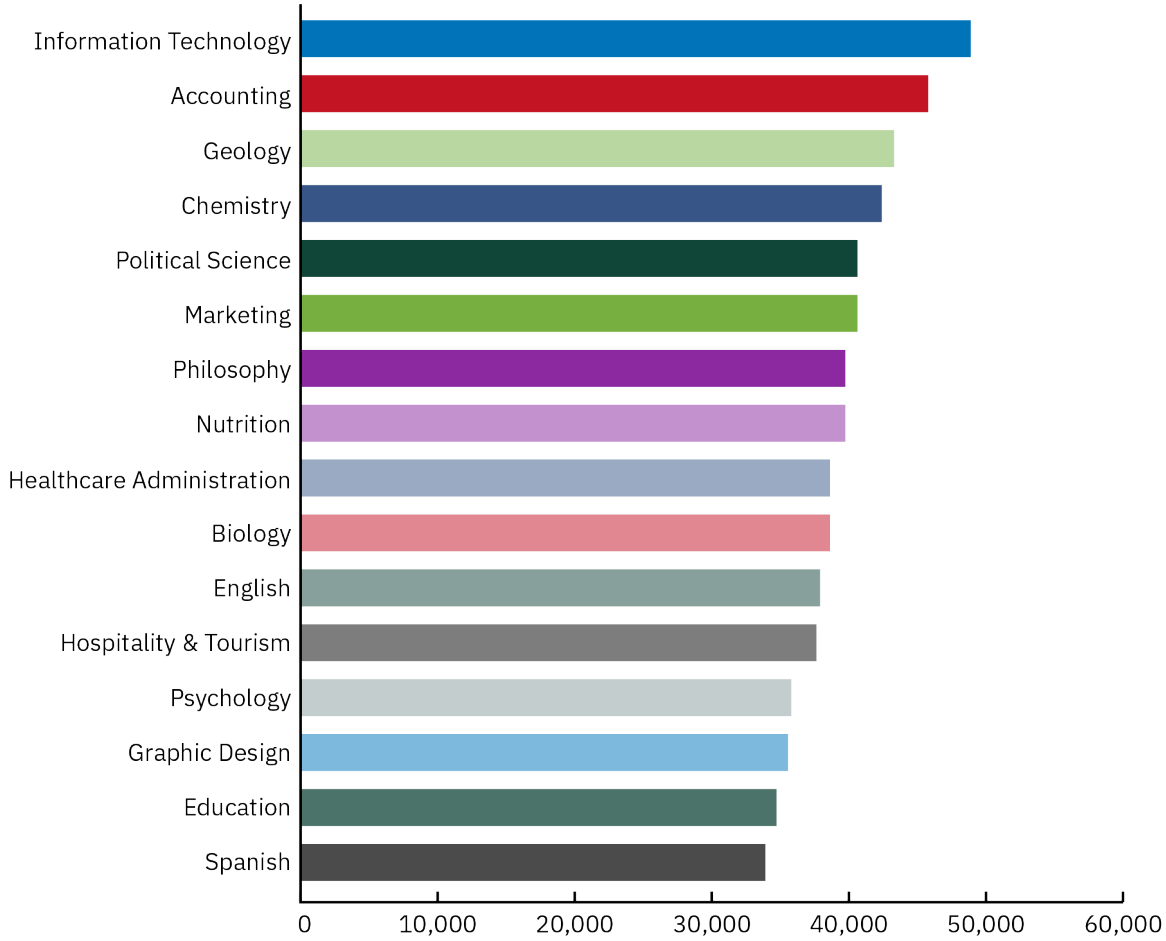

FIGURE 1.10 Median mid-career salaries (10 years after graduation) by college major. Philosophy majors make more, on average, than those majoring in many other areas. (source: *Wall Street Journal*) (attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax under CC BY 4.0 license)

Additionally, philosophy majors have some of the highest LSAT and GMAT scores of any major (these are the tests generally required for admission to law school and business school, respectively). Quite a few former philosophy majors have gone on to become CEOs of large corporations, such as Reid Hoffman, cofounder of LinkedIn, and Carly Fiorina, CEO of Hewlett-Packard (Chideya 2015).

Many philosophers who have earned a graduate degree in philosophy and held positions as professors and instructors have made successful transitions to other careers, including start-ups, technology, business, ethics review boards, and public philosophy. Nigel Warburton, a former philosophy professor, started the philosophy podcast "Philosophy Bites" that is one of the most downloaded podcasts on academic topics. He also is an editor-in-chief of the online magazine *Aeon*. David Barnett, a former philosophy professor, founded the company PopSockets in 2012 after leaving academia. That company now employs over 200 people and generates hundreds of millions of dollars in annual revenue. Additionally, there are a growing number of technology, neuroscience, and medical firms that are specifically looking to hire philosophers to help with research and ethics reviews. Marcus Arvan maintains a public directory of academic philosophers who have found work outside of academia at Philosophers in Industry (https://openstax.org/r/philosopher). In short, philosophers can be found nearly everywhere doing useful work and making good money. You should not let concerns about career prospects drive you away from studying philosophy.

An Overview of Your Philosophy Textbook

This textbook is organized in a way that generally reflects the broad areas of specialization in contemporary academic philosophy. Areas of specialization can be grouped into the following fields: historical traditions;

metaphysics and epistemology; science, logic, and mathematics; and value theory. The fields of science, logic, and mathematics include research into contemporary symbolic logic as well as interdisciplinary work in the philosophy of mathematics and the sciences; these areas are closely related to metaphysics and epistemology. Value theory includes metaethics and the meaning of value, aesthetics, normative moral theories (ethics), and political philosophy. This textbook aims to provide a general overview of each of these areas. We give students a theoretical survey of each field in philosophy and introduce applications of these areas of study to contemporary issues of interest. Additionally, we have an explicitly multicultural focus. We emphasize that philosophy has been studied and practiced throughout the world since the beginning of recorded history. In doing so, we are attempting to confront the Eurocentric bias that has been inherent to the study of philosophy in the West and create a more inclusive curriculum.

Throughout this text, we introduce you to the stunning array of philosophers and ideas from ancient Greece, Rome, and China, the classical Islamic and the late medieval European worlds, Africa, India, Japan, and Latin America. We help situate you within the different regions and time periods using timelines and other tools.

Whether you go on to study philosophy or this is the only philosophy course you take, the habits of mind and techniques of philosophical thought you will learn can have a transformative effect. When you allow yourself to reflect on how a certain situation connects to the whole, when you critically examine your own biases and beliefs, when you investigate the world with an open mind, informed by rational methods of investigation, you will arrive at a richer sense of who you are and what your place is in the world.

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Summary

1.1 What Is Philosophy?

The word "philosophy" derives from ancient Greek, in which the philosopher is a lover or pursuer (*philia*) of wisdom (*sophia*). The earliest Greek philosophers were not known as philosophers; they were simply known as sages. The sage tradition is a largely prehistoric tradition that provides a narrative about how intellect, wisdom, piety, and virtue lead to the innovations central to the flourishing of ancient civilizations. Particularly in Greece, the sage tradition blends into a period of natural philosophy, where ancient scientists or philosophers try to explain nature using rational methods.

Wilfrid Sellars emphasizes that philosophy's goal is to understand a very wide range of topics—in fact, the widest possible range. That is to say, philosophers are committed to understanding everything insofar as it can be understood. A philosopher chooses to study things that are informative and interesting—things that provide a better understanding of the world and our place in it. To make judgments about which areas are interesting or worthy of study philosophers need to cultivate a special skill. Sellars describes this philosophical skill as a kind of know-how. Philosophical know-how has to do with knowing your way around the world of concepts and being able to understand and think about how concepts connect, link up, support, and rely upon one another—in short, how things hang together.

1.2 How Do Philosophers Arrive at Truth?

The goal of philosophy is to provide a coherent story of how the world as it appears to us can be explained in a way that also makes sense of what the sciences tells us. Given the influence of philosophy on world history, it is worthwhile to engage with the writings of past philosophers to inform our understanding of pressing philosophical questions of today.

What philosophers today mean by intuition can best be traced back to Plato, for whom intuition (*nous*) involved a kind of insight into the very nature of things. This notion has had religious connotations, as if the knowledge gained through intuition is like catching a glimpse of divine light.

When philosophers talk about common sense, they mean specific claims based on direct sense perception, which are true in a relatively fundamental sense. In other words, philosophical champions of common sense deny that one can be skeptical of certain basic claims of sense perception.

Experimental philosophy is a relatively recent movement in philosophy by which philosophers engage in empirical methods of investigation, similar to those used by psychologists or cognitive scientists. Philosophers use experimental methods to find out what average people think about philosophical issues. Since common sense and intuition are already a source of evidence in philosophical reasoning, it makes sense to confirm that what philosophers ascribe to common sense or intuition aligns with what people generally think about these things.

Logic attempts to formalize the process that we use or ought to use when we provide reasons for some claims. The first and most important move in logic is to recognize that claims are the product of arguments. In particular, a claim is just the conclusion of a series of sentences, where the preceding sentences (called premises) provide evidence for the conclusion. In logic, an argument is just a way of formalizing reasons to support a claim, where the claim is the conclusion and the reasons given are the premises.

A set of beliefs or statements is coherent, or logically consistent, if it is possible for them to all be true at the same time. If it is not possible for statements or beliefs to be true at the same time, then they are contradictory. It seems unreasonable for a person to accept contradictory claims because a contradiction is a logical impossibility. If a person holds contradictory beliefs, then they must be wrong about at least some of their beliefs.

One of the techniques that philosophers use to clarify and understand philosophical statements (either premises or conclusions) is conceptual analysis. Conceptual analysis involves the analysis of concepts,

notions, or ideas as they are presented in statements or sentences. The term analysis has been a part of philosophical terminology and methodology since its beginning. In its most basic sense, analysis refers to the process of breaking apart complex ideas into simpler ones. Analysis also involves a cluster of related strategies that philosophers use to discover truths. Each of these techniques attempts to arrive at a clearer and more workable definition of the concepts in question.

1.3 Socrates as a Paradigmatic Historical Philosopher

Most of what we know about Socrates is derived from Plato's depiction of him as the primary questioner in most of the dialogues. The idea that a life which is "unexamined" is not worth living strikes at the heart of what Socrates tells us motivated him to live a philosophical life. The first form of examination that Socrates clearly advises is self-examination. Even though Socrates rarely claims to have knowledge about anything at all, the few instances where he does profess knowledge relate directly to morality. In particular, Socrates asserts a pair of moral principles that are quite controversial and may appear at first glance false. Socrates claims the following: 1) No one willingly chooses what is harmful to themselves; 2) When a person does harm to others, they actually harm themselves.

Socrates engaged in a particular method of questioning, sometimes known as the "Socratic method," which was characterized by his asking questions of others rather than explaining his own beliefs. The goal of Socratic questioning is to assist the person being questioned in discovering the truth on their own. By asking questions and examining the claims made by another person, Socrates allows that person to go through a process of self-discovery.

1.4 An Overview of Contemporary Philosophy

Contemporary academic philosophy is different from the classical traditions, although the motivation for doing philosophy remains the same. If you are interested in pursuing a career in academic philosophy, a graduate degree—most likely a PhD—is required. However, philosophy majors at any level can have fulfilling and rewarding careers in a variety of fields.

This textbook is organized in a way that generally reflects the broad areas of specialization in contemporary academic philosophy. Areas of specialization can be grouped into the following fields: historical traditions; metaphysics and epistemology; science, logic, and mathematics; and value theory. The fields of science, logic, and mathematics include research into contemporary symbolic logic as well as interdisciplinary work in the philosophy of mathematics and the sciences; these areas are closely related to metaphysics and epistemology. Value theory includes metaethics and the meaning of value, aesthetics, normative moral theories (ethics), and political philosophy. This textbook aims to provide a general overview of each of these areas.

Key Terms

Ahimsa one of the highest virtues of classical Indian religions. It is the practice of refraining from harming other living things.

Argument a set of sentences, where some of those sentences (called premises) provide support for another sentence, called the conclusion.

Coherence a situation in which it is possible for a set of beliefs or statements to be true at the same time.

Common sense knowledge primarily derived from perception that seems clearly or obviously true.

Conceptual analysis the process of taking apart and making sense of sentences or claims by examining their component parts.

Definite description a method of conceptual analysis that substitutes a descriptive phrase that uniquely identifies the object or thing named for an object term or proper name.

Enumeration the listing of the component parts of a concept, notion, or thing.

Experimental philosophy philosophy that uses methods from experimental science to test claims made in philosophy.

Intuition certain and evident cognition; the kind of knowledge that is so clear that it seems impossible for it to be false.

Logic the formalization of reasoning.

Milesians a school of early philosophers from Miletus; followers of Thales. They were known for examining the underlying causes of natural phenomena.

Philosophy the "love of wisdom." An academic discipline that attempts to grasp the broadest possible understanding of things. It is characterized by rational explanation and a willingness to question assumptions.

Predicate the portion of a sentence that provides the description or characterization of an object or name. (A philosophical predicate is different from the predicate of grammar, and their definitions should not be confused.)

Reflective equilibrium a process of reviewing a theoretical position by going back and forth between the theory and its practical applications. This process seeks coherence between theory and practice.

Sage a wise person. Many ancient cultures designated important wise figures as "sages."

Sanatana dharma the core or absolute set of moral and religious duties ordained for all people of ancient India, regardless of class or caste, and that predate the term *Hinduism*.

Socratic method a method of questioning used by Socrates (and named after him later) to help people understand what they were thinking and to arrive at some truth.

Thought experiment an imaginative scenario that tests some philosophical theory or concept by considering how it might apply in the imagined situation.

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Review Questions

1.1 What Is Philosophy?

1. What are some common characteristics of ancient sages in the Greek, Indian, and Chinese traditions?
2. What characteristics are essential for being identified as a “sage”?
3. What is the connection between sages and philosophers?
4. Provide one example of an ancient philosopher or sage who was doing something like natural science. What made this philosopher’s activity scientific?
5. What does it mean for philosophy to “have an eye on the whole”? How is this different from other disciplines?
6. Why is it necessary for philosophers to discard suppositions or assumptions that may be acceptable in other disciplines?

1.2 How Do Philosophers Arrive at Truth?

7. What are five sources of evidence commonly used in philosophy? Which of these are empirical? Which do not require observation or experiment?
8. What are three techniques used in conceptual analysis? Explain how they work.
9. What is coherence? What does it mean for a set of beliefs or statements to be coherent?
10. What do philosophers mean by intuition?
11. What are thought experiments?

1.3 Socrates as a Paradigmatic Historical Philosopher

12. Consider Socrates's conclusion that "human wisdom is worth little or nothing." Do you think this is true? Why or why not?
13. Do you think the Socratic method is an effective way of maintaining humility about knowledge?
14. What do you think Socrates means by "the life which is unexamined is not worth living"? Do you agree?
15. Compare and contrast Socrates's moral philosophy with that of the Hindu principle of *ahimsa*.

1.4 An Overview of Contemporary Philosophy

16. What are the primary areas of specialization in academic philosophy?

Further Reading

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Critical Thinking, Research, Reading, and Writing

2

FIGURE 2.1 Thinking: a sculpture of two figures in Prague. (credit: modification of "Thinking" by Kurtis Garbutt/ Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

CHAPTER OUTLINE

2.1 The Brain Is an Inference Machine
2.2 Overcoming Cognitive Biases and Engaging in Critical Reflection
2.3 Developing Good Habits of Mind
2.4 Gathering Information, Evaluating Sources, and Understanding Evidence
2.5 Reading Philosophy
2.6 Writing Philosophy Papers

INTRODUCTION You have likely heard the term "critical thinking" and have probably been instructed to become a "good critical thinker." Unfortunately, you are probably also unclear what exactly this means because the term is poorly defined and infrequently taught. "But I know how to think," you might say, and that is certainly true. Critical thinking, however, is a specific skill. This chapter is an informal and practical guide to critical thinking and will also guide you in how to conduct research, reading, and writing for philosophy classes.

Critical thinking is set of skills, habits, and attitudes that promote reflective, clear reasoning. Studying philosophy can be particularly helpful for developing good critical thinking skills, but often the connection between the two is not made clear. This chapter will approach critical thinking from a practical standpoint,

with the goal of helping you become more aware of some of the pitfalls of everyday thinking and making you a better philosophy student.

While you may have learned research, reading, and writing skills in other classes—for instance, in a typical English composition course—the intellectual demands in a philosophy class are different. Here you will find useful advice about how to approach research, reading, and writing in philosophy.

2.1 The Brain Is an Inference Machine

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Describe the role of emotion in thought.
- Explain how cognitive systems produce inferences without conscious thought.

One of the first steps to becoming a more critical and reflective thinker is to understand how and why you are prone to making mistakes in thinking. These mistakes are not the result of a lack of intelligence but are a function of the way our minds work and how they naturally lead us astray.

From a biological perspective, we have been shaped by hundreds of thousands of years of evolution, which have primed our brains to become extremely effective **inference** machines. An inference is the mental process that allows us to draw conclusions from evidence. While we tend to think of inference as a deliberative and conscious process, we infer all kinds of things unconsciously, effortlessly, and immediately; in fact, most of sense perception is a kind of inference. Inference making has been crucial to human survival, but our conclusions are not always correct. By becoming aware of how our brains function to ward off threats and provide us with "cognitive ease," or a feeling of well-being and comfort, we can begin to correct for and guard against faulty thinking.

The Brain's Adaptive Ability to Plan Ahead

One insight of evolutionary biology is that every cell and organ in our body is adapted to its local environment for the purpose of making it more likely that our genes will survive into the next generation. Consequently, it's helpful to think about the brain's role in propagating our genes. Our brains facilitate our survival and promote our ability to find a partner and reproduce by using thought, calculation, prediction, and inference. For this reason, our natural and genetically primed ways of thinking do not necessarily serve the goals of philosophy, science, or truth.

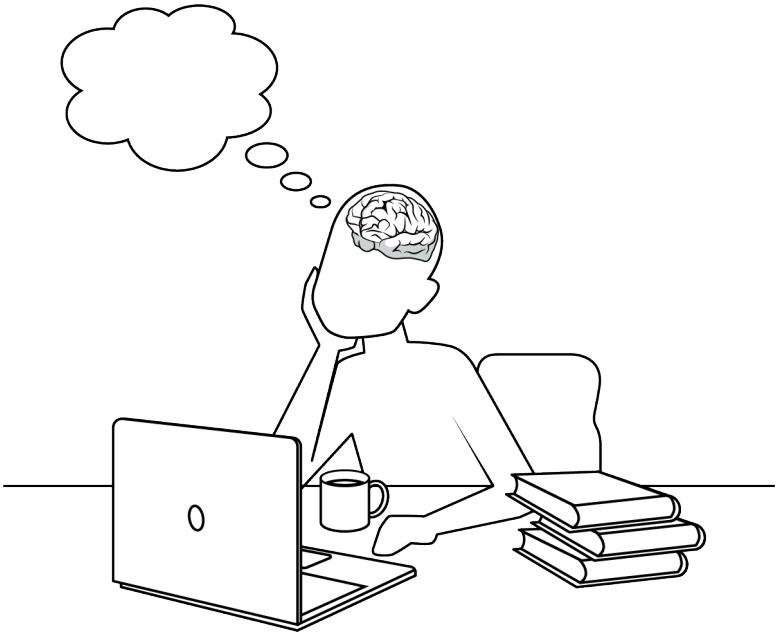

FIGURE 2.2 The "mind-brain" problem points to the unclear relationship between our thoughts, feelings, and perceptions, and the neurological and electrochemical interactions that take place in the brain. (attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY 4.0 license)

Philosophical Caveats about "Brain Talk"

Before we get much further, note that it is important to be cautious when we talk about brains and minds, which are distinct concepts. In fact, the relationship between mind and brain is one of the central problems of metaphysics, known as the "mind-body problem," which might just as well be called the "mind-brain problem." Briefly stated, the mind-body problem is the problem of understanding the relationship between the organic gray and white matter in our skulls (the brain) and the range of conscious awareness (the mind). We know that the brain and central nervous system provide the physical basis for our thoughts, perceptions, emotions, imagination, and desire—in short, our entire mental life. But biology does not tell us what the relationship is between our private mental life and the neurological, electrochemical interactions that take place in the brain. Is the relationship of the mind to the brain like the relationship between lightning and electrical discharge or a rainbow and the refraction of light through water droplets? In other words, is "the mind" just the term we use to label certain kinds of brain activity? Some philosophers think so. However, mental activity is not easily associated with any specific brain activity. Additionally, there seems to be something about the subjective experience of our mental life that is lost when we attempt to explain it fully in terms of brain activity. So other philosophers maintain that the mind is something different from the brain. Nonetheless, the mind and the brain are closely and somewhat mysteriously connected. As a result, it can be helpful to use the resources of psychology and **cognitive science** (the study of the brain's processes) to help us understand how to become better thinkers. We can think of the resources from psychology and cognitive science as providing us with a description of how the brain actually behaves. By contrast, when we study critical thinking, we are interested in how we *ought* to think. Being aware of how we do think may help us devise effective strategies for how we ought to think, but we should understand that the descriptions provided by psychology are not determinative. In this chapter, we explore psychological findings that can help you become more reflective about the ways your thinking can go wrong.

CONNECTIONS

Read more about the nature of the mind and the mind-body problem in the chapter on metaphysics.

Representation as Projection

While you may consider thinking to be made up of ideas or thoughts, philosophers and cognitive scientists use the term **representation** to describe the basic elements of thinking. Representations are information-bearing units of thought. This notion of representation can be traced back to Aristotle and has played a significant role in the history of philosophy, but in contemporary philosophy the term *representation* is more precise. When we think about things, whether through perception, imagination, memory, or desire, we represent those things. What is represented may be something present and real, or it may be fictitious, imagined in the future, or remembered from the past. Representations may even be unconscious. That is, the mind may have some defined content that is directed toward an object without the person being aware that they have produced such a representation.

During the process of representation, even in a relatively simple case of visual perception, the brain makes a complex set of inferences. For instance, consider the checkerboard below. You might imagine that when you perceive something like a checkerboard, your brain passively takes a mental picture of the grid. In this analogy, the eye functions like the lens of a camera, and the brain develops the picture to present to the mind. But there are several problems with this model. First, where is the picture in your brain? Who is viewing the picture in your head? There are further problems with the camera analogy that can be revealed when we examine optical illusions. Look at the checkered set of squares in Figure 2.2. Are the horizontal lines parallel?

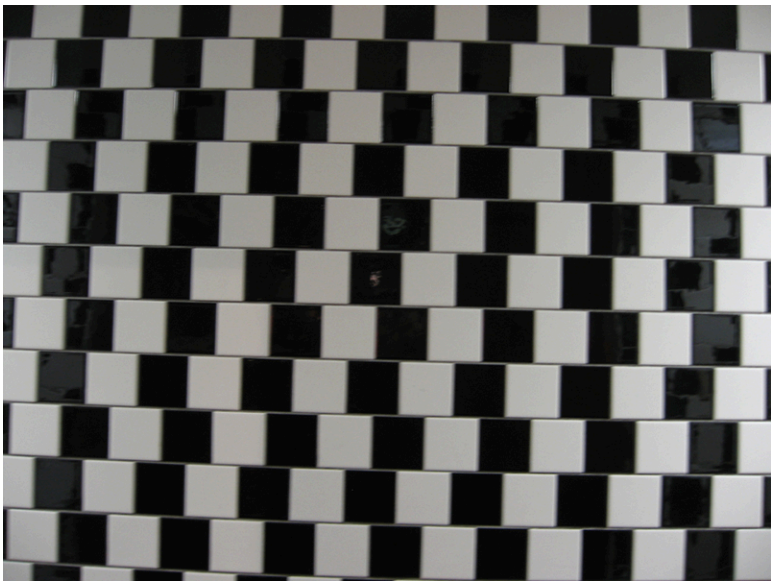

FIGURE 2.3 The horizontal lines on this grid are parallel, but unless you look at the image from the side, it is impossible to "see" this. This is one of many examples of common perceptual illusions. (credit: "Optical Illusion" by Selena N. B. H. CC BY 2.0)

In fact, the horizontal lines are parallel, but unless you look at the image from the side, it is impossible to visualize this. There are countless examples of these types of perceptual illusions. We represent the world outside as a stable picture that is completely filled in, in full focus, and uniformly colored. In reality, our visual field is limited and hazy around the edges, and colors change dramatically depending on lighting conditions, distance, movement, and a host of other factors. In fact, your brain is not passively capturing the world, like a camera, but is actively projecting the world so that it makes sense to you. In the illusion above, your brain is automatically adjusting your perception of the colored squares by accounting for the shadow cast by the cylinder. So your brain presents square B as if it is lighter than A by adjusting the hue of B to account for the shadow.

Neuroscientist David Eagleman (2011) uses the analogy of the front page of a newspaper to describe how perception works. The front page is a representation of the world's events for a given day. Of course, it does not

present a full or complete picture of the world, but a summary intended to highlight the events of consequence, those that have changed, and those that we are most likely to care about. Like a newspaper editor, your brain is working overtime to project an image of the world based on what is relevant to your survival. You unconsciously adjust the images you perceive to give you the impression that they are far away, nearby, moving, and so forth. Instead of the fully formed, three-dimensional image of the world we seem to see, we actually perceive a kind of sketch, highlighting what we need to know to navigate safely in our environment and obtain what we need. You probably think that sense perception is the clearest and most certain way you can know the world around you. As the adage says, "Seeing is believing." To become a better critical thinker, however, you will need to become skeptical of some of your basic beliefs. There are times when you absolutely should not believe your lying eyes.

Emotions and Reason: Homeostasis and Allostasis

In addition to the editorial license of mental representation, thinking is not always as rational as we imagine. The neuroscientist Antonio Damasio (1994) was one of the first to popularize the notion that rational thought is tempered by emotions. He is critical of what he perceives as the philosophical bias against emotion in the history of philosophy. In *Descartes' Error*, he says modern philosophers have neglected the role of emotions in thought, imagining that the goal of rational thinking is to eliminate the influence of emotions. Instead, his years of clinical work with patients revealed to him that emotions cannot be separated from reason. Our most rational thoughts are, in fact, guided, informed, and influenced by emotions. According to Damasio, reasoning and intelligence function best when we care about something. Without feelings, says Damasio, we are less rational, not more rational.

Damasio (1994) explains that emotions serve to maintain **homeostasis** in the brain through the chemical messengers known as neurotransmitters. Homeostasis is the biological tendency to find a neutral state of equilibrium (the word *stasis* means "standing still," and *homeo* means "same or similar"). This process relies on a feedback loop where current bodily states are monitored, observed, and then altered to bring the body back into balance. Most homeostatic processes in the body are unconscious, but emotions are linked to conscious awareness. For instance, when your blood sugar is low and your body needs calories, there is a series of chemical processes that give rise to the feeling of hunger. This is a conscious signal that you need to eat; it promotes behavior that ensures survival. Similarly, a rustling sound in the bushes at night will trigger a series of physiological responses (heightened senses, increased heart rate, pupil dilation, etc.) that correspond to the feeling of fear and promote behavior, such as fight or flight, that are necessary for survival. What Damasio demonstrates is that emotions have their own feedback mechanism, so that an idea or image can generate physiological responses even in the absence of an external stimulus. Because emotional responses and conscious thought are closely linked, decision-making can be influenced by this emotional-physiological feedback mechanism. Our thinking can go astray because we are afraid of bad outcomes, and that fear dominates a more rational calculation about which course of action is most beneficial (1994, 172–175).

In addition to maintaining equilibrium, the brain also anticipates future events and circumstances by projecting likely scenarios based on a catalog of past experiences and concepts generated through social norms and social interactions. The process of regulation that prepares the body to anticipate future needs before they arise is called **allostasis** (*allo* means "other or different"). Psychologist Lisa Feldman Barrett (2017) explains that the brain stores neural pathways that are triggered by external or internal stimuli to provide the closest match to the current situation. The neural pathways form a kind of template of action, promoting behavior like increased heart rate, pupil dilation, or motion. Feelings are a goal-oriented response to certain situations: they prepare us to behave and react in certain ways that promote what is beneficial to the body and sharpen and shape our awareness of the world.

In summary, the brain makes inferences about the world through perceptions, emotions, and concepts that are largely unconscious and deeply ingrained in our psyches. This process allows us to navigate fluidly and accurately through a world with so many and varied stimuli. Our reactions to stimuli are partially homeostatic,

meaning that the body tends to bring itself back into an optimal state of equilibrium, and partially allostatic, meaning that the body prepares for and anticipates future situations. Together, these impulses construct a picture of the world that we experience seamlessly and dynamically. Our experience is far more complicated than the crude mental model we imagine. We are projecting and constructing the world we experience as much as we are recording and viewing it. And that fact has important consequences for the kind of reflective and critical thought we ought to engage in when we try to think clearly about the world.

The Evolutionary Advantage of Shortcuts

Human beings have evolved to navigate the world most effectively and efficiently by engaging conscious awareness only when necessary. For that reason, you can walk through the grocery store while thinking about what you are going to cook for dinner. You do not have to consciously think about where to go, how to slow down to make way for other people, or how hard to push the shopping cart so that it maintains momentum in front of you even as its weight changes as you add groceries to the basket. All that biomechanical activity can be outsourced to unconscious mechanisms as you scan your shopping list. The brain is quite good at engaging in habitual activities without the assistance of conscious thought. And that is a good thing because conscious thought is expensive in energy terms. Consider the picture that follows.

FIGURE 2.4 Many inferences can be made about this woman's inner experience based on her expression and posture. While such inferences can be made quickly, they cannot be verified without further investigation, and they are highly susceptible to error, bias, and stereotyping. (credit: "CL Society 226: Woman with mobile phone" by Francisco Osorio/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

You are probably immediately able to provide complex inferences about this picture, such as the woman is worried, concerned, or anxious about something. The inferences you make about this image are easy, fast, and complex. They are driven by the kind of emotional and conceptual thought processes that are unconscious and efficient. While these inferences are quick and easy, you may also be aware that they are provisional without more information. Given more data about the circumstances surrounding this picture, you might revise your perception about what is going on. This is exactly the sort of thinking that drives the emotional projections discussed in the previous section.

A different type of thinking is required to solve a math problem. The following example comes from psychologist Daniel Kahneman's book *Thinking Fast and Slow* (2013). Try to solve the following in your head:

$$24 \times 14 =$$

Do you know the answer? For most people, multiplying two-digit numbers without pen and paper (or a calculator) is quite difficult. You might need perhaps 10 or 20 seconds of effortful thinking to solve the problem in your head since you do not have the unconscious mechanisms to do so automatically. Long-term social and evolutionary pressures have shaped our brains to find efficient solutions to complex questions about facial expressions. The same cannot be said for math problems. Knowing the solution to a math problem may be useful, but it is not the sort of thing generally required for survival and reproduction. On the other hand, quickly reading other people's emotions is at times vital for survival. There are other interesting differences between these two kinds of thinking. While it is difficult to solve the math problem, once you solve it, you can be 100 percent certain the answer is correct. By contrast, it is easy to generate a story about facial expressions, but this story is highly susceptible to error, bias, and stereotyping. As a result, critical thinkers should be careful not to jump to the first, most obvious solution.

Energy Demands on Deliberate Thinking

Solving a math problem requires rational thought and effort. When we engage in rational thought, our brains use up precious energy stores that may be required for the maintenance of the body. Because evolutionary pressures seek to keep us alive long enough to pass our genes to the next generation, we have a biological tendency to avoid effortful thinking. In a sense, it is evolutionarily wise to be lazy.

The resources demanded by conscious thought can be understood in terms of the familiar notion of "attention." When a task requires significant attention, it places increased energy demands on the brain. Periods of high-attention activity can be stressful, as the body increases blood flow to the brain, delivering more glucose and oxygen for increased mental activity. Additionally, attention is limited and focused on specific tasks. Consider the "selective attention test" developed by Daniel Simons and Christopher Chabris. Watch the video below and see how you perform on this test.

VIDEO

Selective Attention Test

Click to view content (https://openstax.org/books/introduction-philosophy/pages/2-1-the-brain-is-an-inference-machine)

How many passes did you count? Did you miss anything in the process? When our attention is focused on a novel and complex task, we become less aware of other stimuli outside the specific area of focus. Additionally, we may become fatigued, stressed, or anxious while engaged in paying close attention. Not surprisingly, our brains prefer automated shortcuts.

Heuristics and Learning

Kahneman (2013) calls these mental shortcuts **heuristics**, or rules of thumb for drawing inferences. Problem-solving with heuristics is largely unconscious, automated, effortless, and efficient, but it is not always correct. Rational thinking or computation requires conscious attention and effort and may not even be possible without some practice. We are forced to engage in effortful thinking when confronted with something new and possibly dangerous—or even with something slightly outside of our normal routine. For example, you have probably driven home from work or school along a familiar route on "autopilot," preoccupied with your thoughts. Maybe you have even gotten home and felt as if you cannot remember how you got there. By contrast, you have probably experienced the stress of navigating a new, unfamiliar city. In the first case, navigation can be carried out using easy, largely automatic processing, whereas in the second case, navigation requires the intense resources of active attention and rational calculation.

Sometimes complex activities can become effortless, but unlike when we are on "automatic pilot," such activities feel pleasant and fulfilling. When you become fully immersed in a complex activity to the point at which it becomes effortless, you have entered the state of "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi 2008).

Flow states are possible only for someone who has achieved some level of proficiency at a task. They are characterized by intense concentration and awareness as well as a sense of personal control or agency, but they are pleasurable because the challenge of engaging in the task is commensurate with your ability. By contrast, a novice may find the same tasks stressful and frustrating. This phenomenon can be illustrated using the notion of the "learning curve" that describes how a novice grows in proficiency.

What this means is that a person may be able to rely on intuitions, gut reactions, and other automatic responses in a field in which they are an expert, but the novice should be skeptical of these methods of thinking. As a novice, your mental heuristics are frequently faulty, so you are susceptible to prejudice, implicit bias, and error.

Consider the case of buying a car. Someone who is deeply familiar with the automobile market as either a buyer or a seller may be able to estimate the true value of a car easily, but the average person would need to do a great deal of research to arrive at a true estimate. Because of the effort required for nonexperts to appraise car value, they are easily influenced by dealer incentives, marked-up list prices, financing options, and other tricks of the trade. Given that we are all susceptible to these types of errors, it seems like a good idea to try to become more self-aware and critical and not rely exclusively on gut reactions or intuitions when encountering new material. Since you are probably a novice in philosophy if you are reading this textbook, you ought to be suspicious of your gut reactions to and intuitions about philosophical questions. Keep an open mind, and don't assume you already understand the philosophical problems you will encounter in the chapters that follow. Being open to new ideas and allowing yourself to admit some degree of ignorance are important first steps in becoming a better thinker.

Heuristics and Substitution in Decision-Making

The cognitive biases that we will examine in the next section are based on a more fundamental "substitution heuristic." This term describes our tendency to answer a difficult question or problem by substituting it with an easier question to answer. While substitution often results in an incorrect or inappropriate response, it gives us a sense of satisfaction or "cognitive ease" in thinking we have solved a problem. For instance, when you are asked to evaluate something complex and uncertain, like the future value of an investment or the political prospects of a politician, you are likely to substitute that complex calculation for an easier one. In particular, you may substitute your positive or negative feelings toward the politician or the investment product. But your feelings are likely to be guided by your preconceptions.

When the brain defaults to heuristics that produce a less-than-optimal result or even an incorrect decision, it is operating with a **cognitive bias**. A cognitive bias is a pattern of "quick" thinking based on the "rule of thumb." A person operating under a cognitive bias does not use logic or careful reasoning to arrive at a conclusion. Cognitive biases are like perceptual illusions. Just like perceptual illusions, cognitive biases are the result of the natural and, ordinarily, efficient operation of the brain. Even though mental heuristics often work perfectly well to help give us an estimation of reality without the mental effort required to generate a more comprehensive picture, cognitive biases are the result of misleading and faulty patterns that arise from this process.

2.2 Overcoming Cognitive Biases and Engaging in Critical Reflection

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Label the conditions that make critical thinking possible.
- Classify and describe cognitive biases.
- Apply critical reflection strategies to resist cognitive biases.

To resist the potential pitfalls of cognitive biases, we have taken some time to recognize why we fall prey to them. Now we need to understand how to resist easy, automatic, and error-prone thinking in favor of more reflective, critical thinking.

Critical Reflection and Metacognition

To promote good critical thinking, put yourself in a frame of mind that allows critical reflection. Recall from the previous section that rational thinking requires effort and takes longer. However, it will likely result in more accurate thinking and decision-making. As a result, reflective thought can be a valuable tool in correcting cognitive biases. The critical aspect of critical reflection involves a willingness to be skeptical of your own beliefs, your gut reactions, and your intuitions. Additionally, the critical aspect engages in a more analytic approach to the problem or situation you are considering. You should assess the facts, consider the evidence, try to employ logic, and resist the quick, immediate, and likely conclusion you want to draw. By reflecting critically on your own thinking, you can become aware of the natural tendency for your mind to slide into mental shortcuts.

This process of critical reflection is often called **metacognition** in the literature of pedagogy and psychology. Metacognition means thinking about thinking and involves the kind of self-awareness that engages higher-order thinking skills. Cognition, or the way we typically engage with the world around us, is first-order thinking, while metacognition is higher-order thinking. From a metacognitive frame, we can critically assess our thought process, become skeptical of our gut reactions and intuitions, and reconsider our cognitive tendencies and biases.

To improve metacognition and critical reflection, we need to encourage the kind of self-aware, conscious, and effortful attention that may feel unnatural and may be tiring. Typical activities associated with metacognition include checking, planning, selecting, inferring, self-interrogating, interpreting an ongoing experience, and making judgments about what one does and does not know (Hackner, Dunlosky, and Graesser 1998). By practicing metacognitive behaviors, you are preparing yourself to engage in the kind of rational, abstract thought that will be required for philosophy.

Good study habits, including managing your workspace, giving yourself plenty of time, and working through a checklist, can promote metacognition. When you feel stressed out or pressed for time, you are more likely to make quick decisions that lead to error. Stress and lack of time also discourage critical reflection because they rob your brain of the resources necessary to engage in rational, attention-filled thought. By contrast, when you relax and give yourself time to think through problems, you will be clearer, more thoughtful, and less likely to rush to the first conclusion that leaps to mind. Similarly, background noise, distracting activity, and interruptions will prevent you from paying attention. You can use this checklist to try to encourage metacognition when you study:

- Check your work.
- Plan ahead.
- Select the most useful material.
- Infer from your past grades to focus on what you need to study.
- Ask yourself how well you understand the concepts.
- Check your weaknesses.
- Assess whether you are following the arguments and claims you are working on.

Cognitive Biases

In this section, we will examine some of the most common cognitive biases so that you can be aware of traps in thought that can lead you astray. Cognitive biases are closely related to informal fallacies. Both fallacies and biases provide examples of the ways we make errors in reasoning.

CONNECTIONS

See the chapter on logic and reasoning for an in-depth exploration of informal fallacies.

Watch the video to orient yourself before reading the text that follows.

VIDEO

Cognitive Biases 101, with Peter Bauman
Click to view content (https://openstax.org/books/introduction-philosophy/pages/2-2-overcoming-cognitive-biases-and-engaging-in-critical-reflection)

Confirmation Bias

One of the most common cognitive biases is **confirmation bias**, which is the tendency to search for, interpret, favor, and recall information that confirms or supports your prior beliefs. Like all cognitive biases, confirmation bias serves an important function. For instance, one of the most reliable forms of confirmation bias is the belief in our shared reality. Suppose it is raining. When you first hear the patter of raindrops on your roof or window, you may think it is raining. You then look for additional signs to confirm your conclusion, and when you look out the window, you see rain falling and puddles of water accumulating. Most likely, you will not be looking for irrelevant or contradictory information. You will be looking for information that confirms your belief that it is raining. Thus, you can see how confirmation bias—based on the idea that the world does not change dramatically over time—is an important tool for navigating in our environment.

Unfortunately, as with most heuristics, we tend to apply this sort of thinking inappropriately. One example that has recently received a lot of attention is the way in which confirmation bias has increased political polarization. When searching for information on the internet about an event or topic, most people look for information that confirms their prior beliefs rather than what undercuts them. The pervasive presence of social media in our lives is exacerbating the effects of confirmation bias since the computer algorithms used by social media platforms steer people toward content that reinforces their current beliefs and predispositions. These multimedia tools are especially problematic when our beliefs are incorrect (for example, they contradict scientific knowledge) or antisocial (for example, they support violent or illegal behavior). Thus, social media and the internet have created a situation in which confirmation bias can be "turbocharged" in ways that are destructive for society.

Confirmation bias is a result of the brain's limited ability to process information. Peter Wason (1960) conducted early experiments identifying this kind of bias. He asked subjects to identify the rule that applies to a sequence of numbers—for instance, 2, 4, 8. Subjects were told to generate examples to test their hypothesis. What he found is that once a subject settled on a particular hypothesis, they were much more likely to select examples that confirmed their hypothesis rather than negated it. As a result, they were unable to identify the real rule (any ascending sequence of numbers) and failed to "falsify" their initial assumptions. Falsification is an important tool in the scientist's toolkit when they are testing hypotheses and is an effective way to avoid confirmation bias.

In philosophy, you will be presented with different arguments on issues, such as the nature of the mind or the best way to act in a given situation. You should take your time to reason through these issues carefully and consider alternative views. What you believe to be the case may be right, but you may also fall into the trap of confirmation bias, seeing confirming evidence as better and more convincing than evidence that calls your

beliefs into question.

Anchoring Bias

Confirmation bias is closely related to another bias known as anchoring. **Anchoring bias** refers to our tendency to rely on initial values, prices, or quantities when estimating the actual value, price, or quantity of something. If you are presented with a quantity, even if that number is clearly arbitrary, you will have a hard discounting it in your subsequent calculations; the initial value "anchors" subsequent estimates. For instance, Tversky and Kahneman (1974) reported an experiment in which subjects were asked to estimate the number of African nations in the United Nations. First, the experimenters spun a wheel of fortune in front of the subjects that produced a random number between 0 and 100. Let's say the wheel landed on 79. Subjects were asked whether the number of nations was higher or lower than the random number. Subjects were then asked to estimate the real number of nations. Even though the initial anchoring value was random, people in the study found it difficult to deviate far from that number. For subjects receiving an initial value of 10, the median estimate of nations was 25, while for subjects receiving an initial value of 65, the median estimate was 45.

In the same paper, Tversky and Kahneman described the way that anchoring bias interferes with statistical reasoning. In a number of scenarios, subjects made irrational judgments about statistics because of the way the question was phrased (i.e., they were tricked when an anchor was inserted into the question). Instead of expending the cognitive energy needed to solve the statistical problem, subjects were much more likely to "go with their gut," or think intuitively. That type of reasoning generates anchoring bias. When you do philosophy, you will be confronted with some formal and abstract problems that will challenge you to engage in thinking that feels difficult and unnatural. Resist the urge to latch on to the first thought that jumps into your head, and try to think the problem through with all the cognitive resources at your disposal.

Availability Heuristic

The **availability heuristic** refers to the tendency to evaluate new information based on the most recent or most easily recalled examples. The availability heuristic occurs when people take easily remembered instances as being more representative than they objectively are (i.e., based on statistical probabilities). In very simple situations, the availability of instances is a good guide to judgments. Suppose you are wondering whether you should plan for rain. It may make sense to anticipate rain if it has been raining a lot in the last few days since weather patterns tend to linger in most climates. More generally, scenarios that are well-known to us, dramatic, recent, or easy to imagine are more available for retrieval from memory. Therefore, if we easily remember an instance or scenario, we may incorrectly think that the chances are high that the scenario will be repeated. For instance, people in the United States estimate the probability of dying by violent crime or terrorism much more highly than they ought to. In fact, these are extremely rare occurrences compared to death by heart disease, cancer, or car accidents. But stories of violent crime and terrorism are prominent in the news media and fiction. Because these vivid stories are dramatic and easily recalled, we have a skewed view of how frequently violent crime occurs.

Tribalism

Another more loosely defined category of cognitive bias is the tendency for human beings to align themselves with groups with whom they share values and practices. The tendency toward **tribalism** is an evolutionary advantage for social creatures like human beings. By forming groups to share knowledge and distribute work, we are much more likely to survive. Not surprisingly, human beings with pro-social behaviors persist in the population at higher rates than human beings with antisocial tendencies. Pro-social behaviors, however, go beyond wanting to communicate and align ourselves with other human beings; we also tend to see outsiders as a threat. As a result, tribalistic tendencies both reinforce allegiances among in-group members and increase animosity toward out-group members.

Tribal thinking makes it hard for us to objectively evaluate information that either aligns with or contradicts the beliefs held by our group or tribe. This effect can be demonstrated even when in-group membership is not

real or is based on some superficial feature of the person—for instance, the way they look or an article of clothing they are wearing. A related bias is called the **bandwagon fallacy**. The bandwagon fallacy can lead you to conclude that you ought to do something or believe something because many other people do or believe the same thing. While other people can provide guidance, they are not always reliable. Furthermore, just because many people believe something doesn't make it true. Watch the video below to improve your "tribal literacy" and understand the dangers of this type of thinking.

VIDEO

The Dangers of Tribalism, Kevin deLaplante

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Sunk Cost Fallacy

Sunk costs refer to the time, energy, money, or other costs that have been paid in the past. These costs are "sunk" because they cannot be recovered. The **sunk cost fallacy** is thinking that attaches a value to things in which you have already invested resources that is greater than the value those things have today. Human beings have a natural tendency to hang on to whatever they invest in and are loath to give something up even after it has been proven to be a liability. For example, a person may have sunk a lot of money into a business over time, and the business may clearly be failing. Nonetheless, the businessperson will be reluctant to close shop or sell the business because of the time, money, and emotional energy they have spent on the venture. This is the behavior of "throwing good money after bad" by continuing to irrationally invest in something that has lost its worth because of emotional attachment to the failed enterprise. People will engage in this kind of behavior in all kinds of situations and may continue a friendship, a job, or a marriage for the same reason—they don't want to lose their investment even when they are clearly headed for failure and ought to cut their losses.

A similar type of faulty reasoning leads to the **gambler's fallacy**, in which a person reasons that future chance events will be more likely if they have not happened recently. For instance, if I flip a coin many times in a row, I may get a string of heads. But even if I flip several heads in a row, that does not make it more likely I will flip tails on the next coin flip. Each coin flip is statistically independent, and there is an equal chance of turning up heads or tails. The gambler, like the reasoner from sunk costs, is tied to the past when they should be reasoning about the present and future.

There are important social and evolutionary purposes for past-looking thinking. Sunk-cost thinking keeps parents engaged in the growth and development of their children after they are born. Sunk-cost thinking builds loyalty and affection among friends and family. More generally, a commitment to sunk costs encourages us to engage in long-term projects, and this type of thinking has the evolutionary purpose of fostering culture and community. Nevertheless, it is important to periodically reevaluate our investments in both people and things.

In recent ethical scholarship, there is some debate about how to assess the sunk costs of moral decisions. Consider the case of war. Just-war theory dictates that wars may be justified in cases where the harm imposed on the adversary is proportional to the good gained by the act of defense or deterrence. It may be that, at the start of the war, those costs seemed proportional. But after the war has dragged on for some time, it may seem that the objective cannot be obtained without a greater quantity of harm than had been initially imagined. Should the evaluation of whether a war is justified estimate the total amount of harm done or prospective harm that will be done going forward (Lazar 2018)? Such questions do not have easy answers.

Table 2.1 summarizes these common cognitive biases.

Bias	Description	Example
Confirmation bias	The tendency to search for, interpret, favor, and recall information that confirms or supports prior beliefs	As part of their morning routine, a person scans news headlines on the internet and chooses to read only those stories that confirm views they already hold.
Anchoring bias	The tendency to rely on initial values, prices, or quantities when estimating the actual value, price, or quantity of something	When supplied with a random number and then asked to provide a number estimate in response to a question, people supply a number close to the random number they were initially given.
Availability heuristic	The tendency to evaluate new information based on the most recent or most easily recalled examples	People in the United States overestimate the probability of dying in a criminal attack, since these types of stories are easy to vividly recall.
Tribalism	The tendency for human beings to align themselves with groups with whom they share values and practices	People with a strong commitment to one political party often struggle to objectively evaluate the political positions of those who are members of the opposing party.
Bandwagon fallacy	The tendency to do something or believe something because many other people do or believe the same thing	Advertisers often rely on the bandwagon fallacy, attempting to create the impression that "everyone" is buying a new product, in order to inspire others to buy it.
Sunk cost fallacy	The tendency to attach a value to things in which resources have been invested that is greater than the value those things actually have	A business person continues to invest money in a failing venture, "throwing good money after bad."
Gambler's fallacy	The tendency to reason that future chance events will be more likely if they have not happened recently	Someone who regularly buys lottery tickets reasons that they are "due to win," since they haven't won once in twenty years.

TABLE 2.1 Common Cognitive Biases

THINK LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

As we have seen, cognitive biases are built into the way human beings process information. They are common to us all, and it takes self-awareness and effort to overcome the tendency to fall back on biases. Consider a time when you have fallen prey to one of the five cognitive biases described above. What were the circumstances? Recall your thought process. Were you aware at the time that your thinking was misguided? What were the consequences of succumbing to that cognitive bias?

Write a short paragraph describing how that cognitive bias allowed you to make a decision you now realize was irrational. Then write a second paragraph describing how, with the benefit of time and distance, you would have thought differently about the incident that triggered the bias. Use the tools of critical reflection and metacognition to improve your approach to this situation. What might have been the consequences of behaving differently? Finally, write a short conclusion describing what lesson you take from reflecting back on this experience. Does it help you understand yourself better? Will you be able to act differently in the future? What steps can you take to avoid cognitive biases in your thinking today?

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2.3 Developing Good Habits of Mind

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Define epistemic humility and the Dunning-Kruger effect.
- Identify three strategies to increase the ability to think objectively.
- Analyze emotional responses to information.

One of the ways to respond to cognitive biases is to develop good habits of mind. There are no quick fixes or easy solutions to cognitive biases. Remember, these biases are a result of the way the brain works. Nevertheless, metacognition and critical reflection, as well as good mental habits, can help combat these natural tendencies in thought that otherwise leads us astray. The strategies outlined below can help you become a better philosopher. You should compare them with the methods philosophers use to arrive at truth, covered in Chapter 1.

CONNECTIONS

See the introduction to philosophy chapter to learn more about how philosophers arrive at the truth.

Strive for Objectivity

We are likely to assume that our experience or our perspective is generally true for others. To be more objective in thinking about issues, problems, or values, we should actively engage in strategies that remove us from our naturally subjective mindset. In this section, we will explore several strategies for approaching philosophical problems with less subjective bias.

Abstract from Specific Circumstances

Most people's point of view is based on generalizing from their specific circumstances and experiences. However, if your view of morality, consciousness, or free will is tied to notions that come from a specific time or location, then your view is not likely to be objective. Your personal experience has limitations when it comes to understanding what is going on in the world at large. To arrive at more general and representative notions, use your imagination to separate the specific properties of your experience from your worldview. This process of abstraction can make the concept appropriately general. For instance, if you wish to imagine a governing arrangement among citizens, you will probably default to the governmental organizations you are familiar with in your community, state, or nation. But these institutions differ from the way government works in other countries or in different eras of history. So when you think about justice in political organizations, it is important to imagine those not limited by your personal experience, moment in history, or location.

In some cases, however, the specific features of your experience are indispensable to the philosophical position you wish to take. In such instances, your specific experience provides critical information that needs to be preserved. For example, the prevailing views in philosophy as well as any other subject are biased in that they reflect the views of the dominant cultural group who wrote the texts. If you are a person who belongs to a nondominant or minority group or a group that has been historically marginalized, your personal experience may shed new light on a problem. In such cases, specific experience can help you, as well as others, reshape the general view so that it is more comprehensive and inclusive. In these cases, abstracting from the particular circumstances may not be useful.

Promote Alternative Points of View

Actively considering points of view contrary to your own is most useful in political or ethical areas of philosophy. But a similar strategy may also be useful in metaphysics or epistemology. For instance, when considering issues in metaphysics, you may believe that parts of experience—like consciousness, God, or free will—cannot be explained by the natural sciences. Or, conversely, you may think there is a scientific

explanation for everything. When considering these views philosophically, try to actively promote the alternative point of view. Sometimes this strategy is called **steelmanning** the opposing argument. When you steelman an argument, you make the strongest possible case in favor of it. This is the opposite of strawmanning an argument, in which you construct a weaker version of the argument to easily defeat it. You may be tempted to strawman arguments you naturally disagree with, but you will become a better philosopher when you steelman those arguments instead.

CONNECTIONS

Learn more about the strawman fallacy in the chapter on logic and reasoning.

Identify Counterexamples

Generating counterexamples is an effective way to test your own or others' claims. A counterexample is an instance that renders an argument invalid by satisfying all the premises of the claim but demonstrating the conclusion is false. Suppose someone wants to argue that the only legitimate way to know something is to have direct experience of it. To produce a counterexample to this claim, we must imagine something that everyone knows is true but that would be impossible to experience directly. Here is an example: I know my mother was born. Clearly, given that I was born, I had a mother, and she, too, must have been born to have given birth to me. My mother's birth necessarily preceded my birth by many years, so it would be impossible for me to have any direct experience of my mother's birth. And yet, just as surely as I know I was born, I know that my mother was born. Counterexamples are powerful tools to use in evaluating philosophical arguments. If you practice using this tool, you will become a better critical thinker.

CONNECTIONS

See the section on counterexamples in the chapter on logic and reasoning for more discussion of this topic.

Maintain Skepticism of Strong Emotions

While emotions play an important role in thinking, they can also cloud judgment. Strong reactions to claims made by philosophers, other students, your professor, or anyone else may prevent you from considering the argument objectively. You should be wary of any strong attachment or aversion you feel toward a philosophical claim. Emotions can guide us, but they may threaten our ability to objectively consider the arguments being made.

To respond to strong emotions, use the tools of metacognition to reflect on the source of those emotions and attempt to manage them. There may be good reasons for your emotions, but recognize that those reasons, not the emotions themselves, are philosophically relevant. Manage emotions by taking a step back from your personal investment in the issue and considering it from another perspective. Sometimes a short break can allow the immediate emotional reaction to subside. Sometimes imaginative strategies can help; for example, substitute the features of the problem that trigger strong emotions for features that are more neutral. This advice is not to suggest that emotions are harmful or have no place in philosophical thinking. Instead, the purpose of this strategy is to remind you that the way to derive meaning and guidance from your emotions is to reflect on them and think through the causes, origins, or reasons for the emotions.

Adopt Epistemic Humility

A final concept that is a critical component for becoming a better critical thinker is adopting a stance of **epistemic humility**. As we have already seen, our thinking can be clouded by cognitive biases. Additionally, our perspective on the world is always colored by our own experience and rooted in the particular place and time in which we live. Finally, even our best scientific knowledge of the universe explains only a fraction of it, and perhaps even less of our own experience. As a result, we should recognize these limitations of human

knowledge and rein in our epistemic confidence. We should recognize that the knowledge we do possess is fragile, historical, and conditioned by a number of social and biological processes.

FIGURE 2.5 The principle of epistemic humility calls upon us to recognize that the knowledge we possess is fragile, fallible, and colored by our own experiences. (credit: "Life is a long lesson in humility." by e.r.w.i.n./Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Question Yourself: Do I Really Know What I Think I Know?

We retain all sorts of beliefs from many different sources: memory, testimony, sense perception, and imagination. Some of these sources may be reliable, while others may not. Often, however, we forget the source of our beliefs and claim to "know" something simply because we have believed it for a long time. We may become very confident in believing something that never happened or did not happen in the way we remember it. In other cases, we may have been told something repeatedly, but the ultimate source of that information was unreliable. For instance, most people recommend wearing warm clothes outside when the temperature drops so that they do not "catch a cold." This is the sort of wisdom that may have been passed down through generations, but it makes little sense from a medical standpoint. There are not many ways that getting a chill or even lowering the body temperature will lead to a respiratory infection. Colds are caused by viruses, not by a drop in temperature. Without thinking through the source of the belief that "if you get cold, you may catch a cold," you end up believing something that is not true.

Be Aware of the Dunning-Kruger Effect

An even more pernicious form of epistemic overconfidence is revealed in the psychological phenomenon known as the **Dunning-Kruger effect**. David Dunning and Justin Kruger demonstrated a widespread illusion in which incompetent people or novices rate their own knowledge of a subject more highly than they ought to, while highly competent people or experts rate their knowledge slightly lower than they ought to. These findings do not mean that the experts considered themselves to be less competent than novices. In fact, experts are fairly accurate in rating their own knowledge. However, they tend to assume that everyone else has a similar level of expertise. By contrast, novices consider themselves to be far more competent in comparison to others and misrepresent their own incompetence, which can be a dangerous in many situations.

The lesson from the Dunning-Kruger effect is that you should be extremely wary when assessing your expertise about anything, but especially about something that is a new area of learning for you. The reality is that your intuitive sense of your own knowledge is likely to be inaccurate. It takes time to build expertise in a subject area, and the expert is more capable of assessing their own knowledge accurately.

2.4 Gathering Information, Evaluating Sources, and Understanding Evidence

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify four moves for fact-checking.
- Apply fact-checking to specific exercises.

Start with a Strong Foundation

When you are learning a new concept or writing a paper, you probably do some internet research to locate information about the topic. However, as you probably know, not all internet sources are reliable. Philosophy students are fortunate to have two online philosophy encyclopedias that provide excellent information about a wide array of topics. The *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (https://openstax.org/r/ieputmedu) provides good general topic coverage of the major areas of philosophy. The IEP is a traditional encyclopedia, and its articles are written for new students without a lot of prior knowledge. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (https://openstax.org/r/platostanford) provides in-depth, up-to-date articles on a wide range of topics and includes both general and specific coverage. The articles in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* are well written, but they typically go into greater depth and sometimes include technical terms or information you will have to look up. These articles provide an excellent, free introduction to a wide range of specific topics in philosophy. As with all encyclopedia entries, students should start with the article itself and then move on to sources cited in the article. Think of these articles as an entry point into research.

Wherever possible, read articles and books written by philosophers on the topics you are interested in. You can usually find these resources at your college or university library. You may want to cast a wider net on the internet itself by tapping into YouTube channels, podcasts, and other websites that can help you understand philosophical issues or provide information for philosophy papers. However, be discriminating when selecting material. In this section, we will outline some tools and habits that can make you a better, more critically engaged online researcher.

Finally, many instructors in philosophy will encourage their students to engage only with the assigned texts in the class. This can be a valuable technique for learning philosophy since philosophical thinking is cultivated by serious, critical engagement with good philosophical writing. If you can learn to engage directly with primary sources (texts written by philosophers about philosophy), you will be a better philosophy student. However, we acknowledge that most students are accustomed to using the internet for research when they are learning something new. So this section is intended to provide some guidance for students who want to supplement their class readings with information gleaned from online sources.

The SIFT Method (Four Moves for Student Fact Checkers)

Information literacy scholar Michael Caulfield came to realize that the methods of research taught by librarians and information literacy educators often did not work well for students. Typically, students are encouraged to assess the quality of information using an acronym like CRAAP: currency, relevancy, authority, accuracy, and purpose. But these criteria are not always useful in spotting misinformation turned up through search engines. After all, many sources that provide misinformation appear current and relevant and are generated by organizations that appear to be authoritative while they conceal a hidden agenda.

To find out how students evaluate sources they find on Google, Caulfield relies on the empirical research of Sam Wineburg and Sarah Mcgrew (2016). The researchers compared the behavior of Stanford University students to trained fact-checkers at newspapers and magazines. Not surprisingly, the online fact-checkers used search engines more effectively. Based on this research, Caulfield developed his own protocol to make students better researchers.

The first thing to know about using a search engine like Google is that results are not ranked by authority, accuracy, or relevance. Internet companies are notoriously secretive about the algorithms (mathematical

procedural rules) they use to generate search engine results, but we know that they prioritize paid advertisements, popularity, and web interconnectivity (the degree to which key words and links from a website are shared with other websites). Thus, websites interested in sharing misinformation can use the same search engine optimization tools that legitimate companies or media sources use to move up the ranks of search results. So you need to learn to use the search engine to your advantage. Caulfield recommends using the acronym SIFT, or the "four moves" of student fact checkers.

FIGURE 2.6 The four moves for student fact checkers: stop; investigate the source; find better coverage; and trace the claims to the original context. (credit: "SIFT (The Four Moves)" by Michael Caulfield/hapgood.us, CC BY 4.0)

Stop

The first move reiterates something we have already discussed: to become a better critical thinker, slow down the quick and efficient thinking that leads to errors and engage in critical reflection and metacognition. By stopping, slowing down, or taking your time to allow for critical reflection, you will be using rational and reflective thinking to assess claims. Additionally, after some searching, you will want stop, return to your original source, and check its claims again. When you circle back after going down a bit of a rabbit hole, you will have a new perspective from which to evaluate these claims.

Investigate the Source

Next, investigate the source of your information. Internet searches will often lead you through a series of links, in which you jump from one document to another. Strive to understand this electronic paper trail. Who wrote each document? What are their credentials? You can prioritize academic sources, such as web pages of philosophy faculty members, and you can discount sites that aggregate student papers or provide content without clear authorship. But investigating authorship does not mean that you should just read the "About" page on a website. Rather, Wineburg and Mcgrew (2016) found that fact-checkers used search tools to check the reputation of the sites they were investigating, a move they called "reading laterally." You do not have to spend a lot of time on the site itself. Instead, search reviews or critiques of the website and the authors on the site. Find out what other authoritative sources say about the site. Is this a website that is approved by other people you trust? Or do people you trust indicate that the website or its information are questionable?

Find Better Coverage

Check the claims and information on the site you are reading. What do other sources say about the same information? Is there other coverage on the same topic? This move is particularly important for controversial claims you might find on social media, where the original source is frequently obscured. Is this information being covered elsewhere, and does the coverage agree with what you have read? This move can help in evaluating your original source or gaining familiarity with the claims being made. If the claims by one source do not match up with what you are reading elsewhere, be skeptical.

Trace Claims, Quotes, and Media to the Original Context

Frequently, claims made on the internet are divorced from their original context. It is important to trace those claims back to the original source. This advice holds for online research in philosophy. You may discover a claim or quote about a philosopher that lacks context. To evaluate the claim, you need its original context, which will reveal whether the claim or quote was mischaracterized or portrayed in a misleading way. Look for citations, and then follow those citations to the original publication. If the source you have found does not have citations, then you will need to search key terms or phrases in quotation marks to see if you can locate the claim or quote using another method. Good academic sources ought to provide citations so you can verify the original source of the claim. If it is hard to verify a claim or quote, that should be a red flag to not trust the source making those claims or providing those quotes.

THINK LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Here are three examples of claims made online. Use the four moves to assess whether these claims are true. You have been provided with a screen capture of a headline, so you do not have links back to a website. Therefore, use search tools on the web to verify the claims being made. In each case, find a source that either verifies or debunks the claim. The source you use to verify or debunk the claim should be reputable and authoritative.

Mexico's Border Wall

This post claims to be picture of fencing from Mexico's southern border. Is the photo accurate? Is this an image of Mexico's southern border? Has the Mexican government constructed a wall to prevent the flow of migrants from across its southern border?

FIGURE 2.7 This social media image claims to show a wall Mexico constructed on its southern border. (credit: "Mexico's Border Wall?" by Michael Caulfield/fourmoves.blog, CC BY 4.0)

Smart Toilet?

This image was shared on the web. Is it a real product or satire?

FIGURE 2.8 This web headline about Kohler's smart toilet, under the heading "Smart Home," suggests that Kohler's has invented a smart toilet that uses Alexa. (credit: "Alexa Smart Toilet" by Michael Caulfield/fourmoves.blog, CC BY 4.0)

Drilling Stonehenge?

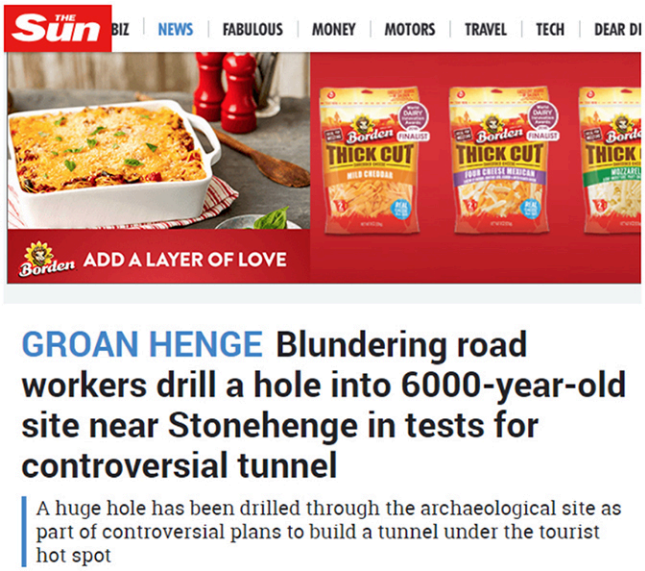

FIGURE 2.9 This newspaper headline claims that engineers drilled a hole into Stonehenge as part of a controversial tunnel project. (credit: "Stonehenge damaged by blundering engineers?" by Michael Caulfield/fourmoves.blog, CC BY 4.0)

2.5 Reading Philosophy

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Describe strategies for reading philosophy.
- Distinguish the goals of philosophical reading from other types of reading.
- Employ a three-part method for reading philosophy.

To be successful in a philosophy course, you must be able to read primary and secondary sources in philosophy. Many students in their first philosophy class struggle with the required readings. You may find yourself rereading a passage several times without having a clear notion of what the author is trying to say. Or you may get lost in the back-and-forth of arguments and counterarguments, forgetting which represent the author's opinion. This is a common problem. Using the strategies described below, you can track the key claims and arguments in your reading. Eventually, you will reach the point where you can begin to reflect on, evaluate, and engage with the philosophical concepts presented.

Prepare to Read

Preparing your reading space will help you focus and improve the chances of retaining the reading material. Read at a table with a comfortable chair instead of on a couch or in a bed. Sitting up straight improves concentration. Have something to drink nearby, and avoid distractions, like TV or music with lyrics. Some people find it helpful to have a little bit of bustle around them (for example, you might choose to work in a café or library), while others find this distracting. Some people like music; others prefer silence. Find the setting that helps you concentrate.

Next, choose an annotation tool. You will need to write notes, underline, and flag portions of the reading, so use text you can alter whenever possible. If you are working with a printed text, use a pencil so that you can erase and rewrite notes in the margin. Many students use highlighters when reading text, but readers have a tendency to highlight too much, which makes the highlighting useless when you go back and reread. A better system is to write marginal notes or markers to flag and identify key passages. You can devise a simple coding system using symbols to identify different parts of a text: for example, main ideas or topics, examples, arguments, references to other philosophers, questions, and quotations to use in papers. If you are working with a digital text, there are many tools you can use to write notes and place markers in the text. OpenStax provides a useful annotation tool for its web-based textbooks, allowing you to create notes that link passages and even to review your notes all together. The purpose of annotation is to create a visual trail you can come back to for easy tracking of an argument. This will ensure you do not need to reread large portions of the text to find key information for studying or writing a paper. Annotations allow you to move quickly through a text, identifying key passages for quotes or citations, understanding the flow of the argument, and remembering the key claims or points made by the author.

Engaging with Philosophical Texts

The purpose of philosophical writing is to engage the reader in a sequence of thoughts that either present a problem to be considered, prompt reflection on previous ideas and works, or lead to some insight or enlightenment. Philosophy consists of ideas and arguments. Your goal is to engage with those ideas and arguments to arrive at your own understanding of the issues. You may critically engage with the author, or you may have your perspective changed by reading the author. In either case, your goal ought to be to reach a new understanding. This is somewhat different from writing in most other disciplines, in which the purpose may be to convey information, evoke emotions, tell a story, or produce aesthetic enjoyment. While engaging with philosophical ideas can be pleasurable and may involve understanding some basic information, the primary purpose of the writing is to engage thought and reflection. This means that you should read the work as fast or slow as you need to engage thoughtfully with it. The speed of reading will depend on how quickly you grasp the ideas and arguments presented or how familiar you are with the claims being made. It is not as important to read sequentially for plot or narrative; much more important is to follow the sequence of ideas and arguments. Consequently, it may make sense to cross-reference passages, jumping from one section to another to compare claims, and link ideas that appear in different places in the text.

Philosophical Methods at Work

Look for philosophical methods at work in your readings. Recall that philosophers use a variety of methods to arrive at truth, including conceptual analysis, logic, and the consideration of trade-offs. Philosophers may also

draw on a variety of sources of evidence, including history, intuition, common sense, or empirical results from other disciplines or from experimental philosophy. In any case, most philosophical works will be attempting to develop a position through argumentation. Sources of evidence will be used to bolster premises for the purpose of reaching a desired conclusion. Additionally, the author may use a variety of methods to make an argument. If you can identify these methods, strategies, and sources of evidence, you will be able to better evaluate the text.

The Principle of Charity

The **principle of charity** is an interpretative principle that advises the reader to interpret the author's statements in the most rational and best way possible. Sometimes a philosopher's argument may be unclear or ambiguous. For example, philosophers from older historical periods may use terminology and expressions that are difficult for a modern reader to understand. In these cases, the reader should start from the assumption that the author is putting forward a rational, thoughtful view. The reader's goal should be to understand that view in the best light possible. This does not mean that you should ignore difficulties or avoid criticizing the author. Rather, when you encounter difficulties, look for an interpretation that makes the most sense of what the author is saying. All the primary- and secondary-source authors you will read are smart, thoughtful people. Therefore, assume the author has a response to simple or obvious objections, and look for that response. Try to understand the work on its own terms, and then critically engage with the best version of that work.

Working with the Dialectic

The dialectical process that is common to many philosophical writings is initially confusing for many students. **Dialectic**, a method for discovering truth through dialogue, involves an exchange of ideas with the goal of arriving at a position that more accurately reflects the truth. In practical terms, philosophers will frequently move back and forth between the view they are advancing and competing views that they may or may not support. These alternative views may provide criticisms, or they may represent views that are common in philosophy. The author's goal is to present alternative perspectives—in addition to their own—to demonstrate the range of perspectives on the problem. If one view emerges through this dialectical process, there is a greater chance that it has some share of the truth since it has survived the criticisms and contrary opinions of others.

When reading a philosophical work that uses a dialectical method, pay attention to tracking different strands of argument. Do not assume that every argument or claim in what you are reading is the considered opinion of the author. Rather, various claims may represent contrasting views that will eventually be rejected. Track the back-and-forth between views to grasp the thread of argument that the author endorses.

FIGURE 2.10 Find a comfortable place to do your philosophy readings. (credit: "Woman sitting in the forest and reading a book, autumn rest" by Marco Verch/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Pre-reading

Start your reading with a pre-read. This is a very useful practice when tackling academic works. So much information can be learned simply by reviewing the surrounding features of the article, book, or chapter. Spend some time reviewing these elements to grasp the context for what you are about to read. Start with these elements.

Title, Author, and Publication

What does the title and author tell you about the work? When was it written? Who has published the text—an academic press or a popular press? If you do not know this information, you may want to do some preliminary internet searches to try to find out. Where does this work fit into the author's broader body of work? What can you learn or what do you know about the author? What are the author's main contributions to philosophy?

Table of Contents and Bibliography

Develop a mental outline for the work by looking carefully at the table of contents, usually at the front of the book. For a shorter work, scan through the article, looking for section headings and breaks. If the headings are labeled, you may have enough information to track the general flow of the article just by reading them. If the headings are not helpful or there are no headings, quickly skim the first and last paragraph, and pick out topic sentences or words that indicate what individual paragraphs are about to get a sense of where the overall argument is going.

At this stage, you want to look at the bibliography or references. Depending on the length and style of the work, the reference list may be very long. As a novice, you may not be able to get much information from a bibliography, but as you become more familiar with your subject, you will get a sense from titles and authors in the bibliography about the perspective that informs this author's writing.

First Read

You may need to read material more than once to become engaged in critical reflection. However, because you are planning to do multiple readings, do not linger too long on the first read. Move quickly and purposefully through the material with the goal of understanding the flow of the argument. Use the information you gleaned from pre-reading to fill in gaps in knowledge where possible, and flag places for follow-up.

Identify Key Claims

During the first read, you should identify the key claims in the text. In a traditional academic article, these

claims ought to be highlighted in the introduction or abstract. In a book or historical work, these key claims may be harder to find. Look for sentences that introduce claims with expressions such as, "I aim to show," "What this chapter will demonstrate," or "The purpose of this work is." Mark key claims so that you can come back to them easily. Ask yourself what the author is trying to say; what does the author hope the reader will take away from reading?

Identify Sources of Evidence and Methods of Argument

Look for the evidence the author is providing to support the key claims. What methods does the author use to generate this evidence? Is the author using logical argumentation? Are there thought experiments or other forms of conceptual analysis? Does the author provide empirical evidence to back up the claims? In the best-case scenario, evidence will be provided shortly before or after the claim is announced. However, sometimes evidence and claims are mixed together. During this stage, try to flag the dialectic in the argument. Is the author presenting their own view, a rival view, a criticism, or a supporting view?

Flag for Follow-Up

Use annotation flags to chart the course of the argument and claims being made. Use a simple notation system that works for you. But you should consider flagging things like thesis, definition, claim, evidence, argument, question, counterargument, objection, response, and so forth. Flagging should also be used to identify words or ideas you do not understand. When you are moving quickly, you may ask questions that you later understand, or you may flag something incorrectly and need to revise your notes. This is fine. You are engaged in a process of gradually becoming acquainted with the text.

Close Read

At this stage, you will read for thoughtful engagement with the ideas and arguments presented in the text. Now is when you critically reflect on, evaluate, and understand the author's writing.

At this point, you should not move any more quickly than you can think alongside the author. Use this time to follow up on questions you posed during flagging. Look up terms; do some research on concepts you do not understand. You do not need to understand the article perfectly, but you should understand it well enough to think about it. If you have a good understanding of what you read, you will have something to say about the material after you finish reading it.

Reading slowly and actively involves asking the author questions: How does this claim follow from that one? Where is the evidence to support this assertion? Is the evidence adequate to support the claim being made? What are the implications of this claim? How does this idea fit with the overall emphasis on some other set of ideas? If something in the text does not sit well with you, try to articulate what is bothering you. Write a short objection in the margin. Even if you are not sure, try to work out why you do not agree with the author. The more you can articulate your concerns and think through your own reactions, the more you will understand the material and your own reaction to it.

The close reading is intended to prepare you for talking and writing about the author's work. That means you are preparing yourself to do philosophy alongside and with the author. Hold yourself to the same standards to which you hold the author. Provide reasons for your claims, support your opinions with adequate evidence, and consider possible objections.

READ LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Identify a reading from Chapter 1 (or another introductory reading from this course). This exercise will work best if the reading is a fairly short, primary source reading from someone who is doing philosophy. Follow the three-step method for reading:

- Pre-read
- Fast read with flagging
- Close read and revise flagging

Consider the following prompts in writing a short review of the article (no more than two paragraphs in length):

- Provide a brief synopsis of the argument and dialectical structure of the text.
- What are the primary claims that the author makes?
- What evidence does the author provide to support those claims?
- What methods does the author use to generate evidence or make arguments?
- Is the evidence adequate to support the claims the author makes?
- Where do you think the evidence falls short?
- Do you agree with the author's claims?
- Where do you disagree, and why?

When you are writing philosophy papers, you should plan the structure of your argument in advance, spend time thinking about a thesis, and focus on an achievable aim relative to the length of your paper.

2.6 Writing Philosophy Papers

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify and characterize the format of a philosophy paper.
- Create thesis statements that are manageable and sufficiently specific.
- Collect evidence and formulate arguments.
- Organize ideas into a coherent written presentation.

This section will provide some practical advice on how to write philosophy papers. The format presented here focuses on the use of an argumentative structure in writing. Different philosophy professors may have different approaches to writing. The sections below are only intended to give some general guidelines that apply to most philosophy classes.

Identify Claims

The key element in any argumentative paper is the claim you wish to make or the position you want to defend. Therefore, take your time identifying claims, which is also called the thesis statement. What do you want to say about the topic? What do you want the reader to understand or know after reading your piece? Remember that narrow, modest claims work best. Grand claims are difficult to defend, even for philosophy professors. A good thesis statement should go beyond the mere description of another person's argument. It should say something about the topic, connect the topic to other issues, or develop an application of some theory or position advocated by someone else. Here are some ideas for creating claims that are perfectly acceptable and easy to develop:

- Compare two philosophical positions. What makes them similar? How are they different? What general lessons can you draw from these positions?
- Identify a piece of evidence or argument that you think is weak or may be subject to criticism. Why is it weak? How is your criticism a problem for the philosopher's perspective?
- Apply a philosophical perspective to a contemporary case or issue. What makes this philosophical position applicable? How would it help us understand the case?
- Identify another argument or piece of evidence that might strengthen a philosophical position put forward by a philosopher. Why is this a good argument or piece of evidence? How does it fit with the philosopher's other claims and arguments?
- Consider an implication (either positive or negative) that follows from a philosopher's argument. How does

this implication follow? Is it necessary or contingent? What lessons can you draw from this implication (if positive, it may provide additional reasons for the argument; if negative, it may provide reasons against the argument)?

THINK LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

The following multiple-choice exercises will help you identify and write modest, clear philosophical thesis statements. A thesis statement is a declarative statement that puts forward a position or makes a claim about some topic.

1. Which of the following is a declarative statement that puts forward a position or claim?
a. How does Aristotle think virtue is necessary for happiness?
b. Is happiness the ultimate goal of human action?
c. Whether or not virtue is necessary for happiness.
d. Aristotle argues that happiness is the ultimate good of human action and virtue is necessary for happiness.

2. Which of the following declarative statements goes beyond mere description?
a. René Descartes argues that the soul or mind is the essence of the human person.
b. Descartes shows that all beliefs and memories about the external world could be false.
c. Some people think that Descartes is a skeptic, but I will show that he goes beyond skepticism.
d. In the meditations, Descartes claims that the mind and body are two different substances.

3. Which of the following statements proposes a comparison between two philosophical views?
a. Descartes says that the mind is a substance that is distinct from the body, but I disagree.
b. Contemporary psychology has shown that Descartes is incorrect to think that human beings have free will and that the mind is something different from the brain.
c. Thomas Hobbes's view of the soul is materialistic, whereas Descartes's view of the soul is nonphysical. In this paper, I will examine the differences between these two views.

4. Which of the following statements identifies a weakness in a philosopher's argument and proposes a criticism of that argument?
a. John Stuart Mill reasons that utilitarian judgments can be based on qualitative differences as well as the quantity of pleasure, but ultimately any qualitative difference must result in a difference in the quantity of pleasure.
b. Mill's approach to utilitarianism differs from Bentham's by introducing qualitative distinctions among pleasures, where Bentham only considers the quantitative aspects of pleasure.
c. J. S. Mill's approach to utilitarianism aligns moral theory with the history of ethics because he allows qualitative differences in moral judgments.

5. Which of the following is an example of a statement that applies a philosophical idea to a contemporary issue or problem?
a. Rawls's liberty principle ensures that all people have a basic set of freedoms that are important for living a full life.
b. The US Bill of Rights is an example of Rawls's liberty principle because it lists a set of basic freedoms that are guaranteed for all people.
c. While many people may agree that Rawls's liberty principle applies to all citizens of a particular country, it is much more controversial to extend those same basic freedoms to immigrants, including those classified by the government as permanent residents, legal immigrants, illegal immigrants, and refugees.

[ANS: 1.d 2.c 3.c 4.a 5.c]

WRITE LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Use the following templates to write your own thesis statement by inserting a philosopher, claim, or contemporary issue:

1. [Name of philosopher] holds that [claim], but [name of another philosopher] holds that [another claim]. In this paper, I will identify reasons for thinking [name of philosopher]'s position is more likely to be true.
2. [Name of philosopher] argues that [claim]. In this paper, I will show how this claim provides a helpful addition to [contemporary issue].
3. When [name of philosopher] argues in favor of [claim], they rely on [another claim] that is undercut by contemporary science. I will show that if we modify this claim in light of contemporary science, we will strengthen or weaken [name of philosopher]'s argument.

Collect Evidence and Build Your Case

Once you have identified your thesis statement or primary claim, collect evidence (by returning to your readings) to compose the best possible argument. As you assemble the evidence, you can think like a detective or prosecutor building a case. However, you want a case that is true, not just one that supports your position. So you should stay open to modifying your claim if it does not fit the evidence. If you need to do additional research, follow the guidelines presented earlier to locate authoritative information.

If you cannot find evidence to support your claim but still feel strongly about it, you can try to do your own philosophical thinking using any of the methods discussed in this chapter or in Chapter 1. Imagine counterexamples and thought experiments that support your claim. Use your intuitions and common sense, but remember that these can sometimes lead you astray. In general, common sense, intuitions, thought experiments, and counterexamples should support one another and support the sources you have identified from other philosophers. Think of your case as a structure: you do not want too much of the weight to rest on a single intuition or thought experiment.

Consider Counterarguments

Philosophy papers differ from typical argumentative papers in that philosophy students must spend more time and effort anticipating and responding to counterarguments when constructing their own arguments. This has two important effects: first, by developing counterarguments, you demonstrate that you have sufficiently thought through your position to identify possible weaknesses; second, you make your case stronger by taking away a potential line of attack that an opponent might use. By including counterarguments in your paper, you engage in the kind of dialectical process that philosophers use to arrive at the truth.

Accurately Represent Source Material

It is important to represent primary and secondary source material as accurately as possible. This means that you should consider the context and read the arguments using the principle of charity. Make sure that you are not strawmanning an argument you disagree with or misrepresenting a quote or paraphrase just because you need some evidence to support your argument. As always, your goal should be to find the most rationally compelling argument, which is the one most likely to be true.

FIGURE 2.11 Good organization is key to strong writing. (credit: "Female hand writing at home." by Nenad Stojkovic/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Organize Your Paper

Academic philosophy papers use the same simple structure as any other paper and one you likely learned in high school or your first-year composition class.

Introduce Your Thesis

The purpose of your introduction is to provide context for your thesis. Simply tell the reader what to expect in the paper. Describe your topic, why it is important, and how it arises within the works you have been reading. You may have to provide some historical context, but avoid both broad generalizations and long-winded historical retellings. Your context or background information should not be overly long and simply needs to provide the reader with the context and motivation for your thesis. Your thesis should appear at the end of the introduction, and the reader should clearly see how the thesis follows from the introductory material you have provided. If you are writing a long paper, you may need several sentences to express your thesis, in which you delineate in broad terms the parts of your argument.

Make a Logical and Compelling Case Using the Evidence

The paragraphs that follow the introduction lay out your argument. One strategy you can use to successfully build paragraphs is to think in terms of good argument structure. You should provide adequate evidence to support the claims you want to make. Your paragraphs will consist of quotations and paraphrases from primary and secondary sources, context and interpretation, novel thoughts and ideas, examples and analogies, counterarguments, and replies to the counterarguments. The evidence should both support the thesis and build toward the conclusion. It may help to think architecturally: lay down the foundation, insert the beams of your strongest support, and then put up the walls to complete the structure. Or you might think in terms of a narrative: tell a story in which the evidence leads to an inevitable conclusion.

CONNECTIONS

See the chapter on logic and reasoning for a developed account of different types of philosophical arguments.

Summarize Your Argument in the Conclusion

Conclude your paper with a short summary that recapitulates the argument. Remind the reader of your thesis and revisit the evidence that supports your argument. You may feel that the argument as written should stand on its own. But it is helpful to the reader to reinforce the argument in your conclusion with a short summary.

Do not introduce any new information in the conclusion; simply summarize what you have already said.

The purpose of this chapter has been to provide you with basic tools to become a successful philosophy student. We started by developing a sophisticated picture of how the brain works, using contemporary neuroscience. The brain represents and projects a picture of the world, full of emotional significance, but this image may contain distortions that amount to a kind of illusion. Cognitive illusions produce errors in reasoning, called cognitive biases. To guard against error, we need to engage in effortful, reflective thinking, where we become aware of our biases and use logical strategies to overcome them. You will do well in your philosophy class if you apply the good habits of mind discussed in this chapter and apply the practical advice that has been provided about how to read and write about philosophy.

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Summary

2.1 The Brain Is an Inference Machine

Our brains facilitate our survival and promote our ability to find a partner and reproduce by using thought, calculation, prediction, and inference. For this reason, our natural and genetically primed ways of thinking do not necessarily serve the goals of philosophy, science, or truth.

The relationship between mind and brain is one of the central problems of metaphysics, known as the "mind-body problem." The mind-body problem is the problem of understanding the relationship between the organic gray and white matter in our skulls (the brain) and the range of conscious awareness (the mind). Biology does not tell us what the relationship is between our private mental life and the neurological, electrochemical interactions that take place in the brain.

It can be helpful to use the resources of psychology and cognitive science (the study of the brain's processes) to help us understand how to become better thinkers. Your brain is not passively capturing the world, like a camera, but is actively projecting the world so that it makes sense to you. When the brain defaults to ways of thinking that produce a less than optimal result or even an incorrect decision, it is operating with a cognitive bias. A cognitive bias is a pattern of "quick" thinking based on the 'rule of thumb.' Cognitive biases are like perceptual illusions.

2.2 Overcoming Cognitive Biases and Engaging in Critical Reflection

Metacognition means thinking about thinking and involves the kind of self-awareness that engages higher order thinking skills. Cognition, or the way we typically engage with the world around us, is first-order thinking, while metacognition is higher-order thinking.

One of the most common cognitive biases is confirmation bias, which is the tendency to search for, interpret, favor, and recall information that confirms or supports your prior beliefs. Anchoring bias refers to our tendency to rely on initial values, prices, or quantities when estimating the actual value, price, or quantity of something. If you are presented with a quantity, even if that number is clearly arbitrary, you will have a hard time discounting it in your subsequent calculations; the initial value "anchors" subsequent estimates. The availability heuristic refers to the tendency to evaluate new information based on the most recent or most easily recalled examples. The availability heuristic occurs when people take easily remembered instances as being more representative than they objectively are (i.e., based on statistical probabilities).

Another more loosely defined category of cognitive bias is the tendency for human beings to align themselves with groups with whom they share values and practices. Tribal thinking makes it hard for us to objectively evaluate information that either aligns with or contradicts the beliefs held by our group or tribe. A related bias is called the bandwagon fallacy. The bandwagon fallacy can lead you to conclude that you ought to do something or believe something because many other people do or believe the same thing.

The sunk cost fallacy is thinking that attaches a value to things in which you have already invested resources that is greater than the value those things have today. A similar type of faulty reasoning leads to the gambler's fallacy, in which a person reasons that future chance events will be more likely if they have not happened recently.

2.3 Developing Good Habits of Mind

One of the ways to respond to cognitive biases is to develop good habits of mind. There are no quick fixes or easy solutions to cognitive biases, but some strategies can be helpful.

To be more objective in thinking about issues, problems, or values, we should actively engage in strategies that remove us from our naturally subjective mindset. When considering philosophical views, try to actively promote the alternative point of view. Another good strategy is to identify counterexamples – instances that render an argument invalid by satisfying all the premises of the claim but demonstrating the conclusion is

false. To respond to strong emotions, use the tools of metacognition to reflect on the source of those emotions and attempt to manage them.

A final concept that is a critical component for becoming a better critical thinker is adopting a stance of epistemic humility. We should recognize these limitations of human knowledge and rein in our epistemic confidence. We should recognize that the knowledge we do possess is fragile, historical, and conditioned by a number of social and biological processes.

2.4 Gathering Information, Evaluating Sources, and Understanding Evidence

Effective internet research requires knowing how to find information and evaluate the quality of sources. The SIFT method for evaluating sources teaches students how to become seasoned fact-checkers when searching online. The four moves for student fact checkers are: stop, investigate the source, find better coverage, trace the claims to the original context.

2.5 Reading Philosophy

Read at a table with a comfortable chair, instead of on a couch or in a bed. Sitting up straight improves concentration. Have something to drink nearby, and avoid distractions, like the TV or music with lyrics. Next, choose an annotation tool. You will need to write notes, underline, and flag portions of the reading, so use text you can alter whenever possible.

Philosophy consists of ideas and arguments. Your goal is to engage with those ideas and arguments to arrive at your own understanding of the issues. It is not as important to read sequentially for plot or narrative; it is much more important to follow the sequence of ideas and arguments. The author may use a variety of methods to make an argument. If you can identify these methods, strategies, and sources of evidence, you will be able to better evaluate the text.

An effective method for reading philosophy involves three key steps: pre-read, first read, and close read. When encountering a new philosophical text, students who use this systematic method will better understand challenging content.

2.6 Writing Philosophy Papers

Most philosophy papers require students to produce an argument in support of a claim about the readings in philosophy class. The first and most important step to writing a good argumentative paper is to find a clear, defensible thesis. The next step is to construct an argument using evidence from assigned readings and external research, original arguments, and applied cases. However, the goal of writing in philosophy is to approach truth, not just to win an argument.

Key Terms

Allostasis the biological process whereby the body prepares itself for anticipated needs.
Anchoring bias the tendency to make estimates based on an earlier initial value.
Availability heuristic the tendency to evaluate new information based on the most recent or most easily recalled examples.
Bandwagon fallacy the fallacy that we ought to do something or believe something because many other people do or believe the same thing.
Cognitive bias a systematic pattern of reasoning that deviates from a rationally optimal or logical judgment based on available facts and probabilities.
Cognitive science the study of the brain and the mechanisms underlying thought, perception, memory, emotion, and other functions of the brain.
Confirmation bias the tendency to search for, interpret, favor, and recall information that confirms or supports established beliefs.
Dialectic a method of discovering truth that comes from dialogue and uses the exchange of different points of

view to arrive at a position that is more likely to be true.

Dunning-Kruger effect the cognitive bias in which people with little expertise in a specific task rate their knowledge too highly relative to others with more knowledge.

Epistemic humility a stance in philosophical and scientific investigation that recognizes the limits of one's own ability to know truth and reality in a direct or complete way.

Gambler's fallacy the reasoning that holds that if a chance event has happened less frequently in the recent past, it is more likely to happen in the near future (or vice versa).

Heuristics mental shortcuts or rules of thumb that provide a method of problem-solving that is not necessarily optimal but is efficient.

Homeostasis the biological process whereby the body regulates itself to maintain a state of equilibrium.

Inference the mental process that leads from one set of information (premises, data, or information) to another (a conclusion, construction, or projection).

Metacognition the process of thinking about thinking. Metacognition engages self-awareness and higher-order thinking skills so that an individual can regulate, monitor, and critically analyze their own thought processes.

Principle of charity the interpretative principle that says a reader ought to interpret the author's statements in the most rational and best possible way.

Representation an information-bearing unit of thought. Representations are the objects that minds consider when they think.

Steelmanning a strategy for making opposing arguments as strong as possible so that it is difficult to knock them down.

Sunk-cost fallacy the fallacy of attaching a greater value to something than is warranted because a person has already invested time, resources, and emotion in that thing (or person).

Tribalism the tendency for human beings to align their beliefs and attitudes with groups of people who have similar attitudes, practices, or beliefs.

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Review Questions

2.1 The Brain Is an Inference Machine

1. Distinguish homeostasis from allostasis, and describe the relationship of both to the emotions and rational thought.
2. What are heuristics?
3. What is the role of emotion in rational thought?
4. Describe some of the reasons for effortless thinking and gut intuitions. Explain why these are sometimes faulty.

2.2 Overcoming Cognitive Biases and Engaging in Critical Reflection

5. What are some of the conditions that make critical thinking possible?
6. Define three of the common cognitive biases identified in this chapter.
7. Describe critical thinking strategies that can be applied to two of the cognitive biases identified in the chapter.

2.3 Developing Good Habits of Mind

8. What is epistemic humility, and how does it relate to the Dunning-Kruger effect?
9. How can you apply the strategies for thinking objectively to your philosophy class?
10. How can you manage your emotions when reading and thinking about philosophy?

2.4 Gathering Information, Evaluating Sources, and Understanding Evidence

11. What are the four moves of fact-checking, and how do they work?

2.5 Reading Philosophy

12. What is the three-part method for philosophical reading?
13. What are some differences between reading philosophical texts and other kinds of texts?

2.6 Writing Philosophy Papers

14. What is a thesis statement, and how should you go about developing a thesis statement for your papers?

Further Reading

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The Early History of Philosophy around the World

3

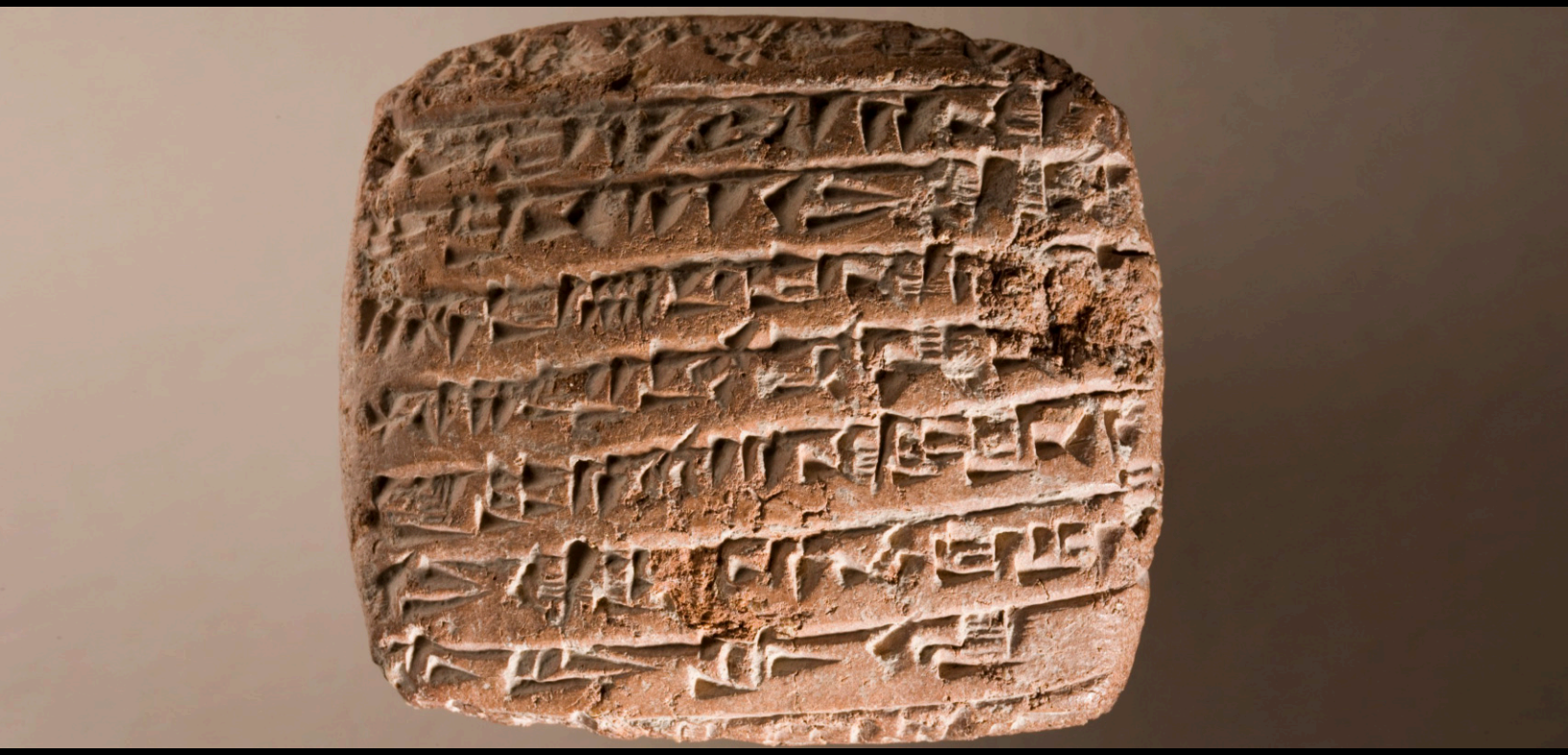

FIGURE 3.1 This cuneiform tablet from Anatolia has been dated to circa 1875–1840 BCE. The development of writing should not be equated with the development of a culture's sense of meaning and history, but writing does make that meaning and history available to those living much later. (credit: "Tablet with Cuneiform Inscription LACMA M.79.106.2 (4 of 4)" by Ashley Van Haeften/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

CHAPTER OUTLINE

3.1 Indigenous Philosophy
3.2 Classical Indian Philosophy
3.3 Classical Chinese Philosophy

INTRODUCTION As discussed in previous chapters, the figure of the sage, the individual found in early societies around the world who mediated between the everyday and the transcendent realm, is an important precursor to philosophy. In most societies, this figure predates the recognition of the philosopher as the individual seeker of wisdom by many hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Justin E. H. Smith (2016) argues that philosophical thought requires abstract thinking of the sort required for the bureaucratic administration of society and that many societies developed philosophical traditions out of these practices of abstract reasoning. These traditions furnished shared beliefs about ethics, metaphysics, and other realms of philosophical inquiry.

Homo sapiens have inhabited the earth for at least 250,000 years, originating in the Blue Nile rift region of northern Africa. However, the oldest forms of human writing were discovered in ancient Sumer, in

Mesopotamia, between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers where they enter the Persian Gulf, dating to around 3500 BCE (approximately 5,500 years ago). The vast period of time between the emergence of biological humans and the emergence of human writing is typically called *prehistory*. This term does not imply that early human beings lacked a sense of their past and the lessons they may draw from it. We know from studying modern aliterate societies that many of them possess oral traditions of storytelling that provide historical perspective. However, whatever perspective prehistoric humans gained from oral history is completely lost to us.

The use of writing to record human thought marks the transition from prehistory to history. The first recorded texts include genealogies, accounts of heroic and everyday actions by human beings, and legal codes. These earliest writings offer a glimpse into early human systems of government and everyday life. Writing expressing philosophical questions came later, primarily in the form of religious and mythological stories, and this is where we begin. There is concrete evidence that at this turning point in human history, people were aware of and concerned with history; engaged in questions of the origins of nature and the self; speculating about the goals and purposes of human life, whether moral or spiritual; and reasoning about right, wrong, justice, and injustice. This turning point is what German intellectual Karl Jaspers (1883–1969) has called the "Axial Period" (1953), more commonly translated as the "Axial Age." Jaspers observed that this "axis" of the emergence of philosophical thought occurred during a somewhat well-defined period, between 800 BCE and 200 BCE, in multiple locations around the world, principally the Mediterranean region, Mesopotamia, India, and China. Remarkably, human beings in these disparate locations appear to have made roughly simultaneous transitions, first from prehistory to history, and then from a mythological and religious understanding of human beings and their place in the world to a more systematic study of human beings and the world around them. This chapter will cover the period of time from the so-called axial age to the development of rich philosophical traditions in Africa, Asia, and the Americas.

3.1 Indigenous Philosophy

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify challenges in the study of Indigenous philosophies.
- Describe metaphysical and epistemological ideas explored by Indigenous African philosophies.
- Describe metaphysical and epistemological ideas explored by Indigenous Native American philosophies.
- Describe metaphysical and epistemological ideas explored by Mesoamerican philosophies.

Some of the best-known ancient texts, connected to many of the great civilizations around the world, are religious or mythological in nature. Examples include the Vedas of India, the earliest literature of China, and the Jewish Talmud. These texts introduce aspects of philosophical inquiry—such as questions concerning the origins of the cosmos and the nature and purpose of human life, morality, justice, human excellence, knowledge, and so forth—in terms of stories and explanations that rely on the supernatural. These stories provide context, meaning, and direction for human life within a framework that assumes that the natural world is infused with supernatural importance. Such texts are a testament to the fundamental and binding nature of religion in human societies.

When humans shift from religious answers to questions about purpose and meaning to more naturalistic and logical answers, they move from the realm of myth to the realm of reason. In Greek, this movement is described as a move from **mythos** to **logos**, where *mythos* signifies the supernatural stories people tell, while *logos* signifies the rational, logical, and scientific stories they tell. This distinction may lead one to believe that there is a clear transition from religious thought to philosophical or scientific thought, but this is not the case. The earliest philosophers in Greece, Rome, India, China, and North Africa all used mythological and analogical (analogy-based) stories to explain their rational systems, while religious texts from the same period often engage in serious, logical argumentation. Rather than seeing a decisive break between mythological thinking and rational thinking, one should understand the transition from mythos to logos as a gradual, uneven, and

zig-zagging progression. This progression teaches that there are close connections between religion, philosophy, and science in terms of the desire to understand, explain, and find purpose for human existence.

Challenges in Researching Indigenous Philosophy

There is growing interest in **Indigenous philosophy** in contemporary academic philosophy, as a way of engaging with both the historical and present-day thought of Indigenous peoples around the world. Indigenous philosophy broadly refers to the ideas of Indigenous peoples pertaining to the nature of the world, human existence, ethics, ideal social and political structures, and other topics also considered by traditional academic philosophy. Unlike the philosophies of ancient Greece, India, and China, Indigenous philosophies did not spread across vast territorial empires or feature centers of formal learning that documented and developed philosophical ideas over hundreds or thousands of years. The study of Indigenous philosophies, or **ethnophilosophy**, often must rely on different methods than typical academic philosophy. Indigenous philosophy is not usually recorded in texts that can be read and analyzed. Instead, those seeking to understand Indigenous philosophical thinking must engage in the kind of research often used in ethnographic and sociological study, including identifying individuals who hold and transmit cultural knowledge about philosophical thought and recording interviews and conversations with them. Most of the philosophy of Indigenous peoples has been passed down through oral traditions, in much the same way that prehistoric thought was transmitted.

There are additional challenges to studying Indigenous philosophy. The discipline of academic philosophy has traditionally dismissed or ignored the philosophical thought of Indigenous peoples, considering it to lie outside the realm of logos. The long history of erasure of Indigenous philosophical thought in academic philosophy makes it difficult to engage in academic discussion with it. There is an absence of past scholarship in this field in the West. Indigenous peoples have also been subjected to racist practices, such as forced education in languages other than their own, that make it difficult for them to retain a lively philosophical tradition. Furthermore, many Indigenous customs have been lost because of the loss of life and cultural heritage among Indigenous peoples following colonization by Europeans and Americans.

Indigenous African Philosophy

If the transition from mythos to logos is predicated on the development of written language, then this transition may have first occurred in Africa. Africa was home to the development of many ancient writing systems, including the system of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics that developed during the fourth millennium BCE. The modern Western understanding of the deep history of philosophy is severely hampered by the lack of scholarship in English and other European languages, the loss of collective cultural knowledge exacerbated by colonialism, and the sometimes deliberate destruction of historical records, such as the burning of the Library of Alexandria. As a result, research has relied heavily on oral traditions or the rediscovery and translation of written evidence. The philosophical legacy of ancient Egypt is discussed in the chapter on classical philosophy. This chapter will examine research into ethnophilosophy from other regions of Africa.

The seizure of the city of Ceuta, bordering present-day Morocco, by the Portuguese in 1415 marks the first attempts by Europeans to colonize Africa. By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, European nations were engaging in what is called the “scramble for Africa.” Prior to this period, European settlement in Africa had been limited by the mosquito-borne disease malaria, the inappropriateness of African terrain to equine (horse-based) conquest, and the power of strong coastal states. European nations now gained access to the interior of Africa with the help of the discovery of quinine to treat malaria and the development of mechanized vehicles and advanced weaponry. During the colonial era, young Africans identified as having intellectual promise were sent to study at European universities, where they read Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, and other Western philosophers. Whether the intent was to help these communities enter the modern age or to create local administrations that would further the interests of Western parties—or both—the result was the failure to preserve knowledge about the history and thought of localities and regions.

In later decades, some Western-educated Africans began to engage directly with African philosophies. In 1910, Congolese philosopher Stefano Kaoze (c. 1885–1951) described the thought of the Bantu people pertaining to moral values, knowledge, and God in an essay entitled "The Psychology of the Bantus" (Dübgen and Skupien, 2019). *Bantu* is a blanket term for hundreds of different ethnic groups in Central and Southern African that speak what are referred to as Bantu languages and share many cultural features (see Figure 3.2). In later writings, Kaoze explored other African thought systems, arguing that these systems had much to teach Western thought systems grounded in Christianity (Nkulu Kabamba and Mpala Mbabula 2017).

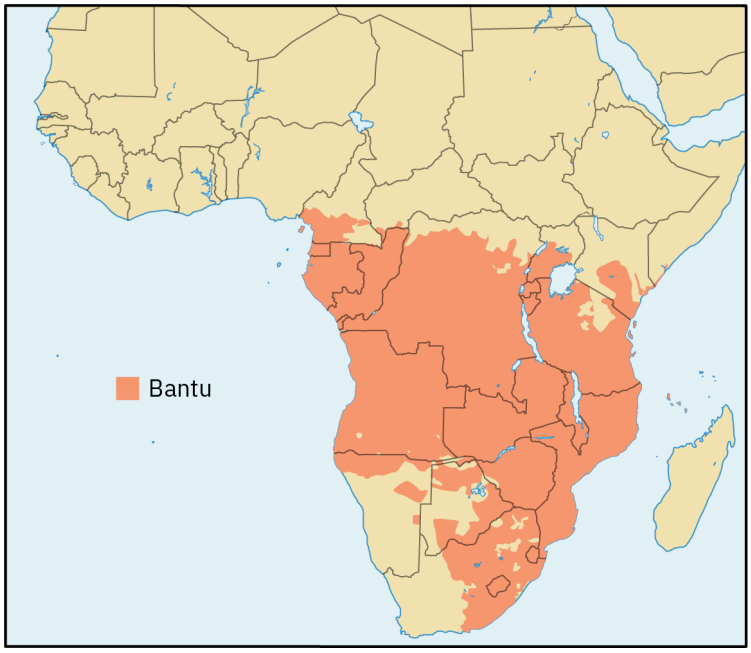

FIGURE 3.2 Approximate territory of Bantu peoples. Bantu is a blanket term for hundreds of different ethnic groups that speak what are referred to as Bantu languages and share many cultural features. (attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY 4.0 license)

It was not until 1945, when Belgian missionary Placide Tempels (1906–1977) published *Bantu Philosophy*, that the topic of African philosophy gained significant attention in the West. Tempels rejected the characterization of African philosophy and theology as consisting of magic, animism, and ancestor worship, instead exploring the richness of Bantu thought pertaining to individuals, society, and the divine. Tempels described Bantu peoples as believing in a "vital force," the source of which is God. He observed that what Western thinkers envisioned as a divine being, the Bantu understood as various forces, including human forces, animal forces, and mineral forces. They viewed the universe as comprising all of these forces, and these forces could directly impact the "life force" of an individual (Okafor 1982, 84).

Later African scholars and theologians, such John Mbiti (1931–2019) and Alexis Kagame (1912–1981), indicated that Tempels was somewhat inventive in his descriptions and interpretations. They engaged in a more authentic study of Bantu philosophy, recording and analyzing African proverbs, stories, art, and music to illuminate what they presented as a shared worldview. One example of this shared worldview is the Zulu term *ubuntu*, which can be translated as "humanity." Variations on the term appear in many other Bantu languages, all referring to a similar concept, expressed through maxims such as "I am because we are." The concept of *ubuntu* holds that human beings have a deep natural interdependence, to the point that we are mutually dependent on one another even for our existence. The notion of *ubuntu* has inspired a uniquely African approach to communitarian philosophy, which refers to ideas about politics and society that privilege the community over the individual.

Nigerian philosopher Sophie Olúwọlé (1935–2018) was a practitioner and scholar of Yoruba philosophy. The Yoruba are a prominent ethnic group in Nigeria and other locations in sub-Saharan Africa. Among other

accomplishments, Olúwọlé translated the Odu Ifá, the oral history concerning the pantheon and divination system of Ifá, the religion of the Yoruba peoples. Olúwọlé proposed that Ọ̀rúnmìlà, the high priest featured in the Odu Ifá, was a historical figure and the first Yoruba philosopher. She argued that Ọ̀rúnmìlà had an equal claim to that of Socrates as the founder of philosophy. In *Socrates and Ọ̀rúnmìlà: Two Patron Saints of Classical Philosophy* (2015), Olúwọlé compares the two philosophers and finds many similarities. Both are considered founders of philosophical traditions. Neither wrote anything down during their lifetimes. They both placed a primacy on the concepts of virtue and learning to live in keeping with virtue. Surprisingly, they shared cosmological views, such as a belief in reincarnation and predestination. Olúwọlé compiled quotes from each philosopher on specific topics, some of which are listed in Table 3.1. Olúwọlé argues that Yoruba ideas as conveyed through the Odu Ifá should be given full standing as a philosophy.

Topic	Socrates's Quote	Ọ̀rúnmìlà's Quote
The nature of truth	"But the highest truth is that which is eternal and unchangeable."	"Truth is what the Great Invisible God uses in organizing the world. . . . Truth is the Word that can never be corrupted."
The limits of human knowledge	"And I am called wise for my hearers always imagine that I myself possess the wisdom which I find wanting in others. But the truth is, O men of Athens, that God only is wise. . . . And so I go about the world, obedient to the God."	"When they turned to me and said: 'Bàbá, we now accept that you are the only one who knows the end of everything,' I retorted, 'I myself do not know these things.' For instruction on this matter, you have to go to God through divination, for He alone is the possessor of that sort of wisdom."
Good and bad	"And are not all things either good or evil, or intermediate and indifferent?"	"Tribulation does not come without its good aspects. The positive and the negative constitute an inseparable pair."
Human nature	"No man voluntarily pursues evil, or that which he thinks to be evil. To prefer evil to good is not in human nature."	"No one who knows that the result of honesty is always positive would choose wickedness when s/he is aware that it has a negative reward."

TABLE 3.1 Olúwọlé's Comparison of Socrates's and Ọ̀rúnmìlà's Ideas. (source: Olúwọlé 2015)

Olúwọlé does identify one important distinction between the ideas of Socrates and Ọ̀rúnmìlà. Socrates held a binary metaphysical theory of matter and ideas, contrasting the unchanging eternal with the forms in which the eternal manifests itself in the physical world. By contrast, Ọ̀rúnmìlà taught that matter and ideas are inseparable. Similarly, while Socrates distinguished the concepts of good and bad, Ọ̀rúnmìlà held that they are "an inseparable pair" (Olúwọlé 2015, 64). The strict binary of the Greeks and of the West, Olúwọlé concludes, leads to an either-or perspective on truth and debate. The Yoruba, she contends, maintain a complementary dualist view of reality.

VIDEO

Watch Professor Olúwọlé discuss what Socrates and Ọ̀rúnmìlà have in common.
Click to view content (https://openstax.org/books/introduction-philosophy/pages/3-1-indigenous-philosophy)

WRITE LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Review the contents of Table 3.1. Translate each of the quotes into everyday language and compare your translations of the sayings of Ọ̀rúnmìlà and Socrates. Where do they agree, and how do they differ?

In the 1970s, Kenyan philosopher Henry Odera Oruka (1944–1995) launched a field study to record the philosophical thoughts of sages in modern-day Kenya. Researchers interviewed individual thinkers from various ethnic groups and questioned them about their views on central concepts in Western philosophy and issues related to applied ethics. Among other aims, this project was intended to demonstrate that philosophy is not an undertaking that is unique to the literate world. Odera Oruka's findings were published in 1990, but no systematic attempt has been made to analyze them (Presbey 2017).

As these philosophers and their work demonstrate, African philosophy has emerged as a body of thought that stands on its own. The philosophy of African peoples, both those living on the African continent and those elsewhere in the world, is rooted in and developed out of concepts that both complement and challenge the Western tradition.

CONNECTIONS

The chapter on classical philosophy discusses Egyptian and Ethiopian philosophers who contributed to the development of classical philosophy in the ancient and early modern worlds.

Indigenous North American Philosophical Thought

Work on Native American philosophy has expanded in recent years, as philosophers, many of them Native American themselves, have engaged in collective research on Native American thought. This work has included the development of academic societies and journals devoted to the topic. Like many Indigenous African peoples, Native American peoples did not rely on written documents to preserve their history and culture but instead preserved knowledge through oral tradition. These oral traditions included rituals, ceremonies, songs, stories, and dance. What is known about Native American philosophy comes from this oral tradition as well as the experiences and thoughts of contemporary Native American people.

Any attempt to define Indigenous North American philosophical thought is further complicated by the fact that thousands of distinct societies have existed on the continent, each with their own ideas about how the world was created, what are the basic elements of reality, what constitutes the self, and other metaphysical issues. There is a rich expanse of philosophical views to synthesize—and for every possible generalization, there are exceptions. Still, some generalizations of Indigenous North American philosophy are true more often than not. One such generalization is the perception that the creative process of the universe is akin to the thought process. Another is that more than one being is responsible for the creation of the universe—and that these beings do not take on anthropomorphic forms (Forbes 2001).

Additionally, there are a number of characteristics common to Indigenous North American metaphysical concepts. Many Native American peoples, for example, emphasize balance, complementarity, and exchange between the different entities that make up the world. For instance, the Diné see breath as a fundamental force in nature, with the exchange of the internal and the external passing through all natural processes. Similarly, the Zuni note that twins, such as the twin Evening Star and the Morning Star—both of which are actually Venus – share a complementary and mirrored existence, serving as a reminder that there can be multiple manifestations of the same thing in nature. Additionally, concepts such as gender identity are understood as animated, nonbinary, and non-discrete, such that gender may develop and change over time (Waters 2004, 107). These generalizations point to a Native American metaphysics that is based on animate processes that are complementary, interactive, and integrated.

North American Indigenous peoples also have views of the self that differ from the European tradition. The Pueblo possess a sense of personal and community identity shaped by both place and time. Known as a **transformative model of identity**, this social identity is understood to spiral both outward and inward through expanding and retracting influences over a certain area of land (Jojola 2004). Extant petroglyphic spirals show the migration of a clan outward to the boundaries of its physical and spiritual territory as well as the inward journey homeward. These journeys also reflect a temporal component, as they were coordinated

with the cycles of the solstice calendar. Such metaphysical understandings are reflected in the tendency of many Native American cultures to build moral and ethical concepts on the idea that human beings are fundamentally social rather than individual—a "we," not an "I."

FIGURE 3.3 These petroglyphic spirals created by the Ancestral Pueblo represent both physical and spiritual journeys. The boxy spiral shown here likely represents the path that many Southwestern tribes believe they took when they emerged from the earth. Many contemporary scholars identify this with the geographic feature of the Grand Canyon. (credit: "Anasazi Indian Petroglyphs (~600 to 1300 A.D.) (Mesa Verde National Park, Colorado, USA) 1" by James St. John/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Mesoamerican Philosophy

Mesoamerican peoples include an array of tribes and cultures, speaking multiple languages, that developed several sophisticated civilizations between 2000 BCE and the arrival of European colonialists in the 1500s CE. This area of the world developed both pictographic/hieroglyphic and alphabetic/phonetic forms of writing that allowed them to record thoughts and ideas, providing modern scholars access to some of the philosophical reflection that occurred within these societies. This section will examine some examples of the thought of Mesoamerican peoples by looking at the preserved writings of the Maya and the Aztec. Though the philosophical thought of each civilization is examined as if it were uniform, note that each encompassed many diverse tribes and cultures with a variety of languages, cultural practices, and religious beliefs.

FIGURE 3.4 The Maya and Aztec were powerful civilizations for centuries. The existence of written records from each of these peoples has given contemporary scholars access to their philosophy, spirituality, and scientific advances. (attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY 4.0 license)

Mayan Writings

The Maya first settled in villages in the area that runs from southern Mexico through Guatemala and northern Belize around 1500 BCE. Between 750 and 500 BCE, large city-states arose and established a trading network. At the height of their civilization, between approximately 250 CE and 900 CE, the Maya possessed a written language that appears to have been a combination of an alphabetic/phonetic language and a pictographic/hieroglyphic language, used not only by the priesthood but also by the urban elite. This writing appears on stone slabs, pottery, and sculptures as well as in books called **codices** (plural of *codex*), written on a paper made from tree bark.

The Maya possessed advanced knowledge of mathematics and natural philosophy. However, following the Spanish conquest of this territory, Catholic priests burned almost all of the Maya codices as well as their scientific and technical manuals (*Yucatan Times* 2019). In the years that followed the conquest, the Maya lost their written language. However, some writings in clay did survive, providing scholars a glimpse into Maya thought. They implemented a numerical system using symbols that allowed for representation of very large numbers, and they may have been the first to use the number 0 in mathematics. This numerical system enabled the Maya to gain insights into arithmetic and geometry that surpassed those of the Egyptians. Their knowledge of astronomy was so advanced that they could correctly predict the timing of solar eclipses. Unlike other early civilizations, the Maya had a highly sophisticated calendar and a unique conception of time.

FIGURE 3.5 This piece of Mayan writing, known as the Dresden Codex because it was found in the city of Dresden, Germany, in the 1700s, is one of the oldest known examples of writing from the Americas. It has been dated to the 11th or 12th century. (credit: "Dresden Codex" by Chris Protopapas/Flickr, Public Domain)

Maya Calendar

The Maya developed a calendar that tracked many cycles simultaneously, including the solar year and the "calendar round," a period of 52 years. The calendar played a central role in Maya rituals and sacred celebrations. Astronomical events, in particular the position of Venus relative to the sun and moon, have been noted to align with the dates of historical battles, causing some to hypothesize that the Maya may have scheduled battles to coincide with these cycles. The Maya placed great importance on customs and rituals surrounding the solar calendar. Using these calendars, the Maya were able to record complex histories of their civilization.

Maya Concept of Time and Divinity

The Maya had a complex understanding of time. They recognized an experiential or existential aspect of time—for instance, observing that disinterest or concentration can elongate or shorten time. The experience of "awe" was considered particularly important because of its ability to bring a person into the present moment, increasing their awareness of the immediate effect of fundamental forces such as the energy of the sun and making them more capable of clear thinking, decision-making, and understanding.

Although the Maya worshipped an array of gods, they believed in a single godlike force, the sun's force or energy, called *K'in*. This force was understood in terms of the position of the sun relative to the planets and the moon during different periods of the calendar. The king served as a conduit through which this divine force, the solar energy, passed to subjects. The Maya also believed that time is the expression of *K'in*. The ability of rulers and priests to predict natural events, such as an eclipse or the coming of spring, and thus seemingly to control time served to secure the allegiance of their subjects and legitimized their rule.

Aztec Metaphysical Thought

For the Aztecs, the fundamental and total character of the universe was captured by the concept of *teotl*, a godlike force or energy that is the basis for all reality. They considered this energy to be a sacred source fueling all life, actions, and desires as well as the motion and power of inanimate objects. In this sense, Aztec metaphysics adopted a view of the world that was pantheistic and monist, meaning that it viewed all reality as composed of a single kind of thing and that thing was divine in nature. However, *teotl* is not an agent or moral force, like the Abrahamic God, but rather a power or energy that is entirely amoral.

Teotl is not a static substance but a process through which nature unfolds. It changes continually and develops through time toward an endpoint or goal, a view that philosophers call *teleological*. For the Aztecs, time was not linear but rather cyclical. Thus, even though *teotl* tends toward an end point and there is an end of humanity and Earth as we know it, from the point of view of the universe, this is part of a cycle, just like leaves

fall from trees before winter. Moreover, because *teotl* is both the matter from which everything in the universe is made and the force by which things are created, change, and move, it is an all-encompassing, dynamic, and immanent force within nature (Maffie 2013).

Teotl has three different shapes, aspects, or manifestations, each with different characteristics, including different motions, powers, and goals. These three aspects of *teotl* have been assigned metaphorical positions related to weaving, aligning an important cultural practice of the Aztecs with their conception of fundamental reality.

Aztec Epistemological Thought

Philosophers use the term **epistemology** to refer to the study of knowledge involving questions such as how we know what we know, what is the nature of true knowledge, and what are the limits to what humans can know. Aztec epistemology understood the concept of knowledge and truth as "well-rootedness." To say that someone knows or understands the truth is to say that they are well-grounded or stably founded in reality. The Aztecs understood truth not in reference to some belief or proposition of reality but as a property of one's character when one is well-grounded. Being well-grounded means understanding the ways reality presents itself and being capable of acting according to what reality dictates. Being well-rooted in reality allows one to grow and develop, following the metaphor of a plant that is able to thrive because of its well-rootedness in the soil. This concept has both an epistemological aspect (relating to knowledge) and an ethical aspect (providing the means by which people may flourish).

In Aztec culture, rooting oneself in the constantly changing and growing power of *teotl* was considered necessary because existence on Earth was considered to be "slippery," meaning that it is part of a process of cyclic change that is constantly evolving. The fundamental question for human beings is, How does one maintain balance on the slippery earth? This question motivates the need to develop the type of character that allows one to remain well-rooted and to find stability and balance, given the shifting and changing nature of Earth.

READ LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

In the short article "What the Aztecs Can Teach Us about Happiness and the Good Life (https://openstax.org/r/whattheaztecs)", Sebastian Purcell outlines an Aztec approach to virtue and the good life grounded in the Aztec folk wisdom that "the earth is slippery, slick." In response to this state of affairs, Aztec thinkers advocated for living a well-rooted life. What does it mean to say that "the earth is slippery"? Do you think this is accurate? What does it mean to live a well-rooted life? What are the levels of well-rootedness? How might well-rootedness facilitate happiness and a good life? Do you think that this accurately describes the way one might achieve happiness? What is missing?

3.2 Classical Indian Philosophy

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify key Indian metaphysical concepts.
- Distinguish between major schools of Indian thought.
- Compare and contrast Indian philosophical writings with other areas of philosophy.

The philosophical depth and richness of Indian philosophy rivals that of European philosophy, and to do justice to it would require a book-length survey. Still, this introductory discussion is intended to show the richness of various Indian philosophical traditions that are more ancient than the Greek origins of European philosophy. Beginning with the Vedic texts, which date from between the seventh and sixth centuries BCE, Indian philosophical traditions are a few centuries older than the earliest European philosophical traditions.

An important parallel between Greek and Roman philosophy and Indian philosophy lies in their respective conceptions of philosophy. Philosophers from both of these traditions understand philosophy as something more than a theoretical activity. For all of these ancient philosophical traditions, philosophy is a practical endeavor. It is a way of life.

The Vedic Tradition

The earliest philosophical texts in India constitute the Vedic tradition. The four **Vedas** are the oldest of the Hindu scriptures. They are the *Rigveda*, the *Samaveda*, the *Yajurveda*, and the *Atharvaveda*. The four Vedas were composed between 1500 and 900 BCE by the Indo-Aryan tribes that had settled in northern India. The Vedas are also called Shruti, which means "hearing" in Sanskrit. This is because for hundreds of years, the Vedas were recited orally. Hindus believe that the Vedas were divinely inspired; priests were orally transmitting the divine word through the generations.

The *Rigveda* is the most ancient of the four Vedic texts. The text is a collection of the "family books" of 10 clans, each of which were reluctant to part with their secret ancestral knowledge. However, when the Kuru monarchs unified these clans, they organized and codified this knowledge around 1200 BCE. The Brahmanic, or priestly, culture arose under the Kuru dynasty (Witzel 1997) and produced the three remaining Vedas. The *Samaveda* contains many of the *Rigveda* hymns but ascribes to those hymns melodies so that they can be chanted. The *Yajurveda* contains hymns that accompany rites of healing and other types of rituals. These two texts shine light on the history of Indo-Aryans during the Vedic period, the deities they worshipped, and their ideas about the nature of the world, its creation, and humans. The *Atharvaveda* incorporates rituals that reveal the daily customs and beliefs of the people, including their traditions surrounding birth and death. This text also contains philosophical speculation about the purpose of the rituals (Witzel 1997).

The Later Texts and Organization

Later Hindu texts developed during the Vedic and post-Vedic periods were integrated into the four Vedas such that each Veda now consists of four sections: (1) the Samhitas, or mantras and benedictions—the original hymns of the Vedas; (2) the Aranyakas, or directives about rituals and sacrifice; (3) the Brahmanas, or commentaries on these rituals; and (4) the **Upanishads**, which consists of two Indian epics as well as philosophical reflections.

The Upanishad epics include the Bhagavad Gita (Song of the Lord), which is part of a much longer poem called the Mahabharata, and the Ramayana. The Mahabharata is an epic depicting the battles of the noble house of Bharata, while the Ramayana focuses on the ancient king Rama during his 14-year exile. There are 13 principal Upanishads and more than 100 minor ones, composed between 800 and 200 BCE in a mix of prose and verse. *Upanishad* derives from the Sanskrit words *upa* (near), *ni* (down), and *shad* (to sit), which comes from the fact that these texts were taught to students who sat at their teachers' feet. Additionally, the term signifies that these texts reveal esoteric doctrines about the true nature of reality beyond the realm of sense perception. The Upanishads became the philosophical core of Hinduism.

Metaphysical Thought in the Vedic Texts

The Vedic texts state that through reflection on the self, one comes to understand the cosmos. Like the Greeks much later, these texts claim that there is a structural analogy between the self and the universe, with one sharing the form of the other. Through inner reflection on oneself, one can then understand the nature of the world.

FIGURE 3.6 The Vedic texts state that reflection on the self can lead to knowledge of the cosmos, proposing that the two share the same form. (credit: "Nightfall" by Mike Lewinski/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

The *Rigveda* examines the origin of the universe and asks whether the gods created humanity or humans created the gods—a question that would later be posed by the Greek philosopher Xenophanes. More than half of the verses in the *Rigveda* are devoted to metaphysical speculation concerning cosmological theories and the relationship between the individual and the universe. The idea that emerges within Hinduism is that the universe is cyclical in nature. The cycle of the seasons and the cyclical nature of other natural processes are understood to mirror the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth among humans and other animals. Related to this conception is the philosophical question of how one puts an end to this cycle. The Hindus suggest that the answer lies in purification, with ascetic rituals provided as means to achieve freedom from the cycle of reincarnation.

Another area of similarity between the universe and humanity is that both are understood to have a hierarchical structure. Hindu theology assigns a rigid hierarchy to the cosmos, with the triple deity, Vishnu, Brahma, and Shiva, standing above the other gods. India first developed its hierarchical caste system during the Vedic period. Vedic rituals cemented caste hierarchies, the remnants of which still structure Indian society today.

CONNECTIONS

See the chapter on the emergence of classical philosophy for more on Hindu views of the nature of the self.

Classical Indian Darshanas

The word ***darshana*** derives from a Sanskrit word meaning "to view." In Hindu philosophy, *darshana* refers to the beholding of a god, a holy person, or a sacred object. This experience is reciprocal: the religious believer beholds the deity and is beheld by the deity in turn. Those who behold the sacred are blessed by this encounter. The term *darshana* is also used to refer to six classical schools of thought based on views or manifestations of the divine—six ways of seeing and being seen by the divine. The six principal orthodox Hindu *darshanas* are Samkhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Mimamsa, and Vedanta. Non-Hindu or heterodox *darshanas* include Buddhism and Jainism.

Samkhya

Samkhya is a dualistic school of philosophy that holds that everything is composed of ***purusha*** (pure, absolute consciousness) and ***prakriti*** (matter). An evolutionary process gets underway when *purusha* comes into contact with *prakriti*. These admixtures of mind and matter produce more or less pure things such as the

human mind, the five senses, the intellect, and the ego as well as various manifestations of material things. Living beings occur when *purusha* and *prakriti* bond together. Liberation finally occurs when mind is freed from the bondage of matter.

CONNECTIONS

The chapter on metaphysics explores Hindu and Buddhist views of self that emerged from Samkhya metaphysics.

Western readers should take care not to reduce Samkhya's metaphysics and epistemology to the various dualistic systems seen in, for example, the account of the soul in Plato's *Phaedo* or in Christian metaphysics more generally. The metaphysical system of creation in Samkhya is much more complex than either of these Western examples.

When *purusha* first focuses on *prakriti*, *buddhi*, or spiritual awareness, results. Spiritual awareness gives rise to the individualized ego or I-consciousness that creates five gross elements (space, air, earth, fire, water) and then five fine elements (sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste). These in turn give rise to the five sense organs, the five organs of activity (used to speak, grasp, move, procreate, and evacuate), and the mind that coordinates them.

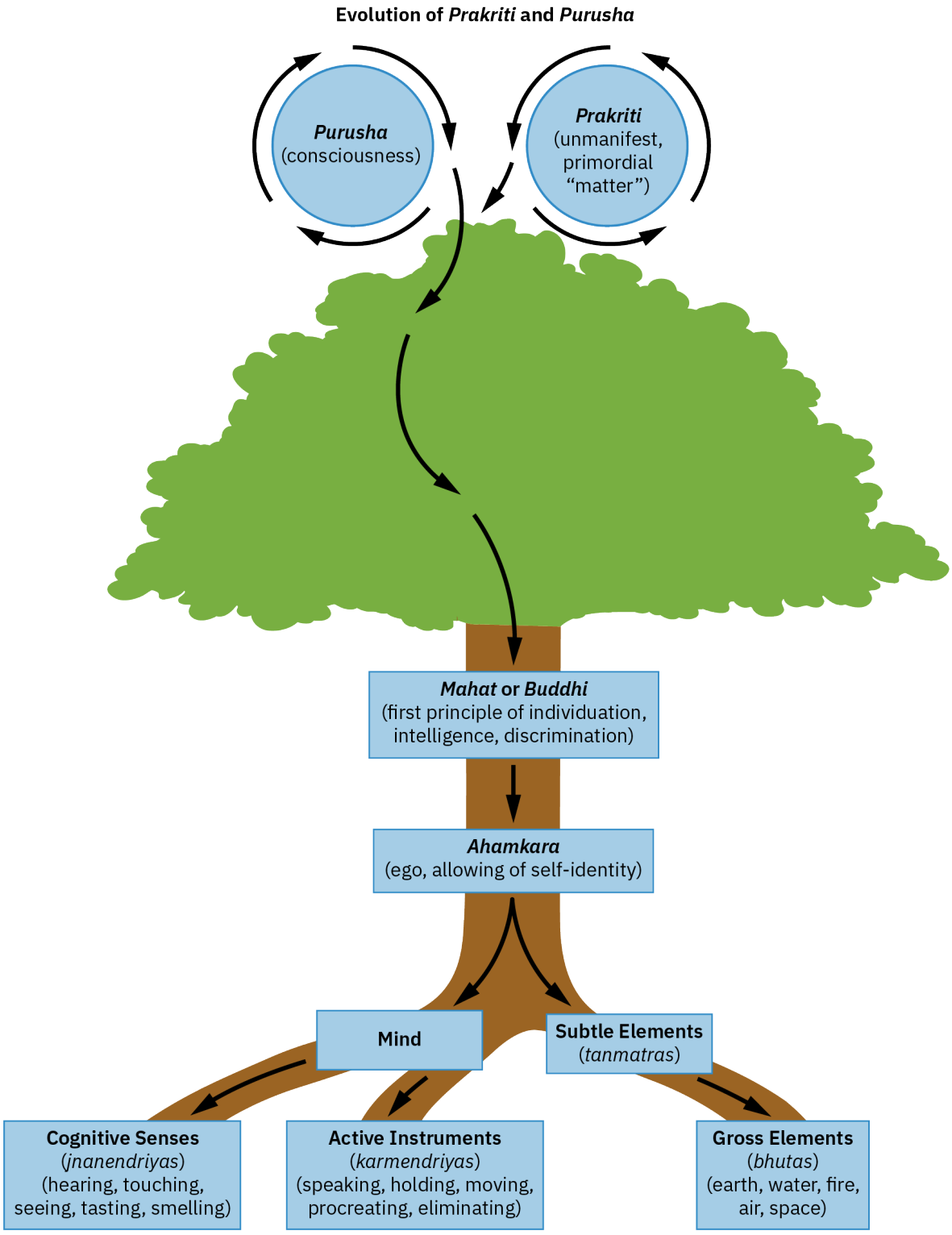

FIGURE 3.7 In Hinduism, the interaction between *purusha* (pure, absolute consciousness) and *prakriti* (matter) is understood to result in many elements of existence. (attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY 4.0 license)

Yoga

Yoga has become popularized as a fitness practice throughout the world, but the Westernization of this concept has emptied it of much of its original content. Although yoga instructors will still sometimes use Sanskrit

terms for various poses, the movement has largely lost its cultural and spiritual vitality as it has become popular in the West. It originally developed during the Vedic period and influenced Buddhist meditation practices.

First mentioned in the *Rigveda*, Yoga is the mental process through which an individual's soul joins with the supreme soul. Originally a part of the Samkhya school, it emerged as a practice during the first millennium BCE. The teachings of the sage Patanjali, who lived circa 400 BCE, regarding ancient Yoga traditions and beliefs were compiled into approximately 200 Yoga sutras. The purpose of Yoga is the stopping of the movement of thought. Only then do individuals encounter their true selves, and only then is the distinction between the observer and that which is being observed overcome (Rodrigues 2018).

Yoga involves eight limbs. The first involves the observance of the *yamas*, moral restraints that keep individuals from being violent, lying, stealing, hoarding, and squandering vital energies (often interpreted as a practice of celibacy). The second limb consists of personal codes of conduct, known as the *niyamas*—purity, discipline, self-study, contentment (gratitude and nonattachment), and surrender to the higher being. The third and fourth limbs, familiar to Western practitioners, are the postures, *asana*, and breath control, *pranayama*. The fifth and sixth limbs involve the mastering of the senses needed to achieve a peaceful mind and focus, the ability to concentrate deeply on one thing—a mental image, a word, or a spot on the wall (Showkeir and Showkeir 2013). The seventh limb involves meditation, which allows one to reach the eight limb, *samadhi*, the oneness of the self and true reality, the supreme soul.

During the Upanishadic period (900–200 BCE), Yoga was incorporated into the new philosophic traditions that gave rise to Jainism and Buddhism. Yoga influenced the emergence of Bhakti and Sufism within Islamic culture in the 15th century CE following the conquest of India by Islamic leaders. New schools and theories of Yoga evolved. Swami Vivekananda's translations of scriptures into English facilitated the spread of Yoga in the West in the 19th century. Today, Yoga is practiced as a form of spirituality across the globe (Pradhan 2015).

Nyaya

Nyaya, which can be translated as "method" or "rule," focuses on logic and epistemology. Scholars seek to develop four of the Hindu *pramanas*, or proofs, as reliable ways of gaining knowledge: perception, inference, comparison, and testimony. Practitioners seek liberation from suffering through right knowledge. They believe that everything that exists could be directly perceived and understood if only one had the proper method for doing so. False knowledge is delusion that precludes purification and enlightenment.

Vaisheshika

The Vaisheshika system developed independently of Nyaya but gradually came to share many of its core ideas. Its epistemology is simpler, allowing for only perception and inference as forms of reliable knowledge. It is known for its naturalism, and scholars of the Vaisheshika school developed a form of atomism. The atoms themselves are understood to be indestructible in their pure state, but as they enter into combinations with one another, these mixtures can be decomposed. Members of the Vaisheshika school believe that only complete knowledge can lead to purification and liberation.

Mimamsa

The Mimamsa school was one of the earliest philosophical schools of Hinduism, grounded in the interpretation of the Vedic texts. It seeks to investigate *dharma*, or the duties, rituals, and norms present in society. The gods themselves are irrelevant to this endeavor, so there are both theistic and atheistic aspects of this school. Scholars of the Mimamsa school carefully investigate language because they believe that language prescribes how humans ought to behave.

Vedanta

Vedanta comprises a number of schools that focus on the Upanishads, and the term itself signifies the end or culmination of the Vedas. All the various Vedanta schools hold that *brahman* exists as the unchanging cause of

the universe. The self is the agent of its own acts (*karma*), and each agent gets their due as a result of karma. As with the other Hindu schools, adherents of Vedanta seek liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth.

Like many philosophical traditions, classical Indian philosophy casts the living world as something to ultimately escape. Practices and teachings such as Yoga provide a particularly explicit set of instructions on how one might go about achieving this transcendent aim. The incorporation of these teachings into other traditions and cultures, in both the past and the present, points to their broad and enduring appeal.

3.3 Classical Chinese Philosophy

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Distinguish the three main schools of classical Chinese philosophy: Confucianism, Mohism, and Daoism.
- Explain the five constant virtues of Confucian moral philosophy.
- Identify the key principles of Mohism.
- Evaluate Daoism's approach to ethics.

In 2013, archaeologists made a remarkable discovery—Chinese characters on a stone axe dating to 5,000 years ago (Tang 2013). Previously, the earliest known Chinese characters had been dated to approximately 1600 BCE. The stone axe suggests that a written language was in use much earlier than previously thought.

The first written records referring to names, dates, and accounts that were part of Chinese prehistory, like the details of other prehistoric periods around the world, are unverifiable. But this discovery of very early writing suggests that what were once considered myths of Chinese history may have a basis in reality. The so-called Five Emperors and the great leaders Yao, Shun, and Yu are frequently referenced in early writings. These great leaders are identified as sages and are said to have invented the key tools for agrarian civilization, including traps, nets, the plow, and river dams to provide a stable water supply.

CONNECTIONS

Read more about the role of sages in the chapter on introduction to philosophy.

That early sages were rulers and inventors of key technological advances is typical of Chinese thought, which emphasizes the practical importance of wisdom. Classical Chinese philosophers were less interested in questions of epistemology and logic; instead, the most enduring impact of classical Chinese philosophy pertained to ethics. Chinese philosophers were less concerned with bridging the gap between internal thought (subjectivity) and the external world (objectivity) than with understanding how the individual fits in a larger social system so that each may act in the best possible way. This section will examine how the main schools of Chinese philosophy—Confucianism, Daoism, and Mohism—address these questions.

Early Chinese Philosophical Thought prior to Confucius

Philosophical thought in China initially developed during an epoch known as the Spring and Autumn period, between the eighth and fifth centuries BCE. The period gets its name from a historical document attributed to Confucius called the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. This period was characterized by the rise of a sophisticated feudal system and relative stability in Chinese politics. Despite advances in government, agriculture, art, and culture, the earliest Chinese texts reveal a concern with the supernatural and highlight the connections that were thought to exist between human beings and the spiritual realm. Great rulers governed not only the affairs of human beings but also the spiritual forces that influence human affairs (Fung 1952). Similarly, the arts of divination, astrology, and magic were celebrated as evidence of the capacity of some human beings to manipulate spiritual forces to benefit humanity.

Magical and mystical thinking of this early period was connected to scientific and philosophical thought. For instance, it was thought that there were five fundamental elements: earth, wood, metal, fire, and water. It was

believed that there was connection between these five elements and the five visible planets (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn) as well as the five constant virtues (benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness). The connections between human virtues, the planets, and the material elements provided some rational basis for belief in spiritual and magical forces (Fung 1952).

FIGURE 3.8 Huangdi of China, a mythical-historical sage from the third millennium BCE, is considered both the first ruler to establish a centralized state in China and the author of the texts that served as the basis for Chinese traditional medicine for thousands of years. (credit: "Chinese Woodcut, Famous Medical Figures: The Yellow Emperor" by Gan Bozong/Wellcome Collection, Public Domain)

Early Chinese writings often refer to the concept of heaven in opposition to the earth, but the word has a meaning that is likely unfamiliar to a modern Western audience. In these texts, the word *heaven* might refer to a material or physical space, like the sky; a ruling or presiding power, like the emperor; something over which human beings have no control, like fate; nature as a whole; or a moral principle guiding human action. Some of these resemble the familiar Western religious concept, but others are quite different. Nonetheless, records of great speeches in the *Zuozhuan* suggest that even in the sixth century BCE, leading thinkers of the period encouraged people to move away from a concern with heavenly matters and toward a greater interest in human affairs on Earth (Fung 1952).

Writings from this period also show the beginnings of the theory of **yin and yang**, the two fundamental forces that are characterized as male and female, or dark and light, or inactivity and activity. The move toward a theory that explains natural phenomena through fundamental forces rather than through spiritual or heavenly forces characterizes a shift from a more mythological and religious age to a more rational and philosophical age.

Another key concern of early Chinese texts is distinguishing between identity and harmony, where harmony is understood to produce new things, while identity does not. The point seems to be that whereas the same matter or form repeated does not generate anything novel, two or more different things, when combined together in a harmonious way, can produce something new. To illustrate, consider the fact that there is no music if there is only one note, but many different notes in harmony with one another can produce beautiful

melodies. A wise and powerful ruler combines elements in harmonious ways to influence their citizens and exercise their power. Whether the elements are five tastes; five colors; the six notes of the pitch pipe; the ingredients of soup; the forces of wind, weather, or seasons; or the five virtues, a wise leader institutes a harmonious relation between these elements, and that relation is what is said to be responsible for the leader's success.

Confucianism

Confucius (551–479 BCE) was the founder of **Confucianism**, a philosophy that has influenced society, politics, and culture in East Asia for more than 2,000 years. Confucius lived just before the beginning of what is called the Warring States period, a time in Chinese history plagued with violence and instability. Though not a member of the aristocracy, Confucius rose from lowly positions to become the minister of justice of Lu, a province in eastern China. He challenged three powerful families that were trying to wrest control of the government. After a clash, Confucius left his home with a small group of followers, hoping to serve as an adviser for rulers in other provinces. After 14 years, he returned to Lu and was able to provide some advice to government ministers, but he never achieved his goal of finding a leader to carry out his ideas (Huang 2013). Confucius is credited with authoring or editing the Chinese classical texts that became the core educational curriculum for hundreds of years, though it was only after his death that Emperor Wudi of the Han dynasty first adopted Confucianism as the official state ideology.

One measure of the immediate impact of Confucius's success is that he spawned an entire class of scholars known as *shih*, who were trained in classical studies and language and were only suited for teaching and government work. They maintained their livelihood through a system of patronage. This system has had an enduring impact in China. Contemporary exams for government officials include testing on traditional knowledge about classical Chinese philosophy and literature (Fung 1952).

Though Confucius was labeled an atheist and considered an innovator, he was in other ways culturally conservative. He believed in a well-ordered society where rules and guidance come from the very top (the emperor or "the heavens," as it may be). Scholars today identify Confucianism as a form of **virtue ethics** because it is an approach to ethics that focuses on personal virtue or character.

CONNECTIONS

Learn more about Confucianism and virtue ethics in the chapter on normative moral theory.

Benevolence and Reciprocity

The Confucian concept of *de* is closely related to moral virtue in the sense that *de* identifies characteristics of a person, understood to be formed through habitual action, that make it more likely the person will act in morally excellent ways. In Confucianism, the five constant virtues are *ren*, *yi*, *li*, *zhi*, and *xin*. Each of these terms is difficult to translate consistently, having varied meanings. Loose translations are sometimes given as follows: *ren* is benevolence, *yi* is righteousness, *li* is propriety, *zhi* is wisdom, and *xin* is trustworthiness. More broadly, ***ren*** means something like shared humanity, empathy, or care for others. Similarly, the institutionalized rituals of the Zhou dynasty are captured in the Chinese word ***li***, which is translated as both propriety and ritual. Though Confucius emphasized the importance of ritual and tradition in daily practice, he also recognized that such actions are empty if they do not have a solid foundation in benevolence. These terms can be seen related in the following passage: "If a man is not *ren* [benevolent], what can he do with *li* [ritual]? If a man is not *ren*, what can he do with music?" (Confucius 2015, p. 9, 3.3).

To emphasize the relational and communal character of Confucian ethics, it is worth noting that alongside the five virtues, Confucius highlights three fundamental bonds or relationships: father and son, lord and retainer, and husband and wife. These bonds designate the fundamental relationships that are necessary for social life (Knapp 2009, 2252). The ethical obligations of children to their parents are frequently captured in the notion

of **filial piety**, or simply *filiality*, which is a widespread Chinese value. Even though Confucius emphasizes that there is a subordinate relation between sons and their fathers, wives and their husbands, and subjects and their lords, he also recognizes that the superior party has obligations to the subordinate one. These obligations can be characterized by the virtue of benevolence, wherein the good and upstanding person demonstrates goodwill toward those with whom they have relations. Whereas the virtue of benevolence emphasizes the common humanity of all people and seems to advise a common concern for all, filial piety introduces the idea of care with distinctions, where the moral and right thing to do is to show compassion to all human beings but to recognize that some people are owed more than others. In the case above, Confucius clearly advises that greater concern is due to one's family members, then to one's local community, and finally to the state.

An important concept in Confucianism is *zhong*, usually translated as "loyalty." Later commentators have defined *zhong* as "the 'exhaustion of one's self' in the performance of one's moral duties" (Fung 1952, 71); it might also be translated as conscientiousness or devotion. Another related virtue is reciprocity. Confucius explains reciprocity with a version of the Golden Rule: "Zigong asked, 'I[s] there a single saying that one may put into practice all one's life?' The Master said, 'That would be "reciprocity": That which you do not desire, do not do to others'" (Confucius 2015, p. 85, 15.24).

Each of these virtues is identified as fundamental, but they all are expressions of the underlying virtue of benevolence. The importance of benevolence runs through the relational and community-driven nature of Confucian ethics. This is quite different from Western ethics, particularly modern Western ethics, which emphasizes the rights, freedoms, and responsibilities of individuals.

Wisdom and the *Dao*

The Chinese concept of ***dao*** is another difficult-to-translate term. Often, it is interpreted as "way" or "path," but in Confucius, it is just as frequently translated as "teaching." One can see the goal of Confucius's teaching as relating a way or pattern of behavior that could be adopted by careful students. The wisdom gained through reading and, more importantly, living according to the *dao* is a kind of natural awareness of what is good and right and a distaste for what is wrong. Confucius also recognizes that a rejection of materiality is a sign of one who follows the *dao*. He frequently cites poverty, the ability to enjoy simple foods, and a lack of concern for the trappings of wealth as signs of one who is devoted to the right path or right ethical teachings.

Propriety and *Junzi*

One of the five constant virtues is propriety, in the sense of following the appropriate rituals in the appropriate contexts. Rituals include wearing ceremonial dress, reading and reciting the classic poetry of the *Shijing*, playing music, and studying culture. However, Confucius also makes clear that the foundations of ritual lie in filial respect for parents and elders, demonstrating care and trustworthiness, and having good relations with people in general (Confucius 2015, pp. 1–2, 1.6). Acting according to propriety or ritual is connected to the idea of the ***junzi***, a person who represents the goal or standard of ethical action and acts as a model for others. One can observe key characteristics of virtue by listening to Confucius's description of the *junzi*. For instance, he suggests that a *junzi* is someone who is thoughtful, but decisive: "The *junzi* wishes to be slow of speech and quick in action" (Confucius 2015, p. 17, 4.24). Similarly, Confucius frequently comments on the lack of material desires or a rejection of material wealth as a sign of the *junzi*'s virtue: "The *junzi* does not hem his upper robes with crimson or maroon. He does not employ red or purple for leisure clothes. In hot weather, he always wears a singlet of fine or coarse hemp as an outer garment." (Confucius 2015, p. 47, 10.6).

These virtuous characteristics are connected to propriety and one's obligations toward others in interesting ways. Confucius articulates what is required in order to become a *junzi* as an ordered series of obligations. The best and highest sense of a *junzi* is one who serves their lord faithfully and without shame, the next best is one who is thought to be filial by their local community, and the least of the *junzi* is one who can keep their word and follow through on their actions. This suggests that personal responsibilities to others—keeping one's word and following through on one's actions—are the minimum, most basic requirements for being a *junzi*; next is

being known as one who is respectful of one's parents and elders in one's local community, and greater than that is being loyal and trustworthy to the regional government.

In a famous passage on filial piety, Confucius introduces a potential moral dilemma for the *junzi*: "The Lord of She instructed Confucius, saying, 'There is an upright man in my district. His father stole a sheep, and he testified against him.' Confucius said, 'The upright men in my district are different. Fathers cover up for their sons and sons cover up for their fathers. Uprightness lies therein'" (Confucius 2015, p. 70, 13.18). Here, Confucius suggests that the appropriate way to resolve the dilemma is to favor familial relations over relations with the state. This is consistent with the previous passage, where Confucius suggests that good family relations are the most necessary relations to maintain, while relations with the state are the highest relations. What Confucius means is that it is a sign of the highest standards of conduct that one can act in accordance with his obligations to the state, but it is essential for one to maintain obligations to family, so if the two are in conflict, then the *junzi* should uphold the relations within the family.

THINK LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Consider the moral dilemma presented here. One of your parents has stolen money from their employer, and you are approached by law enforcement asking what you know about the theft. Do you lie to protect your parent, or do you tell the truth? Which is the more ethical thing to do? Confucius gives one answer here, but philosophy texts elsewhere offer other answers. For instance, Plato's *Euthyphro* dialogue begins with Euthyphro telling Socrates that he is prosecuting his father for killing a worker in his fields, claiming that the pious thing to do is to prosecute people who commit murder no matter who they are. Socrates is shocked to hear this and questions Euthyphro on the nature of piety. What do you think? If your obligation to protect a parent is in conflict with your obligation to tell the truth about a theft and follow the law, which obligation do you choose to uphold? Why?

The Legacy of Confucius

It is difficult to overstate the importance of Confucius for Chinese culture, philosophy, and history. After his death, many of Confucius's disciples became influential teachers. The greatest among them were Mencius (372–289 BCE) and Xunzi (c. 310–c. 235 BCE).

Mencius expanded and developed Confucius's teachings, spreading the ideas of Confucianism more widely and securing the philosophical foundations of Confucius's legacy. One of the doctrines for which he is best known is the idea that human beings are innately benevolent and have tendencies toward the five constant virtues. This view led Mencius to argue, for instance, that human beings have a natural disposition toward concern for a child in need or an obviously suffering human being or animal. In one famous example, he argues that all human beings have hearts that are "not unfeeling toward others":

> Suppose someone suddenly saw a child about to fall into a well: anyone in such a situation would have a feeling of alarm and compassion—not because one sought to get in good with the child's parents, not because one wanted fame among one's neighbors and friends, and not because one would dislike the sound of the child's cries. (quoted in Van Norden 2019)

Given that human beings are innately good, it remains for them to develop the appropriate knowledge of how to act on that goodness in order to become virtuous. In order to do so, Mencius encourages people to engage in reflection and the extension of their natural compassion for some to others. For instance, in one account, he tries to convince a king to care for his subjects by reminding the king of a time he felt compassion for an ox that was being led to slaughter. The reflection necessary for extending one's compassion from those for whom one naturally feels compassion to others requires an awareness that is grounded in practical motivation. In this sense, Mencius holds that virtue is the result of knowledge grounded in the caring motivations and relations that individuals have with one another. He locates this grounding in a process of reflection that, he says, is the natural function of the heart.

By contrast with Mencius, Xunzi held that human beings have an innately detestable nature but that they have the capacity to become good through artifice—that is, by acquiring traits and habits through deliberate action. Unlike Mencius, Xunzi did not believe that goodness came from reflection on one's innate tendency toward compassion. Rather, he held that one's innate emotional attachments would lead one to harmful behavior toward others, but through teaching in accordance with Confucian principles, one can become virtuous and ultimately transform those innate tendencies into something beneficial for humankind. This difference in perspective led Xunzi to emphasize the importance of external forces to guide behavior. He thought that the best guide toward virtue was the rituals that were handed down by ancient sages. Along these lines, Xunzi emphasizes the importance of music for developing an appreciation for ritual. Ultimately, rituals are the signposts that help mark the way, which flows from the constant and enduring guidance of heaven. Here, Xunzi returns to Confucius's appreciation for tradition (Goldin 2018).

Long after Confucius's death, in the eighth century CE, a new school of Chinese philosophy known as Neo-Confucianism became prominent. Thinkers such as Han Yu and Li Ao reinvigorated classical Confucianism with less emphasis on tradition and religion and a greater emphasis on reason and humanism. Neo-Confucianism engages critically and seriously with the traditions of Buddhism and Taoism, which had become prominent in Chinese thought. These schools of thought are distinct from Confucius's own philosophy, but they explicitly link their ideas with his. Classical Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism continue to influence modern philosophical writing in China, and their influence extends even beyond China, to Korea, Japan, and Vietnam.

FIGURE 3.9 Although Confucius was considered an atheist by his contemporaries, the following he has inspired has many elements of what most consider a religion. This contemporary Confucian temple in Urumqi, Xinjiang, China, features shrines, altars, and spaces for offerings. (credit: "Confucian Temple" by David Stanley/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Confucius remains a central and celebrated cultural figure in China. His teachings have produced a following that at times resembles a religion. The degree to which Confucianism is entrenched in Chinese political and cultural life suggests that it performs the function of what has been called a "civil religion"—namely, a set of cultural ideals without the specific doctrinal components that typically characterize religion that nevertheless provides a common basis for moral norms and standards of conduct in political speech and political life (Bellah 1967).

Daoism

The *dao* as a philosophical concept or a school of philosophical thought is associated primarily with the texts the *Daodejing*, commonly attributed to Laozi or the "Old Master," and the *Zhuangzi*, attributed to Zhuangzi (c.

fourth century BCE). Many contemporary scholars question whether Laozi actually existed. It is likely that both texts are collections of writings from a variety of thinkers who belonged to a common school known as **Daoism**. Daoism is a belief system developed in ancient China that encourages the practice of living in accordance with the *dao*, the natural way of the universe and all things. Daoism is associated with a countercultural religious movement in ancient China, contrary to the dominant, traditionalist Confucianism. The religious movement of Daoism varied depending on the region, but the unifying theme among Daoist religions is a focus on a naturalistic, nontheological view of the underlying basis for morality and goodness. Part of the attraction and variability of Daoism is the fact that the *dao* is commonly understood to be empty of content, equally open to interpretation by anyone. This perspective leads to a kind of anarchism, resisting traditional hierarchies and authorities.

Daoism is highly critical of Confucianism, as can be seen from passages such as the following in the *Doadejing*: "When the Great Dao was discarded, only then came *ren* and right. When wisdom and insight emerged, only then came the Great Artifice. When the six kinship classes fell out of harmony, only then came filiality and parental kindness. When the state is darkened with chaos, only then do the loyal ministers appear" (Eno 2010, p. 15, 18). Here, the author criticizes the five constant virtues of Confucius by suggesting that these emerged only after China had lost its way and been separated from the *dao*. Similarly, the *Daodejing* is highly critical of Confucian benevolence (*ren*) and sagehood. It sees the notions of right, virtue, and goodness as concepts that distract the masses and obscure their awareness of the *dao*. Consequently, it recommends a kind of antisocial tendency to reject the way of the masses and act contrary to conventional wisdom.

The Dao as a Metaethical Concept

One of the ways in which Daoism differs from Confucianism and Mohism is that it emphasizes the grounds for moral norms but refrains from offering specific moral guidelines for action. Daoism starts with a certain conception of the natural world that serves as the basis for an ethical perspective on life, whereas Confucianism largely ignores any description of nature untouched, focusing directly on moral behavior. The *dao* itself is understood as a natural force that guides all life: "Men emulate earth; earth emulates heaven (*tian*); heaven emulates the Dao; the Dao emulates spontaneity" (Eno 2010, p. 17, 25). The general moral guidance of Daoism involves becoming aware of the *dao* and ensuring that one's action doesn't oppose natural forces.

In a general sense, the *dao* is considered to be an order governing the universe from its beginnings through the various forces of nature and reaching into human affairs. The human condition sets human beings against the *dao* and places them in opposition to this underlying force, so most of the *Daodejing* is focused on attempts to bring human beings back into alignment with the *dao*. The text warns, "As a thing the Dao is shadowed, obscure" (Eno 2010, p. 16, 21b). The problem is that the typical strategies for illuminating and clarifying things further obscure the *dao* because the *dao* itself appears contradictory: "To assent and to object—how different are they? Beauty and ugliness—what is the distinction between them?" (Eno 2010, p. 15, 20).

Language and rational concepts pull one away from the *dao*, which is either contentless and empty or contradictory: "When the Dao is spoken as words, how thin it is, without taste" (Eno 2010, p. 21, 35). This is why followers of the *dao* should resist attempts to categorize it in a determinative way: "Those who know do not speak; those who speak do not know" (p. 27, 56). Instead, the one who follows the *dao* is capable of embracing contradiction: "One who knows white but preserves black becomes a standard for the world. Such a one never deviates from constant virtue and returns again to being limitless" (p. 18, 28a). Here, it is evident how Daoists draw lessons about the study and mastery of morality from their understanding of metaphysics. If reality is fundamentally contradictory and escapes the human capacity to capture it in language, then the person who wants to remain closest to fundamental reality should refrain from attempting to categorize it and should be willing to live with contradiction.

That said, this teaching leads to several tensions. It seems difficult to derive ethical prescriptions from nature when nature itself seems to lack a prescriptive force. The *dao* is simply the total forces of nature, neither good nor bad. Yet when Daoists advise one to allow the forces of nature to govern all activity, they themselves must

refrain from theorizing. Nevertheless, in order to provide guidance, the Daoist must speak or write. This leaves the reader in a difficult interpretive position (Hansen 2020).

Skepticism, the belief that one can never attain certain knowledge, is entrenched in Daoism. It's not clear, however, whether the reason for skepticism is that there is no ultimate answer, that there is an answer but it cannot be known, or that the answer can be known but it cannot be communicated. The *Daodejing* suggests that the best path is to recognize the limits of human knowledge: "To know you do not know is best; not to know that one does not know is to be flawed. / One who sees his flaws as flaws is therefore not flawed" (Eno 2010, p. 32, 71).

CONNECTIONS

The chapter on epistemology takes a deeper look at Daoism and other forms of skepticism.

The Ethics of *Wuwei*

Daoist texts teach readers to adopt a stance that is typically called ***wuwei***, meaning nonaction, softness, or adaptiveness to the circumstances at hand. *Wuwei* is contrasted with action, assertion, and control. In the *Zhuangzi*, followers of the *dao* are characterized in a way that resembles the psychological state known as flow, where they find themselves completely absorbed in their task, losing awareness of themselves as a distinct ego and becoming completely receptive to the task at hand. The *Zhuangzi* tells the story of Cook Ding, a butcher who was so skillful that he had used the same knife without sharpening it for 19 years. He never dulled the blade by striking bone or tendon. Instead, he was able to find the gaps in the joints and cut through with the thin edge of his blade, no matter how small the gaps. He explains, "At the beginning, when I first began carving up oxen, all I could see was the whole carcass. After three years I could no longer see the carcass whole, and now I meet it with my spirit and don't look with my eyes" (Eno 2019, p. 23, 3.2). The metaphor of flow also resembles descriptions of *wuwei* that compare it to water: "Nothing in the world is more weak and soft than water, yet nothing surpasses it in conquering the hard and strong—there is nothing that can compare" (Eno 2010, p. 34, 78).

Moreover, being in a state of nonaction, softness, and flow allows one to be spontaneous and reactive to circumstances. Spontaneity is another characteristic of someone who follows the *dao*: "To be sparse in speech is to be spontaneous" (Eno 2010, p. 17, 23). Here, speech seems to be associated with control. This may be because speech exercises a certain control over the world by placing names on things and identifying them as similar to or different from other things, grouping them in categories, and assembling these categories and things into chains of reason. For the Daoists, this puts a distance between humanity and the fundamental forces of nature. The *Zhuangzi* states, "The Dao has never begun to possess boundaries and words have never yet begun to possess constancy" (Eno 2019, p. 23, 2.13). The attempt to use language to provide distinctions in the *dao* obscures the *dao*. This is a function of the nature of words to be true or false, allowable or unallowable. The implication is that these distinctions are foreign to the nature of the *dao*. In another section, the *Zhuangzi* reiterates this principle with the slogan "A this is a that; a that is a this" (Eno 2019, p. 16, 2.7). The point is that anything that can be designated as a "this" could also be designated as a "that," which the author takes to imply that language is relative to the perspective of the speaker.

As a result, the Daoists instruct one to surrender their attempts to understand and control nature: "The wish to grasp the world and control it—I see its futility. The world is a spiritlike vessel; it cannot be controlled. One who would control it would ruin it; one who would grasp it would lose it" (Eno 2010, p. 19, 29a). Inaction and the lack of a desire to grasp or comprehend the nature of the world are characteristic of *wuwei*: "He who acts, fails; he who grasps, loses. / Therefore the sage takes no action (*wuwei*) and hence has no failure, does no grasping and hence takes no loss" (p. 30, 64c). In contrast with Confucius, the Daoists link inaction and the lack of reason (spontaneity) with virtue: "The highest virtue does not act (*wuwei*) and has no reason to act; the lowest virtue acts and has reason to act" (p. 21, 38).

WRITE LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Philosophers from around the world believe in the human ability to use reason to create both individual and social flourishing. Describe the qualities an individual has to possess to achieve ethical well-being in Aztec, Confucian, and Daoist thought. Then discuss what qualities you personally believe an individual needs to accomplish this goal.

Mohism

The school of **Mohism** is named after the philosopher Mozi (c. 470–391 BCE), who lived immediately after Confucius and was critical of the Confucian school. Less is known about Mozi than Confucius because even the earliest Chinese histories relegated him to relative obscurity. He appears to have been a tradesman who was skilled in his craft and slowly rose through the ranks of civil society. He was trained in Confucianism but resisted the way Confucius was overly wedded to ritual and hierarchy. Mozi was a universalist, insisting on the equal value of all people, without preferential treatment for family, neighbors, and country. He was followed enthusiastically by his disciples, many of them tradespeople who found solace in his egalitarian approach to philosophical questions.

Mozi's followers, known as Mohists, were numerous and intensely loyal during his life and immediately afterward. Stories from this time indicate that he held strict control over his disciples (Fung 1952). Mohism has had a much smaller influence on classical Chinese ethics and philosophy than Confucianism. The absence of immediate cultural relevance should not indicate that Mohism lacks philosophical importance. In fact, it may be argued that in many ways, Mozi is more philosophical in the contemporary sense of the word than Confucius. Whereas Confucius transmitted and codified the ritualistic values and customs of the Zhou dynasty, Mozi challenged traditional values by insisting on a more rational approach to ethics and a rejection of hierarchical norms. He derived his ethical system from first principles rather than tradition. Followers of Mohism developed an interest in traditional areas of philosophy that were neglected by the Confucians, such as logic, epistemology, and philosophy of language.

What is known of Mohism is derived from a collection of texts with obscure authorship, simply titled *Mozi*. The collection originally consisted of 71 texts written on bamboo strip scrolls, though 18 are missing and many have been corrupted through natural degradation. It is unclear how many of the texts were written by Mozi himself or even during his lifetime. It is likely that many of the doctrines surrounding epistemology, logic, and philosophy of language are later developments. The core of the texts consists of 10 three-part essays expounding on and defending the 10 main doctrines of the Mohist school. Those doctrines are presented in five pairs of principles: "Promoting the Worthy" and "Identifying Upward," "Inclusive Care" and "Condemning Aggression," "Moderation in Use" and "Moderation in Burial," "Heaven's Intent" and "Understanding Ghosts," and "Condemning Music" and "Condemning Fatalism" (Fraser 2020a). The doctrines of inclusive care and anti-aggression are discussed below.

Inclusive Care and Anti-aggression

Perhaps the most central doctrine of Mohist philosophy is the principle that every human being is valued equally in the eyes of heaven (*tian*). With minimal religious or theological commitments, Mohists believe that heaven constitutes the eternal and ideal beliefs of a natural power or force that created and governs the universe. According to Mohists, it is apparent that heaven values every individual human being with exactly the same worth. In contrast to Confucius, who emphasized the importance of care with distinctions, Mozi advanced the doctrine of inclusive or impartial care, sometimes translated as "universal love."

The doctrine of inclusive care leads directly to the doctrine of anti-aggression because the greatest threat to human well-being and care is aggression and war. Mozi lived during the period known as the Warring States period, immediately following the decline of the Zhou dynasty. During this period, local rulers fought for power in the absence of a strong central government. Mozi reasoned that the greatest calamities of the world are the

result of wars between states, aggression between neighbors, and a lack of respect among family members. These calamities are the result of partiality in care—that is, thinking that one group of people has a greater value than another. Partiality of care is the basis of loyalty among families and nations, but it is also the source of enmity and hostility between families and nations (Fung 1952).

In defense of the principle of inclusive care, Mozi offers a sophisticated philosophical argument, developed in dialogue form. He starts with the observation that if other states, capitals, or houses were regarded as if they were one's own, then one would not attack, disturb, or harm them. If one did not attack, disturb, or harm others, this would be a benefit to the world. Those who benefit and do not harm others are said to care for others and, therefore, to express inclusive or universal rather than partial care. Thus, inclusive care is the cause of benefit, while partial care is the cause of harm. The virtuous person should benefit the world, so the virtuous person should adopt inclusive care (Fung 1952). Mozi adds another argument by thought experiment: Imagine two people who are sincere, thoughtful, and otherwise identical in thought, word, and deed, except one of them believes in inclusive care while the other believes in partial care. Suppose you had to put your trust in one of the two people to protect yourself and your family. Which would you choose? He concludes that everyone would choose the person who believes in inclusive care, presumably because it would guarantee that their family would be protected and cared for just the same as anyone else. Trusting someone who believes in partial care only works if you know that the person is partial to you.

One of the key aspects of Mohist ethics is that Mozi asks about the appropriate rational basis for moral principles. Instead of starting from tradition and developing a system of ethics that conforms to and explains traditional views, as Confucius had, Mozi prefers to seek a rational ground for his ethical views. In particular, he asks about the appropriate "model" for ordering and governing society. He rejects any of the usual models, such as parents, teachers, and rulers, concluding that one cannot be certain that any of these people actually possess benevolence and therefore provide the right standard for ethical action. Instead, Mozi insists on finding an objective standard that is not fallible in the way a particular person or cultural tradition may be. Ultimately, the only acceptable model is heaven, which is entirely impartial in its concern for all human beings.

This sort of rational reasoning has led scholars to classify Mohism as a form of consequentialism, a philosophical approach that looks at the consequences of an action to determine whether it is moral.

CONNECTIONS

The chapter on normative ethical theory explores Mohism as a type of consequentialism in further depth.

THINK LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

What doctrines within Mohism and Confucianism might have made Confucianism the more popular choice for Chinese rulers?

Mohist Epistemology

The search for "models" sets Mohism apart in terms of its philosophical grounding. Mohists consider a wide range of possible candidates for models, including a rule, law, or definition; a person (i.e., a role model); and a tool or measuring device, such as a yardstick or compass. There are three different types of standards or models for assessing the value of anything: its root (the historical precedent), its source (the empirical basis), and its use (whether it produces benefit). The third standard has priority and reinforces the pragmatic character of Mohism. The purpose of a model is to help a student better follow the way (*dao*). The fact that there are so many different types of models reflects the fact that there are so many different practical contexts in which one needs to understand the appropriate way to act. Models are applied to practical situations not as a

principle or premise in an argument but rather as a prototype for the purpose of selecting things of a certain kind and casting off things that do not conform to that prototype. “The central questions for early Chinese thinkers are not What is the truth, and how do we know it? but What is the *dao* (way), and how do we follow it?” (Fraser 2020a).

Knowledge, for Mohists, is based on the concept of “recognition” or “knowledge of.” This sort of knowledge involves being able to reliably pick out what a given word means rather than understanding or conceptualizing the word. This can be illustrated by a passage in which Mozi says that the blind do not know white and black, not because they are unable to use the terms *white* and *black* correctly, but because they are not able to select the things that are white and differentiate them from the things that are black. For Mohists, there is little value in investigating the conceptual or ideal nature of terms like *white* and *black*. The focus is, instead, entirely practical: they want to be able to distinguish the things that are white from the things that are black. It is not necessary to know the essence or nature of something in order to be able to reliably distinguish it from other things. Similarly, Mohists have little interest in seeking justifications or foundations of knowledge. Such justifications are unnecessary in order to make the correct distinctions, which is the primary aim of knowledge. Reliable and consistently correct identification is what counts as knowledge, not having access to the right rational justifications or definitions (Fraser 2020a).

Summary

3.1 Indigenous Philosophy

When humans shift from religious answers to questions about purpose and meaning to more naturalistic and logical answers, they move from the realm of myth to reason. In Greek, this movement is described as a move from mythos to logos, where mythos signifies the supernatural stories we tell, while logos signifies the rational, logical, and scientific stories we tell. Rather than seeing a decisive break from mythological thinking to rational thinking, we should understand the transition from mythos to logos as a gradual, uneven, and zig-zagging progression.

Indigenous thought has in the past been seen as wisdom lying outside the realm of academic discussion; however, recent scholarship has challenged this assumption. The philosophies of Indigenous African and North American peoples provide understandings of the self and of society that complement and challenge traditional Western ideas. The Maya possessed advanced understandings of mathematics and astronomy as well as metaphysical concepts of a solar life force. The Aztec had a highly developed epistemology that grounded truth within an understanding of an individual's character and recognized the fundamental and total character of the universe as a godlike force or energy.

3.2 Classical Indian Philosophy

Indian philosophical traditions are a few centuries older than the earliest European philosophical traditions.

Philosophers from both Greek and India see philosophy as not just a theoretical activity but also a practical endeavor—a way of life. The earliest philosophical texts in India are the four Vedas. The Upanishads, a body of scripture added later, contain much of the philosophical core of these Hindu scriptures. According to this tradition, there is a rigid hierarchy to the cosmos that is reflected in the earthly world. Six *darshanas*, or schools of thought, emerged in Hindu philosophy, each pointing to a different path to seeing and being seen by a sacred being or beings.

The six principal darshanas are Samkhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Mimamsa, and Vedanta. Samkhya holds that everything is composed of *puruṣa* (pure, absolute consciousness) and *prakriti* (matter). Liberation occurs when the mind is freed from the bondage of matter. The purpose of yoga is the stopping of the movement of thought. Only then do individuals encounter their true selves. Nyaya, which can be translated as "method" or "rule," focuses on logic and epistemology. The Vaisheshika system developed independently of Nyaya, but gradually came to share many of its core ideas. Its epistemology was simpler, allowing for only perception and inference as the forms of reliable knowledge. The Mimamsa school was one of the earliest philosophical schools of Hinduism, and it was grounded in the interpretation of the Vedic texts. It sought to investigate *dharma* or the duties, rituals, and norms present in society.

3.3 Classical Chinese Philosophy

Early Chinese writings show the beginnings of the theory of yin and yang, the two fundamental forces that are characterized as male and female, dark and light, inactivity and activity. In Confucianism, the five constant virtues are benevolence (*ren*), righteousness (*yi*), propriety (*li*), wisdom (*zhi*), and trustworthiness (*xin*). The unifying theme among Daoist religions is a focus on a naturalistic, nontheological view of the underlying basis for morality and goodness. The general moral guidance of Daoism involves becoming aware of the *dao*, or the natural way of things, and ensuring that one's actions don't oppose those natural forces.

The most central doctrine of Mohist philosophy is the principle that every human being is valued equally in the eyes of heaven (*tian*). In contrast to Confucius, who emphasized the importance of care with distinctions, Mozi advanced the doctrine of inclusive care, following the principle that every human being has equal value in the eyes of heaven. The doctrine of inclusive care leads directly to the doctrine of anti-aggression because the greatest threat to human well-being and care is mutual aggression and war.

Key Terms

Codices singular *codex*; Maya books that transmitted the collective mathematical, scientific, historical, religious, and metaphysical knowledge of the Maya.

Confucianism a normative moral theory developed in ancient China during the Warring States period that proposes that the development of individual character is key to the achievement of an ethical and harmonious society.

Dao in Confucianism, ethical principles or a path by which to live; in Daoism, the natural way of the universe and all things.

Daoism a belief system developed in ancient China that encourages the practice of living in accordance with the *dao*, the natural way of the universe and all things.

Darshana a way of beholding the sacred or manifestations of the divine in Hindu thought.

Epistemology the study of knowledge, involving questions such as how humans know what they know, what is the nature of true knowledge, and what are the limits to what humans can know.

Ethnophilosophy the study of the philosophies of Indigenous peoples.

Filial piety the ethical obligation of children to their parents.

Indigenous philosophy the ideas of Indigenous peoples pertaining to the nature of the world, human existence, ethics, ideal social and political structures, and other topics also considered by traditional academic philosophy.

Junzi in Confucianism, a person who is an exemplary ethical figure and lives according to the *dao*.

Li rituals and practice that develop a person's ethical character as they interact with others.

Logos a way of thinking that rationally analyzes abstract concepts and phenomena independent of accepted belief systems.

Mohism a type of consequentialism established in ancient China by Mozi during the Warring States period.

Mythos a way of thinking that relies on the folk knowledge and narratives that often form part of the spiritual beliefs of a people.

Prakriti in Hindu thought, matter; one of two elements that make up the universe.

Purusha in Hindu thought, pure, absolute consciousness; one of two elements that make up the universe.

Ren a central concept in Confucianism that refers either to specific virtues or to someone with complete virtue.

Samkhya a dualist approach in Hindu metaphysics that views the universe as composed of pure consciousness and matter, which undergoes an evolutionary process.

Skepticism a philosophical position that claims people do not know things they ordinarily think they know.

Transformative model of identity an understanding of social identity as spiraling both outward and inward through expanding and retracting influences over a certain area of land.

Upanishads Hindu texts that contain the philosophical core of Hinduism.

Vedas the four oldest books within Hinduism, consisting of the *Rigveda*, the *Samaveda*, the *Yajurveda*, and the *Atharvaveda*.

Virtue ethics an approach to normative ethics that focuses on character.

Wuwei a natural way of acting that is spontaneous or immediate, in which a person's actions are in harmony with the flow of nature or existence.

Yin and yang an explanation of natural phenomena through two fundamental forces, the male yin and the female yang.

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Review Questions

3.1 Indigenous Philosophy

1. How are the terms *mythos* and *logos* used to classify bodies of thought?
2. What are some of the challenges of studying Indigenous philosophy?
3. How did the study of African thought as a philosophy begin?
4. What are some of the shared metaphysical ideas between African and Native American philosophies?
5. How did Maya rulers use the metaphysical beliefs of their society to establish political legitimacy?

3.2 Classical Indian Philosophy

6. What are some similarities between classical Greek and Indian philosophies?
7. What cosmological ideas emerged from the *Rigveda*?
8. What metaphysical approach is advanced by the Samkhya school of philosophy?
9. What is the principal epistemological tool found in the Nyaya school of philosophy?

3.3 Classical Chinese Philosophy

10. Why is Confucianism considered a conservative philosophy?
11. What are the five constant virtues in Confucianism?
12. What is the relational and communal character of Confucian ethics?
13. What are the legacies of Confucianism and Mohism, and what factors might explain this?
14. What is the most central doctrine of Mohism, and how does it contrast to Confucian ethics?
15. In what way can Daoism be seen as a rejection of Confucianism?
16. What are unifying themes within Daoism?

Further Reading

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The Emergence of Classical Philosophy

4

FIGURE 4.1 The pharaoh Akhenaten, his wife Nefertiti, and their children are blessed by the god Aten, represented by the sun. The Egyptian conception of Aten as the source of all that existed was influential in the metaphysics embraced by the Greeks. (credit: modification of work "Akhenaten, Nefertiti, and the Royal Princesses Blessed by the Aten" by MCAD Library/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

CHAPTER OUTLINE

4.1 Historiography and the History of Philosophy
4.2 Classical Philosophy
4.3 Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Philosophy

INTRODUCTION Scholars long regarded ancient Greece as the birthplace of Western philosophy. After all, the word *philosophy* itself derives from the ancient Greek words *philos* (affection) and *sophos* (wisdom)—and indeed, ancient Greece produced the great minds of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Yet the path of classical philosophy begins in North Africa, reaches Greece and Rome, jumps back across the Mediterranean, and spreads from Persia to Spain before it emerges to support what is frequently called the birth of modernity. This chapter examines that path.

In order to consider the historical path of philosophy across these various cultures, we need to begin with a brief account of how philosophers have studied the history of philosophy and how we might consider the practice of philosophy throughout history before turning to these historical traditions themselves.

4.1 Historiography and the History of Philosophy

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- List and briefly describe three different approaches to the history of philosophy.
- Identify the strengths of each of the three different approaches to the history of philosophy.
- Identify the weaknesses of each of the three different approaches to the history of philosophy.

We will begin our discussion of the history of philosophy and the historiography of philosophy, or the study of how to conduct history pertaining to philosophy, with two fundamental questions: Why should one study the history of philosophy? And how should one study the history of philosophy? In response to the first question, the history of philosophy has both intrinsic and instrumental value. It can give us a more accurate understanding of our philosophical past while also informing contemporary approaches to philosophy. Historical authors provide a source of arguments, ideas, and theories that inform contemporary debates. Historical writings may inspire us. Finally, understanding the process by which philosophical ideas have developed can help contemporary philosophers better understand the debates and ideas that are important to them. In response to the second question: How should one study the history of philosophy? We may distinguish, broadly, between three main approaches to the history of philosophy—the presentist approach, the contextualist approach, and the hermeneutic approach.

Presentist Approach

A **presentist approach** to the history of philosophy examines philosophical texts for the arguments they contain and judges whether their conclusions remain relevant for philosophical concerns today. A presentist approach concerns itself with the present concerns of philosophy and holds past philosophers to present standards. This approach allows us to benefit from a rich body of past wisdom—even in our everyday lives. We might, for example, find strength from the Confucian proverb "Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall." Inspired by the maxim of English philosopher Edmund Burke (1729–1797)—as restated by President John F. Kennedy—"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing," we might volunteer, donate, or take action to help a cause. When attempting to understand a challenging situation, we might apply Occam's razor, the idea that the most likely explanation is the one that requires the fewest assumptions.

The main limitation to this approach is that it neglects various contexts in which past philosophers lived and worked. This does not mean that the arguments found in philosophical texts are not important and that we should not focus on them. But the focus on arguments at the exclusion of anything else causes problems. It downplays the various ways that philosophers communicate their ideas and try to persuade readers of their truth.

In addition to reading philosophical texts too narrowly, the exclusive focus on arguments has been criticized for yielding a profoundly ahistorical understanding of the development of philosophy. Past philosophers are judged by contemporary standards instead of being understood in relation to the historical and cultural contexts in which they lived and wrote. Philosophers are found wanting because they do not contribute to contemporary debates in subfields such as epistemology (the study of the basis for knowledge) and metaphysics (the study of the nature of reality). Additionally, ideas from contemporary philosophy may be attributed to historical philosophers in a way that does not accurately apply to them. This ignores the differences in time, culture, and context between contemporary philosophers and historical philosophers, an error known as anachronism.

An example will clarify these points. Plato's Allegory of the Cave, which describes humanity as prisoners within a cave reacting to shadows on the wall, might be read in terms of how it contributes to debates in epistemology or metaphysics. However, it is anachronistic and inaccurate to claim that this is exclusively what it is about, as the Allegory of the Cave also has political significance specific to Plato's time and social context. We can only

grasp the political significance once we understand the situation in Plato's home city of Athens during his lifetime. Athens had suffered a terrible defeat at the hands of Sparta in the Peloponnesian War. Following the war, Athens's democratic government was replaced with a group of wealthy tyrants who were sympathetic to Sparta, called the Thirty Tyrants. Plato, who had relatives among the Thirty Tyrants, was thought to be sympathetic to the Thirty Tyrants and suspicious of those who were advocating for democracy. But when we realize that the Thirty Tyrants were the government responsible for Athens's humiliating defeat and for the death of Plato's beloved teacher Socrates, we understand why Plato questions the limits of human understanding. Plato's political project becomes easier to understand as well, for in questioning the limits of human knowledge and seeking a deeper understanding of the truth, the Allegory of the Cave attempts to solve what Plato sees as the problems inherent in both tyrannical and democratic forms of government. Plato's hope is to foster generations of individuals who have a greater understanding of truth and will serve capably in government.

CONNECTIONS

The chapter on metaphysics covers the Allegory of the Cave in more detail.

Contextualist Approach

The **contextualist approach** to philosophical texts aims to be more sensitive to the history surrounding their creation. This approach attempts to understand historical philosophy on its own terms, using concepts and ideas that would have been appropriate to the time period in which they were written. Contextualist understandings of philosophy are interested in getting the history right. They give us a richer understanding of philosophical ideas and help avoid misinterpretation.

For example, an often-misunderstood passage from the Hebrew Bible is "an eye for an eye." Many today interpret this passage as a justification for violence, not realizing that the passage reflects a body of laws meant to restrict retaliation. For millennia, when a wrong was done to an individual, a family or another group to which the individual belongs would often seek retribution. This retribution was viewed as a means both of achieving justice and of dissuading others from wronging the family or group in a similar way in the future. The biblical law, which was eventually adopted widely across the Middle East, meant that the wrongdoer or the group to which the wrongdoer belonged was not to be made to pay more than an eye for an eye. In this way, a justice system might prevent the extralegal cycle of increasingly violent retribution that still takes place between some groups, such as in gang or underworld warfare. Moreover, the biblical law also set monetary equivalents for specific wrongdoings so that physical harm, as a form of punishment, could be avoided. By understanding the context of the phrase "an eye for an eye," we gain greater insight into human behavior and how systems of justice can prevent violence from cycling out of control.

While the contextualist approach makes possible this detailed and rich type of understanding, there is a danger that contextualist historians might fall into the trap of antiquarianism. This means that they might become interested in the history of philosophy for history's sake, ignoring the instrumental value of historical philosophy for contemporary philosophers.

Hermeneutic Approach

A third approach to the history of philosophy attempts to address problems inherent to the presentist and contextualist approaches. The **hermeneutic approach** takes the historical context of a text seriously, but it also recognizes that our interpretation of history is conditioned by our contemporary context. The hermeneutic historian of philosophy recognizes both that a contemporary philosopher cannot abandon their contemporary framework when interpreting historical texts and that the context of historical authors deeply influenced the way that historical texts were written. Additionally, hermeneutic philosophers contend that philosophical ideas are historical in nature; that is, no philosophical concept can be understood if it is completely abstracted from the historical process that generated it. However, a hermeneutic approach to

philosophy can fall prey to a tendency to think about history as culminating in the present. This view of history might be summarized as an account of history that says, "a, then b, then c, then me." While this may be the way things look now, it's important to remember that our contemporary perspective will be eclipsed by future historians of philosophy. Also, we ought not assume that history has a purpose or progression. It may be that the sequence of historical events lacks any goal.

Table 4.1 summarizes these three approaches, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of each.

Approach	Brief Description	What it Offers	Where it Can Fall Short
Presentist	Concerns itself with the present questions of philosophy and holds past philosophers to present standards	Allows people to benefit from a rich body of past wisdom	Neglects the contexts in which past philosophy was developed
Contextualist	Attempts to understand historical philosophy on its own terms, using concepts and ideas that would have been appropriate to the time period in which they were written	Provides a richer understanding of philosophical ideas and helps avoid misinterpretations	Might become interested in the history of philosophy for history's sake, ignoring the instrumental value of historical philosophy for contemporary people
Hermeneutic	Recognizes both that contemporary people cannot abandon their own frameworks when interpreting historical texts, and that the context of historical authors deeply influenced the way that historical texts were written	Grounds the philosophy of the past within a historical context, while also acknowledging its lasting value	Can fall prey to a tendency to think about history as culminating in the present

TABLE 4.1 Three Different Approaches to Studying the History of Philosophy

4.2 Classical Philosophy

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Evaluate the influence of Egyptian scholarship on classical Greek philosophy.
- Describe the key ideas of the most influential Greek philosophers.
- Describe the key ideas of the most influential Roman philosophers.
- Distinguish between major schools of classical thought.

Egyptian Origins of Classical Philosophy

The understanding that the roots of classical thought lie, at least in part, in Egypt is as old as the ancient Greeks themselves. In *The Histories of Herodotus*, the ancient Greek historian Herodotus (c. 484–425 BCE) traces Greek beliefs about the gods, religious practices, and understanding of the natural world to Egypt. Herodotus claimed the ancient Greeks adopted practices and ideas as diverse as solemn processions to temples, the belief in an immortal soul, and the knowledge of geometry and astrology from the Egyptians. Herodotus notes that the people of Heliopolis, one of the largest cities in ancient Egypt, "are said to be the most learned in records of the Egyptians" (Herodotus 1890, 116). Plato spent 13 years in Heliopolis, and Pythagoras (c. 570–495 BCE) studied mathematics in Heliopolis for more than two decades (Boas 1948).

FIGURE 4.2 This obelisk, erected in Heliopolis, Egypt, in approximately 1200 BCE, was transported to Rome in the 16th century and made part of that city's public environment. Similarly, many of the ideas of what is now considered classical Greek philosophy can be traced back to Egyptian origins. (credit: "Egyptian Obelisk (Metres 25), Erected at Heliopolis" by Carlo Raso/Flickr, Public Domain)

Egyptian and Babylonian Mathematics

Could Pythagoras have learned, rather than discovered, the "Pythagorean" theorem—the law of relationships between the sides and hypotenuse of a right triangle—in Egypt? Almost assuredly. A Babylonian clay tablet dating to approximately 1800 BCE, known as Plimpton 322, demonstrates that the Babylonians had knowledge not only of the relationship of the sides and hypotenuses of a right triangle but also of trigonometric functions (Lamb 2017). Further, the Rhind Mathematical Papyrus provides evidence that the Egyptians had advanced knowledge of algebra and geometry as early as 1550 BCE, presenting problems that include calculating the volume of cylindrical granaries and the slope of pyramids. The Berlin Papyrus 6619, usually dated between 1800 BCE and 1649 BCE, contains a solution to a problem involving the Pythagorean theorem and evidence that the Egyptians could solve quadratic equations. Pythagoras studied with the priests of Heliopolis more than 1,000 years after these documents were created. It is possible that this Egyptian mathematical knowledge had been lost and that Pythagoras rediscovered the relationship during or after his studies in Heliopolis. However, given what we know now about Greek individuals visiting and residing in Egypt, it seems more likely that he was introduced to the knowledge there. As with mathematics, there are specific philosophical ideas that can be traced back to Egypt. This is particularly the case within metaphysics, the branch of philosophy that studies reality, being, causation, and related abstract concepts and principles.

Akhenaten's Metaphysics

In the mid-14th century BCE, Akhenaten became pharaoh in Egypt. Partly in an attempt to undercut the growing power of the priests, Akhenaten abolished all other gods and established Aten, the sun god, as the one true god. Akhenaten held that solar energy was the element out of which all other elements evolved or emanated (Flegel 2018). In proposing this idea, Akhenaten established an unseen divinity responsible for causation. Aten became the one true substance that created the observable world. One hymn reads, "You

create millions of forms from yourself, the one, / cities and towns / fields, paths and river" (Assmann [1995] 2009, 154). Although the Egyptian elite quickly reestablished the temples and the practices of the full pantheon of gods after Akhenaten's death, theological thought incorporated this idea of an all-powerful invisible first cause. This idea evolved, with the phrase "one and the millions" coming to signify the sun god as the soul and the world as its body (Assmann 2004, 189). As you will see later in this chapter, this same concept—a single, invisible, unchanging substance expressing itself through forms to give rise to the material world—is the key principle in Plato's metaphysics.

The Egyptian Origins Controversy

Scholars have long puzzled over to what extent the origins of classical thought can be said to lie in Egypt. In recent years, a heated debate has erupted over this question. In the three-volume text *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, Martin Bernal, a contemporary American professor specializing in modern Chinese political history, argued that the ancient Egyptians and Phoenicians played a foundational role in the formation of Greek civilization and philosophy. He further claimed that an "ancient model" recognizing the African and Middle Eastern origins of Greece was widely accepted until the 19th century, when it was replaced by a racist "Aryan model" proposing Indo-European origins instead. Mary Lefkowitz, a contemporary professor of classical studies, has famously critiqued Bernal's work. Lefkowitz's position is that though it is important to acknowledge the debt the Greeks owe to Egyptian thought, Greek philosophy was not wholly derived from Egypt, nor did Western civilization arise from Africa. A bitter academic war of words has ensued, with Lefkowitz and other prominent scholars noting significant errors in Bernal's scholarship. Lefkowitz authored *Not Out of Africa: How Afrocentrism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History* in 1997. Bernal responded with *Black Athena Writes Back* in 2001. This exchange reflects a much broader phenomenon in which academics spar over the accuracy of historical narratives and the interpretation of philosophical ideas, often presenting the issues as ethical questions. By thinking critically about these disagreements, we gain deeper insight not only into the topic of study but also into philosophical and political discourse today.

WRITE LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Read the summary of these two articles: (1) Mary Lefkowitz's "Egyptian Philosophy: Influence on Ancient Greek Thought (https://openstax.org/r/egyptianphilosophy)" and (2) Simphiwe Sesanti's "Teaching Ancient Egyptian Philosophy (Ethics) and History: Fulfilling a Quest for a Decolonised and Afrocentric Education (https://openstax.org/r/teachingancientegyptian)". Identify two arguments from each article, and identify two to three sources that could provide evidence to substantiate or refute each argument.

Ancient Greek Philosophy

Classical philosophy emerged in ancient Greece, following a procession from what are known as the Presocratics; to the three great philosophers, Socrates (470–399 BCE), Plato (c. 428–347 BCE), and Aristotle (384–322 BCE); and then to later schools of thought, including the Epicureans and Stoics. As is the case with all ancient societies, knowledge of these thinkers is limited by the documentation that has survived. Socrates, for example, wrote down nothing. Rather, Plato wrote dialogues featuring his mentor Socrates engaged in philosophical debate with various individuals in Athens, some of them his fellow citizens and other prominent visitors to the city. The material that has survived from ancient Greece has fueled philosophical discourse for two millennia.

The Presocratics

The term *Presocratics* is somewhat problematic. At least a few of the thinkers considered part of this school were contemporaries of Socrates and are mentioned in Plato's dialogues. Foremost among these are the Sophists, traveling teachers of rhetoric who serve as foils for Plato's philosophers. Plato sought to distinguish

philosophers, seekers of truth, from Sophists, whom he regarded as seeking wealth and fame and peddling in fallacious arguments. Indeed, one of the most prominent Sophists, Protagoras, is a main character in the dialogue that bears his name.

Researching the Presocratics is difficult because so little of their work has survived. What we have is fragmentary and often based on the testimony of later philosophers. Still, based on the work that is available, we can characterize the Presocratics as interested in questions of metaphysics and natural philosophy, with many of them proposing that nature consisted of one or more basic substances.

The fragments of the works of these early philosophers that have come down to us focus on metaphysical questions. One of the central debates among the Presocratics is between **monism** and **plurism**. Those who think nature consisted of a single substance are called monists, in contrast to pluralists, who see it as consisting of multiple substances. For example, the monist Thales of Miletus thought that the basic element that comprised everything was water, while Empedocles the pluralist sought to show that there were four basic elements (earth, air, fire, and water) that were resolved and dissolved by the competing forces of love and strife.

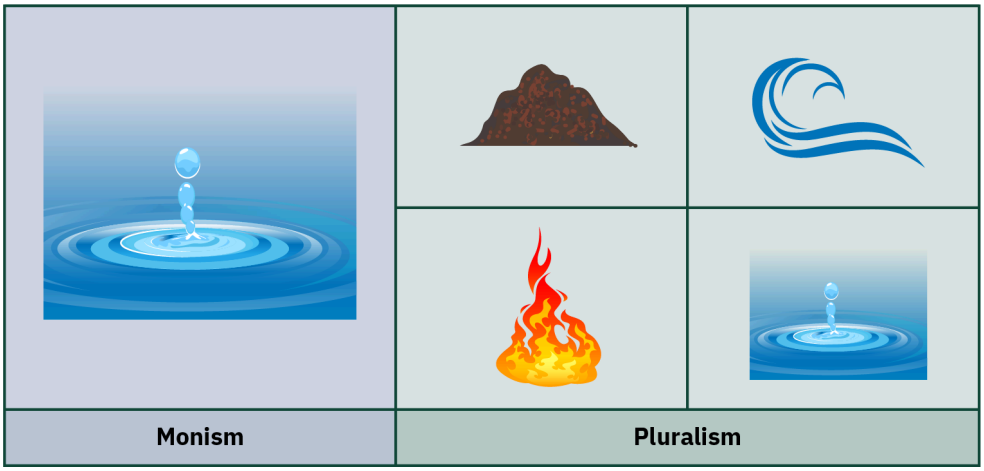

FIGURE 4.3 A central debate among PreSocratic Greek philosophers concerned whether nature consisted of a single substance—an approach taken by the monists—or was made up of a number of substances—a position taken by the pluralists. One prominent monist, Thales of Miletus, posited that all of nature was made of water. Empedocles, a pluralist, argued instead that the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water formed the basis of the natural world. (attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY 4.0 license)

Prominent Monists

Presocratic philosophers who sought to present a unified conception of nature held that nature ultimately consists of a single substance. This proposition can be interpreted in various ways. The claim proposed by Thales of Miletus (620–546 BCE) that the basic substance of the universe was water is somewhat ambiguous. It might mean that everything is ultimately made of water, or it might mean that water is the origin of all things. Thales and two of his students, Anaximander and Anaximenes, made up the monist Milesian school. Anaximander thought that water was too specific to be the basis for everything that exists. Instead, he thought the basic stuff of the universe was the *apeiron*, the indefinite or boundless. Anaximenes held that air was the basic substance of the universe.

Parmenides, one of the most influential Presocratic monists, went so far as to deny the reality of change. He presented his metaphysical ideas in a poem that portrays himself being taken on a chariot to visit a goddess who claims she will reveal the truths of the universe to him. The poem has two parts, “the Way of the Truth”, which explains that what exists is unified, complete, and unchanging, and “the Way of Opinion”, which argues that the perception of change in the physical world is mistaken. Our senses mislead us. Although it might seem to us that Parmenides’s claim that change is not real is absurd, he and his student Zeno advanced strong arguments. Parmenides was the first person to propose that the light from the moon came from the sun and to

explain the moon's phases. In this way, he showed that although we see the moon as a crescent, a semicircle, or a complete circle, the moon itself does not change (Graham 2013). The perception that the moon is changing is an illusion.

Zeno proposed paradoxes, known as **Zeno's paradoxes**, that demonstrate that what we think of as plurality and motion are simply not possible. Say, for example, that you wish to walk from the library to the park. To get there, you first must walk halfway there. To finish your trip, you must walk half of the remaining distance (one quarter). To travel that final quarter of the distance, you must first walk half of that (an eighth of the total distance). This process can continue forever—creating an infinite number of discrete distances that you must travel. It is therefore impossible that you arrive at the park. A more common way to present this paradox today is as a mathematical asymptote or limit (Figure 4.4). From this point of view, you can never reach point *a* from point *b* because no matter where you are along the path, there will always be a distance between wherever you are and where you want to be.

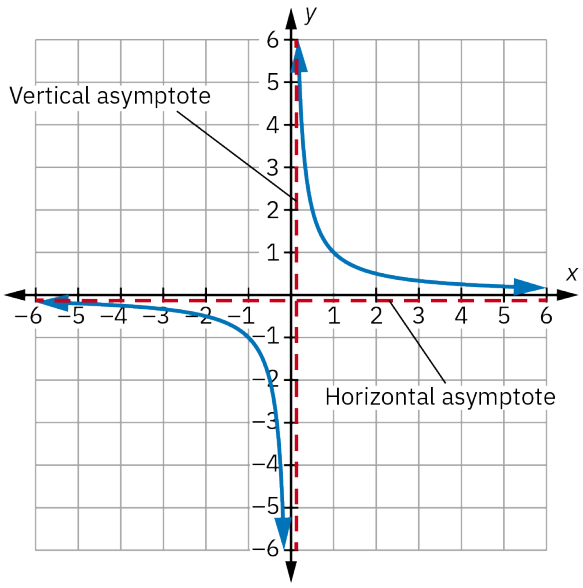

FIGURE 4.4 For the function $y = 1/x$, neither x nor y can have a value of zero because y approaches infinity as x approaches zero and x approaches infinity as y approaches zero. Other functions show these same characteristics, which are called asymptotes or limits. (attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY 4.0 license)

VIDEO

The Paradoxes of Zeno

Click to view content (https://openstax.org/books/introduction-philosophy/pages/4-2-classical-philosophy)

Prominent Pluralists

Parmenides and Heraclitus (525–475 BCE) held diametrically opposed views concerning the nature of the universe. Where Parmenides saw unity, Heraclitus saw diversity. Heraclitus held that nothing remains the same and that all is in flux. One of his most well-known sayings illustrates this well: "[It is not possible to step twice into the same river]. . . . It scatters and again comes together, and approaches and recedes" (quoted in Curd 2011, 45).

Anaxagoras (500–428 BCE) and Empedocles (494–434 BCE) were substance pluralists who believed that the universe consisted of more than one basic kind of "stuff." Anaxagoras believed that it is mind, or *nous*, that controls the universe by mixing and unmixing things into a variety of different combinations. Empedocles held that there were four basic substances (the four elements of air, earth, fire, and water) that were combined and recombined by the opposing forces of love and strife.

Finally, there are the schools of the atomists, who held the view that the basic substance of the universe was tiny, indivisible atoms. For the atomists, all was either atoms or void. Everything we experience is a result of atoms combining with one another.

CONNECTIONS

The chapter on metaphysics covers monism and pluralism across cultures.

Presocratic Theology

The Presocratic philosopher Pythagoras (570–490 BCE) and his followers, known as the Pythagoreans, comprised a rational yet mystical sect of learned men. The Pythagoreans had a reputation for learning and were legendary for their knowledge of mathematics, music, and astronomy as well as for their dietary practices and other customs (Curd 2011). Like Socrates, Pythagoras wrote nothing, so scholars continue to debate which ideas originated with Pythagoras and which were devised by his disciples.

Among the Pythagoreans' key beliefs was the idea that the solution to the mysteries of the universe was numerical and that these numerical mysteries could be revealed through music. A reminder of their mathematical legacy can be found in the Pythagorean theorem, which students continue to learn in school. Pythagoreans also believed in the transmigration of souls, an idea that Plato would adopt. According to this doctrine, the soul outlives the body, and individuals are reborn after death in another human body or even in the body of a nonhuman animal.

Another important Presocratic philosopher who produced novel theological ideas is Xenophanes (c. 570–478 BCE). Xenophanes, who was fascinated by religion, rejected the traditional accounts of the Olympian gods. He sought a rational basis of religion and was among the first to claim that the gods are actually projections of the human mind. He argued that the Greeks anthropomorphized divinity, and like many later theologians, he held that there is a God whose nature we cannot grasp.

Socrates and Plato

As Socrates never wrote anything, he is remembered today because thinkers like Plato featured him in their writings. Plato deliberately dramatized the life of his teacher Socrates. One of the key questions of Plato's scholarship is exactly how many liberties he took in depicting the life of his teacher. Scholars generally agree that the dialogues that Plato wrote early in his career are more faithful to the life of Socrates than later ones. His writings are usually divided into three periods: early, middle, and late.

The early dialogues feature a skeptical Socrates who refuses to advance any doctrines of his own. Instead, he questions his interlocutors until they despair of finding the truth at all. These early dialogues tend to be somewhat short with a simpler composition. One of the dialogues features a young man named Meno who is the pupil of a prominent Sophist. The dialogue focuses on the nature of virtue and whether virtue can be taught. At one point in the dialogue, Meno famously compares Socrates to a torpedofish, a fish similar to a stingray that paralyzes its prey. Socrates does this to his dialogue partners: they begin the discussion believing that they know something and over the course of the dialogue begin to question whether they know anything at all.

CONNECTIONS

See the introduction to philosophy chapter for more on Socrates as the paradigmatic philosopher.

Gradually, Plato has Socrates give voice to more positive doctrines. These include what comes to be known as the **theory of the forms**, a metaphysical doctrine that holds that every particular thing that exists participates in an immaterial form or essence that gives this thing its identity. The invisible realm of the forms differs fundamentally from the changing realm we experience in this world. The invisible realm is eternal,

unchanging, and perfect. The material things themselves change, but the immaterial forms remain the same. Consider, for example, the form of a rectangle: four adjacent straight sides that meet at 90-degree angles. You can draw a rectangle, but it is an imperfect representation. The desk or table you are sitting at might be rectangular, but are its edges perfectly straight? How perfect was the instrument that cut the sides? If you nick the edge of a table, then it changes and becomes less like the form of a rectangle. With the doctrine of forms, Plato may be said to combine the metaphysics of Parmenides with that of Heraclitus into a metaphysical dualism.

The philosopher's task is to access the immaterial realm of the forms and try to convince others of its truth. Plato further believed that if we understand the true nature of virtues like wisdom, justice, and courage, we cannot avoid acting in accordance with them. Hence, rulers of states should be philosopher-kings who have the clearest understanding of forms. Yet philosopher-kings never have perfect knowledge because our understanding is based on a material realm that is always changing. True knowledge is only possible in the abstract realms, such as math and ethics.

In the dialogues, Socrates claims that he was divinely inspired to question prominent citizens of Athens to determine whether their claims to know could be verified. These citizens grow annoyed with Socrates after some years of this treatment, eventually bringing charges against him for corrupting the youth and making the weaker argument appear the stronger. The proceedings of the resulting trial were immortalized in Plato's *Apologia*, where Socrates presents his defense of his life's work as a philosopher. The dialogue's name derives from the Greek *apologia*, meaning "defense"—Socrates never apologizes for anything! He is found guilty and sentenced to death. Socrates becomes a martyr to philosophy, put to death by the democratic government of Athens.

CONNECTIONS

This text examines Plato's ideas in greater depth in the chapters on metaphysics, epistemology, value theory, and political philosophy.

Aristotle

During the Middle Ages, people referred to Plato's most famous pupil Aristotle as simply "the Philosopher." This nickname is a testament to his enduring fame, as well as to the fact that he was driven by philosophical curiosity to try to understand everything under the sun. The first sentence of his famous work *Metaphysics* states, "Philosophy begins in wonder." He exemplified this claim in his writing. His works ranged widely across all the main areas of philosophy, including logic, metaphysics, and ethics. In addition, he investigated **natural philosophy**, the fields of study that eventually gave rise to science. Aristotle also researched topics that would today be classified as biology and physics. Stylistically, his work was very different from that of his teacher. While Plato's work was literary and even dramatic, Aristotle's writings are presented as lecture.

CONNECTIONS

Explore Aristotle's ideas in greater depth in the chapters on metaphysics and epistemology.

Plato and his successors were prone to mysticism. It was easy to translate the philosophical theory of the forms into a mystical doctrine in which the forms were known by the mind of God. Aristotle resisted this trend. At the center of Aristotle's work was his doctrine of the four causes. He believed that the nature of any single thing could be understood by answering four basic questions: "What's it made of?" (material cause), "What shape does it have?" (formal cause), "What agent gave it this form?" (efficient cause), and, finally, "What is its end goal?" (final cause). Not only can we explain the nature of anything by answering these four basic questions, we can also understand the nature of the universe. Aristotle's universe is a closed system that is comprehensible to humanity because it is composed of these four causes. Each cause leads to another, until we get to the first

cause or prime mover at the head of it all. Somewhat obscurely, Aristotle claims that this first cause is "thought thinking itself."

In addition to the doctrine of the four causes, it is important to understand Aristotle's account of the soul. Unlike Plato, who held that the soul is an eternal substance that is reborn in various bodies, Aristotle has a functional conception of the soul. He defined the soul based upon what the soul does. In Aristotle's understanding, all living things have souls. Plants have a vegetative soul that promotes growth and the exchange of nutrients. The animal soul, in addition to taking in nutrients and growing, experiences the world, desires things, and can move of its own volition. Added to these various functions in humans is the ability to reason.

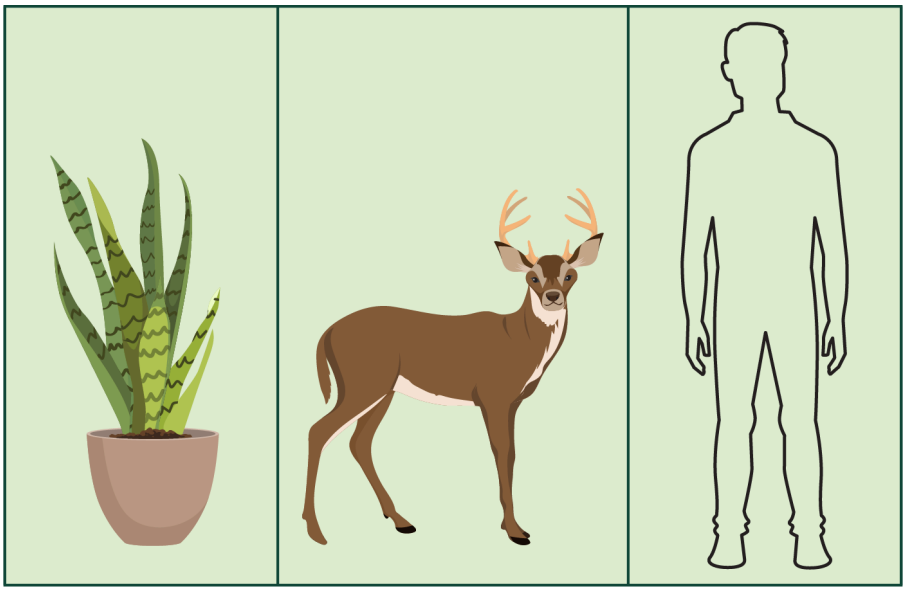

FIGURE 4.5 Aristotle believed that all living beings had souls, but that the souls of various types of creatures differed in their abilities. The soul of a plant promotes growth and the exchange of nutrients. The animal soul allows for everything a plant can do, with the additional ability to desire things and move of its own volition. Only the human soul makes possible the ability to reason. (attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY 4.0 license)

With the four causes and the functional conception of the soul, we can begin to understand Aristotle's ethics. Aristotle systematized Plato's conception of ethics based upon his conception of the self and his four causes. Since everything that exists has a purpose, one of the basic questions for ethics is "What is the purpose of the human being?" After considering such candidates as pleasure and power, Aristotle settles on the answer "happiness" or, more accurately, "eudaimonia." Rather than a fleeting emotional state, eudaimonia is better understood as "flourishing." So the question at the heart of Aristotle's ethics is "How should humans best achieve happiness?" His basic answer is that we achieve eudaimonia by cultivating the virtues. Virtues are habits of character that help us to decide what action is preferable in a particular moment. Cultivating these virtues will helps us to lead a fulfilling life.

It is generally true to say that Plato tended to be more focused on the transcendental world of the forms while Aristotle and his followers were more focused on this worldly existence. They shared a belief that the universe was comprehensible and that reason should serve as a guide to ordering our lives.

CONNECTIONS

Aristotle's virtue ethics are explored in much greater depth in the chapters on value theory and normative moral theories.

Epicureans

In the wake of the giants of Greek philosophy—Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle—some philosophers turned away from Plato's ideal forms and toward materialism. In this, they can be seen as furthering a trend already present in the thinking of Aristotle. For Aristotle, there can be no immaterial forms—everything that exists has some material basis, though he allows an exception for his first cause, the unmoved mover.

The Epicureans steadfastly rejected the existence of immaterial forms, unmoved movers, and immaterial souls. The Epicureans, like Aristotle, embraced **empiricism**, which means that they believed that all knowledge was derived from sense experience. This view was the basis of the revival of empiricism in 18th-century British thought and scientific practice. They espoused an ethical naturalism that held that in order to live a good life we must properly understand human nature. The ultimate goal of life is to pursue pleasure. Despite their disagreements with Plato and, to a lesser extent, Aristotle, the Epicureans agreed with their predecessors that human existence ought to be guided by reason.

The two principal Greek Epicureans were Epicurus himself (341–270 BCE) and his Roman disciple Lucretius (c. 99–55 BCE). Although Epicurus's views are characterized as hedonistic, this does not mean that he believed that we ought to be indiscriminate pleasure-seekers. Instead, he proposed that people could achieve fulfilling lives if they were self-sufficient and lived free from pain and fear. Of course, complete self-sufficiency is just as impossible as a life utterly free from pain and fear, but Epicurus believed that we should strive to minimize our dependence upon others while limiting the pain in our lives. Epicureans thought that the best way to do this was to retire from society into philosophical communities far from the hustle and bustle of the crowd. Epicurus and Lucretius saw the fear of death as our most debilitating fear, and they argued that we must overcome this fear if we were going to live happy lives.

Lucretius developed Epicurean philosophy in a poem called *De Rerum Natura* (On the nature of things). This poem discusses ethical ideas, but physics provides its focus. Lucretius adopts a material atomism that holds that things are composed of atoms in motion. Rejecting religious explanations, he argues that the universe is governed by chance and exemplified by these atoms in motion. Although the Epicurean philosophers were critically responding to the work of Plato and Aristotle, it should be evident that they also have antecedents in Presocratic thought. We can see this in their atomism and their religious skepticism, which hearkens back to Xenophanes.

Roman Philosophy

Just as Hellenistic philosophy developed in the long shadows cast by Plato and Aristotle, Roman philosophy also used these two giants of Greek philosophy as reference points. While Roman philosophical traditions were built upon their Greek forebearers, they developed in a Roman cultural context. Rome began as a republic before becoming an empire, and Roman philosophy was affected by this political transformation. Still, Roman philosophical schools were thoroughly grounded in Greek philosophy, with many Roman philosophers even choosing to write in Greek rather than Latin, since Greek was viewed as the language of scholarship.

Rhetoric and Persuasion in Politics

Recall that Plato defined philosophy in opposition to sophistry. Whereas the philosopher sought the truth in a dispassionate way using reason as a guide, the Sophist addressing a crowd was indifferent to truth, seeking power and influence by appealing to the audience's emotions. This harsh critique of rhetoric, which can be defined as the art of spoken persuasion, softened with subsequent philosophers. Indeed, Aristotle wrote a text called *Rhetoric* in which he sought to analyze rhetoric as the counterpart to philosophy. The tension never disappears entirely, however, and the relationship between philosophy and rhetoric and, more generally, the relationship between philosophy and politics remains a perennial question.

Despite the fact that his ideal statesman was a philosopher, Plato generally sought to keep philosophy distinct from the grubbiness of real politics and was concerned about the messiness of democratic politics in

particular. In the Roman political context, this ambivalence becomes less apparent. Examples of philosophers who were also statesmen include Cicero (106–43 BCE) and Marcus Aurelius (121–180 CE). Marcus Aurelius even served as emperor of Rome from 161 to 180 CE. However, as the Roman Republic gave way to the Roman Empire, philosophers shifted inward by focusing on things that were in their control.

Stoicism

Aristotle held that eudaimonia is worthwhile at least in part because it helps us to better deal with various inevitable misfortunes. The Roman Stoics further developed this idea, proposing four core virtues: courage, justice, temperance, and wisdom. The Stoics were wary of the type of false judgments that might arise from the emotions. They were also uneasy with the loss of control associated with strong emotions, observing that some people can become enslaved to their passions. The Stoics prized rational self-control above everything else. This constant work at maintaining inner freedom epitomizes the Stoic conception of philosophy (Hadot 2002).

WRITE LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Marcus Aurelius was both a Roman emperor and a Stoic philosopher. His writings, which he meant only for himself, were eventually published in *Meditations*, a work that serves as one of the major sources of Stoic thought. Although much of Marcus Aurelius's reign fell under a period known as the Pax Romana, when the empire enjoyed relative stability and peace, the end of his reign occurred during a period of major wars and a plague. This famous passage, taken from Book VII, Section 47 of the *Meditations*, provides advice about how to deal with pain or grief called by an external source. Translate it into your own language. Then explain why you agree or disagree with Marcus Aurelius's conclusions.

> If you are grieved about anything external, 'tis not the thing itself that afflicts you, but your judgment about it; and it is in your power to correct this judgment and get quit of it. If you are grieved at anything in your own disposition; who hinders you to correct your maxims of life? If you are grieved, because you have not accomplished some sound and virtuous design; set about it effectually, rather than be grieving that it is undone. "But some superior force withstands." Then you have no cause of sorrow; for, the fault of the omission lies not in you. "But, life is not worth retaining, if this be not accomplished." Quit life, then, with the same serenity, as if you had accomplished it; and with good-will, even toward those who withstand you.

The Stoics were systematic philosophers whose writings focused on ethics, physics, logic, rhetoric, and grammar. For the Stoics, the world consists of material bodies in motion, causally affecting each other. Real entities are those capable of causally affecting one another. The Stoic god is a material entity who exists in nature and meticulously manages it, the material first cause of the universe, Aristotle's unmoved mover incarnated as a material entity. In other words, God is an animating reason that gives life to the universe. Unlike the Christian God who transcends the universe, the Stoic god is found within it, a force immanent to the universe who combines and recombines the four elements into things we can experience because they act upon us and we upon them. Stoicism developed at a time when politics in the Roman world was increasingly seen as something outside individuals' power to change. So Stoics let politics go. While turning away from politics may indeed promote a tranquil life, it also promotes passivity. Thus, Stoicism reached a conclusion similar to that reached by Daoism, as explored in the chapter on early philosophy.

PODCAST

Stoic ideas are enjoying something of a revival, as evidenced by the popularity of Ran Holliday's *Daily Stoic (https://openstax.org/r/dailystoicpodcast)* podcasts.

Academic Skepticism

Academic Skepticism is another aspect of Roman philosophy that developed out of a tendency found in earlier

Greek thought. Recall that Socrates questioned whether we could ever know anything at all. The Academic Skeptics opposed the Stoic claims that sense impressions could yield true knowledge, holding instead that knowledge is impossible. Instead of knowledge, Academic Skeptics articulated the idea of degrees of belief. Things are more or less believable based on various criteria, and this degree of believability is the basis for judgment and action. Disciples of the Greek philosopher Pyrrho (c. 360–270 BCE) held that we had to suspend judgment when it comes to knowledge claims, going so far as to say that we cannot even reliably claim that we cannot know anything. Rather than suspending all judgment, Academic Skeptics sought to demonstrate that knowledge claims lead us to paradoxical conclusions and that one can argue cogently both for and against the same proposition.

The philosopher, orator, and statesman Cicero (106–43 BCE) was the most prominent of the Academic Skeptics. His works provide much of the information we have about the school. He had a decisive influence on Latin style and grammar and was decisive in the introduction of Hellenistic philosophy into Rome. The rediscovery of his work in the 15th century ushered in the European Renaissance.

FIGURE 4.6 This Flemish illuminated manuscript, dated to approximately 1470, is a French translation of Cicero's philosophical treatise *De amicitia*. The rediscovery of Cicero's work in the 15th century has been connected to the European Renaissance. (credit: "Cicero's *De amicitia* (French Translation), Presentation of the Book to Its Patron, Walters Manuscript W.312, Fol. 1r" by Walters Art Museum Illuminated Manuscripts/Flickr, CC0)

Neoplatonism

Plotinus (c. 204–270) led a revival of Plato's thought in the late Roman Empire that lasted until Emperor Justinian closed Plato's Academy in 529. Plotinus believed that he was simply an expositor of Plato's work, but the philosophy he developed, known as Neoplatonism, expanded on Plato's idea. Neoplatonism arose during a time of cultural ferment in the Roman Empire, incorporating ideas borrowed from sources such as Judaism and early Christianity. The key metaphysical problem in Neoplatonism was accounting for how a perfect God could create a universe that was manifestly imperfect. Plotinus solved this problem by applying ideas similar to Plato's theory of forms. The perfect, unchanging realm is the one inhabited by God, but creation inhabits the changing realm, which only mirrors forms imperfectly. Plotinus claims that creation emanates from God, but

the further one is from this source the less perfect things become.

4.3 Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Philosophy

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Describe what constitutes Jewish, Christian, and Islamic philosophy.
- Outline the historical path of classical ideas up until the early modern era.
- Identify the ideas of key philosophers in Africa and Europe.

Greek and Roman imperialism in the Middle East and North Africa brought Jews—and later, Christians—into the intellectual sphere of Hellenism. Early on, Jewish and Christian scholars incorporated ideas of classical Greek and Roman philosophy into their theological studies. As Arab conquerors and traders expanded into the Middle East and Africa, the Muslim world also came into contact with classical philosophy and the natural sciences, adopting and advancing many key ideas. At the same time, religious centers of learning were developing their own philosophies of metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. Within these institutions, people engaged in deep and often contentious debate about the nature of humans, of the world, and—more generally—of being. There were also active epistemological debates attempting to determine the boundaries of what could and could not be known. These thinkers developed ethical systems that adherents put into practice. Yet a tension runs through most of these works, as philosophers tried to balance theological revelation with freedom of intellectual exploration.

Defining Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Philosophy

The previous chapter on the early history of philosophy examined how and whether organized philosophies differ from Indigenous belief systems and religions. It was mentioned that the emergence of a philosophy has been described as a transition from a system of myths (*mythos*) to a rational system of ideas (*logos*). If this distinction appears blurry at times, how much more difficult might it be to untangle theology from philosophy—or to determine what constitutes Jewish, Christian, or Islamic philosophy?

In a provocative article, 20th-century rabbi and scholar Eliezer Berkovits (1908–1992) tackles the question of what is Jewish philosophy and who should be considered a Jewish philosopher (Berkovits 1961). Is a Jewish philosopher anyone who is both a Jew and a philosopher? Consider, for example, the Sephardic Jew Baruch Spinoza, often cast as a Dutch philosopher. Inspired by the French philosopher René Descartes, Spinoza developed a metaphysical model of God, humans, and the world that challenged religious orthodoxy and established a moral philosophy that functions independently of scripture, laying the foundation for a rational, democratic society. Excommunicated by his own community, Spinoza emerged as one of the most important thinkers of the early modern era (Nadler 2020). Should Spinoza be considered a Jewish philosopher? Or, even more on point, should Spinoza's work be considered Jewish philosophy?

Berkovits did not think so. He argued that unlike Descartes, who created a new philosophy—a modern epistemology that gave rise to advancements in politics and science—Jewish philosophers have not been involved in the project of creating something from scratch. They did not have a blank slate to start from. A Jewish philosopher—and the same could be said for a Christian or Muslim philosopher—always works with a partner, i.e., the events and facts central to the religion. For example, all three of these monotheistic religions have foundational texts that claim that God created the world. This is a metaphysical starting point for Jewish, Christian, and Muslim philosophers—and it runs counter to Aristotle's supposition that the universe has always existed, emanating from the unmoved mover.

Whereas each of the three monotheistic religions produced rich bodies of thought that address the nature of reality (metaphysics) and ethics, this section examines those Jewish, Christian, and Islamic thinkers who carried the mantle of the Greek philosophical tradition into the early modern age, often in partnership with their own traditions.

Early Jewish Philosophy

After Alexander the Great, a student of Aristotle, conquered Persia in 332 BCE, his generals divided the empire's vast lands in Asia, the Levant, northern Africa, and Europe into three states and spread Greek culture and ideas into these territories, Hellenizing these areas. As a result, wealthier Jews gained exposure to the Greek classics.

Philo of Alexandria

Born into a wealthy, Hellenized family in the Roman province of Egypt, Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE–50 CE) published both his philosophical treatises and his personal accounts of his political experiences. Philo served as ambassador to Emperor Gaius Caligula on behalf of the one million Jews dwelling in Egypt. His work represents the first systematic attempt to make use of ideas developed by Plato and other Greek philosophers to explain and justify Jewish scripture. In Plato's metaphysical vision, true reality is unchanging and eternal, with the world we experience only a temporary reflection of these eternal forms. But, Philo asked, how can the creation of a physical world be explained? How can eternal forms express themselves in a physical world? In reconciling Jewish and Greek doctrines of creation, Philo identifies Plato's forms as **logos**, or the thoughts of God. Separate from the eternal divinity—Aristotle's unmoved mover—logos serves as the mediator between God and the physical world. When in the Book of Genesis, God says, "Let there be light," this is the logos of the unmoved mover. Philo's fusion of Greek and Jewish philosophy lays the foundation for early Christian doctrine. In fact, his scholarship was preserved by the Christian community and only rediscovered by the Jewish community in the 16th century.

FIGURE 4.7 Philo identified Plato's forms as logos, or the thoughts of God. In this view, when God says, "Let there be light," this is the logos of the unmoved mover. This interpretation is typical of Philo's blending of Greek and Jewish philosophy. (credit: "Let There Be Light, and There Was Light" by rippchenmitkraut66/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Early Jewish Ethics and Metaphysics

At the time of Philo, the Jewish Bible consisted of the five books of Moses, known as the Pentateuch, the Prophets, and the later books that make up the Tanakh. Much of Jewish theological, legal, and philosophical thought was passed down orally. Following the Roman Empire's destruction of Jerusalem and the Kingdom of Judah in 70 CE, the Sanhedrin, a semiautonomous Jewish legal and judicial body that had been forcibly relocated to northern Israel, began transcribing the oral traditions so as not to lose them. These writings would later become the Talmud. Among these writings is the text *Ethics of Our Fathers*, which provides a moral guide to everyday life. Later, Jewish scholars also began to explore metaphysics, culminating in the Kabbalah, which examines the relationship between God—defined as the infinite, unchanging, and eternal—and the finite world

we experience. Eventually, the brutal repression of Jews who remained in their homeland led to the collapse of the Hellenized Jewish communities throughout the Roman Empire. As a result, the continuation of Philo's work fell to a subgroup of Jews whose new religion, Christianity, would be adopted by Rome.

Early Christian Philosophy

Late antiquity witnessed the gradual demise of the Roman Empire in the West, a political development accompanied by great social turmoil and uncertainty. The Catholic Church gradually filled this political and cultural void, as it sought to make itself the legitimate heir of Roman power. Philosophy reflects this transformation in Western European society, with the uncertainty and turmoil of the period reflected in the work of philosophers of late antiquity such as Augustine and Boethius. The triumph of Christianity can be seen in the grand edifice of scholasticism that developed later, reflected in the writings of Thomas Aquinas.

Augustine

Augustine (354–430 CE) was one of the most influential philosophers and theologians of late antiquity. In his *Confessions*, he used his own life and the story of his initially reluctant turn to Christianity as an allegory for understanding God's universe and humanity's place within it. His narrative begins with a discussion of his struggles with faith, particularly with sexual desire. In later books, he turned to considerations of history and the nature of time. Augustine famously posits a theory of time that holds that we experience the temporal present in three different ways: the present anticipates the future and bleeds into the recent past.

As Bishop of Hippo, Augustine sought to defend theological orthodoxy against various heresies. He wrote against the Pelagian heresy, which held that humans could achieve salvation themselves without divine grace, and the Manichean heresy, which held that the universe was a battlefield between the forces of good and evil that are equal in power. In contrast, Augustine held that all of creation was good simply by virtue of the fact that God had created it. Nothing in God's creation was evil: things that appeared evil to us were all part of God's providential plan. Even Satan's rebellion was part of God's plan.

Augustine's ideas raise interesting issues with respect to free will. How can we reconcile individual human freedom in a world where an all-powerful God knows all? In opposition to the strict determinism of the Manicheans, Augustine sought to make room for some amount of human freedom. Despite the original sin of Adam and Eve discussed in the Christian and Jewish Bible and the fall from grace that this entails, Augustine held that it is within our power to choose the good. Augustine sees this conflict as one between two rival wills, one that wills the good and one that desires sinfulness. Only divine grace can ultimately resolve this, though it is within our power to choose whether to sin.

Not only did Augustine articulate Christian doctrine that shaped medieval European philosophy for centuries to come, but he raised questions that are still being pondered today. Queries about the nature of time and temporality as well as agency and free will remain relevant for philosophers today, as does Augustine's development of possible answers.

Boethius

Like Augustine, Boethius (c. 477–524 CE) was a philosopher who straddled the late Roman and Christian worlds. Indeed, he serves as one of the most important intermediaries between these two very different worlds. A Roman statesman and Christian theologian, Boethius is best known for his work *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Boethius was imprisoned on conspiracy charges and subsequently executed by the ruler he had served, the Ostrogothic King Theodoric the Great. Prior to his imprisonment, he had translated and written commentaries on Aristotle's work, logic, music theory, astronomy, and mathematics that were influential for medieval philosophers. However, while imprisoned, he wrote *The Consolation of Philosophy*, which takes the form of a dialogue between Boethius and philosophy personified by a beautiful woman who visits him in his cell. The text starts out with a bitter Boethius complaining of his fall from power to Lady Philosophy. She consoles him by showing Boethius that happiness remains possible for him even in his wretched state. She

argues that Boethius has not lost true happiness, or the true Platonic form of happiness, as these are not found in material possessions or high stature, but in family, virtuous actions, and wisdom. She then reminds him that true good—and so true happiness—is found in God. Extremely popular throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance (Marenbon 2020), *The Consolation* never makes mention of Christianity. In facing death, Boethius turns to Plato. His work and influence exemplify how Catholicism incorporated classical philosophy into its worldview.

FIGURE 4.8 In this copy of a 15th-century painting, Lady Philosophy consoles Boethius as he faces death. (credit: "The Figure of Philosophy Appearing to Boethius" by Wellcome Collection/Public Domain)

THINK LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

When Lady Philosophy says that true goodness is God, she is referring to Plato's idea about the form of goodness. Read this excerpt from Plato's *The Republic*, an exchange between Socrates and Glaucon that begins with a discussion of what allows us to see beauty. Glaucon initially answers that it is sight that allows us to see beautiful things but through questioning recognizes that it is both eyes and light—or the sun—that enables us to see. This leads Socrates toward a discussion of goodness. What do Socrates—and so Plato—believe is the form of goodness? Is this form of goodness similar to how Christianity or other religions or philosophical approaches that you've encountered view God? Do you agree with Plato's conclusion? How would you define the form of goodness?

> Socrates: You know that, when we turn our eyes to things whose colors are no longer in the light of day but in the gloom of night, the eyes are dimmed and seem nearly blind, as if clear vision, were no longer in them.
>
> Glaucon: Of course.
>
> Socrates: Yet whenever one turns them on things illuminated by the sun, they see clearly, and vision appears in those very same eyes.
>
> Glaucon: Indeed.

> Socrates: Well, understand the soul in the same way: When it focuses on something illuminated by truth and what is, it understands, knows, and apparently possesses understanding, but when it focuses on what is mixed with obscurity, on what comes to be and passes away, it opines and is dimmed, changes its opinions this way and that, and seems bereft of understanding.
>
> Glaucon: It does seem that way.
>
> Socrates: *So that what gives truth to the things known and the power to know to the knower is the form of the good.* And though it is the cause of knowledge and truth, it is also an object of knowledge. *Both knowledge and truth are beautiful things, but the good is other and more beautiful than they.* In the visible realm, light and sight are rightly considered sunlike, but it is wrong to think that they are the sun, so here it is right to think of knowledge and truth as good like but wrong to think that either of them is the good—for the good is yet more prized.

Anselm

Anselm (1033–1109) served as Bishop of Canterbury and sought to extend the reach of Christianity into the British Isles. Philosophically, he is best known for his formulation of what has come to be known as a proof for the existence of God, which he elaborated in his written meditation the *Proslogion*. Anselm is an early proponent of—and some say the founder of—the philosophical school of Scholasticism, which anticipates the writings of prominent Scholastics such as Thomas Aquinas. Like later Scholastics, Anselm believed that a rational system of thought reflects the rationality inherent in the universe and that reason and logic can lead people to God.

Islamic Philosophy

The rise of Islam is linked to the decline of the Roman and Persian Empires. More specifically, the ruinous wars that the two once-great powers fought left both weak. In 622 CE, the Prophet Muhammed led his followers out of Mecca to Medina, which signaled the birth of Islam as a political power (Adamson 2016, 20). In the early years of Islam, theologians prohibited the teaching of Aristotle and other Greek philosophers on the grounds that they were contrary to the true Muslim faith. This restriction began to give way in the eighth century CE, which led to the flourishing of philosophy in the Islamic world.

As the Roman Empire declined, the Muslim world safeguarded ancient philosophical Greek and Latin texts through major centers of learning in Alexandria, Baghdad, and Cordova. Islamic philosophers published major works in metaphysics, epistemology, and natural philosophy. Key Islamic scholars who carried classical philosophy forward include Ibn Sina (whose Latin name became Avicenna), Ibn Rushd (whose name was Latinized to Averroes), and Al-Gazali. Of these three, Ibn Sina is the linchpin of Muslim philosophy. His genius inaugurates the shift from an early period focused on the consolidation of Greek learning to a later period of philosophical and scientific innovation (Adamson 2016).

Ibn Sina (Avicenna)

Abū-ʿAlī al-Ḥusayn ibn-ʿAbdallāh Ibn-Sīnā (c. 970–1037 CE) was a Persian polymath who published works in philosophy, medicine, astronomy, alchemy, geography, mathematics, Islamic theology, and even poetry. Because of the vast scope of Ibn Sina's intellectual endeavors, he is considered the linchpin between Islamic philosophy's formative phase and its more creative phase during the Golden Age of Islam, which extends from roughly the 8th through the 13th centuries. During this period, Islamic culture and learning flourished, and the Muslim-ruled lands spread from the Middle East, through Northern Africa, and into the Iberian Peninsula. Taking his cue from Aristotle, Ibn Sina sought to present a complete philosophy that would address both theoretical and practical philosophy. Some have estimated that Ibn Sina published as many as 450 works, though others place the figure at under 100 (Namazi 2001).

Ibn Sina's work was highly influential within both the Muslim and the Christian world. His proof of the

existence of God became predominant. Called the Proof of the Truthful, the argument proposed that existence requires that there be a necessary entity—an entity that cannot *not* exist. Elements of the material world—animals, plants, rivers, mountains—are contingent—that is, they come and go. They may have existed in the past but do not exist now, or they may exist now but will not exist in the future. Therefore, they can *not exist*. Therefore, there must be a nonmaterial entity that causes this material world to come into existence.

Much like Aristotle, Ibn Sina believed that the rational order of the universe was comprehensible by our human minds, and his well-ordered and complete philosophical project demonstrated this (Gutas 2016). Ibn Sina's most influential book is the *Canon*, a five-volume medical encyclopedia that—translated into Latin and Hebrew—became the textbook for the study of medicine in European universities from the 12th to the 17th century (Amr and Tbakhi 2007). Ibn Sina's epistemology—and in particular, his development of an empiricism that advances far beyond the Epicureans and is, in fact, comparable to that of John Locke—has received less attention.

Ibn Sina, similar to Locke, proposed that humans are born with a rational soul that is a blank slate. The child possesses the five external senses associated with the animal soul (sight, smell, sound, taste, and touch) and two internal senses of the human rational soul, memory and imagination. The child gathers and stores information from the senses and is able to abstract intelligible concepts about the world from this sensual data and about the human soul (rationality) through reflection (which Locke later calls experience). So, a child in a high chair might drop food and observe that it falls to the floor, based on experience, but a child through reflection also observes a causal relationship. For Ibn Sina, gravity exists both in the materialist realm of the senses and in the cognitive realm of the mind or soul. Like gravity, numbers exist in both realms, the abstract concept of the number two and concrete pairs of objects, such as two shoes or two apples. He explains in *The Metaphysics of Healing*, "Number has an existence in things and an existence in the soul" (quoted in Tahiri 2016, 41).

The child's mind organizes this information—making generalizations, separating out the essential from the nonessential, and affirming or negating relationships. Through this process, the child forms definitions and propositions that reflect the logical and mathematical modes of rational thought (Gutas 2012).

Ibn Sina stated that all knowledge is a result either of forming concepts or acknowledging the truth of propositions. He distinguished different types of propositions, each of which have different sources and therefore different ways to prove or disprove the proposition. Table 4.2 lists 5 of Ibn Sina's 16 types of propositions and examples (Gutas 2012).

Type of Proposition	Example
Sense data	Grass is green.
Data of reflection	Humans think.
Tested data	Fire burns flesh.
Propositions with a middled term	Six is an even number.
Data provided by multiple reports	The US Constitution was written in 1787.

TABLE 4.2 Types of Propositions Proposed by Ibn Sina

Some types of propositions, such as sense data and data based on reflection, are knowledge based on the external or internal senses. Tested data, however, can be accepted as true only after repeated observation and attribution to a cause. For example, "fire causes burns" would be based on the observations that fire is hot, hot things burn objects (cause), and flesh is an object. The truth of data provided by multiple reports can only be

confirmed if it has been reported by so many sources that it is highly unlikely to be a falsehood.

Building on Aristotle's idea of induction conveyed in *Posterior Analytics*, Ibn Sina developed a scientific methodology of experimentation in his treatise "On Demonstration" within his *Book of Healing*. Induction involves making an inference based on observations. Ibn Sina stated that—unlike untested induction—experimentation provides the basis of certain knowledge. He used the example of the relationship between consuming the plant scammony and purging (vomiting). He noted that the observation of a positive correlation does not prove that the relationship exists but rather that the lack of observation of a negative correlation (cases in which scammony did not cause purging) provides stronger evidence. Ibn Sina's experimentation involved a search for falsification of a correlation—just like the scientific method used today, which, for example incorporates control groups (McGinnis 2003). Furthermore, Ibn Sina insisted that a causal term be inserted into the relationship that is observed. It is not scammony that causes purging but a property that scammony has that requires further investigation. So Ibn Sina's argument is (1) scammony has the power to purge, (2) scammony causes purging, (3) a power to purge causes purging. Exactly what the power to purge is remains uncertain until further investigation. In the first example above, the cause is established: (1) fire burns flesh, (2) fire is hot, (3) heat burns flesh.

As advancement of experimental knowledge challenged Islamic theology, debate emerged over how to reconcile faith and science.

FIGURE 4.9 This statue of Ibn Sina in Tehran, Iran, honors this highly influential thinker, who published works in philosophy, medicine, astronomy, alchemy, geography, mathematics, Islamic theology, and poetry. (credit: "Avicenna - Ibn Sina" by Blondinrikard Fröberg/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Ibn Rushd (Averroes)

Ibn Rushd (1126–1198), known as Averroes in the Latin world, was born into a family of jurists in Cordova in Andalusia, or Muslim-ruled Spain. Like Ibn Sina, his philosophy took its inspiration from Aristotle. Like Ibn Sina and Aristotle, his work ranged across a number of domains, from metaphysics and logic through medicine and natural philosophy. Much of this work took the form of commentaries on Aristotle. He thought that the Neoplatonic interpretation of Aristotle had distorted the original meaning of Aristotle's work and sought a return to Aristotle's original works in his commentaries. Ibn Rushd was pivotal to the revival of Aristotle in Europe. The tradition of commentary on Aristotle's works that developed among Islamic philosophers developed Aristotle's thought in fascinating ways and kept Aristotle scholarship alive.

Ibn Rushd saw demonstration as the key to logic and the condition for philosophical certainty and scientific reasoning (Ben Ahmed and Pasnau 2021). This had important theological implications and led to

confrontations with theologians who believed that philosophical reflection was at odds with the Muslim faith. He sought to demonstrate the existence of God by showing that his creation was fine-tuned for humans in a way that could not be simply a matter of chance. In addition, he advanced an argument, taken up today by intelligent design advocates, that holds that it is not possible to explain the complexity of living beings without a creator.

Even as philosophy gained ground in the Islamic world, theological traditionalists remained influential. These traditionalists denied that reason could bring one closer to God. Ibn Rushd was among a number of philosophers who opposed this traditionalism and sought to show the compatibility of faith and reason. Not only did Ibn Rushd seek to show that reason was compatible with faith, he went further and cited Quranic scripture to show that religion required philosophical reflection. He wrote, "Many Quranic verses, such as 'Reflect, you have a vision' (59.2) and 'they give thought to the creation of heaven and earth' (3:191), command human intellectual reflection upon God and his creation" (quoted in Hiller 2016).

Al-Ghazali, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*

Al-Ghazali (c.1056–1111) was one of the most prominent Sunni Muslim theologians and philosophers. Writing in a period after the initial establishment of the Sunni sect, he sought to refute various challenges to its teachings from both Shi'ite religious scholars and philosophers. In his most well-known work, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers,* Al-Ghazali sought to refute these challenges while also strengthening the theological basis for Sunnism. Ibn Rushd wrote a refutation of Al-Ghazali's *The Incoherence of the Philosophers.* In it, he argues against Al-Ghazali's claim that philosophical reflection must remain distinct from the Muslim faith and that mystical union with Allah or God is the only true path to religious enlightenment. This dispute between Al-Ghazali and Ibn Rushd represents the conflict between faith and reason that characterized medieval Islam. This same conflict remains relevant in the present.

Late Medieval Philosophy in Christian Europe

Christian philosophy during this period is influenced by the development of two institutions: the university and the monastery. The development of these institutions influenced the form that philosophy would take during this period. It was in these institutions that a systematic effort was made to combine philosophy and theology in the Christian world. The attempt to reconcile challenges posed to theology by philosophy is illustrated in the voluminous work of Bonaventure (1221–1274) and Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274).

Bonaventure

Bonaventure, a Franciscan friar from Italy, traveled to the University of Paris in 1235, where he encountered Aristotle, the Islamic philosophers, and a rigorous course of logic. Bonaventure fused Augustinian ideas with Aristotle. In his illumination argument, he argued that God is the source of all knowledge but that "knowledge of the divine truth is impressed on every soul" (quoted in Houser 1999, 98). The acquisition of knowledge proceeds from effect, the outward world that we observe, to its cause, God. Knowledge is acquired through reasoning, using abstract ideas, propositions, and observed correlations, but certainty about this knowledge is only obtained through Augustine's process of inner reflection or meditation through which we see the unchangeable divine light.

Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) is the quintessential Scholastic philosopher, whose many works determined the course of European philosophy for generations. Somewhat like Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) several centuries later, philosophers after Aquinas knew that they would have to contend with his writings, either by extending his project or critiquing it. Aquinas saw that Scholastic philosophy needed to be reinvigorated, and he introduced the work of Jewish and Islamic philosophers to medieval Christian thought, bringing new ideas and approaches to philosophy (Van Norden 2017).

Aquinas is probably best known for his five ways to demonstrate the existence of God. The five ways are

considered natural theology because Aquinas does not depend upon the authority of the church to justify the existence of God. Instead, he writes that we can define God in five ways: as an unmoved mover, first cause, necessary being, absolute being, and grand designer. In order to avoid an infinite regress, we must assume an unmoved mover who put all the entities into motion. Similarly, God is the first cause of everything that exists, or else we face an infinite causal regress. Everything that exists has contingent existence, save for God. God is the necessary being upon which every contingent being depends. Contingent beings have qualities that are relative to one another (bigger and smaller, etc.), which entails an absolute being to whom all these are relative. Finally, the evidence of design in the world implies a grand designer. All natural bodies act to achieve an end. For example, an acorn gives rise to a tree. However, not all natural bodies are aware of and able to direct themselves to achieve this end. Therefore, an intelligent being must exist to guide these natural beings toward their end.

We can see Aristotle's influence in the metaphysics and epistemology of Aquinas as well as in his ethics and political philosophy. Aristotle defined God as the prime mover and "thought thinking itself." We can discern the influence of this idea in Aquinas's Five Ways. Aquinas also adopted Aristotle's virtue ethics and adapted them to his Christian context.

Jewish Philosophers in the Christian and Islamic Worlds

Although Jewish people did not enjoy equal status in Europe, Africa, and Asia, they did contribute to medieval philosophy in both the Christian and Islamic worlds. Perhaps the two most notable Jewish scholars of this period were Moses Maimonides and Levi ben Gershom.

Moses Maimonides

Moses ben Maimon, or Maimonides (1138–1204), was a physician, Torah scholar, and astronomer in addition to being a philosopher. Born in Cordova in Muslim-ruled Spain, he served as the personal physician of Saladin, the political and military leader of Muslim forces during the Second and Third Crusades.

Like many medieval thinkers across the various traditions of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, Maimonides's philosophical work begins with the question concerning the relationship between theology and philosophy. His most well-known work, *The Guide for the Perplexed* (1190), is addressed to a student trying to decide which field of inquiry to pursue.

To the ancient Greek philosophers, God is the unmoved mover that sets into motion all other existence in a universe that has always existed. This conception of God conflicts with both the story of creation and with the idea of miracles, which necessitate intervention. These conflicts created perplexity in the minds of Maimonides's student and other Jews. This conflict came about, Maimonides proposed, because philosophers developed doctrines that do not follow from objective evidence and reason, whereas theologians erroneously interpreted religious texts literally (Bokser 1947).

Maimonides claimed that biblical literalism was the main reason people could not get closer to God. Instead, biblical texts ought to be interpreted figuratively. Typical of medieval thinkers in these traditions, Maimonides was a systematic thinker who held that ultimate truths akin to Platonic forms remain forever true in the mind of God, which our finite minds seek to apprehend. Adam and Eve comprehended these truths prior to the Fall, but in the post-Fall world, we can only approximate them. Literalism and a materialist conception of God are the two forces keeping us from a fuller knowledge.

Maimonides presents a demythologized conception of the divine that influences later thinkers, Spinoza among them. Like Xenophanes before him, Maimonides rejects anthropomorphic religious elements, such as God in human form. Although Maimonides grants that picturing the divine in human terms may be necessary for young believers, adherents should get over this tendency as they mature, as it obscures the true nature of the divine. The true nature of the divine is captured in the central prayer of Jewish faith, the Sh'ma: "Hear, oh, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." God is one—unity that is expressed in the biblical reference to God as

ein sof—without end. Maimonides argued that God cannot be broken into parts or assigned attributes. The Bible refers to God's rod and staff, but this is figurative and should not be taken literally (Robinson 2000). When the Bible refers to God as merciful or gracious, these are not moral attributes of God. Rather, Maimonides explained, God has performed actions—set into motion events—that if performed by a human, we would perceive as merciful or gracious (Putnam 1997).

FIGURE 4.10 Although deeply religious, Maimonides opposed both literal interpretations of the Bible and anthropomorphized images of God, arguing that God cannot be imagined or even assigned attributes. This statue of Maimonides stands in his birthplace of Cordoba, Spain. (credit: "Maimónides" by Marco Chiesa/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Just as often we often understand God's attributes as analogous to human attributes, we often liken God's knowledge to human knowledge. This sort of analogical thinking is misguided, Maimonides argued. Human knowledge is finite and quantifiable, as is human power. God's knowledge and power are infinite and hence not the finite knowledge and power familiar to us. We may perceive God as gracious, but what we see as gracious is not God but an attribute of his action. "Every attribute that is found in the books of the deity . . . is therefore an attribute of His action and not an attribute of His essence" (Maimonides 1963, 121). This leads Maimonides to a radical negative theology asserting that human knowledge cannot conceive of what God is but only of what God is not. Humans can only ascribe attributes to God's actions and not God's essence. The role of revelation, as transmitted through the Jewish Bible, was not to acquaint us with knowledge of God but rather to guide us to our highest ends—and in doing so, we come as close to God as is possible (Bokser 1947). Maimonides's negative theology was radical and was challenged, perhaps most notably, by St. Thomas Aquinas.

Levi ben Gershom (Gersonides)

Like Maimonides, Gersonides (1288–1344) sought to demonstrate the compatibility between Jewish faith and reason. His most well-known work, *Wars of the Lord*, takes up the problem of the relationship between Torah or Jewish scripture on the one hand and reason on the other. Gersonides also made major contributions to the scientific study of astronomy. Applying mathematical calculations to data he collected using tools that he himself created, Gersonides concluded that several principles advanced by the Greek astronomer Ptolemy were wrong. For Gersonides, reason was both mathematical and empirical. He built upon the work of

Maimonides and Averroes, and his work can be read as an effort to understand Aristotle through these predecessors.

The Rise of Reason in the Early Modern Era

Although scholars agree that the early modern era ended with the 1789 French Revolution, there is still much debate about when it began. Some mark the beginning as the 1453 Ottoman conquest of Constantinople that drove scholars of the East into the West, carrying with them knowledge of Islamic intellectual advances. Some look to the Age of Discovery sparked by the Ottoman victory and the subsequent closing down of European access to trade routes (Goldstone 2009). Others point to the 1543 publication of Nicolas Copernicus's text *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres*, refuting the heliocentric theory that proposed the solar system revolved around the sun. In philosophy, the early modern era is delineated by the rapid advancement of natural philosophy, which in turn sparked the scientific revolution. This development relied upon the ability of scholars and clerics to openly question religious orthodoxy as the sole, authoritative source of truth and to instead seek answers through human reason.

Nicolaus Copernicus

Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543), born in Poland and raised by his uncle who was a bishop in the Catholic Church, matriculated from the University of Krakow. Although appointed a canon in the Catholic Church, he was able to continue his studies in mathematics, astronomy, and medicine at universities in Padua and Bologna in Italy. At the time, the Catholic Church espoused the ancient Greek astronomer Ptolemy's geocentric model of the solar system, in which the sun and the planets revolve around Earth. However, Copernicus's mathematical analysis of the astronomical data indicated that Earth and other planets revolved around the sun. As a canon in the Catholic Church, Copernicus feared to publish this data and sat on his discovery for over two decades. It was only after his colleague and friend Lutheran professor of mathematics Georg Joachim Rheticus published Copernican ideas in *Narratio Prima* in 1540 that Copernicus released *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres* in 1543. In an attempt to shield himself and his work, he dedicated the manuscript to the pope.

READ LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Read this excerpt from the preface of *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres*, which was dedicated to Pope Paul III. How does Copernicus's use of the word *consensus* shift the authority for truth from the church to natural philosophers?

> Those who know that the consensus of many centuries has sanctioned the conception that the earth remains at rest in the middle of the heavens as its center, would, I reflected, regard it as an insane pronouncement if I made the opposite assertion that the earth moves. . . . Therefore, when I considered this carefully, the contempt which I had to fear because of the novelty and apparent absurdity of my view, nearly induced me to abandon utterly the work I had begun.
>
> Therefore, when I considered this carefully, the contempt which I had to fear because of the novelty and apparent absurdity of my view, nearly induced me to abandon utterly the work I had begun. Not a few other very eminent and scholarly men made the same request, urging that I should no longer through fear refuse to give out my work for the common benefit of students of Mathematics. Therefore I would not have it unknown to Your Holiness, the only thing which induced me to look for another way of reckoning the movements of the heavenly bodies was that I knew that mathematicians by no means agree in their investigation thereof.

Zera Yacob

Whereas Copernicus did not directly challenge church authority, the Ethiopian scholar Zera Yacob

(1592–1692) did. Yacob, born in the district of Axum within the Ethiopian Empire, studied Christian, Jewish, and Islamic thought. Ethiopia had adopted Christianity as the state religion in 330 CE. The Christian kingdom resisted Islamic conquest for hundreds of years. By 1540, however, Ahmed Gragn, supported by the Ottoman Empire based in Turkey, succeeded in capturing much of the kingdom. The Ethiopian emperor then appealed to Portugal for support. Portugal sent troops that helped Ethiopia regain its territory. In the years that followed, Jesuit missionaries from Portugal arrived in Ethiopia and converted Emperor Susenyos from Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity to Catholicism. When Ethiopian Emperor Susenyos declared Catholicism the state religion in 1622, a civil war broke out. Yacob was forced to flee to the countryside. There, he composed much of *Hatata* (Inquiry), published in 1668 after the emperor's death.

Although deeply religious, Yacob argued against the supremacy of one religion over another. Rather, he counseled that we must rely on reason to evaluate religious tracts and traditions—and in this way, reach God. For Yacob, God is not only the master of all things, but he also understands all things: "He is intelligent who understands all, for he created us as intelligent from the abundance of his intelligence" (Yacob 1976, 8). God had a purpose in creating humans as intelligent beings, and that purpose was for humans "to look for him and to grasp him and his wisdom in the path he has opened for [them] and to worship him as long as [they] live" (Yacob 1976, 8).

The method of inquiry Yacob proposed echoes the ideas of Augustine and Aquinas. It involves reflection, observation, and connecting to a God-given light, our reason. Yacob explained that "he who investigates with the pure intelligence set by the creator in the heart of each man and scrutinizes the order and laws of creation, will discover the truth" (Yacob 1976, 9). However, using scrutiny and reason, Yacob rejected some religious doctrine, in a manner that Augustine and Aquinas would have seen as sacrilegious. He discarded all beliefs that he judged to not agree with the "wisdom of the creator," which he said we can know by observing "the order and laws of creation." While accepting Moses as a prophet, Yacob rejected the stories of the miracles Moses is said to have performed. Similarly, Yacob called into question Mohammed's miracles. Yacob believed that in the beginning, God had established the laws by which the world worked. Why would God violate his own laws by allowing some individuals to perform miracles? In Yacob's view, the stories of these miracles arose instead from false human understanding.

Yacob, Copernicus, and others had to challenge religious authorities in arguing for a truth based on reason, mathematical logic, and scientific observation. However, by the 18th century, governments began to embrace these methods and establish schools and institutes to expand knowledge of the natural world. This period of change is known as the Enlightenment. This process, as well as the rapid development and implementation of new technologies and the spread of capitalism, is often referred to as *modernization*.

Much of the remainder of this text examines the ideas of thinkers who lived during the Enlightenment as well as later in the modern era. They laid out the foundations for scientific inquiry, laid down the arguments for government based on popular representation rather than divine rule, and proposed economic systems designed to create wealth, which freed societies from feudal bonds. In doing so, these thinkers studied the works of classical and medieval philosophy while advancing ideas about metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics that this text examines in the chapters that are to come.

Summary

4.1 Historiography and the History of Philosophy

Scholars adopt three main approaches to the history of philosophy. The presentist approach to the history of philosophy examines philosophical texts for the arguments they contain and judges whether their conclusions remain relevant for philosophical concerns today. While making the wisdom of the past available for present applications, this approach has been critiqued on two points: 1) in reading philosophical texts too narrowly, past philosophers are judged by contemporary standards; 2) this approach may also result in anachronistic errors, as ideas from contemporary philosophy may be inaccurately attributed to historical philosophers. A contextualist approach interprets philosophy in terms of the historical and cultural contexts in which it was written. While this approach can yield deep understanding of historical moments and historical ways of thinking, it can be blind to the lasting value of philosophical inquiry. A hermeneutic approach attempts to take the best of the presentist and contextualists approaches, viewing the historical context of original texts seriously but also recognizing that our interpretation of history is connected to and conditioned by our contemporary context.

4.2 Classical Philosophy

Classical Greek philosophy owes much to Egyptian scholarship emanating from Heliopolis, as both Pythagoras and Plato are believed to have studied at that center of learning. Indeed, the Plimpton 332 clay tablet reveals that Babylonian mathematicians knew not only of the Pythagorean theorem of right triangles but also of trigonometric functions. Classical philosophy emerged in ancient Greece with the Presocratics; the three great philosophers Socrates (470–399 BCE), Plato (c. 428–347 BCE), and Aristotle (384–322 BCE); and schools of thought that came after—Epicureans, stoics, and others. From what remains of the works of the Presocratics, they were primarily interested in questions of metaphysics and natural philosophy. Some Presocratics, such as Parmenides, were monists while others, such as Heraclitus, were plurists. Plato advanced a theory of the forms, a metaphysical doctrine that holds that every particular thing that exists participates in an immaterial form or essence that gives this thing its identity. The invisible realm of the forms differs fundamentally from the changing realm we experience in this world. The invisible realm is eternal, unchanging, and perfect. Aristotle's work centers on his doctrine of the four causes: "What's it made of?" (material cause), "What shape does it have?" (formal cause), "What agent gave it this form?" (efficient cause), and, finally, "What is its end goal?" (final cause). The four causes can explain nature of all things in this universe, including the universe itself. Aristotle's universe is a closed system of final causes. Each final cause leads to another, until we get to the first cause or prime mover.

4.3 Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Philosophy

Greek and Roman imperialism in the Middle East and North Africa brought Jews—and later, Christians—into the intellectual sphere of Hellenism. Jewish and later Christian scholars incorporated ideas of classical Greek and Roman philosophy into their own theological studies. As Arab conquerors and traders expanded into the Middle East and Africa, the Muslim world adopted and advanced classical philosophy and the natural sciences. Yet a tension at all times runs through these works as philosophers tried to balance theological revelation and freedom of intellectual exploration. Unlike the classical Greek and Roman philosophers, the Jewish, Christian, or Muslim philosopher always works with a partner, the events and facts central to the religion. It is only in the early modern age that philosophers replace the primacy of God as the source of truth with reason.

Key Terms

Contextualist approach an approach to the philosophy that interprets the ideas of philosophers in terms of the historical and cultural contexts in which they wrote.

Empiricism a belief that all knowledge is derived inductively from sense experience.

Hermeneutic approach an approach to philosophy that takes the historical context of the original text

seriously but also recognizes the influence of contemporary issues and perspectives.

Logos the thoughts of God, which according to Philo of Alexandria serve as the means by which God creates the physical world.

Monism the belief that the universe is made up of one substance.

Natural philosophy the fields of study that eventually gave rise to science.

Plurism the belief that the universe is made up of more than one substance.

Presentist approach an approach to philosophy that examines philosophical texts for the arguments they contain and judges how and whether they remain relevant today.

Theory of the forms a metaphysical doctrine that holds that every particular thing that exists in our changing, material world participates in an immaterial form or essence, which is unchanging, invisible, and perfect and which gives this thing its identity.

Zeno's paradoxes paradoxes proposed by Zeno that attempt to prove that change and motion are illusory.

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Review Questions

4.1 Historiography and the History of Philosophy

1. What are the advantage and disadvantages of a presentist approach to the history of philosophy?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a contextualist approach to the history of philosophy?
3. What approach to the history of philosophy represents a middle ground between the presentists and the contextualists?

4.2 Classical Philosophy

4. What evidence suggests that many of the ideas that we attribute to Greek philosophers may have had their origin in ancient Egypt or Babylonia?
5. How can one justify Parmenides's claim that the world is unchanging?
6. What are Aristotle's four causes, and how did he apply them?
7. How can one justify Parmenides's claim that the world is unchanging?
8. What are Aristotle's four causes, and how did he apply them?

4.3 Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Philosophy

9. How is Jewish, Christian, and Muslim philosophy different from classical philosophy?
10. How did Philo of Alexandria develop Plato and Aristotle's ideas to explain the creation?

11. How did Ibn Sina's scientific approach differ from that of the Aristotle and the Epicureans?

Further Reading

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Logic and Reasoning

5

FIGURE 5.1 Buddhist monks debating at the Sera Monastery in Mysore, India. (credit: modification of "Monks at Sera Monastery 24" by Esther Lee/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

CHAPTER OUTLINE

5.1 Philosophical Methods for Discovering Truth
5.2 Logical Statements
5.3 Arguments
5.4 Types of Inferences
5.5 Informal Fallacies

INTRODUCTION Within the philosopher's toolkit, logic is arguably the most powerful tool, and certainly it gets the most use. Logic, the study of reasoning, aims to formalize and describe reasoning processes used to arrive at claims. Logic is a study of both how we *do* reason and how we *ought* to reason. Logicians categorize and explain different forms of successful reasoning along with mistakes in reasoning, with the goal of understanding what to do right and what to avoid. This chapter seeks to provide you with a general understanding of the discipline of logic.

5.1 Philosophical Methods for Discovering Truth

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Describe the role that dialectics plays in logic and reasoning.
- Define "argument" and "negation of a argument."
- Define the laws of noncontradiction and the excluded middle.

Like most academic disciplines, the goal of philosophy is to get closer to the truth. Logic, reasoning, and argumentation are the predominant methods used. But unlike many other disciplines, philosophy does not contain a large body of accepted truths or canonical knowledge. Indeed, philosophy is often known for its uncertainty because it focuses on questions for which we do not yet have ways of definitively answering. The influential 20th-century philosopher Bertrand Russell explains that "as soon as definite knowledge concerning any subject becomes possible, the subject ceases to be called philosophy, and becomes a separate science" (1912, 240).

Because philosophy focuses on questions we do not yet have ways of definitively answering, it is as much a method of thinking as it is a body of knowledge. And logic is central to this method. Thinking like a philosopher involves thinking critically about alternative possibilities. To answer the question of whether there is a God (a question for which we lack a definitive method of answering), we can look at things we believe we know and then critically work through what those ideas entail about the existence or possible characteristics of God. We can also imagine God exists or God does not exist and then reason through what either possibility implies about the world. In imagining alternative possibilities, we must critically work through what each possibility must entail. Changing one belief can set off a cascade of implications for further beliefs, altering much of what we accept as true. And so, in studying philosophy, we need to get used to the possibility that our beliefs could be wrong. We use reason to do philosophy, and logic is the study of reason. Hence, logic helps us get closer to the truth.

Dialectics and Philosophical Argumentation

Philosophers love to argue. But this love does not mean that philosophy lectures are loud, contentious events. Most people think of an argument as a verbal disagreement, and the term evokes images of raised voices, heightened emotions, and possibly bad behavior. However, in philosophy, this word does not have a negative connotation. An **argument** in philosophy is a reasoned position—to argue is simply to offer a set of reasons in support of some conclusion. The goal of an individual argument is to support a conclusion. However, the long-term goal of argumentation between philosophers is to get closer to the truth. In contemporary academic philosophy, philosophers are engaged in dialogue with each other where they offer arguments in the publication of articles. Philosophers also engage in argument at conferences and in paper presentations and lectures. In this way, contemporary academic philosophers are engaged in a dialectic of sorts.

A traditional dialectic is a debate or discussion between at least two people who hold differing views. But unlike debate, participants in the discussion do not have the goal of "winning," or proving that the other view is wrong. Rather, the goal is to get closer to the truth. Thus, dialectics make use of logic and reason, while debates often use rhetorical ploys or appeal to the emotions. Because of the tendency of participants to appeal to emotion and prejudice in many modern popular debates, philosophers often qualify their words and refer to *reasoned* debate when discussing proper public discourse between people. But even reasoned debates can become adversarial, while dialectics are mostly collaborative. The participants in a dialectic, whom philosophers refer to as "interlocuters," enter into discourse with the aim of trading their poor or false beliefs for knowledge.

Dialectics usually start with a question. An interlocuter offers an answer to the question, which is then scrutinized by all participants. Reasons against the answer are given, and someone may offer a counterexample to the answer—that is, a case that illustrates that the answer is wrong. The interlocuters will

then analyze why the answer is wrong and try to locate its weakness. The interlocuters may also examine what made the answer plausible in the first place. Next, someone offers another answer to the question—possibly a refined version of the previous answer that has been adjusted in light of the weaknesses and strengths identified in the analysis. This process is repeated over and over, with each iteration theoretically bringing participants closer to the truth.

While dialectics aims at the truth, the creation of knowledge is not its sole function. For example, a long, deep conversation with a friend about the meaning of life should not be viewed as a failure if you do not come up with a satisfactory answer to life's purpose. In this instance, the process has as much value as the aim (getting closer to the truth). Contemporary academic philosophers view their practice in the same way.

Indian Dialectics and Debate

Dialectics played an important role in early Indian philosophy. The earliest known philosophical writings originate in India as sections of the Vedas, which have been dated as far back as 1500 BCE (Mark 2020). The Vedas are often considered religious texts, but it is more accurate to think of them as religious *and* philosophical texts since they explore what it means to be a human being, discuss the purpose and function of the mind, and attempt to identify the goal of life. The Upanishads, which are the most philosophical of the Vedic texts, often take the form of dialogues. These dialogues generally occur between two participants—one who knows a truth and the other who seeks to know and understand the truth. The Vedic dialectics explore fundamental concepts such as *Brahman* (the One without a second, which includes the universe as its manifestation), *dharma* (an individual's purpose and duty), and *atman* (an individual's higher self). As in many dialectics, questioning, reasoning, and realizations that arise through the dialogue are the aim of these texts.

Buddhist philosophical texts that were part of early Indian philosophy also contain narrative dialogues (Gillon 2021). Logical argumentation is evident in these, and as time progressed, texts became more focused on argument, particularly those relying on analogical reasoning, or the use of analogies. Analogies use an object that is known to draw inferences about other similar objects. Over time, the analogical arguments used in Buddhist texts took on *structure*. When arguments have structure, they rely on a form that captures a specific manner of reasoning, such that the reasoning can be schematized. As an example, consider the following argument that appears in the *Caraka-saṃhitā* (CS 3.8.31) (Gillon 2021). The argument has been slightly altered to aid in understanding.

Soul Analogical Argument

1. The soul is eternal.
2. Space is eternal and it is unproduced.
3. Therefore, the soul is eternal because it is unproduced.

Analogical Argument Form

1. X has property P.
2. Y has property P and property S.
3. Therefore, X has property S because it has property P

As you will see later in the section on deductive argumentation, relying on argumentative structure is a feature of logical reasoning.

Classical Indian philosophical texts also refer to the occurrence of reasoned public debates. Public debate was a further method of rational inquiry and likely the main mode of rational inquiry that most people had access to. One mode of debate took the form of assemblies in which experts considered specific topics, including those in politics and law (Gillon 2021). Arguments are the public expression of private inferences, and only by exposing one's private thoughts through argument can they be tested. Public arguments are a method to improve one's reasoning when it is scrutinized by others.

Greek Dialectics and Debate

Ancient Greek philosophy is also known for its use of dialectic and debate. Socrates, perhaps the most famous ancient Greek philosopher, claimed that knowledge is true opinion backed by argument (Plato, *Meno*). "Opinion" here means unjustified belief: your beliefs could be true, but they cannot count as knowledge unless you have reasons for them and can offer justifications for your beliefs when questioned by others. Furthermore, Socrates's method of gaining knowledge was to engage in dialectics with others. All of what we know about Socrates is through the writings of others—particularly the writings of Plato. Quite appropriately, Plato uses dialogues in all his works, in which Socrates is almost always a participant.

Socrates never wrote anything down. In the *Phaedrus*, one of Plato's dialogues, Socrates criticizes written works as being a dead discourse of sorts. Books cannot respond to you when you ask questions. He states, "You'd think they were speaking as if they had some understanding, but if you question anything that has been said because you want to learn more, it continues to signify just the very same thing forever" (*Phaedrus*, 275e). Clearly, dialectics was central to Socrates's philosophical method.

CONNECTIONS

Learn more about Socrates in the introduction to philosophy chapter.

Plato's dialogues are a testament to the importance of public discourse as a form of rational inquiry in ancient Greece. Based on Greek philosophical writings, we can assume reasoned public debate took place and that Socrates preferred it as a method of teaching and learning. In Plato's dialogues, many questions are asked, and Socrates's interlocuters offer answers to which Socrates asks further clarifying questions. Through the process of questioning, false beliefs and inadequate understanding are exposed. Socrates's goal was not simply to offer people truth. Rather, through questioning, Socrates guides people to discover the truth on their own, provided they are willing to keep an open mind and admit, when necessary, that they are in the wrong. In Plato's dialogues, participants don't always land on a determinate answer, but they as well as readers are always left with a clearer understanding of the correct way to *reason*.

If any ancient Greek philosopher most embodies the tie between dialectic and logic, it is Aristotle (c. 384–322 BCE), who was a student of Plato. Aristotle wrote books on the art of dialectic (Smith 2020). And he probably participated in gymnastic dialectic—a structured dialectic contest practiced in the Academy (the school founded by Plato, which Aristotle attended). But more importantly, Aristotle created a complex system of logic upon which skill in the art of dialectic relied. Aristotle's logic is the earliest formal systematized account of inference we know of and was considered the most accurate and complete system until the late 19th century (Smith 2020). Aristotle's system is taught in logic classes to this day.

FIGURE 5.2 Roman copy in marble of a Greek bronze bust of Aristotle. (credit: "Vienna 014" by Jeremy Thompson/ Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

The Use of Reason to Discover Truth

Reasoning allows us to hypothesize, work out consequences of our hypotheses, run thought experiments, assess the coherence of a set of beliefs, and generate plausible explanations of the world around us. As Chapter 1 explained, coherence is the property of consistency in a set of beliefs. Thus, when a set of beliefs is inconsistent, it is not possible for every belief in the set to be true. We must use reason to determine whether a set of beliefs is consistent and work out the logical implications of beliefs, given their truth. In this way, reason can be used to discover truth.

The rules of logic are like the rules of math; you cannot make 1 + 1 = 3. Indeed, math is a form of deductive reasoning that ensures truth. Answers to problems in math are derived using known functions and rules, which is also true in logic. Unlike math, however, not all of logic can *guarantee* correct answers. Nonetheless, logic supplies means by which to derive better answers—answers that are more likely to be true. Because logic is the study of proper reasoning, and proper reasoning is an essential tool for discovering truth, logic is foundational to the pursuit of learning.

Testing Hypotheses

A **hypothesis** is a proposed explanation for an observed process or phenomenon. Human beings formulate hypotheses because they wish to answer specific questions about the world. Usually, the sciences come to mind when we think of the word "hypothesis." However, hypotheses can be created on many subjects, and chances are that you have created many hypotheses without realizing it. For example, if you often come home and find that one of your outside potted plants has been knocked over, you might hypothesize that "the wind must have knocked that one over." In doing so, you answer the question, "Why is that plant often knocked over?" Generating and testing hypotheses engages different forms of reasoning— abduction, induction, and deduction—all of which will be explained in further detail below.

Clearly, simply coming up with a hypothesis isn't enough for us to gain knowledge; rather, we must use logic to

test the truth of our supposition. Of course, the aim of testing hypotheses is to get to the truth. In testing we often formulate if–then statements: "If it is windy, then my plant will get knocked over" or "If nitrogen levels are high in the river, then algae will grow." If–then statements in logic are called conditionals and are testable. For example, we can keep a log registering the windy days, cross-checked against the days on which the plant was found knocked over, to test our if–then hypothesis.

Reasoning is also used to assess the evidence collected for testing and to determine whether the test itself is good enough for drawing a reliable conclusion. In the example above, if on no windy days is the plant knocked over, logic demands that the hypothesis be rejected. If the plant is sometimes knocked over on windy days, then the hypothesis needs refinement (for example, wind direction or wind speed might be a factor in when the plant goes down). Notice that logic and reasoning play a role in every step of the process: creating hypotheses, figuring out how to test them, compiling data, analyzing results, and drawing a conclusion.

FIGURE 5.3 "If it is windy, the plant will be knocked over" is a testable hypothesis. If the plant is found knocked over on days that aren't windy, another force may be responsible. Hypotheses help philosophers, as well as scientists, answer specific questions about the world. (credit: "strollin' with Fräulein Zeiss - 5" by torne (where's my lens cap?)/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

We've been looking at an inconsequential example—porch plants. But testing hypotheses is serious business in many fields, such as when pharmaceutical companies test the efficacy of a drug in treating a life-threatening illness. Good reasoning requires researchers to gather enough data to compare an experimental group and control group (patients with the illness who received the drug and those who did not). If scientists find a statistically significant difference in positive outcomes for the experimental group when compared to the control group, they can draw the reasonable conclusion that the drug could alleviate illness or even save lives in the future.

Laws of Logic

Logic, like the sciences, has laws. But while the laws of science are meant to accurately describe observed regularities in the natural world, laws of logic can be thought of as rules of thought. Logical laws are rules that underlie thinking itself. Some might even argue that it is only by virtue of these laws that we can have reliable thoughts. To that extent, laws of logic are construed to be laws of reality itself. To see what is meant by this, let's consider the **law of noncontradiction**.

Noncontradiction

To understand the law of noncontradiction, we must first define a few terms. First, a **statement** is a sentence with truth value, meaning that the statement must be true or false. Statements are declarative sentences like "Hawaii is the 50th state to have entered the United States" and "You are reading an online philosophy book." Sometimes philosophers use the term "proposition" instead of "statement," and the latter term has a slightly different meaning. But for our purposes, we will use these terms as synonyms. Second, a *negation* of a

statement is the denial of that statement. The easiest way to turn a statement into its negation is to add the qualifier "not." For example, the negation of "My dog is on her bed" is "My dog is not on her bed." Third, a **contradiction** is the conjunction of any statement and its negation. We may also say that any statement and its opposite are *contradictory*. For example, "My dog is on her bed" and "My dog is not on her bed" are contradictory because the second is the negation of the first. And when you combine a statement and its opposite, you get a contradiction: "My dog is on her bed and my dog is not on her bed."

The law of noncontradiction is a law about truth, stating that contradictory propositions cannot be true *in the same sense, at the same time*. While my dog may have been on her bed earlier and now she's off barking at squirrels, it cannot be true *right now* that my dog is both on her bed and not on her bed. However, some of you may be thinking about dogs who lie half on their beds and half on the floor (Josie, the dog belonging to the author of this chapter, is one of them). Can it not be true that such a dog is both on and not on their bed? In this instance, we must return to the phrase *in the same sense*. If we decide that "lying on the bed" means "at least 50% of your body is on the bed," then we must maintain that definition when looking at propositions to determine whether they are contradictory. Thus, if Josie is half out of the bed with her head on the floor, we can still say "Josie is on the bed." But notice that "Josie is not on the bed" remains false since we have qualified the meaning of "on the bed."

For Aristotle, the law of noncontradiction is so fundamental that he claims that without it, knowledge would not be possible—the law is foundational for the sciences, reasoning, and language (Gottlieb 2019). Aristotle thought that the law of noncontradiction was "the most certain of all principles" because it is impossible for someone to believe that the same thing both is and is not (1989, 1005b).

The Excluded Middle

The law of the excluded middle is related to the law of noncontradiction. The **law of the excluded middle** states that for any statement, either that statement is true, or its negation is true. If you accept that all statements must be either true or false *and* you also accept the law of noncontradiction, then you must accept the law of the excluded middle. If the only available options for truth-bearing statements are that they are true or false, and if a statement and its negation cannot both be true at the same time, then one of the statements must be true while the other must be false. Either my dog is on her bed or off her bed *right now*.

Normativity in Logic

What if Lulu claims that she is 5 feet tall and that she is 7 feet tall? You'd think that she was joking or not being literal because this is tantamount to saying that she is both 5 feet tall and *not* 5 feet tall (which is implied by being 7 feet tall). The statement "I'm 5 feet tall and not 5 feet tall" is a contradiction. Surely Lulu does not believe a contradiction. We might even think, as Aristotle did, that it is impossible to believe a contradiction. But even if Lulu could believe a contradiction, we think that she *should not*. Since we generally believe that inconsistency in reasoning is something that *ought to be avoided*, we can say that logic is normative. Normativity is the assumption that certain actions, beliefs, or other mental states are good and ought to be pursued or realized. Normativity implies a standard (a norm) to which we ought to conform. Ethics is a normative discipline because it is the study of how we ought to act. And because we believe people ought to be logical rather than illogical, we label logic as normative.

While ethics is normative in the realm of actions and behavior, logic is normative in the realm of reasoning. Some rules of thought, like the law of noncontradiction, seem to be imperative (a command), so logic is a command of reasoning. Some philosophers argue that logic is what makes reasoning possible (MacFarlane 2002). In their view, logic is a constitutive norm of reasoning—that is, logic constitutes what reasoning *is*. Without norms of logic, there would be no reasoning. This view is intuitively plausible: What if your thoughts proceeded one after the other, with no connection (or ability to detect a connection) between them? Without logic, you would be unable to even categorize thoughts or reliably attach concepts to the contents of thoughts. Let's take a closer look at how philosophers use special logical statements to organize their reasoning.

5.2 Logical Statements

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify the necessary and sufficient conditions in conditionals and universal affirmative statements.
- Describe counterexamples for statements.
- Assess the truth of conditionals and universal statements using counterexamples.

Specific types of statements have a particular meaning in logic, and such statements are frequently used by philosophers in their arguments. Of particular importance is the *conditional*, which expresses the logical relations between two propositions. Conditional statements are used to accurately describe the world or construct a theory. Counterexamples are statements used to disprove a conditional. Universal statements are statements that assert something about every member of a set of things and are an alternative way to describe a conditional.

Conditionals

A **conditional** is most commonly expressed as an if–then statement, similar to the examples we discussed earlier when considering hypotheses. Additional examples of if–then statements are "If you eat your meat, then you can have some pudding" and "If that animal is a dog, then it is a mammal." But there are other ways to express conditionals, such as "You can have pudding *only if* you eat your meat" or "*All* dogs are mammals." While these sentences are different, their logical meaning is the same as their correlative if–then sentences above.

All conditionals include two components—that which follows the "if" and that which follows the "then." Any conditional can be rephrased in this format. Here is an example:

> Statement 1: You must complete 120 credit hours to earn a bachelor's degree.
>
> Statement 2: If you expect to graduate, then you must complete 120 credit hours.

Whatever follows "if" is called the *antecedent*; whatever follows "then" is called the *consequent*. *Ante* means "before," as in the word "antebellum," which in the United States refers to anything that occurred or was produced *before* the American Civil War. The *ante*cedent is the first part of the conditional, occurring *before* the consequent. A consequent is a result, and in a conditional statement, it is the result of the antecedent (if the antecedent is true).

Necessary and Sufficient Conditions

All conditionals express two relations, or *conditions*: those that are necessary and those that are sufficient. A relation is a relationship/property that exists between at least two things. If something is sufficient, it is always sufficient *for something else*. And if something is necessary, it is always necessary *for something else*. In the conditional examples offered above, one part of the relation is required for the other. For example, 120 credit hours are required for graduation, so 120 credit hours is necessary if you expect to graduate. Whatever is the consequent—that is, whatever is in the second place of a conditional—is necessary for that particular antecedent. This is the relation/condition of necessity. Put formally, Y is a **necessary condition** for X *if and only if X cannot be true without Y being true*. In other words, X cannot happen or exist without Y. Here are a few more examples:

- Being unmarried is a necessary condition for being a bachelor. If you are a bachelor, then you are unmarried.
- Being a mammal is a necessary condition for being a dog. If a creature is a dog, then it is a mammal.

But notice that the *necessary relation* of a conditional does not automatically occur in the other direction. Just because something is a mammal does not mean that it *must* be a dog. Being a bachelor is not a necessary feature of being unmarried because you can be unmarried and be an unmarried woman. Thus, the

relationship between X and Y in the statement "if X, then Y" is not always symmetrical (it does not automatically hold in both directions). Y is always *necessary* for X, but X is *not necessary* for Y. On the other hand, X is always *sufficient* for Y.

Take the example of "If you are a bachelor, then you are unmarried." If you know that Eric is a bachelor, then you automatically know that Eric is unmarried. As you can see, the antecedent/first part is the sufficient condition, while the consequent/second part of the conditional is the necessary condition. X is a **sufficient condition** for Y *if and only if the truth of X guarantees the truth of Y.* Thus, if X is a sufficient condition for Y, then X automatically implies Y. But the reverse is not true. Oftentimes X is not the only way for something to be Y. Returning to our example, being a bachelor is not the only way to be unmarried. Being a dog is a sufficient condition for being a mammal, but it is *not necessary* to be a dog to be a mammal since there are many other types of mammals.

FIGURE 5.4 All dogs are mammals, but not all mammals are dogs. Being a dog is a sufficient condition for being a mammal but it is not necessary to be a dog to be a mammal. (credit: "Sheepdog Trials in California" by SheltieBoy/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

The ability to understand and use conditionals increases the clarity of philosophical thinking and the ability to craft effective arguments. For example, some concepts, such as "innocent" or "good," must be rigorously defined when discussing ethics or political philosophy. The standard practice in philosophy is to state the meaning of words and concepts before using them in arguments. And oftentimes, the best way to create clarity is by articulating the necessary or sufficient conditions for a term. For example, philosophers may use a conditional to clarify for their audience what they mean by "innocent": "If a person has not committed the crime for which they have been accused, then that person is innocent."

Counterexamples

Sometimes people disagree with conditionals. Imagine a mother saying, "If you spend all day in the sun, you'll get sunburnt." Mom is claiming that getting sunburnt is a *necessary* condition for spending all day in the sun. To argue against Mom, a teenager who wants to go to the beach might offer a **counterexample**, or an opposing statement that proves the first statement wrong. The teenager must point out a case in which the claimed necessary condition *does not occur* alongside the sufficient one. Regular application of an effective sunblock with an SPF 30 or above will allow the teenager to avoid sunburn. Thus, getting sunburned is not a necessary condition for being in the sun all day.

Counterexamples are important for testing the truth of propositions. Often people want to test the truth of statements to effectively argue against someone else, but it is also important to get into the critical thinking

habit of attempting to come up with counterexamples for our own statements and propositions. Philosophy teaches us to constantly question the world around us and invites us to test and revise our beliefs. And generating creative counterexamples is a good method for testing our beliefs.

Universal Statements

Another important type of statement is the **universal affirmative statement**. Aristotle included universal affirmative statements in his system of logic, believing they were one of only a few types of meaningful logical statements (*On Interpretation*). Universal affirmative statements take two groups of things and claim all members of the first group are also members of the second group: "All A are B." These statements are called *universal* and *affirmative* because they assert something about all members of group A. This type of statement is used when classifying objects and/or the relationships. Universal affirmative statements are, in fact, an alternative expression of a conditional.

Universal Statements as Conditionals

Universal statements are logically equivalent to conditionals, which means that any conditional can be translated into a universal statement and vice versa. Notice that universal statements also express the logical relations of necessity and sufficiency. Because universal affirmative statements can always be rephrased as conditionals (and vice versa), the ability to translate ordinary language statements into conditionals or universal statements is helpful for understanding logical meaning. Doing so can also help you identify necessary and sufficient conditions. Not all statements can be translated into these forms, but many can.

Counterexamples to Universal Statements

Universal affirmative statements also can be disproven using counterexamples. Take the belief that "All living things deserve moral consideration." If you wanted to prove this statement false, you would need to find *just one* example of a living thing that you believe does not deserve moral consideration. Just one will suffice because the categorical claim is quite strong—that *all* living things deserve moral consideration. And someone might argue that some parasites, like the protozoa that causes malaria, do not deserve moral consideration.

5.3 Arguments

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Define key components of an argument.
- Categorize components of sample arguments.
- Explain the difference between assessing logic and assessing truth.

As explained at the beginning of the chapter, an **argument** in philosophy is simply a set of reasons offered in support of some conclusion. So an "arguer" is a person who offers reasons for a specific conclusion. Notice that the definition does not state that the reasons *do* support a conclusion (and rather states reasons are *offered* or *meant* to support a conclusion) because there are bad arguments in which reasons do not support a conclusion.

Arguments have two components: the conclusion and the reasons offered to support it. The conclusion is what an arguer wants people to believe. The reasons offered are called **premises**. Often philosophers will craft a numbered argument to make clear each individual claim (premise) given in support of the conclusion. Here is an example of a numbered argument:

1. If someone lives in San Francisco, then they live in California.
2. If someone lives in California, then they live in the United States.
3. Hassan lives in San Francisco.
4. Therefore, Hassan lives in the United States.

Getting to the Premises

The first step in understanding an argument is to identify the conclusion. Ask yourself what you think the main point or main idea is. Can you identify a thesis? Sometimes identifying the conclusion may involve a little bit of "mind reading." You may have to ask yourself "What is this person trying to make me accept?" The arguer may use words that indicate a conclusion—for example, "therefore" or "hence" (see Table 5.1). After you have identified the conclusion, try to summarize it as well as you can. Then, identify the premises or evidence the arguer offers in support of that conclusion. Once again, identifying reasons can be tricky and might involve more mind reading because arguers don't always explicitly state all of their reasons. Attempt to identify what you think the arguer wants you to accept as evidence. Sometimes arguers also use words that indicate that reasons or premises are being offered. In presenting evidence, people might use terms such as "*because* of" or "since" (see Table 5.1). Lastly, if it is difficult to first identify the conclusion of an argument, you may have to begin by parsing the evidence to then figure out the conclusion.

Conclusion indicator words and phrases	therefore, hence, so, thus, consequently, accordingly, as a result, it follows that, it entails that, we can conclude, for this reason, it must be that, it has to be that
Premise indicator words and phrases	given that, since, because, for, in that, for the reason that, in as much as, as indicated by, seeing how, seeing that, it follows from, owing to, it may be inferred from

TABLE 5.1 Navigating an Argument

Understanding evidence types can help you identify the premises being advanced for a conclusion. As discussed earlier in the chapter, philosophers will often offer definitions or conceptual claims in their arguments. For example, a premise may contain the conceptual claim that "The idea of God includes perfection." Arguments can also contain as premises empirical evidence or information about the world gleaned through the senses. Principles are also used as premises in arguments. A principle is a general rule or law. Principles are as varied as fields of study and can exist in any domain. For example, "Do not use people merely as a means to an end" is an ethical principle.

CONNECTIONS

See the introduction to philosopher chapter to learn more about conceptual analysis.

The Difference between Truth and Logic

Analysis of arguments ought to take place on the levels of both truth *and* logic. **Truth analysis** is the determination of whether statements are correct or accurate. On the other hand, **logical analysis** ascertains whether the premises of an argument support the conclusion.

Often, people focus solely on the truth of an argument, but in philosophy logical analysis is often treated as primary. One reason for this focus is that philosophy deals with subjects in which it is difficult to determine the truth: the nature of reality, the existence of God, or the demands of morality. Philosophers use logic and inference to get closer to the truth on these subjects, and they assume that an inconsistency in a position is evidence against its truth.

Logical Analysis

Because logic is the study of reasoning, logical analysis involves assessing reasoning. Sometimes an argument with a false conclusion uses good reasoning. Similarly, arguments with true conclusions can use terrible reasoning. Consider the following absurd argument:

1. The battle of Hastings occurred in 1066.
2. Tamaracks are deciduous conifer trees.
3. Therefore, Paris is the capital of France.

The premises of the above argument are true, as is the conclusion. However, the argument is illogical because the premises do not support the conclusion. Indeed, the premises are unrelated to each other and to the conclusion. More specifically, the argument does not contain a clear **inference** or evidence of reasoning. An inference is a reasoning process that leads from one idea to another, through which we formulate conclusions. So in an argument, an inference is the movement from the premises to the conclusion, where the former provide support for the latter. The above argument does not contain a clear inference because it is uncertain how we are supposed to cognitively move from the premises to the conclusion. Neither the truth nor the falsity of the premises helps us reason toward the truth of the conclusion. Here is another absurd argument:

1. If the moon is made of cheese, then mice vacation there.
2. The moon is made of cheese.
3. Therefore, mice vacation on the moon.

The premises of the above argument are false, as is the conclusion. However, the argument has strong reasoning because it contains a good inference. If the premises are true, then the conclusion does follow. Indeed, the argument uses a particular kind of inference—deductive inference—and good a deductive inference *guarantees* the truth of its conclusion as long as its premises are true.

The important thing to remember is that a good inference involves clear steps by which we can move from premise to premise to reach a conclusion. The basic method for testing the two common types of inferences—deductive and inductive—is to provisionally assume that their premises are true. Assuming a neutral stance in considering an inference is crucial to doing philosophy. You begin by assuming that the premises are true and then ask whether the conclusion logically follows, given the truth of those premises.

Truth Analysis

If the logic in an argument seems good, you next turn to assessing the truth of the premises. If you disagree with the conclusion or think it untrue, you must look for weaknesses (untruths) in the premises. If the evidence is empirical, check the facts. If the evidence is a principle, ask whether there are exceptions to the principle. If the evidence is a conceptual claim, think critically about whether the conceptual claim can be true, which often involves thinking critically about possible counterexamples to the claim.

5.4 Types of Inferences

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Define deductive, inductive, and abductive inferences.
- Classify inferences as deductive, inductive, or abductive.
- Explain different explanatory virtues used in abductive reasoning.

Inferences can be deductive, inductive, or abductive. Deductive inferences are the strongest because they can guarantee the truth of their conclusions. Inductive inferences are the most widely used, but they do not guarantee the truth and instead deliver conclusions that are probably true. Abductive inferences also deal in probability.

Deductive Reasoning

Deductive inferences, which are inferences arrived at through deduction (deductive reasoning), can guarantee truth because they focus on the structure of arguments. Here is an example:

1. Either you can go to the movies tonight, or you can go to the party tomorrow.
2. You cannot go to the movies tonight.

3. So, you can go to the party tomorrow.

This argument is good, and you probably knew it was good even without thinking too much about it. The argument uses "or," which means that at least one of the two statements joined by the "or" must be true. If you find out that one of the two statements joined by "or" is false, you *know* that the other statement is true by using deduction. Notice that this inference works no matter what the statements are. Take a look at the structure of this form of reasoning:

1. X or Y is true.
2. X is not true.
3. Therefore, Y is true.

By replacing the statements with variables, we get to the *form* of the initial argument above. No matter what statements you replace X and Y with, if those statements are true, then the conclusion must be true as well. This common argument form is called a disjunctive syllogism.

Valid Deductive Inferences

A good deductive inference is called a **valid inference**, meaning its structure guarantees the truth of its conclusion given the truth of the premises. Pay attention to this definition. The definition does not say that valid arguments *have* true conclusions. Validity is a property of the logical forms of arguments, and remember that logic and truth are distinct. The definition states that valid arguments have a form such that *if* the premises are true, then the conclusion must be true. You can test a deductive inference's validity by testing whether the premises lead to the conclusion. If it is impossible for the conclusion to be false when the premises are assumed to be true, then the argument is valid.

Deductive reasoning can use a number of valid argument structures:

Disjunctive Syllogism:

1. X or Y.
2. Not Y.
3. Therefore X.

Modus Ponens:

1. If X, then Y.
2. X.
3. Therefore Y.

Modus Tollens:

1. If X, then Y.
2. Not Y.
3. Therefore, not X.

You saw the first form, disjunctive syllogism, in the previous example. The second form, modus ponens, uses a conditional, and if you think about necessary and sufficient conditions already discussed, then the validity of this inference becomes apparent. The conditional in premise 1 expresses that X is sufficient for Y. So if X is true, then Y must be true. And premise 2 states that X is true. So the conclusion (the truth of Y) necessarily follows. You can also use your knowledge of necessary and sufficient conditions to understand the last form, modus tollens. Remember, in a conditional, the consequent is the necessary condition. So Y is necessary for X. But premise 2 states that Y is *not* true. Because Y must be the case if X is the case, and we are told that Y is false, then we know that X is also false. These three examples are only a few of the numerous possible valid inferences.

Invalid Deductive Inferences

A bad deductive inference is called an **invalid inference**. In invalid inferences, their structure does not guarantee the truth of the conclusion—that is to say, even if the premises are true, the conclusion *may* be false. This does not mean that the conclusion *must* be false, but that we simply cannot know whether the conclusion is true or false. Here is an example of an invalid inference:

1. If it snows more than three inches, the schools are mandated to close.
2. The schools closed.
3. Therefore, it snowed more than three inches.

If the premises of this argument are true (and we assume they are), it may or may not have snowed more than three inches. Schools close for many reasons besides snow. Perhaps the school district experienced a power outage or a hurricane warning was issued for the area. Again, you can use your knowledge of necessary and sufficient conditions to understand why this form is invalid. Premise 2 claims that the necessary condition is the case. But the truth of the necessary condition does not guarantee that the sufficient condition is true. The conditional states that the closing of schools is guaranteed when it has snowed more than 3 inches, *not* that snow of more than 3 inches is guaranteed if the schools are closed.

Invalid deductive inferences can also take general forms. Here are two common invalid inference forms:

Affirming the Consequent:

1. If X, then Y.
2. Y.
3. Therefore, X.

Denying the Antecedent:

1. If X, then Y.
2. Not X.
3. Therefore, not Y.

You saw the first form, affirming the consequent, in the previous example concerning school closures. The fallacy is so called because the truth of the consequent (the necessary condition) is affirmed to infer the truth of the antecedent statement. The second form, denying the antecedent, occurs when the truth of the antecedent statement is denied to infer that the consequent is false. Your knowledge of sufficiency will help you understand why this inference is invalid. The truth of the antecedent (the sufficient condition) is only enough to know the truth of the consequent. But there may be more than one way for the consequent to be true, which means that the falsity of the sufficient condition does not guarantee that the consequent is false. Going back to an earlier example, that a creature is not a dog does not let you infer that it is not a mammal, even though being a dog is sufficient for being a mammal. Watch the video below for further examples of conditional reasoning. See if you can figure out which incorrect selection is structurally identical to affirming the consequent or denying the antecedent.

VIDEO

The Wason Selection Task

Click to view content (https://openstax.org/books/introduction-philosophy/pages/5-4-types-of-inferences)

Testing Deductive Inferences

Earlier it was explained that logical analysis involves assuming the premises of an argument are true and then determining whether the conclusion logically follows, given the truth of those premises. For deductive arguments, if you can come up with a scenario where the premises are true but the conclusion is false, you have proven that the argument is invalid. An instance of a deductive argument where the premises are all true

but the conclusion false is called a counterexample. As with counterexamples to statements, counterexamples to arguments are simply instances that *run counter to* the argument. Counterexamples to statements show that the statement is false, while counterexamples to deductive arguments show that the argument is invalid. Complete the exercise below to get a better understanding of coming up with counterexamples to prove invalidity.

THINK LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Using the sample arguments given, come up with a counterexample to prove that the argument is invalid. A counterexample is a scenario in which the premises are true but the conclusion is false. Solutions are provided below.

Argument 1:

1. If an animal is a dog, then it is a mammal.
2. Charlie is not a dog.
3. Therefore, Charlie is not a mammal.

Argument 2:

1. All desserts are sweet foods.
2. Some sweet foods are low fat.
3. So all desserts are low fat.

Argument 3:

1. If Jad doesn't finish his homework on time, he won't go to the party.
2. Jad doesn't go to the party.
3. Jad didn't finish his homework on time.

When you have completed your work on the three arguments, check your answers against the solutions below.

Solution 1: Invalid. If you imagine that Charlie is a cat (or other animal that is not a dog but is a mammal), then both the premises are true, while the conclusion is false. Charlie is not a dog, but Charlie *is* a mammal.

Solution 2: Invalid. Buttercream cake is a counterexample. Buttercream cake is a dessert and is sweet, which shows that not all desserts are low fat.

Solution3: Invalid. Assuming the first two premises are true, you can still imagine that Jad is too tired after finishing his homework and decides not to go to the party, thus making the conclusion false.

Inductive Inferences

When we reason inductively, we gather evidence using our experience of the world and draw general conclusions based on that experience. **Inductive** reasoning (induction) is also the process by which we *use* general beliefs we have about the world to create beliefs about our particular experiences or about what to expect in the future. Someone can use their past experiences of eating beets and absolutely hating them to conclude that they do not like beets of any kind, cooked in any manner. They can then use this conclusion to avoid ordering a beet salad at a restaurant because they have good reason to believe they will not like it. Because of the nature of experience and inductive inference, this method can never guarantee the truth of our beliefs. At best, inductive inference generates only probable true conclusions because it goes beyond the information contained in the premises. In the example, past experience with beets is concrete information, but the person goes beyond that information when making the general claim that they will dislike all beets (even those varieties they've never tasted and even methods of preparing beets they've never tried).

Consider a belief as certain as "the sun will rise tomorrow." The Scottish philosopher David Hume famously argued against the certainty of this belief nearly three centuries ago ([1748, 1777] 2011, IV, i). Yes, the sun has risen every morning of recorded history (in truth, we have witnessed what appears to be the sun rising, which is a result of the earth spinning on its axis and creating the phenomenon of night and day). We have the science to explain why the sun will continue to rise (because the earth's rotation is a stable phenomenon). Based on the current science, we can reasonably conclude that the sun will rise tomorrow morning. But *is this proposition certain*? To answer this question, you have to think like a philosopher, which involves thinking critically about alternative possibilities. Say the earth gets hit by a massive asteroid that destroys it, or the sun explodes into a supernova that encompasses the inner planets and incinerates them. These events are extremely unlikely to occur, although no contradiction arises in imagining that they could take place. We believe the sun will rise tomorrow, and we have good reason for this belief, but the sun's rising is still only probable (even if it is nearly certain).

While inductive inferences are not always a sure thing, they can still be quite reliable. In fact, a good deal of what we think we know is known through induction. Moreover, while deductive reasoning can guarantee the truth of conclusions if the premises are true, many times the premises themselves of deductive arguments are inductively known. In studying philosophy, we need to get used to the possibility that our inductively derived beliefs could be wrong.

There are several types of inductive inferences, but for the sake of brevity, this section will cover the three most common types: reasoning from specific instances to generalities, reasoning from generalities to specific instances, and reasoning from the past to the future.

Reasoning from Specific Instances to Generalities

Perhaps I experience several instances of some phenomenon, and I notice that all instances share a similar feature. For example, I have noticed that every year, around the second week of March, the red-winged blackbirds return from wherever they've wintering. So I can conclude that generally the red-winged blackbirds return to the area where I live (and observe them) in the second week of March. All my evidence is gathered from particular instances, but my conclusion is a general one. Here is the pattern:

$$\text{Instance}_1, \text{Instance}_2, \text{Instance}_3 \ldots \text{Instance}_n \text{ --> Generalization}$$

And because each instance serves as a reason in support of the generalization, the instances are premises in the argument form of this type of inductive inference:

Specific to General Inductive Argument Form:

1. Instance_1
2. Instance_2
3. Instance_3
4. General Conclusion

Reasoning from Generalities to Specific Instances

Induction can work in the opposite direction as well: reasoning from accepted generalizations to specific instances. This feature of induction relies on the fact that we are learners and that we learn from past experiences and from one another. Much of what we learn is captured in generalizations. You have probably accepted many generalizations from your parents, teachers, and peers. You probably believe that a red "STOP" sign on the road means that when you are driving and see this sign, you must bring your car to a full stop. You also probably believe that water freezes at 32° Fahrenheit and that smoking cigarettes is bad for you. When you use accepted generalizations to predict or explain things about the world, you are using induction. For example, when you see that the nighttime low is predicted to be 30°F, you may surmise that the water in your birdbath will be frozen when you get up in the morning.

Some thought processes use more than one type of inductive inference. Take the following example:

> Every cat I have ever petted doesn't tolerate its tail being pulled.
>
> So this cat probably will not tolerate having its tail pulled.

Notice that this reasoner has gone through a series of instances to make an inference about one additional instance. In doing so, the reasoner implicitly assumed a generalization along the way. The reasoner's implicit generalization is that no cat likes its tail being pulled. They then use that generalization to determine that they shouldn't pull the tail of the cat in front of them now. A reasoner can use several instances in their experience as premises to draw a general conclusion and then use that generalization as a premise to draw a conclusion about a specific new instance.

Inductive reasoning finds its way into everyday expressions, such as "Where there is smoke, there is fire." When people see smoke, they intuitively come to believe that there is fire. This is the result of inductive reasoning. Consider your own thought process as you examine Figure 5.5.

FIGURE 5.5 "Where there is smoke, there is fire" is an example of inductive reasoning. (credit: "20140803-FS-UNK-0017" by US Department of Agriculture/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Reasoning from Past to Future

We often use inductive reasoning to predict what will happen in the future. Based on our ample experience of the past, we have a basis for prediction. Reasoning from the past to the future is similar to reasoning from specific instances to generalities. We have experience of events across time, we notice patterns concerning the occurrence of those events at particular times, and then we reason that the event will happen again in the future. For example:

> I see my neighbor walking her dog every morning. So my neighbor will probably walk her dog this morning.

Could the person reasoning this way be wrong? Yes—the neighbor could be sick, or the dog could be at the vet. But depending upon the regularity of the morning dog walks and on the number of instances (say the neighbor has walked the dog every morning for the past year), the inference could be strong in spite of the fact that it is possible for it to be wrong.

Strong Inductive Inferences

The strength of inductive inferences depends upon the reliability of premises given as evidence and their relation to the conclusions drawn. A *strong* inductive inference is one where, if the evidence offered is true, then the conclusion is probably true. A *weak* inductive inference is one where, if the evidence offered is true,

the conclusion is not probably true. But just how strong an inference needs to be to be considered good is context dependent. The word "probably" is vague. If something is more probable than not, then it needs at least a 51 percent chance of happening. However, in most instances, we would expect to have a much higher probability bar to consider an inference to be strong. As an example of this context dependence, compare the probability accepted as strong in gambling to the much higher probability of accuracy we expect in determining guilt in a court of law.

Figure 5.6 illustrates three forms of reasoning are used in the scientific method. Induction is used to glean patterns and generalizations, from which hypotheses are made. Hypotheses are tested, and if they remain unfalsified, induction is used again to assume support for the hypothesis.

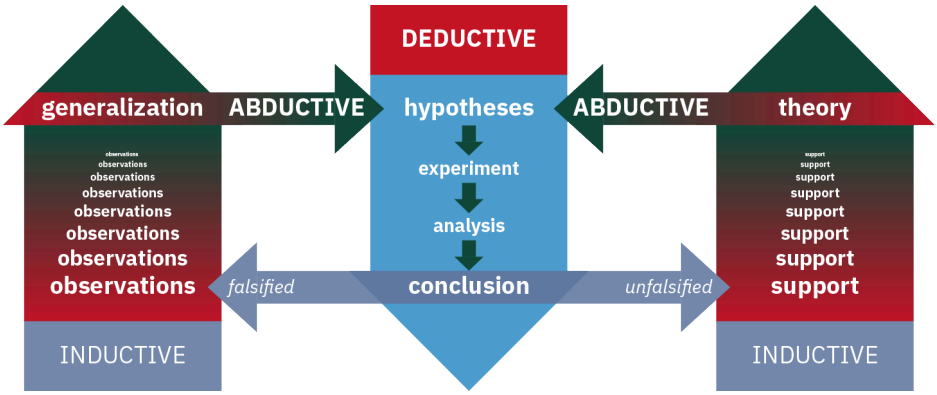

FIGURE 5.6 Induction in the Scientific Method (attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY 4.0 license)

Abductive Reasoning

Abductive reasoning is similar to inductive reasoning in that both forms of inference are probabilistic. However, they differ in the relationship of the premises to the conclusion. In inductive argumentation, the evidence in the premises is used to justify the conclusion. In **abductive** reasoning, the conclusion is meant to explain the evidence offered in the premises. In induction the premises explain the conclusion, but in abduction the conclusion explains the premises.

Inference to the Best Explanation

Because abduction reasons from evidence to the most likely explanation for that evidence, it is often called "inference to the best explanation." We start with a set of data and attempt to come up with some unifying hypothesis that can best explain the existence of those data. Given this structure, the evidence to be explained is usually accepted as true by all parties involved. The focus is not the truth of the evidence, but rather what the evidence means.

Although you may not be aware, you regularly use this form of reasoning. Let us say your car won't start, and the engine won't even turn over. Furthermore, you notice that the radio and display lights are not on, even when the key is in and turned to the ON position. Given this evidence, you conclude that the best explanation is that there is a problem with the battery (either it is not connected or is dead). Or perhaps you made pumpkin bread in the morning, but it is not on the counter where you left it when you get home. There are crumbs on the floor, and the bag it was in is also on the floor, torn to shreds. You own a dog who was inside all day. The dog in question is on the couch, head hanging low, ears back, avoiding eye contact. Given the evidence, you conclude that the best explanation for the missing bread is that the dog ate it.

Detectives and forensic investigators use abduction to come up with the best explanation for how a crime was committed and by whom. This form of reasoning is also indispensable to scientists who use observations (evidence) along with accepted hypotheses to create new hypotheses for testing. You may also recognize abduction as a form of reasoning used in medical diagnoses. A doctor considers all your symptoms and any

further evidence gathered from preliminarily tests and reasons to the best possible conclusion (a diagnosis) for your illness.

Explanatory Virtues

Good abductive inferences share certain features. **Explanatory virtues** are aspects of an explanation that generally make it strong. There are many explanatory virtues, but we will focus on four. A good hypothesis should be *explanatory, simple*, and *conservative* and must have *depth*.

To say that a hypothesis must be *explanatory* simply means that it must explain *all* the available evidence. The word "explanatory" for our purposes is being used in a narrower sense than used in everyday language. Take the pumpkin bread example: a person might reason that perhaps their roommate ate the loaf of pumpkin bread. However, such an explanation would not explain why the crumbs and bag were on the floor, nor the guilty posture of the dog. People do not normally eat an entire loaf of pumpkin bread, and if they do, they don't eviscerate the bag while doing so, and even if they did, they'd probably hide the evidence. Thus, the explanation that your roommate ate the bread isn't as explanatory as the one that pinpoints your dog as the culprit.

But what if you reason that a different dog got into the house and ate the bread, then got out again, and your dog looks guilty because he did nothing to stop the intruder? This explanation seems to explain the missing bread, but it is not as good as the simpler explanation that your dog is the perpetrator. A good explanation is often *simple*. You may have heard of *Occam's razor*, formulated by William of Ockham (1287–1347), which says that the simplest explanation is the best explanation. Ockham said that "entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity" (Spade & Panaccio 2019). By "entities," Ockham meant concepts or mechanisms or moving parts.

Examples of explanations that lack simplicity abound. For example, conspiracy theories present the very opposite of simplicity since such explanations are by their very nature complex. Conspiracy theories *must* posit plots, underhanded dealings, cover-ups (to explain the existence of alternative evidence), and maniacal people to explain phenomena and to further explain away the simpler explanation for those phenomena. Conspiracy theories are never simple, but that is not the only reason they are suspect. Conspiracy theories also generally lack the virtues of being *conservative* and having *depth*.

A *conservative* explanation maintains or *conserves* much of what we already believe. Conservativeness in science is when a theory or hypothesis fits with other established scientific theories and explanations. For example, a theory that accounts for some physical phenomenon but also does not violate Newton's first law of motion is an example of a conservative theory. On the other hand, consider the conspiracy theory that we never landed on the moon. Someone might posit that the televised Apollo 11 space landing was filmed in a secret studio somewhere. But the reality of the first televised moon landing is not the only belief we must get rid of to maintain the theory. Five more manned moon landings occurred. Furthermore, the reality of the moon landings fits into beliefs about technological advancement over the next five decades. Many of the technologies developed were later adopted by the military and private sector (NASA, n.d.). Moreover, the Apollo missions are a key factor in understanding the space race of the Cold War era. Accepting the conspiracy theory requires rejecting a wide range of beliefs, and so the theory is not conservative.

A conspiracy theorist may offer alternative explanations to account for the tension between their explanation and established beliefs. However, for each explanation the conspiracist offers, more questions are raised. And a good explanation should not raise more questions than it answers. This characteristic is the virtue of *depth*. A deep explanation avoids *unexplained explainers,* or an explanation that itself is in need of explanation. For example, the theorist might claim that John Glenn and the other astronauts were brainwashed to explain the astronauts' firsthand accounts. But this claim raises a question about how brainwashing works. Furthermore, what about the accounts of the thousands of other personnel who worked on the project? Were they all brainwashed? And if so, how? The conspiracy theorist's explanation raises more questions than it answers.

Extraordinary Claims Require Extraordinary Evidence

Is it possible that our established beliefs (or scientific theories) could be wrong? Why give precedence to an explanation because it upholds our beliefs? Scientific thought would never have advanced if we deferred to conservative explanations all the time. In fact, the explanatory virtues are not laws but rules of thumb, none of which are supreme or necessary. Sometimes the correct explanation is more complicated, and sometimes the correct explanation will require that we give up long-held beliefs. Novel and revolutionary explanations can be strong if they have evidence to back them up. In the sciences, this approach is expressed in the following principle: *Extraordinary claims will require extraordinary evidence.* In other words, a novel claim that disrupts accepted knowledge will need more evidence to make it credible than a claim that already aligns with accepted knowledge.

Table 5.2 summarizes the three types of inferences just discussed.

Type of inference	Description	Considerations	
Deductive	Focuses on the structure of arguments	Provides valid inferences when its structure guarantees the truth of its conclusion	Provides invalid inferences when, even if the premises are true, the conclusion may be false
Inductive	Uses general beliefs about the world to create beliefs about specific experiences or to make predictions about future experiences	Strong if the conclusion is probably true, assuming that the evidence is true	Weak if the conclusion is probably not true, even if the evidence offered is true
Abductive	An explanation is offered to justify and explain evidence	Strong if it is explanatory, simple, conservative, and has depth	Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence

TABLE 5.2 Three Types of Inferences

5.5 Informal Fallacies

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain the four general categories of informal fallacies.
- Classify fallacies by general category.
- Identify fallacies in ordinary language.

Reasoning can go wrong in many ways. When the form of an argument is problematic, it is called a *formal* **fallacy**. Mistakes in reasoning are not usually caused by the structure of the argument. Rather, there is usually a problem in the relationship between the evidence given in the premises and the conclusion. Take the following example:

> I don't think Ms. Timmons will make a good mayor. I've got a bad feeling about her. And I've heard she's not a Christian. Furthermore, the last time we had a female mayor, the city nearly went bankrupt. Don't vote for Ms. Timmons.

Notice that to assess the above argument, you have must think about whether the reasons offered function *as evidence* for the conclusion that Ms. Timmons would be a bad mayor. This assessment requires background knowledge about the world. Does belonging to a specific religion have any bearing on one's qualification for mayor? Is there any credible connection between a mayor's gender and the likelihood that person will cause a

bankruptcy? If the reasons are not adequate support for the conclusion, then the reasoner commits an informal fallacy. In the above argument, none of the reasons offered support for the conclusion. In fact, each reason commits a different fallacy. The first reason is based on an appeal to emotion, which is not relevant. The second reason points to a characteristic (religion) that is irrelevant in judging competency, and the third reason creates a spurious connection between the candidate and a previous female mayor, putting them both in the same failed category based solely on the fact that they share the same gender.

There are many specific *types* of informal fallacies, but most can be sorted into four general *categories* according to how the reasoning fails. These categories show how reasoning can go wrong and serve as warnings for what to watch out for in arguments. They are (1) fallacies of relevance, (2) fallacies of weak induction, (3) fallacies of unwarranted assumption, and (4) fallacies of diversion.

CONNECTIONS

See the chapter on critical thinking, research, reading, and writing to learn more about overcoming biases.

Fallacies of Relevance

In **fallacies of relevance**, the arguer presents evidence that is not relevant for logically establishing their conclusion. The reason why fallacies of relevance stick around is because the evidence *seems* relevant—meaning it *feels* relevant. Fallacies of relevance prey on our likes and dislikes. Indeed, the very first fallacy of relevance is called "appeal to emotion."

Appeal to Emotion

Emotional appeals can target any number of emotions—from fear to pity and from love and compassion to hate and aversion. For the most part, appeals to emotion of any kind are not relevant for establishing the conclusion. Here's an example:

> I know the allegations against the governor seem serious. However, he's in his 80s now, and he fought for our country in the Korean War, earning a Purple Heart. We don't want to put an elderly veteran through the ordeal of a trial. I urge you to drop the charges.

In this example, the arguer appeals to our feelings of pity and compassion and to our positive feelings about the governor. We might admire the governor for his military service and feel sympathy for his advanced age. But are our feelings relevant in making the decision about whether to drop criminal charges? Notice that the arguer says nothing about the content of the charges or about whether the governor is innocent or guilty. Indeed, the arguer says absolutely nothing *that's relevant to the conclusion*. How we feel about somebody is not a logical determinant to use in judging guilt or innocence.

Ad Hominem Attacks

The **ad hominem attack** is most often committed by a person who is arguing *against* some other person's position. "Ad hominem" in Latin means "toward the man." It is so named because when someone commits this fallacy, the reasons they give for their conclusion concern the characteristics of the person they are arguing against rather than that person's position. For example, the arguer may verbally attack the person by making fun of their appearance, intelligence, or character; they can highlight something about the person's circumstances like their job or past; or they can insinuate that the person is a hypocrite.

You may wonder why such arguments are effective, and one reason is sloppy associative reasoning, wherein we problematically assume that characteristics held by an arguer will be transferred to their argument. Another related reason is that too often we allow ourselves to be ruled by emotion rather than reason. If we are made to feel negatively toward a person, those feelings can cloud assessment of their arguments. Consider the following example:

> My fellow councilwoman has argued for the city solar project. But what she failed to mention was that

> she has been arrested twice—once for protesting during the Vietnam War and another time for protesting the 2003 invasion of Iraq. She's a traitor and a liar. Any project she espouses is bad for the city.

This is clearly an ad hominem attack. The arguer wants to undermine the councilwoman's position by making us feel negatively toward her. The fact that a person engaged in protests in the past has no bearing on their arguments for an energy project. Furthermore, the arguer goes on to call the councilwoman a *traitor* and a *liar* and offers no evidence. Attaching negative labels to people is one way to manipulate an audience's emotions.

There are other types of ad hominem attacks, and the most successful is probably the one called *tu quoque*, which means "you too" in Latin. When someone commits a *tu quoque* ad hominem fallacy, they attempt to undermine a person's argument by pointing to real or perceived hypocrisy on the part of the person. They assert or imply that their opponent, in the past or currently, has done or said things that are inconsistent with their current argument. Often *tu quoque* is used as a defensive maneuver. Take the example of a teenager whose father just caught her smoking cigarettes and reprimanded her. If she knows that her father smoked when he was her age, her defensive response will be "You did it too!" She is likely to think he is a hypocrite who should not be heeded. However, the daughter reasons poorly. First, a person's actions have no bearing on the strength of their arguments or the truth of their claims (unless, of course, the person's arguments are about their own actions). That her father smoked in the past (or smokes currently) has no bearing on whether smoking is in fact dangerous. Smoking does not suddenly cease to be dangerous because the person explaining the dangers of smoking is a smoker.

You might think, however, that we should not trust the reasoning of hypocrites because hypocrisy is a sign of untrustworthiness, and untrustworthy people often say false things. But remember that there is a difference between a truth analysis and a logical analysis. *If* smoking has bad consequences on health and development, *then* that counts as a good reason for the father to not allow his daughter to smoke. But interestingly, some cases of perceived hypocrisy make the supposed hypocrite more trustworthy rather than less. And the smoking example is one such case. Of all the people who might be able to speak of the dangers of picking up a smoking habit at a young age, the father, who became addicted to cigarettes in his teenage years, is a good source. He speaks from experience, which is a second reason the daughter reasons incorrectly in thinking she should not listen to him because he was or is a smoker.

Let's take a different scenario. Suppose a married person argues that it is immoral to cheat on one's spouse, but you know he has a mistress. As much as you may hate it, his status as a cheater is not relevant to assessing his argument. You might infer from his hypocrisy that he does not believe his own arguments or perhaps that he suffers guilt about his actions but cannot control his cheating behavior. Nonetheless, whatever the cheater believes or feels is simply *not relevant to determining whether his argument is good*. To think that whether a person believes an argument affects the truth of that argument is tantamount to thinking that if you believe X, the belief itself is more likely to make X happen or make X true. But such an approach is magical thinking, not logic or reason.

Fallacies of Weak Induction

The **fallacies of weak induction** are mistakes in reasoning in which a person's evidence or reasons are too weak to firmly establish a conclusion. The reasoner uses relevant premises, but the evidence contained therein is weak or defective in some way. These errors are errors of induction. When we inductively reason, we gather evidence using our experience in the world and draw conclusions based on that experience. Earlier in the chapter I used a generalization about the return of the red-winged blackbirds in March. But what if I based my generalization on just two years of experience? Now my conclusion—that the blackbirds return every mid-March—seems much weaker. In such cases, the reasoner uses induction properly by using relevant evidence, but her evidence is simply too weak to support the generalization she makes. An inductive inference may also be weak because it too narrowly focuses on one type of evidence, or the inference may apply to a generalization in the wrong way.

Hasty Generalization

A **hasty generalization** is a fallacy of weak induction in which a person draws a conclusion using too little evidence to support the conclusion. A hasty generalization was made in the red-winged blackbird case above. Here is another example:

> Don't eat at the restaurant. It's bad. I had lunch there once, and it was awful. Another time I had dinner, and the portions were too small.

This person draws the conclusion that the restaurant is bad from two instances of eating there. But two instances are not enough to support such a robust conclusion. Consider another example:

> Sixty-five percent of a random poll of 50 registered voters in the state said they would vote for the amendment. We conclude that the state amendment will pass.

Fifty voters is not a large enough sample size to draw predictive conclusions about an election. So to say the amendment will pass based on such limited evidence is a hasty generalization. Just how much evidence we need to support a generalization depends upon the conclusion being made. If we already have good reason to believe that the class of entities that is the subject of our generalization are all very similar, then we will not need a very large sample size to make a reliable generalization. For instance, physics tells us that electrons are very similar, so a study drawn from observing just a few electrons may be reasonable. Humans (particularly their political beliefs and behaviors) are not the same, so a much larger sample size is needed to determine political behavior. The fallacy of hasty generalization highlights the empirical nature of induction—we need a basic understanding of the world to know exactly how much evidence is needed to support many of our claims.

Biased Sample

A biased sample has some things in common with a hasty generalization. Consider the following:

> Don't eat dinner at that restaurant. It's bad. My book club has met there once a week for breakfast for the past year, and they overcook their eggs.

This seems much better than the restaurant example offered above. If the book club has gone to the restaurant once per week for a year, the arguer has more than 50 instances as data. However, notice that the arguer's evidence concerns *breakfast*, not dinner, and focuses on the eggs. Suppose the restaurant has an entirely different, more expensive dinner menu; then we cannot draw reliable conclusions about the restaurant's success at dinner. This is an example of a **biased sample**. With a hasty generalization, the problem is that not enough evidence is used. In a biased sample, the problem is that the evidence used is biased in some way.

Appeal to Ignorance

Appeal to ignorance is another type of fallacy of weak induction. Consider the following line of reasoning:

> In my philosophy class, we reviewed all the traditional arguments for the existence of God. All of them have problems. Because no one can prove that God exists, we can only conclude that God doesn't exist.

Notice that the arguer wants to conclude that because we do not have evidence or sufficient arguments for God's existence, then God cannot exist. In an appeal to ignorance, the reasoner relies on the lack of knowledge or evidence for a thing (our ignorance of it) to draw a definite conclusion about that thing. But in many cases, this simply does not work. The same reasoning can be used to assert that God must exist:

> In my philosophy class, we reviewed different arguments against the existence of God. All of them have problems. Because no one can prove that God doesn't exist, we can only conclude that God exists.

Any form of reasoning that allows you to draw contradictory conclusions ought to be suspect. Appeals to ignorance ignore the idea that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. The fact that we lack evidence for X should not always function *as evidence* that X is false or does not exist.

False Cause Attribution

The fallacy of **false cause** occurs when a causal relation is assumed to exist between two events or things when it is unlikely that such a causal relationship exists. People often make this mistake when the two events occur together. The phrase "correlation does not equal causation" captures a common critique of this form of false cause reasoning. For example, a person may think that swimsuits cause sunburns because people often get sunburned when wearing swimsuits. There is a correlation between sunburn and swimsuits, but the suits are not a cause of sunburns.

False cause fallacies also occur when a person believes that just because one event occurs after another, the first event is the cause of the second one. This poor form of reasoning, in tandem with confirmation bias, leads to many superstitious beliefs. Confirmation bias is the natural tendency to look for, interpret, or recall information that confirms already-established beliefs or values. For example, some sports fans may notice that their team won sometimes on days when they were wearing a specific item of clothing. They may come to believe that this clothing item is "lucky." Furthermore, because of confirmation bias, they may remember only instances when the team won when they were wearing that item (and not remember when the team lost when they were also wearing the item). The resulting superstition amounts to believing that wearing a special team jersey somehow *causes* the team to win.

FIGURE 5.7 Correlation Is Not the Same as Causation (attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY 4.0 license)

In short, as emphasized by Figure 5.7, just because two things are often correlated (connected in that they occur together in time or place) does not mean that a cause-and-effect relationship exists between them.

CONNECTIONS

See the chapter on critical thinking, research, reading, and writing to learn more about confirmation bias.

Fallacies of Unwarranted Assumption

Fallacies of unwarranted assumption occur when an argument relies on a piece of information or belief that requires further justification. The category gets its name from the fact that a person *assumes* something *unwarranted* to draw their conclusion. Often the unjustified assumption is only implicit, which can make these types of fallacies difficult to identify.

False Dichotomy

False dichotomy, or "false dilemma," occurs in an argument when a limited number of possibilities are assumed to be the only available options. In the classic variation, the arguer offers two possibilities, shows that the one cannot be true, and then deduces that the other possibility must be true. Here is the form:

1. Either A or B must be true.
2. A is not true.
3. Therefore, B is true.

The form itself looks like a good argument—a form of disjunctive syllogism. But a false dichotomy is an *informal* fallacy, and such errors depend upon the content of arguments (their meaning and relation to the world) rather than the form. The problematic assumption occurs in premise 1, where it is assumed that A and B are the *only* options. Here is a concrete example:

> A citizen of the United States either loves their country, or they are a traitor. Since you don't love your country, you are a traitor.

The above argument assumes that loving the United States or being a traitor are the only two possible options for American citizens. The argument assumes these options are mutually exclusive (you cannot be both) and jointly exhaustive (you must be one or the other). But this position requires justification. For example, a person can have mixed emotions about their country and *not* be a traitor. False dichotomy is poor reasoning because it artificially limits the available options and then uses this artificial limitation to attempt to prove some conclusion. A false dichotomy may include more than two options. The important thing to remember is a false dichotomy limits options in an argument without justification when there is reason to think there are more options.

Begging the Question

Begging the question occurs when an arguer either assumes the truth of the conclusion they aim to prove in the course of trying to prove it or when an arguer assumes the truth of a contentious claim in their argument. When the former happens, it is sometimes called *circular reasoning*. Here is an example:

1. The Bible states that God exists.
2. The Bible is true because it is divinely inspired.
3. Therefore, God exists.

The problematic assumption occurs in premise 2. To say the Bible is "divinely inspired" is to say that it *is the word of God*. But the argument aims to prove that God exists. So premise 2 assumes that God exists in order to prove God exists. This is patently circular reasoning. The name "begging the question" is confusing to some students. One way to think about this fallacy is that *the question* is whatever is at issue in a debate or argument. Here the question is "Does God exist?" To "beg" the question means to assume you already know the answer. The above argument assumes the answer to the question it is supposed to answer.

The name "begging the question" makes more sense for the second form of the fallacy. When a person begs the question in the second sense, they assume the truth of something controversial while trying to prove their conclusion. Here is an example you might be familiar with:

1. The intentional killing of an innocent person is murder.
2. Abortion is the intentional killing of an innocent person.
3. Therefore, abortion is murder.

This is a valid argument. Structurally, it uses good logic. However, the argument is an example of begging the question because of premise 2. Much of the debate over abortion revolves around the question of whether a fetus is a person. But premise 2 simply assumes that a fetus is a person, so the argument *begs the question* "Is a fetus a person?"

Fallacies of Diversion

The final class of informal fallacies is the **fallacy of diversion**, which usually occurs in contexts where there is an opponent or an audience. In this instance, the arguer attempts to distract the attention of the audience away from the argument at hand. Clearly, the tactic of diverting attention implies that there is someone whose attention can be diverted: either an audience, an opponent, or both.

Strawman

Men made of straw can easily be knocked over. Hence, a **strawman** occurs when an arguer presents a weaker

version of the position they are arguing against to make the position easier to defeat. The arguer takes their opponent's argument, repackages it, and defeats this new version of the argument rather than their opponent's actual position. If the audience listening to or reading the argument is not careful, they won't notice this move and believe that the opponent's original position has been defeated. Usually when a strawman is created, the misrepresented position is made more extreme. Here is an example:

> **Senator:** It is important that the path to citizenship be governed by established legal procedure. Granting citizenship to undocumented immigrants who came to this country illegally sets up a dangerous and unfair precedent. It could encourage others to illegally enter the country in hopes that they too can be granted clemency at a later date. We must only reward the status of citizenship to those who followed the laws in coming here.
>
> **Opponent:** Clearly, we can reject the Senator's position, which is obviously anti-immigrant. If he had it his way, we'd never allow any immigration into the country. We are a nation of immigrants, and disallowing people from other countries to join our nation is against everything this nation has stood for historically.

The opponent misrepresents the senator as being wholly anti-immigration and then argues against that manufactured position—a classic strawman move. The senator's original argument focuses narrowly on the question of whether to create a pathway to citizenship for people already in the country who came here illegally. The repackaged argument is much easier to defeat than the senator's actual argument since few people are in favor of not allowing any immigration into the country.

Red Herring

A **red herring** fallacy is like a strawman, except the arguer completely ignores their opponent's position and simply changes the subject. The arguer diverts the attention of the audience to a new subject. A red herring is a smelly smoked fish that was used to train hunting dogs to track smells by dragging this fish along a path as practice. So the fallacy gets its name because it means to trick people into following a different path of reasoning than the one at hand. You may wonder how a person can get away with simply changing the subject. Successful use of the red herring usually involves shifting the subject to something tangentially related. Here is an example:

> My daughter wants me to exercise more. She said she is worried about my health. She showed me research about cardiovascular fitness and its impact on quality of life for people my age and older. She suggested I start biking with her. But bicycles are expensive. And it is dangerous to ride bicycles on a busy road. Furthermore, I do not have a place to store a bicycle.

This arguer first summarizes the daughter's position that they ought to exercise more. But then they take the suggestion of bicycling and veer off topic (getting more exercise) to the feasibility of cycling instead. The comments on bicycling in no way address the daughter's general conclusion that the arguer needs to exercise more. Because the argument changes the subject, it is a red herring.

Table 5.3 summaries these many types of informal fallacies.

General Category	Specific Type	Description
Fallacies of relevance—rely on evidence that is not relevant for logically establishing a conclusion		
	Appeal to emotion	Appeals to feelings (whether positive or negative) rather than discussing the merits of an idea or proposal
	Ad hominem attack	Argues against someone's idea or suggestion by attacking the individual personally, rather than pointing out problems with the idea or suggestion
Fallacies of weak induction—rely on evidence or reasons that are too weak to firmly establish a conclusion		
	Hasty generalization	Draws a conclusion using too little evidence to support the conclusion
	Biased sample	Draws a conclusion using evidence that is biased in some way
	Appeal to ignorance	Relies on the lack of knowledge or evidence for a thing (our ignorance of it) to draw a definite conclusion about that thing
	False cause attribution	A causal relation is assumed to exist between two events or things that are not causally connected; "correlation does not equal causation"
Fallacies of unwarranted assumption—rely on information or beliefs that require further justification		
	False dichotomy	A limited number of possibilities are assumed to be the only available options
	Begging the question	Either assumes the truth of a conclusion in the course of trying to prove it or assumes the truth of a contentious claim
Fallacies of diversion—rely on attempts to distract the attention of the audience away from the argument at hand		
	Strawman	Utilizes a weaker version of the position being argued against in order to make the position easier to defeat
	Red Herring	Ignores the opponent's position and simply changes the subject

TABLE 5.3 Types of Informal Fallacies

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Summary

5.1 Philosophical Methods for Discovering Truth

Logic is the study of reasoning and is a key tool for discovering truth in philosophy and other disciplines. Early philosophers used dialectics—reasoned debates with the goal of getting closer to the truth—to practice and develop reason. Dialectics usually start with a question. An interlocuter offers an answer to the question, which is then scrutinized by all participants. Early forms of arguments are evident in written dialogues. Arguments are reasons offered in support of a conclusion. We use logic to test hypotheses in philosophy and other domains. There are laws of logic—the law of noncontradiction and the law of the excluded middle. Laws of logic can be thought of as rules of thought. Logical laws are rules that underlie thinking itself. The rules or laws of logic are normative—they describe how we ought to reason.

5.2 Logical Statements

Logical statements can be conditionals or universal affirmative statements. Both are important since they express the important logical relations (also called "conditions") of necessity and sufficiency. If something is sufficient, it is always sufficient for something else. And if something is necessary, it is always necessary for something else. If you want to prove that a conditional or universal affirmative statement is false (which is to also prove that the necessary and sufficient conditions they express do not hold), then you must offer a counterexample.

5.3 Arguments

An argument is a set of reasons offered in support of a conclusion. The reasons are called premises, and they are meant to logically support the conclusion. Identifying the premises involves critically identifying what is meant to be evidence for the conclusion. Both the premises and conclusion can be indicated by phrases and words. Evaluations of arguments take place on two levels: assessing truth and assessing logic. Logic and truth are separate features of arguments. Logical assessment involves determining whether the truth of the premises do support the conclusion. Logically good arguments contain inferences—a reasoning process that leads from one idea to another, through which we formulate conclusions—where the inference does support the conclusion.

5.4 Types of Inferences

There are three different types of inferences: deductive, inductive, and abductive. Deductive inferences, when valid, guarantee the truth of their conclusions. Inductive inferences, when strong, offer probable support for the conclusion. And good abductive inferences offer probable support for their conclusions. Deductive inferences that cannot guarantee the truth of their conclusions are called invalid. A counterexample can be offered to prove that a deductive inference is invalid. Inductive inferences involve using observations based on experience to draw general conclusions about the world. Abductive inferences involve offering explanations for accepted evidence. Abduction is sometimes called "inference to the best explanation."

5.5 Informal Fallacies

A fallacy is a poor form of reasoning. Fallacies that cannot be reduced to the structure of an argument are called informal fallacies. There are many types of informal fallacies, which can be sorted into four general *categories* according to how the reasoning fails. These categories are fallacies of relevance, fallacies of weak induction, fallacies of unwarranted assumption, and fallacies of diversion. A fallacy of relevance occurs when the arguer presents evidence that is not relevant for logically establishing their conclusion. The fallacies of weak induction occur when the evidence used is relevant but is too weak to support the desired conclusion. The fallacies of unwarranted assumption occur when an argument assumes, as evidence, some reason that requires further justification. The fallacies of diversion occur when the arguer attempts to distract the attention of the audience from the argument at hand.

Key Terms

Abductive having to do with abduction/abductive reasoning. Abduction is probabilistic form of inference in which an explanation is offered to justify and explain evidence.

Ad hominin attack fallacy of relevance that argues against someone's idea or suggestion by attacking the individual personally, rather than pointing out problems with the idea or suggestion.

Appeal to ignorance a fallacy of weak induction that relies on the lack of knowledge or evidence for a thing (our ignorance of it) to draw a definite conclusion about that thing.

Argument a set of reasons offered in support of a conclusion.

Begging the question a fallacy of unwarranted assumption that either assumes the truth of a conclusion in the course of trying to prove it or assumes the truth of a contentious claim.

Biased sample a fallacy of weak induction that draws a conclusion using evidence that is biased in some way.

Conclusion the result of an argument. A conclusion is that which is meant to be proved by the reasoning and premises used in an argument.

Conditional a logical statement that expresses a necessary and a sufficient condition. Conditionals are usually formulated as if–then statements.

Contradiction a statement that is always false. A contradiction is the conjunction of any statement and its negation.

Counterexample an example that proves that either a statement is false or an argument is invalid.

Deductive having to do with deduction/deductive reasoning. Deduction is a form of inference that can guarantee the truth of its conclusions, given the truth of the premises.

Emotional appeal fallacy of relevance that appeals to feelings (whether positive or negative) rather than discussing the merits of an idea or proposal.

Explanatory virtues aspects of an explanation that generally make it strong; four such virtues are that a good hypothesis should be explanatory, simple, and conservative, and have depth.

Fallacy a poor form of reasoning.

Fallacy of diversion a general category of informal fallacies in which an arguer presents evidence that functions to divert the attention of the audience from the current subject of argument.

Fallacy of relevance a general category of informal fallacies in which an arguer relies on reasons that are not relevant for establishing a conclusion.

Fallacy of unwarranted assumption a general category of informal fallacies in which an arguer implicitly or explicitly relies on reasons that require further justification.

Fallacy of weak induction a general category of informal fallacies in which an arguer's evidence or reasons are too weak to firmly establish their conclusion.

False cause fallacy of weak induction in which a causal relation is assumed to exist between two events or things that are not causally connected; "correlation does not equal causation".

False dichotomy a fallacy of unwarranted assumption in which a limited number of possibilities are assumed to be the only available options.

Hasty generalization fallacy of weak induction that draws a conclusion using too little evidence to support the conclusion.

Hypothesis a proposed explanation for an observed process or phenomenon.

Inductive having to do with induction/inductive reasoning. Induction is a probabilistic form of inference in which observation or experience is used to draw conclusions about the world.

Inference a reasoning process that moves from one idea to another, resulting in conclusions.

Invalidity a property of bad deductive inferences. An invalid inference/argument is one in which the truth of the premises does not guarantee the truth of the conclusion.

Law of noncontradiction a logical law that states that contradictory statements/propositions can never be true in the same sense at the same time.

Law of the excluded middle a logical law that states that for any statement, either that statement or its negation is true.

Logical analysis the process of determining whether the logical inferences made in an argument are good. A logical analysis determines whether the premises in an argument logically support the conclusion.

Necessary condition X is a necessary condition for Y if and only if X must be true given the truth of Y. If X is necessary for Y, then X is guaranteed by Y—without the truth of X, Y cannot be true.

Premise evidence or a reason offered in support of a conclusion.

Red herring fallacy of diversion that ignores the opponent's position and simply changes the subject.

Statement a sentence with a truth value—a sentence that must be either true or false.

Strawman fallacy of diversion that utilizes a weaker version of the position being argued against in order to make the position easier to defeat.

Sufficient condition X is a sufficient condition for Y if and only if the truth of X guarantees the truth of Y. If X is sufficient for Y, then the truth of X is enough to prove the truth of Y.

Truth analysis the process of determining whether statements made in an argument are either true or false.

Universal affirmative statement statements that take two groups of things and claim all members of the first group are also members of the second groups.

Validity a property of deductive arguments where the structure of an argument is such that if the premises are true, then the conclusion is guaranteed to be true. A valid inference is a logically good inference.

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Review Questions

5.1 Philosophical Methods for Discovering Truth

1. What is the general structure of a dialectic?
2. What is a statement?
3. Offer an example of a statement and its negation.
4. How does the law of noncontradiction logically imply the law of the excluded middle?

5.2 Logical Statements

5. Offer an example of a conditional, then identify the necessary and sufficient conditions expressed by it.
6. What is a counterexample?
7. Consider the following conditional: "If you walk in the rain, your shirt will get wet." What is a possible counterexample to this statement?
8. Consider the following universal affirmative statement: "All games involve a winner and a loser." What is a counterexample to this statement?

5.3 Arguments

9. What is an argument?
10. What are the key components of an argument?
11. Consider the following argument: "Since Jori is allergic to cats and her apartment complex does not allow dogs, it must be the case that Jori does not have a pet." What are the premises of this argument, and what is the conclusion? What words in the argument indicate the premises and conclusion?
12. Explain the difference between a logical analysis and a truth analysis of an argument.

5.4 Types of Inferences

13. What makes a deductive argument valid, and how can you test for validity?
14. Explain inductive inference, and describe how it is different from an abductive inference.
15. How is reasoning from specific instances to generalizations similar to reasoning from the past to the future?
16. Explain abductive inference and describe how it is similar to an inductive inference.

5.5 Informal Fallacies

17. What are the four general categories of informal fallacies?
18. What is the difference between fallacies of relevance and fallacies of weak induction?
19. What is problematic with appealing to emotion in an argument, and how does this qualify it as a fallacy of relevance?
20. Explain what a fallacy of unwarranted assumption is, and offer an example of one.

Further Reading

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Metaphysics 6

FIGURE 6.1 Being and Becoming. The acorn and the oak allow us to frame several metaphysical questions. Are there first causes? Do things have essences? Do things develop along a predetermined path? (credit: "Acorn" by Shaun Fisher/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

CHAPTER OUTLINE

6.1 Substance
6.2 Self and Identity
6.3 Cosmology and the Existence of God
6.4 Free Will

INTRODUCTION Defining **metaphysics** is difficult. On a summary level, one possible definition is that metaphysics is the field of philosophy concerned with identifying that which is real. You may wonder why any reasonable person would invest time pursuing an answer to that which, at first glance, seems obvious. But on deeper inspection of the world around you, it can be challenging to identify what is real.

Consider the acorn. As you probably learned through life science, an acorn is destined to become an oak. If you were to look at the acorn and compare it to the oak, you would see two radically different things. How can a thing change and remain the same thing?

Aristotle offers insight into how the acorn and the oak represent change but within the same being. Within Aristotle's thinking, each being has a specific end or purpose. As *telos* is Greek for "end" (*end* as target or goal), this view is known as *teleological*. In addition, each being is described as having a specific function (ergon) by

which that being seeks the proper end.

In the case of an oak tree, the oak tree works from its acorn to the fullness of the oak. Aristotle describes the becoming as movement from a state of **potentiality** to **actuality**. You might say that which is most real concerning the oak stands beneath the movement from acorn to oak. The movement from potentiality toward actuality is one method to make sense of change while maintaining a constant or underlying sense of true being.

As you will discover, the topic of metaphysics is far-reaching and broaches many questions.

- What is real?
- What is being?
- Is there a purpose to our being?
- What is the self?
- Is there a God?
- Do human beings (however defined) possess free will?

Metaphysical questions tend not to be resting points but starting points. This chapter begins to explore many simple yet interrelated questions as part of seeking the real.

ΤΩΝ ΜΕΤΑ ΤΑ ΦΥΣΙΚΑ [a]Α.

ΠΑΝΤΕΣ ἄνθρωποι τοῦ εἰδέναι ὀρέγονται φύσει. Σημεῖον δ' ἡ τῶν αἰσθήσεων ἀγάπησις· καὶ γὰρ χωρὶς τῆς χρείας ἀγαπῶνται δι' [b]αὐτάς, καὶ μάλιστα τῶν ἄλλων ἡ διὰ τῶν ὀμμάτων. Οὐ γὰρ μόνον ἵνα πράττωμεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ μηθὲν [c]μέλλοντες πράττειν τὸ ὁρᾶν αἱρούμεθα ἀντὶ πάντων ὡς εἰπεῖν τῶν ἄλλων. Αἴτιον δ' ὅτι μάλιστα ποιεῖ [d]γνωρίζειν τι ἡμῖν αὕτη τῶν αἰσθήσεων, καὶ πολλὰς δηλοῖ διαφοράς. Φύσει μὲν οὖν αἴσθησιν ἔχοντα γίνεται τὰ ζῷα, ἐκ δὲ [e]τῆς αἰσθήσεως τοῖς μὲν αὐτῶν οὐκ ἐγγίγνεται μνήμη, τοῖς [f]δ' ἐγγίγνεται. Καὶ διὰ τοῦτο [g]ταῦτα φρονιμώτερα [h]καὶ μαθητικώτερα τῶν [i]μὴ δυναμένων μνημονεύειν ἐστίν. Φρόνιμα [k]μὲν ἄνευ τοῦ μανθάνειν, ὅσα μὴ [l]δύναται τῶν ψόφων ἀκούειν, οἷον μέλιττα, καὶ εἴ τι τοιοῦτον ἄλλο γένος ζῴων ἐστίν· μανθάνει δ' [m]ὅσα πρὸς τῇ μνήμῃ καὶ ταύτην ἔχει τὴν αἴσθησιν. Τὰ μὲν οὖν ἄλλα ταῖς φαντασίαις ζῇ καὶ ταῖς μνήμαις, ἐμπειρίας δὲ μετέχει μικρόν· τὸ δὲ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένος καὶ τέχνῃ καὶ λογισμοῖς. Γίγνεται δ' ἐκ τῆς [n]μνήμης ἐμπειρία τοῖς ἀνθρώποις· αἱ γὰρ πολλαὶ μνῆμαι τοῦ αὐτοῦ πράγματος μιᾶς ἐμπειρίας δύναμιν ἀποτελοῦσιν. Καὶ δοκεῖ σχεδὸν ἐπιστήμῃ καὶ τέχνῃ [n]ὅμοιον εἶναι ἡ ἐμπειρία.

Codices E.Q.S.T.H[a].A[b].B[b].C[b].D[b].E[b].F[b].G[b].H[b].I[b].f. [a] Α E.A[b], α τὸ μεῖζον plerique, α μεῖζον Q.T., μεῖζον a f, a μέγα E[b]. [b] ἑαυτὰς H[a].E[b].f. [c] θέλοντες H[a].E[b].f. [d] τι om. E.A[b].E[b].f. [e] τῆς αἰσθήσεως] ταύτης A[b].D[b]. [f] δ' ἐγγίγνεται A[b].D[b]. et rc. E[b]: ceteri δὲ γίγνεται. [g] ταῦτα φρονιμώτερα A[b].D[b]: ceteri τὰ μὲν φρόνιμα. [h] καὶ μαθητικώτερα A[b].D[b], τὰ δὲ μαθητικώτερα E.B[b].E[b].F[b]: ceteri τὰ δὲ μαθηματικώτερα. [i] μὴ om. S. [k] μὲν] μὲν οὖν T. [l] δύναται A[b].D[b].E[b]: ceteri δυνατά. [m] ὅσα] ὃ A[b].D[b]. [n] ὅμοιον εἶναι ἐμπειρία H[a].f, ὅμοιον εἶναι καὶ ἐμπειρία A[b].D[b], καὶ ἐμπειρία ὅμοιον εἶναι H[b].

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FIGURE 6.2 The term *metaphysics* comes from Aristotle's book of the same name. The opening sentence translates as "All men by nature desire to know." Our desire to lay bare the deepest and most discrete understanding of reality is at the heart of metaphysics. (credit: "Aristotle: Metaphysica, first page in Immanuel Bekker's edition, 1837." by Wikimedia, Public Doman)

6.1 Substance

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify what constitutes a substance.
- Articulate the difference between monism and pluralism.
- Contrast Aristotle's and Plato's views of form and substance.
- Compare theories of substance in Greek and Indian philosophy.

The Latin term *substantia,* translated as **substance**, is often used to refer to the basic reality of a thing. The notion that reason could lay bare the secrets of the cosmos if properly applied was widespread throughout the ancient world. One of the early questions that philosophers in ancient Greece and India approached was that of fundamentality, or simply, What is the foundation of reality? What is the independent base for that which we consider to be real?

Fundamentality: The One and the Many

A reasonable starting point in the philosophical pursuit of the "really real" is to consider just how many real things exist. Is the real one, or is it many? You are probably puzzled by the question. Every day, you see and experience a plurality of beings. Common sense suggests that if you were to take a moment to observe the many different and ostensibly non-related things in your presence right now, you would most likely support a pluralistic view (there are many real things). Yet the framing of the real as one (the view known as monism) is also compelling.

Monism

One of the earliest metaphysical positions taken was **monism**. At its simplest form, monism is the belief that the most discrete or fundamental reality (i.e., "the really real") is singular. This idea was held by the so-called pre-Socratics, a disparate group of philosophers who lived somewhat near each other and were born prior to Socrates but whose metaphysical positions, even if monistic, were wildly different. For example, they had different views of what the one "really real" is (see Table 6.1).

Date	Philosopher	The One Is:
c. 624–547 BCE	Thales of Miletus	water
c. 610–546 BCE	Anaximander of Miletus	the unbounded
c. 586–526 BCE	Anaximenes	air
c. 535–475 BCE	Heraclitus of Ephesus	fire
c. 515–445 BCE	Parmenides of Elea	Being

TABLE 6.1 Pre-Socratic Monists

It is tempting to look at the list of monistic answers and dismiss the thought quickly. Water, for example, is not the "really real." Yet, as we see below, philosophers such as Thales of Miletus made a consistent, rational argument for monism. In his case, he argued in support of water as the fundamental substance.

Thales of Miletus

Studying the philosophers who predate Socrates is challenging, as in many cases their primary works did not survive. But there are transcribed fragments and the characterization of other philosophers from which to gain insights. There are also historians to give glimpses of what these thinkers posited. In the case of Thales,

Aristotle is a useful source. Aristotle noted, "Thales, the founder of this school of philosophy, says the permanent entity is water (which is why he also propounded that the earth floats on water)" (Metaphysics 983b20). Why would anyone draw this conclusion? Aristotle suggested that Thales's belief reflected the observations that all things are nourished through water, that heat itself is generated through the absence or removal of water, and that all things require water to live. The observations inherent to the position itself are understandable. How long can a person live without water? What happens to plants during drought? Water is, indeed, essential for any being.

The intellectual assumptions supporting the position are intriguing. First, Thales is working from the assumption that all things that are must be conceived as having only a material principle. Given how these thinkers made sense of the world around them, assuming only material causes (e.g. fire, water, air, etc.) is understandable. A second assumption informing the position is the notion that being either is or it is not. For these thinkers, there is no becoming (for example, change or evolving) from one fundamental substance, such as water, to another, such as fire. There is no state somewhere in between being and not being. By extension, being (once it *is*) cannot be generated or destroyed. Thus, primary being (the most real of reals) must be and must not be capable of not being (Aristotle, Metaphysics 983b).

Thales's account of water as the most real is internally consistent, meaning the argument uses the evidence presented in such a way as to avoid asserting contradictory and potentially competing claims. However, his approach itself prioritizes reason over the overwhelming empirical evidence. As a result, he draws a conclusion that denies the reality of change, motion, and plurality that is experienced so readily.

Pluralism

Pluralism asserts that fundamental reality consists of many types of being. The pluralists viewed the "really real" as "many," but like the pre-Socratic monists, they did not hold a uniform view concerning how to define the many or basic realities (see Table 6.2).

Date	Philosopher	The Many Is:
c. 500–428 BCE	Anaxagoras	moving bits of matter
c. 494–434 BCE	Empedocles	fire, air, water, earth
c. 5th century BCE	Leucippus	atoms (indivisible eternal bits of matter)
c. 460–370 BCE	Democritus	atoms (indivisible eternal bits of matter)

TABLE 6.2 Pre-Socratic Pluralists

One of the views that resonates with the contemporary reader is that of atomism. Note that the atomism alluded to here is different from what is referred to as atomic theory. The atom within the thinking of Leucippus and Democritus refers to *atomos* as meaning "uncuttable" or "that which cannot be divided." The plurality we experience is the result of atoms in motion. As these indivisible and eternal bits of true being collide and either join or separate, the beings we experience are formed. But underneath or supporting the being we experience is that being which is eternal and unchanging—in other words, the atoms. Atoms are the true being, and the visible objects are not!

Although it might appear that they have broken all philosophical ties with the monists, both the monists and pluralists agreed that true being was eternal. Anything real stayed as it was. Change happened to things that were not real. This assertion, however, leads to the unsatisfactory conclusion that neither the acorn nor the oak is real.

Atomism in Indian Philosophy

Indian atomism provides for foundational immutable substances while going further toward accounting for change and explaining the transformation of the acorn into the oak. One of the earliest of all atomic models was pioneered in the sixth centurty BCE by a philosopher named Acharya Kanad. According to legend, he was inspired by watching pilgrims scatter rice and grains at a temple. As he began to examine the rice, he realized that the grains, left alone, were without value. But once the grains were assembled into a meal, the collection of "anu" (atom) made a meal. So too were the beings we observe collections of indivisible particles.

Another tradition, the Nyāya-VaiśeṢika, proposed an atomic theory built upon two elements: 1) The presence of change within things or wholes, and 2) The doctrine of five elements (pañca mahābhūtas). Unlike the Greek atomistic view explored earlier, each atom was thought to have a specific attribute. As noted by Chatterjee (2017), "An earth atom has odour, a water atom taste, a fire atom colour and an air atom has touch as specific attribute."

The reasoning supporting the atomistic views described above is *a priori.* Using an appeal to reason (and not experience), it was asserted that all things were composed of parts, and therefore it was necessary to assert that all things were reducible to eternal, spherical, and indivisible building blocks. The potential of an infinite regress (anavasthā) suggested that parts could always be divided into smaller parts. However, reason dictated that there must be a logical starting point at which no smaller part could be admitted (Chatterjee, 2017).

Unlike the random bumping and grinding used by Democritus to explain how atoms combined to form wholes, the Nyāya-VaiśeṢika framework explained composition through the joining of similar atomic types to first form a dyad (dyaṇuka) and then a triad (tryaṇuka). Triads joined in varying permutations in order to build the objects, or "wholes," we experience.

Ontological Perspectives on Substance

Up until now, this chapter has examined substance from a materialistic perspective—the concrete substances (water, fire, atoms) that make up the physical world that we see around us. As such, the discussion has been located squarely within a physicalism, an approach that equates the real world with the physical world. The study of existence, of being, of what is real—a discipline known as **ontology**—is broader. *Ontos* is the Greek participle from the verb "to be" and means "being." What qualifies as being? How should we categorize being?

Naturalism

Naturalism, in its simplest form, is the view that meaningful inquiry includes only the physical and the laws governing physical entities and rejects the priority placed on reason assumed within metaphysics. For example, naturalism asserts that the inventory of beings allowed should include beings that are found within the physical realm. If we can see a thing or if we can test a thing within a laboratory environment, then a naturalist would include the being within their inventory. Naturalists also weed out the assumptions, theories, and questions that are introduced but are not capable of empirical proof.

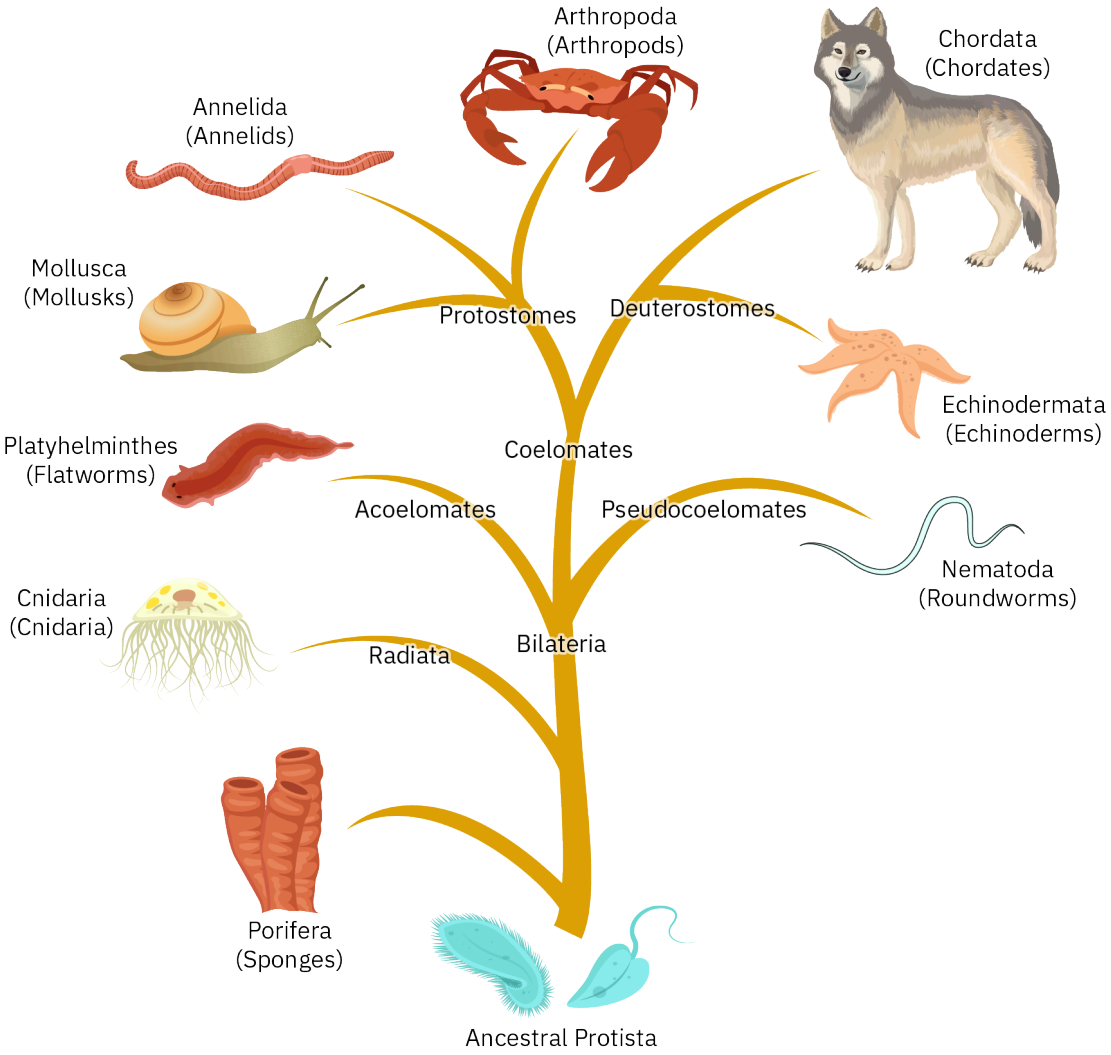

FIGURE 6.3 Aristotle initiated the classification of living things that continues today. (attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY 4.0 license)

The debate between supernaturalism (that accepts the existence of beings beyond or above our natural realm) and naturalism is as old as philosophical inquiry itself. But the tension became particularly relevant during the modern period. During modernity, scholars made advances across many disciplines based upon a turn to a scientific method and a rejection of *a priori* reasoning.

CONNECTIONS

The chapter on logic and reasoning covers the topic of logic in greater detail.

The Allegory of the Cave

In Book VII of *The Republic*, Plato offered his allegory of the cave, which depicts prisoners who have mistaken shadows cast on the wall of the cave for real beings and therefore have mistaken illusion for truth. The prisoners have been imprisoned throughout their lives. They are chained in place and have been positioned so that they can only see shadows that are cast upon the wall in front of them. They have come to treat the shadows not as the reflections that they are, but as something real. In an unexpected plot twist, one prisoner escapes and reaches the cave entrance. There, for the first time, he sees the sun—the true source of light (knowledge). After adjusting to the overpowering light emanating from the sun, the prisoner realizes that a fire was causing objects to cast shadows on the cave wall. The shadows cast by the fire within the cave were

reflections. He realized that the shadows are not actual being or truth—they were merely fading facsimiles of reality. The escaped prisoner, freed from the chains of his earlier captivity (metaphorically speaking), understands the true nature of being and truth. He returns to the cave to "free" his fellow captives, but his claim is rejected by those in chains.

FIGURE 6.4 The Allegory of the Cave (attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY 4.0 license)

Plato's Notion of Substance and Form

The prisoners were mistaking shadows for that which was real. But shadows do not last. As soon as the source of light fades, the shadows too disappear. If we want to identify the really real, Plato argued, we need to go beyond mere shadows and try to find those beings whose reality is not temporary. The idea or form of a thing, unlike the material "shadow," was not subject to atrophy and change.

The Latin term *substantia*, translated as "substance," describes the basic reality or essence of a thing that supports or stands under features that are incidental to the substance itself. While the so-called incidental features (e.g., quantity, time, place, etc.) can change, the essence of the entity endures. To account for the fundamental whatness of a thing, Plato posited an unchanging form or idea as the underlying and unchanging substance. As all things within a person's reality are subject to change, Plato reasoned that the forms or unchanging basic realities concerning all things must not be located within this world. He therefore posited a realm in which change did not occur.

There is an intuitive appeal to Plato's accounting of the real to forms. How else could we explain our ability to recognize a type of being given the sheer number of differences we will observe in the instances of a thing? We can make sense of dog, for example, because beyond the differences found among spaniels, poodles, and retrievers, there is a form of dog that accounts for knowing dog and being as dog.

Aristotle on Matter and Form

Aristotle, a student of Plato, disagreed with his teacher. If forms did exist, he challenged, then how could forms influence things? How could an immaterial form–which lacks matter—cause change to material entities?

In addition, what about concepts that are not easily reducible to a simple meaning or idea? Aristotle noted that "good was said in many ways" (*Ethics* 1096a–b as found in Adamson 2016, 232). The reduction to a single form to identify the whatness for something works when the concept is simple but does not work when a wide-ranging concept (such as "the good") is considered. Aristotle agreed with the approach of isolating dogness as the essence, but through the study of specific instances or **particulars**. He encouraged natural observation of the entity in question and introduced the categories of species and genera.

Unlike Plato, Aristotle does not posit an otherworldly form or collection of forms. In his middle and later works,

Aristotle explained substance through a composite of matter and form. Form, much like an idea a sculptor has in mind, is the unchanging purpose or whatness informing each particular or individual instance. In this case of a sculpture, the sculptor's vision or idea was referred to as the formal cause. The marble would be the material cause. The ability and artistic skill of the sculptor was termed the efficient cause. The final cause reflected the purpose of the being, or the reason why the sculpture was made in the first place.

The idea of substance being a composite of form within matter became known as hylomorphism. The Greek word *hyle* translates as "wood." Here wood is figurative, a symbol of basic building material that is shaped by the form within a particular instance. The form does not reside in the Platonic heavens but, through purpose and efficiency, moves a particular thing from its beginning state (potentiality) along a continuum toward its final goal (actuality). The acorn is driven by its form and purpose to become the mighty oak. The movement from potentiality to actuality requires material and the efficient (proper) application of these materials such that the acorn can become!

FIGURE 6.5 School of Athens (credit: modification of work "The School of Athens by Raphael" by Bradley Weber/ Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

The attitudes of Plato and Aristotle are reflected in Figure 6.5. The School of Athens was discussed in the introduction to philosophy chapter. This section details the interaction between the two central characters in the oil-on-canvas painting. Plato is the subject displayed to the left of center, and Aristotle is the subject depicted to the right of center. Plato's gesture toward the heavens with his right hand was the artist's way of recognizing Plato's theory of forms. For Plato, forms were immutable and the ultimate reality. Forms were supposed to exist outside of our earthly realm as the things we observe are subject to change. Aristotle's gesture with his right hand was the artist's representation of Aristotle's stressing of the form embedded within particular matter. The ultimate reality was supposed to be within each instance of matter observed. The material components were subject to change, but the form was not.

What do you think? The crucial difference introduced at this historical point was the emphasis placed upon particulars—individual instances of an entity—by Aristotle. While Plato stressed forms and asserted that there could be no individual instance without the form, Aristotle stressed particulars and asserted that without individual instances, there could be no knowledge of the form. Whereas Plato holds that beauty itself causes the beauty we see in flowers or faces, Aristotle asserts that there is no such thing as beauty without beautiful things, such as flowers and faces (Adamson, 2016, p. 231).

PODCAST

Listen to the podcast "Aristotle on Substance (https://openstax.org/r/aristotle-substance)" in the series *The History of Philosophy without Any Gaps*.

6.2 Self and Identity

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Apply the dilemma of persistence to self and identity.
- Outline Western and Eastern theological views of self.
- Describe secular views of the self.
- Describe the mind-body problem.

Today, some might think that atomism and Aristotle's teleological view have evolved into a theory of cells that resolves the acorn-oak tree identity problem. The purpose, or ergon, of both the acorn and the oak tree are present in the zygote, the cell that forms when male and female sex cells combine. This zygote cell contains the genetic material, or the instructions, for how the organism will develop to carry out its intended purpose.

But not all identity problems are so easily solved today. What if the author of this chapter lived in a house as a child, and years later, after traveling in the highly glamorous life that comes with being a philosopher, returned to find the house had burned down and been rebuilt exactly as it had been. Is it the same home? The generic questions that center on how we should understand the tension between identity and persistence include:

- Can a thing change without losing its identity?
- If so, how much change can occur without a loss of identity for the thing itself?

This section begins to broach these questions of identity and self.

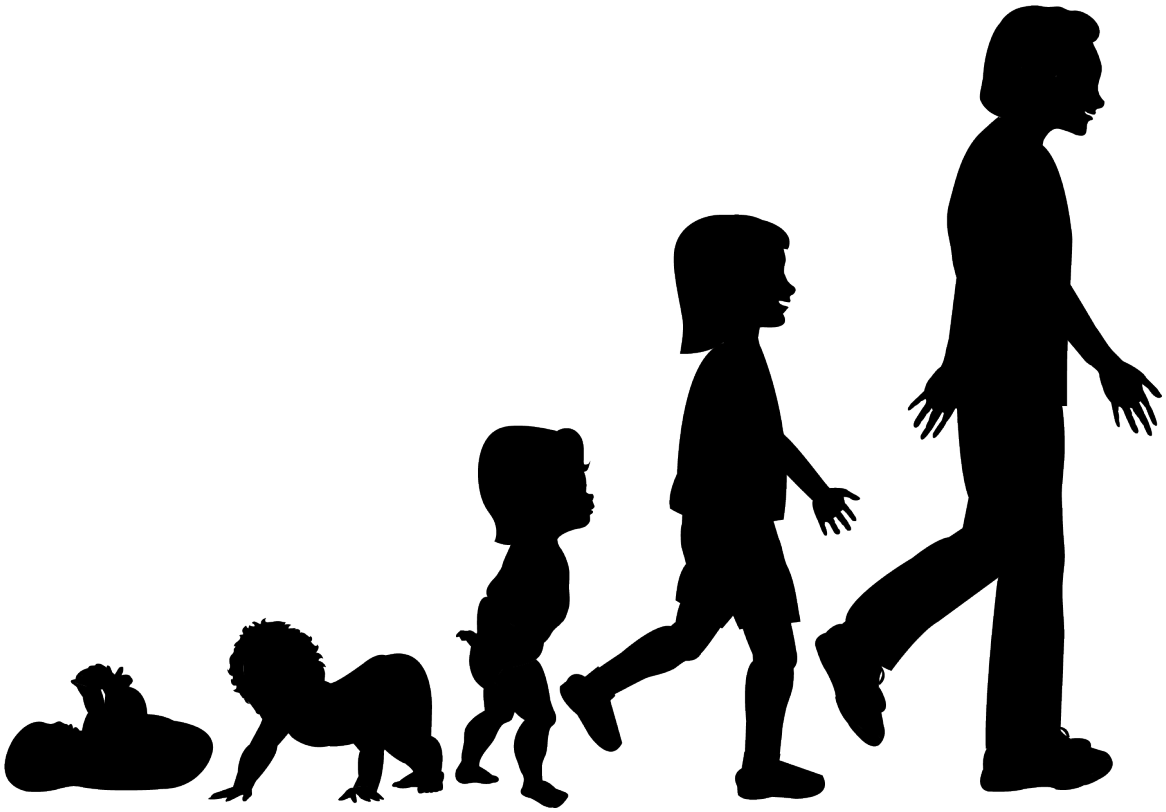

FIGURE 6.6 As we age, the cells in our body continually die and are replaced, and our appearance can change a great deal, particularly in childhood. In what way can we be said to be the same being as we were 10 or 20 years ago? This is a perennial philosophical question. (attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY 4.0 license)

The Ship of Theseus

Consider the following thought experiment. Imagine a wooden ship owned by the hero Theseus. Within months of launching, the need to replace decking would be evident. The salt content of sea water is highly corrosive. Accidents can also happen. Within a common version of the thought experiment, the span of one thousand years is supposed. Throughout the span, it is supposed that the entire decking and wooden content of the ship will have been replaced. The name of the ship remains constant. But given the complete change of materials over the assumed time span, in what sense can we assert that the ship is the same ship? We are tempted to conceptualize identity in terms of persistence, but the Ship of Theseus challenges the commonly held intuition regarding how to make sense of identity.

Similarly, as our bodies develop from zygote to adult, cells die and are replaced using new building materials we obtain though food, water, and our environment. Given this, are we the same being as we were 10 or 20 years ago? How can we identify what defines ourselves? What is our essence? This section examines answers proposed by secular and religious systems of belief.

WRITE LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Watch the video "Metaphysics: Ship of Theseus (https://openstax.org/r/ship-of-theseus)" in the series *Wi-Phi Philosophy*. You will find five possible solutions for making sense of the thought experiment. Pick one solution and explain why the chosen solution is the most salient. Can you explain how the strengths outweigh the stated objections—without ignoring the objections?

Judeo-Christian Views of Self

The common view concerning identity in Judeo-Christian as well as other spiritual traditions is that the self is a soul. In Western thought, the origin of this view can be traced to Plato and his theory of forms. This soul as the real self solves the ship of Theseus dilemma, as the soul continuously exists from zygote or infant and is not replaced by basic building materials. The soul provides permanence and even persists into the afterlife.

Much of the Christian perspective on soul and identity rested on Aristotle's theory of being, as a result of the work of St. Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas, a medieval philosopher, followed the Aristotelian composite of form and matter but modified the concept to fit within a Christianized cosmology. Drawing upon portions of Aristotle's works reintroduced to the West as a result of the Crusades, Aquinas offered an alternative philosophical model to the largely Platonic Christian view that was dominant in his day. From an intellectual historical perspective, the reintroduction of the Aristotelian perspective into Western thought owes much to the thought of Aquinas.

In *Being and Essence*, Aquinas noted that there was a type of existence that was necessary and uncaused and a type of being that was contingent and was therefore dependent upon the former to be brought into existence. While the concept of a first cause or unmoved mover was present within Aristotle's works, Aquinas identified the Christian idea of God as the "unmoved mover." God, as necessary being, was understood as the cause of contingent being. God, as the unmoved mover, as the essence from which other contingent beings derived existence, also determined the nature and purpose driving all contingent beings. In addition, God was conceived of as a being beyond change, as perfection realized. Using Aristotelian terms, we could say that God as Being lacked potentiality and was best thought of as that being that attained complete actuality or perfection—in other words, necessary being.

God, as the ultimate Good and Truth, will typically be understood as assigning purpose to the self. The cosmology involved is typically teleological—in other words, there is a design and order and ultimately an end to the story (the *eschaton*). Members of this tradition will assert that the Divine is personal and caring and that God has entered the narrative of our history to realize God's purpose through humanity. With some doctrinal exception, if the self lives the good life (a life according to God's will), then the possibility of sharing eternity

with the Divine is promised.

THINK LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Watch this discussion with Timothy Pawl on the question of eternal life, part of the PBS series *Closer to the Truth*, "Imagining Eternal Life (https://openstax.org/r/imagining-eternal-life)".

Is eternal life an appealing prospect? If change is not possible within heaven, then heaven (the final resting place for immortal souls) should be outside of time. What exactly would existence within an eternal now be like? In the video, Pawl claimed that time has to be present within eternity. He argued that there must be movement from potentiality to actuality. How can that happen in an eternity?

Hindu and Buddhist Views of Self

Within Hindu traditions, *atman* is the term associated with the self. The term, with its roots in ancient Sanskrit, is typically translated as the eternal self, spirit, essence, soul, and breath (Rudy, 2019). Western faith traditions speak of an individual soul and its movement toward the Divine. That is, a strong principle of individuation is applied to the soul. A soul is born, and from that time forward, the soul is eternal. Hinduism, on the other hand, frames *atman* as eternal; *atman* has always been. Although *atman* is eternal, *atman* is reincarnated. The spiritual goal is to "know atman" such that liberation from reincarnation (*moksha*) occurs.

Brahman

Hindu traditions vary in the meaning of *brahman*. Some will speak of a force supporting all things, while other traditions might invoke specific deities as manifestations of *brahman*. Escaping the cycle of reincarnation requires the individual to realize that *atman* is *brahman* and to live well or in accordance with *dharma*, observing the code of conduct as prescribed by scripture, and *karma*, actions and deeds. Union of the *atman* with *brahman* can be reach though yoga, meditation, rituals, and other practices.

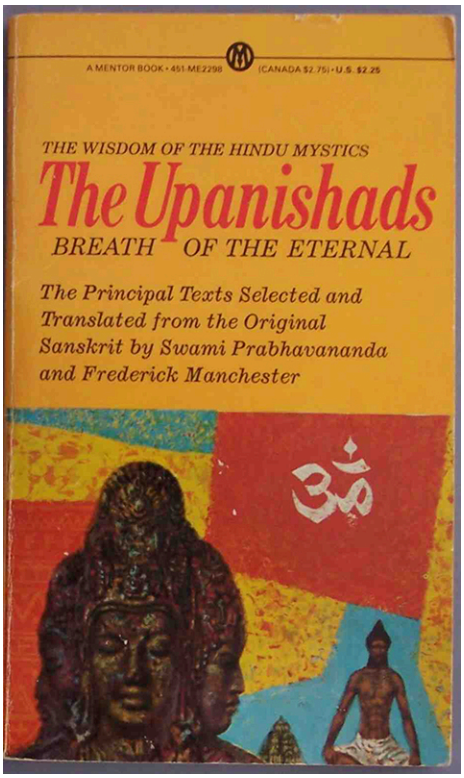

FIGURE 6.7 The Upanishads are Hindu scripture. (credit: "upanishads" by Dr Umm/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Buddha rejected the concept of *brahman* and proposed an alternate view of the world and the path to liberation. The next sections consider the interaction between the concepts of Atman (the self) and Brahman (reality).

The Doctrine of Dependent Origination

Buddhist philosophy rejects the concept of an eternal soul. The doctrine of dependent origination, a central tenet within Buddhism, is built on the claim that there is a causal link between events in the past, the present, and the future. What we did in the past is part of what happened previously and is part of what will be.

The doctrine of dependent origination (also known as interdependent arising) is the starting point for Buddhist cosmology. The doctrine here asserts that not only are all people joined, but all phenomena are joined with all other phenomena. All things are caused by all other things, and in turn, all things are dependent upon other things. Being is a nexus of interdependencies. There is no first cause or prime mover in this system. There is no self—at least in the Western sense of self—in this system (O'Brien 2019a).

The Buddhist Doctrine of No Self (*Anatman*)

One of many distinct features of Buddhism is the notion of **anatman** as the denial of the self. What is being denied here is the sense of self expressed through metaphysical terms such as substance or **universal** being. Western traditions want to assert an autonomous being who is strongly individuated from other beings. Within Buddhism, the "me" is ephemeral.

PODCAST

Listen to the podcast "Graham Priest on Buddhism and Philosophy (https://openstax.org/r/buddhism-and-philosophy)" in the series *Philosophy Bites.*

Suffering and Liberation

Within Buddhism, there are four noble truths that are used to guide the self toward liberation. An often-quoted sentiment from Buddhism is the first of the four noble truths. The first noble truth states that "life is suffering" (*dukkha*).

But there are different types of suffering that need to be addressed in order to understand more fully how suffering is being used here. The first meaning (*dukkha-dukkha*) is commensurate with the ordinary use of suffering as pain. This sort of suffering can be experienced physically and/or emotionally. A metaphysical sense of *dukkha* is *viparinama-dukkha*. Suffering in this sense relates to the impermanence of all objects. It is our tendency to impose permanence upon that which by nature is not, or our craving for ontological persistence, that best captures this sense of *dukkha*. Finally, there is *samkhara-dukkha*, or suffering brought about through the interdependency of all things.

Building on an understanding of "suffering" informed only by the first sense, some characterize Buddhism as "life is suffering; suffering is caused by greed; suffering ends when we stop being greedy; the way to do that is to follow something called the Eightfold Path" (O'Brien 2019b). A more accurate understanding of *dukkha* within this context must include all three senses of suffering.

The second of the noble truths is that the cause of suffering is our thirst or craving (*tanha*) for things that lack the ability to satisfy our craving. We attach our self to material things, concepts, ideas, and so on. This attachment, although born of a desire to fulfill our internal cravings, only heightens the craving. The problem is that attachment separates the self from the other. Through our attachments, we lose sight of the impermanence not only of the self but of all things.

The third noble truth teaches that the way to awakening (*nirvana*) is through a letting go of the cravings. Letting go of the cravings entails the cessation of suffering (*dukkha*).

The fourth truth is founded in the realization that living a good life requires doing, not just thinking. By living in accordance with the Eightfold Path, a person may live such that "every action of body, mind, and speech" are geared toward the promotion of dharma.

VIDEO

Buddhism's Four Noble Truths

Part of the BBC Radio 4 series *A History of Ideas*, this clip is narrated by Steven Fry and scripted by Nigel Warburton.

Click to view content (https://openstax.org/books/introduction-philosophy/pages/6-2-self-and-identity)

The Five Aggregates

How might the self (*atman*) experience the world and follow a path toward liberation? Buddhist philosophy posits five aggregates (*skandhas*), which are the thoughtful and iterative processes, through which the self interacts with the world.

1. Form (*rupa*): the aggregate of matter, or the body.
2. Sensation (*vedana*): emotional and physical feelings.
3. Perception (*samjna*): thinking, the processing of sense data; "knowledge that puts together."
4. Mental formation (*samskara*): how thoughts are processed into habits, predispositions, moods, volitions, biases, interests, etc. The fourth skandhas is related to karma, as much of our actions flow from these elements.
5. Consciousness (*vijnana*): awareness and sensitivity concerning a thing that does not include conceptualization.

Although the self uses the aggregates, the self is not thought of as a static and enduring substance underlying the processes. These aggregates are collections that are very much subject to change in an interdependent world.

Secular Notions of Self

In theology, continuity of the self is achieved through the soul. Secular scholars reject this idea, defining self in different ways, some of which are explored in the next sections.

Bundle Theory

One of the first and most influential scholars in the Western tradition to propose a secular concept of self was Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711–1776). Hume formed his thoughts in response to empiricist thinkers' views on substance and knowledge. British philosopher John Locke (1632–1704) offered a definition of substance in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. In Book XXIII, Locke described substance as "a something, I know not what." He asserted that although we cannot know exactly what substance is, we can reason from experience that there must be a substance "standing under or upholding" the qualities that exist within a thing itself. The meaning of substance is taken from the Latin *substantia*, or "that which supports."

If we return to the acorn and oak example, the reality of what it means to be an oak is rooted in the ultimate reality of what it means to be an oak tree. The ultimate reality, like the oak's root system, stands beneath every particular instance of an oak tree. While not every tree is exactly the same, all oak trees do share a something, a shared whatness, that makes an oak an oak. Philosophers call this whatness that is shared among oaks a substance.

Arguments against a static and enduring substance ensued. David Hume's answer to the related question of "What is the self?" illustrates how a singular thing may not require an equally singular substance. According to Hume, the self was not a Platonic form or an Aristotelian composite of matter and form. Hume articulated the self as a changing bundle of perceptions. In his *Treatise of Human Nature* (Book 1, Part IV), Hume described

the self as "a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement."

Hume noted that what has been mistaken for a static and enduring self was nothing more than a constantly changing set of impressions that were tied together through their resemblance to one another, the order or predictable pattern (succession) of the impressions, and the appearance of causation lent through the resemblance and succession. The continuity we experience was not due to an enduring self but due to the mind's ability to act as a sort of theater: "The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations" (Hume 1739, 252).

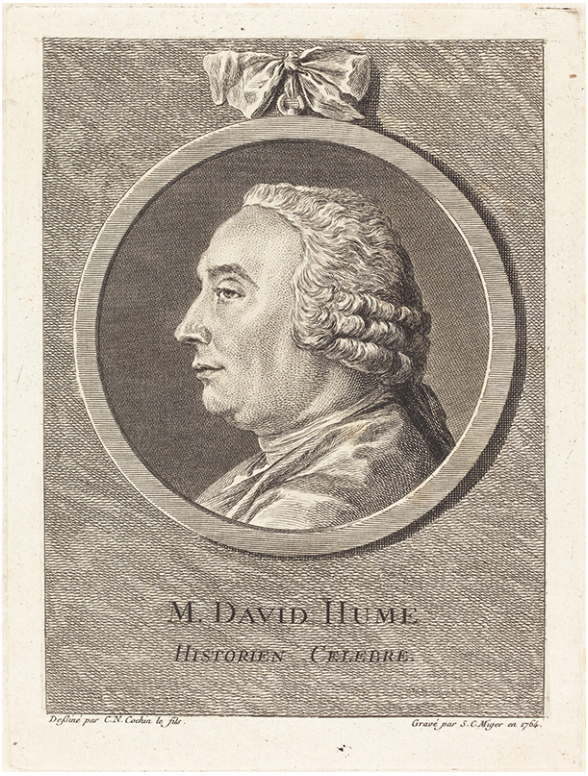

FIGURE 6.8 David Hume (1711–1776) took British empiricism to its logical extreme. Immanuel Kant credited Hume as awakening him from his "dogmatic slumbers." (credit: "M. David Hume, 1764" by Simon Charles Miger after Charles-Nicolas Cochin II/National Gallery of Art, Public Domain)

Which theories of self—and substance—should we accept? The Greek theories of substance and the theological theories of a soul offer advantages. Substance allows us to explain what we observe. For example, an apple, through its substance, allows us to make sense of the qualities of color, taste, the nearness of the object, etc. Without a substance, it could be objected that the qualities are merely unintelligible and unrelated qualities without a reference frame. But bundle theory allows us to make sense of a thing without presupposing a mythical form, or "something I know not what!" Yet, without the mythical form of a soul, how do we explain our own identities?

Anthropological Views

Anthropological views of the self question the cultural and social constructs upon which views of the self are erected. For example, within Western thought, it is supposed that the self is distinct from the "other." In fact, throughout this section, we have assumed the need for a separate and distinct self and have used a principle of continuity based on the assumption that a self must persist over time. Yet, non-Western cultures blur or negate this distinction. The African notion of ubuntu, for example, posits a humanity that cannot be divided. The Nguni proverb that best describes this concept is "umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" sometimes translated as "a

person is a person through other persons" (Gade 2011). The word *ubuntu* is from the Zulu language, but cultures from southern Africa to Tanzania, Kenya, and Democratic Republic of the Congo all have words for this concept. Anthropological approaches attempt to make clear how the self and the culture share in making meaning.

The Mind as Self

Many philosophers, Western and non-Western, have equated the self to the mind. But what is the mind? A monist response is the mind is the brain. Yet, if the mind is the brain, a purely biological entity, then how do we explain consciousness? Moreover, if we take the position that the mind is immaterial but the body is material, we are left with the question of how two very different types of things can causally affect the other. The question of "How do the two nonidentical and dissimilar entities experience a causal relationship?" is known as the mind-body problem. This section explores some alternative philosophical responses to these questions.

Physicalism

Reducing the mind to the brain seems intuitive given advances in neuroscience and other related sciences that deepen our understanding of cognition. As a doctrine, **physicalism** is committed to the assumption that everything is physical. Exactly how to define the physical is a matter of contention. Driving this view is the assertion that nothing that is nonphysical has physical effects.

THINK LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Listen to the podcast "David Papineau on Physicalism (https://openstax.org/r/david-papineau)" in the series *Philosophy Bites.*

Focus on the thought experiment concerning what Mary knows. Here is a summary of the thought experiment:

Mary is a scientist and specializes in the neurophysiology of color. Strangely, her world has black, white, and shades of gray but lacks color (weird, but go with it!). Due to her expertise, she knows every physical fact concerning colors. What if Mary found herself in a room in which color as we experience it is present? Would she *learn* anything? A physicalist must respond "no"! Do you agree? How would you respond?

John Locke and Identity

In place of the biological, Locke defined identity as the continuity lent through what we refer to as consciousness. His approach is often referred to as the psychological continuity approach, as our memories and our ability to reflect upon our memories constitute identity for Locke. In his *Essay on Human Understanding*, Locke (as cited by Gordon-Roth 2019) observed, "We must consider what Person stands for . . . which, I think, is a thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider it self as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places." He offered a thought experiment to illustrate his point. Imagine a prince and cobbler whose memories (we might say consciousness) were swapped. The notion is far-fetched, but if this were to happen, we would assert that the prince was now the cobbler and the cobbler was now the prince. Therefore, what individuates us cannot be the body (or the biological).

VIDEO

John Locke on Personal Identity

Part of the BBC Radio 4 series *A History of Ideas*, this clip is narrated by Gillian Anderson and scripted by Nigel Warburton.

Click to view content (https://openstax.org/books/introduction-philosophy/pages/6-2-self-and-identity)

The Problem of Consciousness

Christof Koch (2018) has said that "consciousness is everything you experience." Koch offered examples, such as "a tune stuck in your head," the "throbbing pain from a toothache," and "a parent's love for a child" to illustrate the experience of consciousness. Our first-person experiences are what we think of intuitively when we try to describe what consciousness is. If we were to focus on the throbbing pain of a toothache as listed above, we can see that there is the experiencing of the toothache. Curiously, there is also the experiencing of the experiencing of the toothache. Introspection and theorizing built upon first-person inspections affords vivid and moving accounts of the things experienced, referred to as *qualia*.

An optimal accounting of consciousness, however, should not only explain *what* consciousness is but should also offer an explanation concerning *how* consciousness came to be and *why* consciousness is present. What difference or differences does consciousness introduce?

PODCAST

Listen to the podcast "Ted Honderich on What It Is to Be Conscious (https://openstax.org/r/what-it-is-to-be-conscious)," in the series *Philosophy Bites*.

Rene Descartes and Dualism

Dualism, as the name suggests, attempts to account for the mind through the introduction of two entities. The dualist split was addressed earlier in the discussion of substance. Plato argued for the reality of immaterial forms but admitted another type of thing—the material. Aristotle disagreed with his teacher Plato and insisted on the location of the immaterial within the material realm. How might the mind and consciousness be explained through dualism?

VIDEO

Mind Body Dualism

Click to view content (https://openstax.org/books/introduction-philosophy/pages/6-2-self-and-identity)

A substance dualist, in reference to the mind problem, asserts that there are two fundamental and irreducible realities that are needed to fully explain the self. The mind is nonidentical to the body, and the body is nonidentical to the mind. The French philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650) offered a very influential version of substance dualism in his 1641 work *Meditations on First Philosophy*. In that work, Descartes referred to the mind as a thinking thing (*res cogitans*) and the body as an extended nonthinking thing (*res extensa*). Descartes associated identity with the thinking thing. He introduced a model in which the self and the mind were eternal.

FIGURE 6.9 Alas Poor Yorick. In Shakespeare's Hamlet, the character of Hamlet holds the skull of a court jester, his departed childhood companion, and laments his passing. Hamlet contemplates the fleetingness of existence through the moment. But what exactly is it that experiences existence? What is the self? (credit: "Hamlet with Yorick's skull" by Henry Courtney Selous/Wikimedia, Public Domain)

Behaviorism

There is a response that rejects the idea of an independent mind. Within this approach, what is important is not mental states or the existence of a mind as a sort of central processor, but activity that can be translated into statements concerning observable behavior (Palmer 2016, 122). As within most philosophical perspectives, there are many different "takes" on the most correct understanding. Behaviorism is no exception. The "hard" behaviorist asserts that there are no mental states. You might consider this perspective the purist or "die-hard" perspective. The "soft" behaviorist, the moderate position, does not deny the possibility of minds and mental events but believes that theorizing concerning human activity should be based on behavior.

Before dismissing the view, pause and consider the plausibility of the position. Do we ever really know another's mind? There is some validity to the notion that we ought to rely on behavior when trying to know or to make sense of the "other." But if you have a toothache, and you experience myself being aware of the *qualia* associated with a toothache (e.g., pain, swelling, irritability, etc.), are these sensations more than activities? What of the experience that accompanies the experience?

6.3 Cosmology and the Existence of God

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Describe teleological and moral arguments for the existence of God.
- Outline Hindu cosmology and arguments for and against the divine.
- Explain Anselm's ontological argument for the existence of God.
- Articulate the distinction between the logical and evidential problems of evil.

Another major question in metaphysics relates to cosmology. Cosmology is the study of how reality is ordered. How can we account for the ordering, built upon many different elements such as causation, contingency, motion, and change, that we experience within our reality? The primary focus of **cosmological arguments** will be on proving a logically necessary first cause to explain the order observed. As discussed in earlier sections, for millennia, peoples have equated the idea of a first mover or cause with the divine that exists in another realm. This section cosmological arguments for the existence of God as well as how philosophers have reconciled the existence of God with the presence of evil in the world.

Teleological Arguments for God

Teleological arguments examine the inherent design within reality and attempt to infer the existence of an entity responsible for the design observed. Teleological arguments consider the level of design found in living organisms, the order displayed on a cosmological scale, and even how the presence of order in general is significant.

Aquinas's Design Argument

Thomas Aquinas's Five Ways is known as a teleological argument for the existence of God from the presence of design in experience. Here is one possible formulation of Aquinas's design argument:

1. Things that lack knowledge tend to act toward an end/goal.
2. These things act toward an end either by chance or by design.
   A. It is obvious that it is not by chance.
   B. Things that lack knowledge act toward an end by design.
3. If a thing is being directed toward an end, it requires direction by some being endowed with intelligence (e.g. the arrow being directed by the archer).
4. Therefore, some intelligent being exists that directs all natural things toward their end. This being is known as God.

FIGURE 6.10 Thomas Aquinas proposed a teleological argument for the existence of God, basing God's existence on what he viewed as the inherent design within reality. (credit: "Saint Thomas Aquinas, c. 1450" by Rosenwald

Collection/National Gallery of Art, Public Domain)

Design Arguments in Biology

Though Aquinas died long ago, his arguments still live on in today's discourse, exciting passionate argument. Such is the case with design arguments in biology. William Paley (1743–1805) proposed a teleological argument, sometimes called the design argument, that there exists so much intricate detail, design, and purpose in the world that we must suppose a creator. The sophistication and incredible detail we observe in nature could not have occurred by chance.

Paley employs an analogy between design as found within a watch and design as found within the universe to advance his position. Suppose you were walking down a beach and you happened to find a watch. Maybe you were feeling inquisitive, and you opened the watch (it was an old-fashioned pocket watch). You would see all the gears and coils and springs. Maybe you would wind up the watch and observe the design of the watch at work. Considering the way that all the mechanical parts worked together toward the end/goal of telling time, you would be reluctant to say that the watch was not created by a designer.

Now consider another object—say, the complexity of the inner workings of the human eye. If we can suppose a watchmaker for the watch (due to the design of the watch), we must be able to suppose a designer for the eye. For that matter, we must suppose a designer for all the things we observe in nature that exhibit order. Considering the complexity and grandeur of design found in the world around us, the designer must be a Divine designer. That is, there must be a God.

Often, the design argument is formulated as an induction:

1. In all things we have experienced that exhibit design, we have experienced a designer of that artifact.
2. The universe exhibits order and design.
3. Given #1, the universe must have a designer.
4. The designer of the universe is God.

THINK LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Read "The Fine-Tuning Argument for the Existence of God (https://openstax.org/r/the-existence-of-god)" by Thomas Metcalf.

Evaluate the arguments and counterarguments presented in this short article. Which are the most cogent, and why?

Moral Arguments for God

Another type of argument for the existence of God is built upon metaethics and normative ethics. Consider subjective and objective values. Subjective values are those beliefs that guide and drive behaviors deemed permissible as determined by either an individual or an individual's culture. Objective values govern morally permissible and desired outcomes that apply to all moral agents. Moral arguments for the existence of God depend upon the existence of objective values.

If there are objective values, then the question of "Whence do these values come?" must be raised. One possible answer used to explain the presence of objective values is that the basis of the values is found in God. Here is one premise/conclusion form of the argument:

1. If objective values exist, there must be a source for their objective validity.
2. The source of all value (including the validity held by objective values) is God.
3. Objective values do exist.
4. Therefore, God exists.

This argument, however, raises questions. Does moral permissibility (i.e., right and wrong) depend upon God?

Are ethics an expression of the divine, or are ethics better understood separate from divine authority?

WRITE LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Watch "God & Morality: Part 2 (https://openstax.org/r/god-and-morality-part-2)" by Steven Darwall.

Darwall's argument for the autonomy of ethics may be restated as follows:

1. God knows morality best (1:44).
2. God knows what is best for us (2:12).
3. God has authority over us (2:48).

How does Darwall refute the conclusion? What is the evidence offered, and at what point within the argument is the evidence introduced? What does his approach suggest about refutational strategies? Can you refute Darwall's argument?

As you write, begin by defining the conclusion. Remember that in philosophy, conclusions are not resting points but mere starting points. Next, present the evidence, both stated and unstated, and explain how it supports the conclusion.

The Ontological Argument for God

An **ontological argument** for God was proposed by the Italian philosopher, monk, and Archbishop of Canterbury Anselm (1033–1109). Anselm lived in a time where belief in a deity was often assumed. He, as a person and as a prior of an abbey, had experienced and witnessed doubt. To assuage this doubt, Anselm endeavored to prove the existence of God in such an irrefutable way that even the staunchest of nonbelievers would be forced, by reason, to admit the existence of a God.

Anselm's proof is *a priori* and does not appeal to empirical or sense data as its basis. Much like a proof in geometry, Anselm is working from a set of "givens" to a set of demonstrable concepts. Anselm begins by defining the most central term in his argument—God. For the purpose of this argument, Anselm suggests, let "God" = "a being than which nothing greater can be conceived." He makes two key points:

1. When we speak of God (whether we are asserting God is or God is not), we are contemplating an entity who can be defined as "a being than which nothing greater can be conceived."
2. When we speak of God (either as believer or nonbeliever), we have an intramental understanding of that concept—in other words, the idea is within our understanding.

Anselm continues by examining the difference between that which exists in the mind and that which exists both in the mind and outside of the mind. The question is: Is it greater to exist in the mind alone or in the mind and in reality (or outside of the mind)? Anselm asks you to consider the painter—for example, define which is greater: the reality of a painting as it exists in the mind of an artist or that same painting existing in the mind of that same artist and as a physical piece of art. Anselm contends that the painting, existing both within the mind of the artist and as a real piece of art, is greater than the mere intramental conception of the work.

At this point, a third key point is established:

3. It is greater to exist in the mind and in reality than to exist in the mind alone.
   Have you figured out where Anselm is going with this argument?

   A. If God is a being than which nothing greater can be conceived (established in #1 above);
   B. And since it is greater to exist in the mind and in reality than in the mind alone (established in #3 above);
   C. Then God must exist both in the mind (established in #2 above) and in reality;
   D. In short, God must be. God is not merely an intramental concept but an extra-mental reality as well.

FIGURE 6.11 Anselm's proof for the existence of God is structured like a mathematical proof, working from a definition of the term "God" to the conclusion that God must exist. (credit: "S. Anselme, évêque de Cantorbéry (St. Anslem, Bishop of Canterbury), April 21st, from Les Images De Tous Les Saincts et Saintes de L'Année (Images of All of the Saints and Religious Events of the Year)" by Jacques Callot/The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Public Domain)

Hindu Cosmology

One of the primary arguments for the existence of God as found within Hindu traditions is based on cosmological conditions necessary to explain the reality of karma. As explained in the introduction to philosophy chapter and earlier in this chapter, karma may be thought of as the causal law that links causes to effects. Assuming the doctrine of interdependence, karma asserts that if we act in such a way to cause harm to others, we increase the amount of negativity in nature. We therefore hurt ourself by harming others. As the self moves through rebirth (*samsara*), the karmic debt incurred is retained. Note that positive actions also are retained. The goal is liberation of the soul from the cycle of rebirth.

Maintenance of the Law of Karma

While one can understand karmic causality without an appeal to divinity, how the causal karmic chain is so well-ordered and capable of realizing just results is not as easily explainable without an appeal to divinity. One possible presentation of the argument for the existence of God from karma could therefore read as follows:

1. If karma is, there must be some force/entity that accounts for the appropriateness (justice) of the karmic debt or karmic reward earned.
2. The source responsible for the appropriateness (justice) of the debt or reward earned must be a conscious agent capable of lending order to all karmic interactions (past, present, and future).
3. Karmic appropriateness (justice) does exist.
4. Therefore, a conscious agent capable of lending order to all karmic interactions (past, present, and future) must exist.
5. Therefore, God exists.

Physical World as Manifestation of Divine Consciousness

The cosmology built upon the religious doctrines allows for an argument within Hindu thought that joins a version of the moral argument and the design argument. Unless a divine designer were assumed, the moral and cosmological fabric assumed within the perspective could not be asserted.

Hindu Arguments Against the Existence of God

One of the primary arguments against the existence of God is found in the Mīmāmsā tradition. This ancient school suggests that the Vedas were eternal but without authors. The cosmological and teleological evidence as examined above was deemed inconclusive. The focus of this tradition and its several subtraditions was on living properly.

Problem of Evil

The problem of evil poses a philosophical challenge to the traditional arguments (in particular the design argument) because it implies that the design of the cosmos and the designer of the cosmos are flawed. How can we assert the existence of a caring and benevolent God when there exists so much evil in the world? The glib answer to this question is to say that human moral agents, not God, are the cause of evil. Some philosophers reframe the problem of evil as the problem of suffering to place the stress of the question on the reality of suffering versus moral agency.

The Logical Problem of Evil

David Hume raised arguments not only against the traditional arguments for the existence of God but against most of the foundational ideas of philosophy. Hume, the great skeptic, starts by proposing that if God knows about the suffering and would stop it but cannot stop it, God is not omnipotent. If God is able to stop the suffering and would want to but does not know about it, then God is not omniscient. If God knows about the suffering and is able to stop it but does not wish to assuage the pain, God is not omnibenevolent. At the very least, Hume argues, the existence of evil does not justify a belief in a caring Creator.

The Evidential Problem of Evil

The evidential problem considers the reality of suffering and the probability that if an omnibenevolent divine being existed, then the divine being would not allow such extreme suffering. One of the most formidable presentations of the argument was formulated by William Rowe:

1. There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
2. An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
3. (Therefore) there does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being. (Rowe 1979, 336)

Western Theistic Responses to the Problem of Evil

Many theists (those who assert the existence of god/s) have argued against both the logical and evidential formulations of the problem of evil. One of the earliest Christian defenses was authored by Saint Augustine. Based upon a highly Neo-Platonic methodology and ontology, Augustine argued that as God was omnibenevolent (all good), God would not introduce evil into our existence. Evil, observed Augustine, was not real. It was a privation or negation of the good. Evil therefore did not argue against the reality or being of God but was a reflection for the necessity of God. Here we see the application of a set of working principles and the stressing of *a priori* resulting in what could be labeled (*prima facie*) a counterintuitive result.

An African Perspective on the Problem of Evil

In the above sections, the problem of evil was centered in a conception of a god as all-powerful, all-loving, and

all-knowing. Evil, from this perspective, reflects a god doing evil (we might say reflecting the moral agency of a god) and thus results in the aforementioned problem—how could a "good" god do evil or perhaps allow evil to happen? The rich diversity of African thought helps us examine evil and agency from different starting points. What if, for example, the lifting of the agency (the doing of evil) was removed entirely from the supernatural? In much of Western thought, God was understood as the creator. Given the philosophical role and responsibilities that follow from the assignment of "the entity that made all things," reconciling evil and creation and God as good becomes a problem. But if we were to remove the concept of God from the creator role, the agency of evil (and reconciling evil with the creator) is no longer present.

Within the Yoruba-African perspective, the agency of evil is not put upon human agency, as might be expected in the West, but upon "spiritual beings other than God" (Dasaolu and Oyelakun 2015). These multiple spiritual beings, known as "Ajogun," are "scattered around the cosmos" and have specific types of wrongdoing associated specifically with each being (Dasaolu and Oyelakun 2015). Moving the framework (or cosmology) upon which goodness and evil is understood results in a significant philosophical shift. The meaning of evil, instead of being packed with religious or supernatural connotations, has a more down-to-earth sense. Evil is not so much sin as a destruction of life. It is not an offense against an eternal Creator, but an action conducted by one human moral agent that harms another human moral agent.

Unlike Augustine's attempt to explain evil as the negation of good (as not real), the Yoruban metaphysics asserts the necessity of evil. Our ability to contrast good and evil are required logically so that we can make sense of both concepts.

6.4 Free Will

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Define free will.
- Explain how determinism, libertarianism, and compatibilism are different.

Though the presence of evil in the world suggests that we have free will, the idea of a first mover or an all-powerful divine being challenges the idea that we might have free will in the material world. Throughout most of our experiences, it seems as if we are free. When we complete a task, we seem very capable of marking this experience as different from being free. But what if the sensation of freedom does not demonstrate the presence of freedom?

Amusement parks often have rides that consist of a car on a track that has safety features forcing the car to stay within predetermined paths. In most cases, there is an accelerator, a brake, and a steering wheel. Some rides have strategically placed rubber boundaries guiding the vehicle, while others have a steel post hidden underneath the car that guides the car by means of a predetermined tract. While "driving" the car, the young driver feels free to choose the direction. As vivid as the experience for the driver may be, the thrill and phenomenon does not prove the presence or existence of freedom! Similarly, does the feeling of being free demonstrate the presence of freedom in our actions?

Defining Freedom

To begin to answer these questions, this section first explores two competing definitions of freedom.

The Ability to Do Otherwise

Perhaps the most intuitive definition of freedom can be expressed as "A moral agent is free if and only if the moral agent could have done otherwise." Philosophers refer to this expression as the Principle of Alternative Possibilities (PAP). A person is typically thought of as performing a free action if that same person could have taken a different action or decided to take no action. Within many legal systems, a person is not considered culpable if the action taken was forced.

One objection against the PAP is based on how we define our being. What if we as physical objects are governed by the laws of nature? We do not set our rate of velocity when diving into a pool, nor are we able to determine the force of gravity if we choose to enter the water "belly first"! Those outcomes are determined by the laws of nature. We, as objects, are governed by such forces. Does this mean, like the driver in the ride depicted above, that we never actually experience alternative possibilities? If so, then the possibility of freedom—a precondition for responsibility—seems absent.

What about socialization and the conditioning that follows from living in a society? Does the constructed set of norms and values lessen our ability to do otherwise? Given the external conditioning we all endure, can we assert that the PAP is a possibility?

The Ability to Do as One Wants

One possible objection to defining freedom through PAP was offered by Harry G. Frankfurt. Frankfurt argued that freedom was better understood not as the ability to do otherwise but as the ability to do what one wants (1971). Imagine that a deranged space alien barges into your room and produces a sinister-looking button. You are informed that the button will annihilate Earth if pressed. The alien laughs manically and demands that you eat a delicious pizza brought from your favorite pizzeria or the alien will press the button. You can feel and smell the freshness! In this case, most of us would argue that you are not free to do otherwise. But you could say that you not only want the pizza, a first-order volition, but given what is at stake, you want to want the pizza. You could be described as acting freely, as you are satisfying your first- and second-order volitions. You are free, as you are doing what you want to do.

Libertarianism

Within the free will debate, **libertarianism** denotes freedom in the metaphysical sense and not in the political sense. A libertarian believes that actions are free—that is, not caused by external forces. We are free to plot our course through our actions. Existentialists further argue that our essence is the product of our choices.

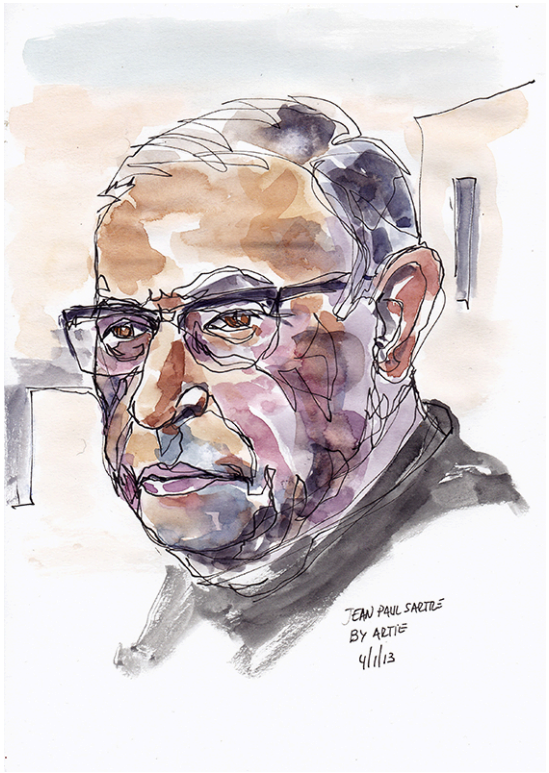

FIGURE 6.12 Condemned to Be Free. Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) was a leader in the existential movement. He once characterized the reality of freedom as condemnation, as through the existence of free will, a human being was

therefore responsible for all actions taken. (credit: "Jean Paul Sartre for PIFAL" by Arturo Espinosa/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Many proponents of the libertarian view assume the definition of freedom inherent to the Principle of Alternative Possibilities (PAP). We are free if and only if we could have done otherwise at a specific time.

There are many challenges to this assertion. One objection, based on Benjamin Libet's neuroscience-based experiments, suggest that many of the actions we perceive as free are, in fact, caused and determined by the brain.

VIDEO

The Libet Experiment: Is Free Will Just an Illusion?

This video, from the BBC Radio 4 series *A History of Ideas*, is narrated by Harry Shearer and scripted by Nigel Warburton.

Click to view content (https://openstax.org/books/introduction-philosophy/pages/6-4-free-will)

Determinism

The contrary view to metaphysical libertarianism is **determinism**. The determinist holds that human moral agents are not free from external forces. Our actions could not have been otherwise. Thus, action X at time T must occur.

Causal Closure of the Physical World

One argument used to support determinism is built upon the observation of causality. Baron D'Holbach (1723–1789), in his *System of Nature,* observed that we, like all other natural entities, are subject to and governed by natural laws of the universe. His so-called "hard determinism" posited that all our actions are outside of our control. Humans cannot escape the cause-and-effect relationships that are part and parcel of being in the world.

Causal Determinacy of the Past

Another argument used to support determinism is built upon the consideration of past experiences. Perhaps the simplest way to express the causal force the past holds on future events is to reflect on your first-person experience. How influential has the past been in shaping the decisions you make in the present? We use expressions that reflect this causal power—for example, I will not get fooled again, I guess I will have to learn from my mistakes, etc. What has happened in the past can, in the least, limit the event horizon of the present.

The power of the past is not limited to first-person experience. Our socio-economic status, for example, can be a powerful force in determining the actions we deem permissible. As Ralph Waldo Emerson once quipped, we tend to "don the knapsack of custom" without questioning the contents of the knapsack.

Another important distinction when discussing determinism is that of **compatibilism**. Some determinists will assume that free will is not compatible with determinism. An incompatibilist position asserts that due to the nature of freedom and our lack of control concerning our actions, we cannot be held culpable for our actions. A soft determinist will assume that free will is compatible with determinism. In order to salvage a sense of moral culpability, an incompatibility might challenge the definition of freedom in terms of the PAP. For example, if you consider Frankfurt's framing of freedom of fulfilling higher-order volitions, then even when forced to take an action, it may have very well been the action you would have chosen if not forced to do so.

William James (1842–1910) offers a view called indeterminism in which the notion is that all events are rigidly controlled. What if there is the possibility that one small effect might be uncaused somewhere out there in the grand series of cause-and-effect sequences? Given the possibility that such an uncaused effect might occur, there is the chance that not all events are falling dominoes or events that must happen. Thus, even in a deterministic setting, an indeterminist can argue that the possibility of an uncaused act is a genuine one. By extension, your choices, your hopes, and the actions for which you should be praised or criticized cannot be

treated without doubt as caused externally. These actions could be your own!

THINK LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Watch the video "Language: Contrastivism #2 (Free Will) (https://openstax.org/r/contrastivism-2-free-will)" by Walter Sinnott-Armstrong.

Metaphysicians are concerned with freedom from causation. By contrast, ethicists are concerned with freedom from constraint. Contrastivism allows enough space for philosophers to contrast the different focuses and to appreciate the differences that these differences introduce. According to Sinnott-Armstrong, the net result is a cease-fire. How can you support or refute the contrastivist solution to the problem of free will?

Summary

6.1 Substance

The Latin term *substantia,* translated as "substance," is often used to refer to the basic reality supporting or standing under features that are incidental to that same thing. Ancient Greek philosophers were both monists and dualists. Indian philosophers developed the idea of atomism. The challenge of persistence (i.e., whether a thing could be said to retain identity despite changes introduced through time) can be explored through the Ship of Theseus thought experiment.

6.2 Self and Identity

There are different answers to the question "What is the self?" The Judeo-Christian view tends to posit the "really real," or the true self, in terms of a soul. Hindu and Buddhist views identify the self with the "atman." *Atman* is an ancient term and has many meanings, but typically the term is translated as eternal self, soul, or even breath. Unlike in the Judeo-Christian view, the soul is reincarnated until the self attains release from reincarnation (*moksha*). The Buddhist doctrine of No Self (*anatman*) challenged the Western view in which the self is understood as enduring. There is no persistent self; within Buddhism, the "me" is ephemeral.

A second issue addressed within this subsection is the reality of the mind. Many people identify the mind as the brain. Perhaps the attempts to reduce thinking to an independent mind are relics of an outdated view. The hard problem of consciousness is identified as the inability to explain one's awareness of being aware. Behaviorism, the understanding of the self in terms of behavior, is one possible explanation for the ultimate reality of the self.

6.3 Cosmology and the Existence of God

The attempt to demonstrate the existence of God has taken many forms and occurred across multiple cultures. Cosmological arguments consider that which is found in experience—that is, they are *a posteriori* and move from observed effects to cause. Ontological arguments are not based in experience but call upon people as thinkers to apply reason in order to reach a conclusion (i.e., they are *a priori* arguments). These arguments, much as a geometer might consider the nature of a triangle and then prove a theorem concerning triangularity, do not appeal to experience. Rather, they pose that the basic attributes of God are known through reason. Moral theorists argue for the existence of a divine being through a consideration of the possibility of objective values.

How might the existence of evil support or argue against the existence of a god? The evidential problem of evil considers the reality of suffering and challenges the attributes we might apply to God given the existence of suffering. As not all traditions assume the same cosmology, some traditions (such as the African or Yoruban view) do not have this particular issue. Augustine, working within a Christian cosmology, attempted to answer the challenge by positing evil as the absence of good. Thus, a god could not be challenged as being good if evil existed as evil was merely the privation (absence) of good.

6.4 Free Will

Does the sensation of freedom prove the existence of freedom? The metaphysical libertarian response declares that human action are free and outside of the causality observed governing natural objects. Because free choices exist, we are culpable for our decisions. The determinist response, in its so-called hard form, states that all actions are governed by the laws and principles observed in nature. According to this view, people's actions, although accompanied by a feeling of freedom, are not in fact free. This section considers the soft determinist position, in which, as long as the moral agent did not face internal constraints concerning the choice at hand, the action could be free. Soft determinism is considered a compatibilist position, as the lack of alternative possibilities was considered compatible with freedom. Indeterminism, observing the inability of human reason to capture reality and all cause-and-effect chains in totality, asserts that the possibility of one event being outside of a cause-and-effect sequence is enough to assert the possibility of human freedom.

Key Terms

Actuality in Aristotelian thought, the level to which a being has realized its purpose.
Anatman a Buddhist concept of the self as no-self (as not retaining identity through time).
Compatibilism the view that a lack of freedom for the human moral agent is compatible with moral culpability for that same agent.
Cosmological argument a type of argument for the existence of God based upon consideration of cosmic causality.
Determinism the belief that human actions are governed by the laws of nature.
Dualism a view that posits two types of being in order to account fully for the nature of the thing under scrutiny.
Libertarianism within the problem of freedom, the view that human actions are freely chosen and outside of the causality that governs natural objects.
Metaphysics the field of philosophy concerned with identifying that which is real.
Monism the view that reality is comprised of one fundamental type of being.
Naturalism the rejection of any non-natural or appeal to supernatural explanatory concepts within philosophy.
Ontological argument an argument for the existence of God built upon a consideration of the attribute of God's existence.
Ontology a field within metaphysics dedicated to the study of being.
Particular when discussing being, the instance of a specific being.
Physicalism the notion that being is material or physical.
Pluralism asserts that fundamental reality consists of many types of being.
Potentiality in Aristotelian thought, the level to which a being's purpose might reach.
Substance the most enduring and underlying reality of a thing; from the Latin *substantial* or that which supports a thing.
Teleological argument an argument for the existence of God based upon the presence of ends (goals or purpose) as observed within nature.
Universal when discussing being, a reality or concept that accounts for the shared whatness of a specific type of being.

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Review Questions

6.1 Substance

1. Why does Thales believe that water is the most basic reality?
2. The Pre-Socratics were wrong in their various metaphysical explanations. Yet they are considered to have contributed significantly to the history of philosophy and metaphysics. How could they have contributed if they were wrong?
3. What inspired Kanad and his atomistic understanding of reality?
4. What does the Sun represent within Plato's Allegory of the Cave?

5. How does Aristotle connect the acorn and the oak? What do they share?

6.2 Self and Identity

6. Why does the "Ship of Theseus" present a problem for identity?
7. What does the term "Anatman" mean? What are the implications for the self?
8. What is the so-called "mind-body problem"?
9. What is the so-called "hard problem of consciousness?"
10. After reading Locke's "The Prince and the Pauper" thought experiment, do you agree that two have switched identities? Why or why not?

6.3 Cosmology and the Existence of God

11. The moral arguments for the existence of God rest upon the reality of objective values. Can a shared human interest preserve a sense of objective good (without needing a reference to a God)?
12. Anselm's argument posits a distinction between necessary being and contingent being. What is the difference and how did he argue in support of the reality of the distinction?
13. In Aquinas' arguments offered in this section, motion was not movement from one place to another but rather movement from potentiality to actuality, i.e, becoming. Using the acorn and the oak, describe what happens as a being moves from becoming to actuality within Aquinas's metaphysics. What role does purpose play in motion? What role does God play?
14. Why is the existence of suffering a problem for those who posit a God?

6.4 Free Will

15. What is determinism?
16. What is the difference between hard and soft determinism?
17. What is libertarianism?
18. Is determinism compatible with moral culpability? Why or why not?
19. Who was Jean Paul Sartre and what was his position concerning the free will problem?

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Epistemology 7

FIGURE 7.1 *The Thinker*, sculpted by French artist Auguste Rodin at the very beginning of the 20th century, has become a symbol of the intellect-centered pursuit of truth characteristic of the Western philosophical tradition. (credit: modification of "at Rodin museum" by Evgenii/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

CHAPTER OUTLINE

7.1 What Epistemology Studies
7.2 Knowledge
7.3 Justification
7.4 Skepticism
7.5 Applied Epistemology

INTRODUCTION Within any discipline of study, the acquisition of new knowledge is a primary goal. Theorists and researchers throughout academia seek to expand the body of knowledge associated with their discipline. Philosophers likewise aim for knowledge acquisition but are also concerned with the nature of knowledge itself. What *is* knowledge? Is there a limit to what we can know? How can we increase our knowledge without first understanding what knowledge is? **Epistemology** is the field within philosophy that focuses on questions pertaining to the nature and extent of human knowledge. This chapter seeks to provide a general understanding of the discipline of epistemology.

7.1 What Epistemology Studies

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Describe the study of epistemology.
- Explain how the counterexample method works in conceptual analysis.
- Explain the difference between a priori and a posteriori knowledge.
- Categorize knowledge as either propositional, procedural, or by acquaintance.

The word *epistemology* is derived from the Greek words *episteme*, meaning "knowledge," and *logos*, meaning "explanation" and translated in suffix form (*-logia*) as "the study of." Hence, epistemology is the study of knowledge. Epistemology focuses on what knowledge is as well as what types of knowledge there are. Because knowledge is a complex concept, epistemology also includes the study of the possibility of justification, the sources and nature of justification, the sources of beliefs, and the nature of truth.

How to Do Epistemology

Like other areas within philosophy, epistemology begins with the philosophical method of doubting and asking questions. What if everything we think we know is false? Can we be sure of the truth of our beliefs? What does it even mean for a belief to be true? Philosophers ask questions about the nature and possibility of knowledge and related concepts and then craft possible answers. But because of the nature of philosophical investigation, simply offering answers is never enough. Philosophers also try to identify problems with those answers, formulate possible solutions to those problems, and look for counterarguments. For example, in questioning the possibility of knowledge, philosophers imagine ways the world could be such that our beliefs are false and then try to determine whether we can rule out the possibility that the world really is this way. What if there's a powerful evil demon who feeds you all your conscious experiences, making you believe you are currently reading a philosophy text when in fact you are not? How could you rule this out? And if you can't rule it out, what does this say about the concept of knowledge?

In answering epistemological questions, theorists utilize arguments. Philosophers also offer counterexamples to assess theories and positions. And many philosophers utilize research to apply epistemological concerns to current issues and other areas of study. These are the tools used in epistemological investigation: arguments, conceptual analysis, counterexamples, and research.

Conceptual Analysis and Counterexamples

One of the main questions within epistemology pertains to the nature of the concepts of *knowledge*, *justification*, and *truth*. Analyzing what concepts mean is the practice of conceptual analysis. The idea is that we can answer questions like "What is knowledge?" and "What is truth?" by using our grasp of the relevant concepts. When investigating a concept, theorists attempt to identify the essential features of the concept, or its necessary conditions. So, when investigating *knowledge*, theorists work to identify features that all instances of knowledge share. But researchers are not only interested in isolating the necessary conditions for concepts such as knowledge; they also want to determine what set of conditions, when taken together, always amounts to knowledge—that is, its sufficient conditions. Conceptual analysis is an important element of doing philosophy, particularly epistemology. When doing conceptual analysis, theorists actively endeavor to come up with counterexamples to proposed definitions. A counterexample is a case that illustrates that a statement, definition, or argument is flawed.

CONNECTIONS

The introductory chapter provides an in-depth exploration of conceptual analysis. Counterexamples are discussed in the chapter on logic and reasoning.

Counterexamples to definitions in epistemology usually take the form of hypothetical cases—thought

experiments intended to show that a definition includes features that are either not necessary or not sufficient for the concept. If a counterexample works to defeat an analysis, then theorists will amend the analysis, offer a new definition, and start the process over again. The counterexample method is part of the philosophical practice of getting closer to an accurate account of a concept. Understanding the process of conceptual analysis is key to following the debate in epistemological theorizing about knowledge and justification.

For example, a theorist could contend that certainty is a necessary component of knowledge: if a person were not completely certain of a belief, then they could not be said to know the belief, even if the belief were true. To argue against this "certainty" theory, another philosopher could offer examples of true beliefs that aren't quite certain but are nevertheless considered to be knowledge. For example, take my current belief that there's a bird on a branch outside my office window. I believe this because I can see the bird and I trust my vision. Is it *possible* that I am wrong? Yes. I could be hallucinating, or the so-called bird may be a decoy (a fake stuffed bird). But let's grant that there is indeed a real bird on the branch and that "there is a bird on that branch" is true right now. Can I say that I *know* there is a bird on the branch, given that I believe it, it's true, and I have good reason to believe it? If yes, then the "certainty" thesis is flawed. Certainty is not necessary to have knowledge. This chapter includes several examples such as this, where a theorist offers an example to undermine a particular account of knowledge or justification.

Arguments

As with all areas of philosophy, epistemology relies on the use of argumentation. As explained in the chapter on logic and reasoning, argumentation involves offering reasons in support of a conclusion. The aforementioned counterexample method is a type of argumentation, the aim of which is to prove that an analysis or definition is flawed. Here is an example of a structured argument:

1. Testimonial injustice occurs when the opinions of individuals/groups are unfairly ignored or treated as untrustworthy.
2. If the testimony of women in criminal court cases is less likely to be believed than that of men, then this is unfair.
3. So, if the testimony of women in criminal court cases is less likely to be believed than that of men, this is a case of testimonial injustice.

The above argument links the general concept of testimonial injustice to a specific possible real-world scenario: women being treated as less believable by a jury. If women are considered less believable, then it is problematic.

Research

Notice that the above argument does not say that women are in fact considered less believable. To establish this thesis, philosophers can offer further arguments. Often, arguments utilize empirical research. If a theorist can find studies that indicate that women are treated less seriously than men in general, then they can argue that this attitude would extend to the courtroom. Philosophers often search for and utilize research from other areas of study. The research used can be wide-ranging. Epistemologists may use research from psychology, sociology, economics, medicine, or criminal justice. In the social and hard sciences, the goal is to accurately *describe* trends and phenomena. And this is where philosophy differs from the sciences—for epistemology, the goal is not only to describe but also to prescribe. Philosophers can argue that unjustifiably discounting the opinions of groups is bad and to be avoided. Hence, epistemology is a normative discipline.

The Normative Nature of Epistemology

This chapter began with the observation that knowledge is the goal of many disciplines. If knowledge is a goal, then it is desirable. Humans do not like being proven wrong in their beliefs. Possessing justification in the form of reasons and support for beliefs makes a person less likely to be wrong. Hence, both justification and knowledge are valuable. If knowledge is valuable and there are proper methods of justification that we should

follow, then epistemology turns out to be a *normative* discipline. Normativity is the assumption that certain actions, beliefs, or other mental states are good and ought to be pursued or realized. One way to think of epistemology is that in describing what knowledge, truth, and justification are, it further *prescribes* the proper way to form beliefs. And we do treat knowledge as valuable and further judge others according to the justification for their beliefs.

A Preliminary Look at Knowledge

Because the concept of knowledge is so central to epistemological theorizing, it is necessary to briefly discuss knowledge before proceeding. Knowledge enjoys a special status among beliefs and mental states. To say that a person knows something directly implies that the person is not wrong, so knowledge implies truth. But knowledge is more than just truth. Knowledge also implies effort—that the person who has knowledge did more than just form a belief; they somehow *earned* it. Often, in epistemology, this is understood as justification. These features of knowledge are important to keep in mind as we continue. First, we will look at the different ways of knowing.

Ways of Knowing

The distinction between a priori knowledge and a posteriori knowledge reveals something important about the possible ways a person can gain knowledge. Most knowledge requires experience in the world, although some knowledge without experience is also possible. **A priori knowledge** is knowledge that can be gained using reason alone. The acquisition of a priori knowledge does not depend on experience. One way to think of a priori knowledge is that it is logically *prior* to experience, which does not necessarily mean that it is always prior in time to experience. Knowledge that exists before experience (prior in time) is innate knowledge, or knowledge that one is somehow born with. Theorists disagree over whether innate knowledge exists. But many theorists agree that people can come to know things by merely thinking. For example, one can know that $4 \times 2 = 8$ without needing to search for outside evidence.

A posteriori knowledge is knowledge that can only be gained through experience. Because a posteriori knowledge depends on experience, it is empirical. Something is empirical if it is based on and verifiable through observation and experience, so empirical knowledge is knowledge gained from sense perception. If my belief that there's a bird on the branch outside my window is knowledge, it would be a posteriori knowledge. The difference between a posteriori and a priori knowledge is that the former requires experience and the latter does not.

While a priori knowledge does not require experience, this does not mean that it must always be reached using reason alone. A priori knowledge can be learned through experience. Think of mathematical truths. While it is possible to figure out multiplication using thinking alone, many first understand it empirically by memorizing multiplication tables and only later come to understand why the operations work the way they do.

FIGURE 7.2 Some facts that students are asked to memorize in school, such as multiplication tables, fall into the category of a priori knowledge—knowledge gained through reason alone. Knowledge about the shortest route to the nearest restroom, while possibly informed by looking at a map, typically is grounded in a posteriori knowledge—knowledge that can only be gained through experience. (credit: modification of work "Ventura Elementary-12" by US Department of Education/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Things You Can Know: Types of Knowledge

Philosophers classify knowledge not only by source but also by type. **Propositional knowledge** is knowledge of propositions or statements. A proposition or **statement** is a declarative sentence with a truth value—that is, a sentence that is either true or false. If one knows a statement, that means that the statement is true. And true statements about the world are usually called facts. Hence, propositional knowledge is best thought of as knowledge of facts. Facts about the world are infinite. It is a fact that the square root of 9 is 3. It is a fact that Earth is round. It is a fact that the author of this chapter is five feet, one inch tall, and it is a fact that Nairobi is the capital of Kenya. Often, philosophers describe propositional knowledge as "knowledge that," and if you look at the structure of the previous sentences, you can see why. Someone can *know that* Nairobi is the capital of Kenya, and "Nairobi is the capital of Kenya" is a true proposition. Propositional knowledge can be a priori or a posteriori. Knowledge of our own height is clearly a posteriori because we cannot know this without measuring ourselves. But knowing that 3 is the square root of 9 is a priori, given that it's possible for a person to reason their way to this belief. Propositional knowledge is the primary focus of traditional epistemology. In the following sections of this chapter, keep in mind that *knowledge* refers to propositional knowledge.

While traditional epistemology focuses on propositional knowledge, other types of knowledge exist. **Procedural knowledge** is best understood as know-how. Procedural knowledge involves the ability to perform some task successfully. While a person may *know that* a bicycle stays erect using centrifugal force and forward momentum caused by peddling, and that the forces of friction and air resistance will affect their speed, this does not mean that they *know how* to ride a bicycle. Having propositional knowledge concerning a task does not guarantee that one has procedural knowledge of that task. Indeed, one could be a physicist who studies the forces involved in keeping a bike upright, and therefore know many facts about bicycles, but still not know how to ride a bike.

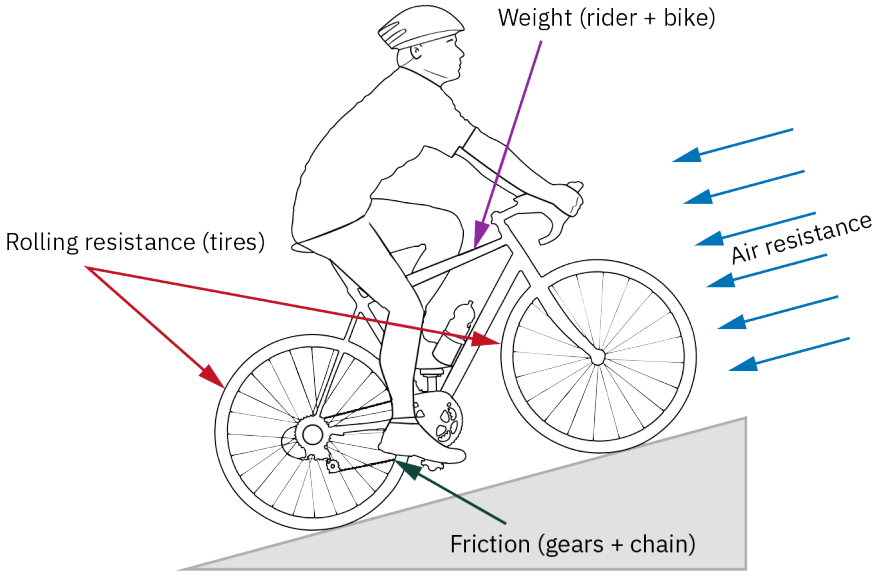

FIGURE 7.3 Several forces are at work when a person rides a bicycle. Understanding the physics of cycling does not guarantee that one knows how to ride a bicycle. (attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY 4.0 license)

Knowledge by acquaintance is knowledge gained from *direct* experience. A person knows something by acquaintance when they are directly aware of that thing. This awareness comes from direct perception using one's senses. For example, I have knowledge by acquaintance of pain when I am in pain. I am directly aware of the pain, so I cannot be mistaken about the existence of the pain.

British philosopher Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) is credited with first articulating a distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and propositional knowledge, which he called *knowledge by description* (Russell 1910–1911). According to Russell, knowledge by acquaintance is a *direct* form of knowledge. A person has knowledge by acquaintance when they have direct cognitive awareness of it, which is awareness absent of inference. That knowledge by acquaintance is not the product of inference is very important. Inference is a stepwise process of reasoning that moves from one idea to another. When I feel pain, I am acquainted with that pain without thinking to myself, "I am in pain." No inference is required on my part for me to know of my pain. I am simply aware of it. It is the directness of this knowledge that differentiates it from all other a posteriori knowledge. All knowledge by acquaintance is a posteriori, but not all a posteriori knowledge is knowledge by acquaintance. My awareness of pain is knowledge by acquaintance, yet when I infer that "something is causing me pain," this belief is propositional.

Russell's distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and propositional knowledge, if accurate, has important implications in epistemology. It shows that inference is used even in cases of beliefs that people think are obvious: ordinary beliefs based on perception. Russell thought that one can only have knowledge by acquaintance of one's sensations and cannot have direct awareness of the objects that could be the cause of those sensations. This is a significant point. When I see the bird on a branch outside my office window, I am not immediately aware of the bird itself. Rather, I am directly aware of my perceptual experience of the bird—what philosophers call *sense data*. Sense data are sensations gained from perceptual experience; they are the raw data obtained through the senses (seeing, smelling, feeling, etc.). One's perceptual experience is of sense data, not of the objects that could be causing that sense data. People infer the existence of external objects that they believe cause their perceptual experiences. Russell's view implies that people always use reasoning to access the external world. I have knowledge by acquaintance of my perceptual experience of seeing a bird; I then infer ever so quickly (and often unconsciously) that there is a bird on the branch, which is propositional knowledge.

Not all philosophers think that experience of the external world is mediated through sense data. Some philosophers contend that people can directly perceive objects in the external world. But Russell's theory

introduces an important possibility in epistemological thinking: that there is a gap between one's experience of the world and the world itself. This potential gap opens up the possibility for error. The gap between experience and the world is used by some thinkers to argue that knowledge of the external world is impossible.

Table 7.1 summarizes the types of knowledge discussed in this section.

Type	Description	Examples
Propositional knowledge	Knowledge of propositions or statements; knowledge of facts	Examples are infinite: "I know that..." the Earth is round, two is an even number, lions are carnivores, grass is green, etc.
Procedural knowledge	"Know-how"; understanding how to perform some task or procedure	Knowing how to ride a bicycle, do a cartwheel, knit, fix a flat tire, dribble a basketball, plant a tree, etc.
Knowledge by acquaintance	Knowledge gained from direct experience	Perception of physical sensations, such as pain, heat, cold, hunger; important to differentiate between the knowledge by acquaintance that is the sensation (e.g., a physical sensation of feeling cold) and related inferences, such as "the air temperature must be dropping," which is propositional knowledge.

TABLE 7.1 Types of Knowledge

Truth

Philosophers who argue that knowledge of the external world is impossible do so based on the idea that one can never be certain of the truth of one's external world beliefs. But what does it mean to claim that a belief is true? People are sometimes tempted to believe that truth is relative. A person may say things like "Well, that's just their truth" as if something can be true for one person and not for others. Yet for statements and propositions, there is only one truth value. One person can believe that Earth is flat while another can believe is it round, but only one of them is right. People do not each personally get to decide whether a statement is true. Furthermore, just because one has no way of determining whether a statement is true or false does not mean that there is no truth to the matter. For example, you probably don't quite know how to go about determining the exact number of blades of grass on the White House lawn, but this does not mean that there is no true answer to the question. It is true that there is a specific number of blades of grass at this moment, even if you cannot know what that number is.

But what does it mean for a statement to be true? At first, this question may seem silly. The meaning of truth is obvious. True things are correct, factual, and accurate. But to say that something is correct, factual, or accurate is just another way of saying it is true. *Factual* just means "true." Creating a noncircular and illuminating account of truth is a difficult task. Nevertheless, philosophers attempt to explain truth. Philosophers often are curious about and question concepts that most people accept as obvious, and truth is no exception.

Theories of truth and the debate over them are a rather complicated matter not suitable for an introductory text. Instead, let's briefly consider two ways of understanding truth in order to gain a general understanding of what truth is. Aristotle claimed that a true statement is one that says of something that *it is what it is* or that *it is not what it is not* (Aristotle 1989). A possible interpretation of Aristotle's idea is that "A is B" is true if and only if A is B. Notice that this simply removes the quotations around the proposition. The idea is simple: the statement "Dogs are mammals" is true if dogs are mammals.

Another way of understanding truth is as a correspondence between statements and the world. The correspondence theory of truth proposes that a statement is true if and only if that statement corresponds to some fact (David 2015). A fact is a state of affairs in the world—an arrangement of objects and properties in reality—so the statement "The dog is under the bed" is true if and only if there exists in the world a dog and a bed and the dog is related to the bed by being underneath it. The correspondence theory of truth makes truth a relation between statements and the world. If statements are appropriately related to the world—if they correspond to the world—then those statements can be said to be true.

7.2 Knowledge

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify and explain the elements of Plato's traditional account of knowledge.
- Describe the Gettier problem.
- Recall a Gettier case and explain how it is a counterexample to the traditional account of knowledge.
- Identify and explain a way of thinking that attempts to solve the Gettier problem.

What does it mean to say that one *knows* something? Knowledge is an important concept in all areas of thought. Knowledge is the goal and therefore enjoys a special status. Investigating the nature of knowledge reveals the importance of other concepts that are key to epistemological theorizing—justification in particular.

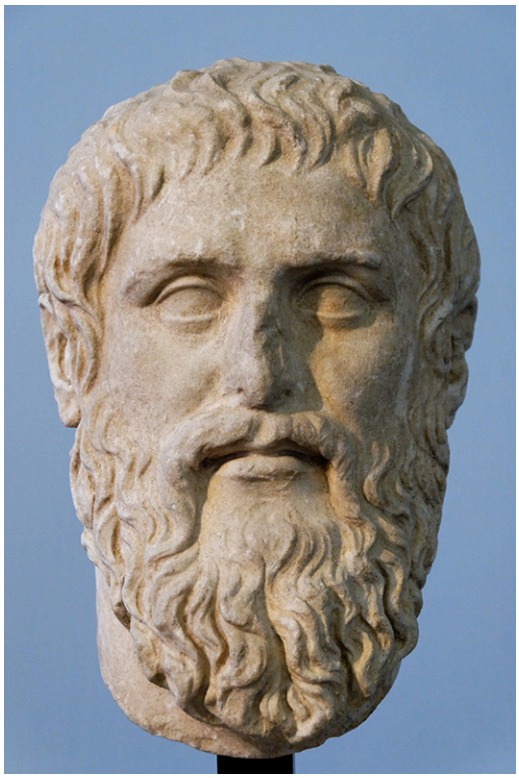

FIGURE 7.4 This is a copy of a sculpture of Plato completed in approximately 370 BCE. Plato is credited with what is termed the *traditional account of knowledge*, which explains knowledge as justified true belief. (credit: "Plato Silanion Musei Capitolini MC1377" by Marie-Lan Nguyen/Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 2.5)

Plato and the Traditional Account of Knowledge

Plato, one of the most important of the Greek philosophers, hypothesized that knowledge is justified true belief. Plato's analysis is known as the traditional account of knowledge. Plato's definition is that a person S knows proposition P if and only if

1. P is true,
2. S believes P, and
3. S is justified in believing P (Plato 1997b).

Plato's hypothesis on knowledge, often referred to as the JTB account (because it is "justified true belief"), is highly intuitive. To say "John knows P, but he does not believe P" sounds wrong. In order to know something, a subject must first believe it. And one also cannot say "Ali knows P, but P is false." A person simply cannot have knowledge of false things. Knowledge requires truth. Last, someone should not claim to know P if they have no reason to believe P (a reason to believe being justification for P).

Problems with the Traditional Account of Knowledge

Amazingly, Plato's view that knowledge is justified true belief was generally accepted until the 20th century (over 2,000 years!). But once this analysis was questioned, a flurry of developments occurred within epistemology in the latter half of the 20th century. This section discusses the counterexample method at play in the dialectic concerning what knowledge is. Plato's JTB analysis was the first to come under scrutiny.

In 1963, American philosopher Edmund Gettier (1927–2021) published a short paper titled "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?," which upended the JTB canon in Western philosophy. Gettier presents two counterexamples to Plato's analysis of knowledge. In these counterexamples, a person seems to have a justified true belief, yet they do not seem to have knowledge. While Gettier is credited with the first popular counterexample to the JTB account, he was not the first philosopher to articulate a counterexample that calls into question Plato's analysis. But because Gettier published the first influential account, any example that seems to undermine Plato's JTB account of knowledge is called a **Gettier case**. Gettier cases illustrate the inadequacy of the JTB account—a problem referred to as the *Gettier problem*.

Dharmakīrti's Mirage

The earliest known Gettier case, long predating the term, was conceived by the eighth century Indian Buddhist philosopher Dharmakīrti. Dharmakīrti's case asks one to imagine a weary nomad traveling across the desert in search of water (Dreyfus 1997). The traveler crests a mountain and sees what appears to be an oasis in the valley below, and so comes to believe that there is water in the valley. However, the oasis is just a mirage. Yet there is water in the valley, but it is just beneath the surface of the land where the mirage is. The traveler is justified in believing there is water in the valley due to sensory experience. Furthermore, it is true that there is water in the valley. However, the traveler's belief does not seem to count as knowledge. Dharmakīrti's conclusion is that the traveler cannot be said to know there is water in the valley because the traveler's reason for believing that there is water in the valley is an illusory mirage.

Russell's Case

Perhaps you've heard the phrase "Even a broken clock is right twice a day." The next case relies on this fact about broken clocks. In 1948, Bertrand Russell offered a case in which a man looks up at a stopped clock at exactly the correct time:

> There is the man who looks at a clock which is not going, though he thinks it is, and who happens to look at it at the moment when it is right; this man acquires a true belief as to the time of day, but cannot be said to have knowledge. (Russell 1948, 154)

Imagine that the clock the man looks at is known for its reliability. Hence, the man is justified in believing that the time is, for example, 4:30. And, as the cases supposes, *it is true* that it is 4:30. However, given that the clock is not working and that the man happens to look up at one of the two times a day that the clock is correct, it is only a matter of luck that his belief happens to be true. Hence, Russell concludes that the man cannot be said to know the correct time.

Fake Barn Country

The last Gettier case we will look at is from American philosopher Carl Ginet (b. 1932) (Goldman 1976). Henry is driving through a bucolic area of farmland and barns. What he doesn't realize, however, is that the area is currently being used as a movie set, and all the barns save one are actually barn facades. While looking at one of the barns, Henry says to himself, "That is a barn." Luckily for Henry, the one he points to is the one true barn in the area. Again, all the conditions in Plato's analysis of knowledge are met. It is true that Henry is looking at a real barn, and he believes it is a barn. Furthermore, he has come to this belief utilizing justifiable means—he is using his vision, in normal lighting, to identify a common object (a barn). Yet one cannot reasonably say that Henry knows the barn is a barn because he could have, by chance, accidentally identified one of the fake barns as a true barn. He fortunately happens to pick the one true barn.

Table 7.2 summarizes the Gettier cases discussed in this chapter.

Case	Proposed by	Description	How does this challenge Plato's characterization of knowledge as justified, true belief?
Dharmakīrti's Mirage	Eighth century Indian Buddhist philosopher Dharmakīrti	A person travelling in the dessert sees a mirage of a watery oasis in a valley and concludes that there is water in the valley. In fact, there is water in the valley, but it is beneath the surface and not visible.	The traveler cannot be said to know there is water in the valley because the traveler's reason for believing that there is water in the valley is an illusory mirage.
Russell's Case	British philosopher Bertrand Russell (1872 – 1970)	A man looks at a stopped clock at exactly the right time and correctly concludes the actual time.	It is only a matter of luck that the man's belief about what time it is happens to be true. Hence, the man cannot be said to know the correct time.
Fake Barn Country	American philosopher Carl Ginet (b. 1932)	A person driving through a landscape that is being used as a movie and is full of fake barns happens to look at the one barn that is real and conclude, "this is barn."	The person cannot reasonably be said to know the barn is a real barn because they could easily have identified one of the fake barns as a real barn and been wrong.

TABLE 7.2 Gettier Cases

Fixing Plato's Traditional Account of Knowledge

Gettier cases demonstrate that Plato's traditional account of knowledge as justified true belief is wrong. Specifically, Gettier cases show that a belief being true and justified is not sufficient for that belief to count as knowledge. In all the cases discussed, the subject seems to have a justified true belief but not knowledge. Notice that this does not mean that belief, truth, or justification is not *necessary* for knowledge. Indeed, when speaking of propositional knowledge, all philosophers grant that belief and truth are necessary conditions for knowledge. A person cannot be said to know a proposition if they do not believe that proposition. And clearly, if a belief is to count as knowledge, then that believe simply cannot be false. Accordingly, attempts to solve the Gettier problem do one of two things: either they replace the justification condition with something more robust, or they add a fourth condition to JTB to make the account sufficient.

No False Premises

In Dharmakīrti's case, the nomad believes there is water in the valley based on the false belief that a mirage is an oasis. And in Russell's case, the man bases his true belief about the time on the false belief that the clock he's looking at is working. In both cases, the inference that leads to the true belief passes through false premises. In response to this fact, American philosopher Gilbert Harman (1928–2021) suggested adding a condition to the JTB account that he termed "no false lemmas" (Harman 1973). A false lemma is a false premise, or step in the reasoning process. Harman's fourth condition is that a person's belief cannot be based on an inference that uses false premises. According to Harman, S knows P if and only if (1) P is true, (2) S believes P, (3) S is justified in believing P, and (4) S did not infer P from any falsehoods.

Harman theorized that many counterexamples to the traditional account share a similar feature: the truth of the belief is not appropriately connected to the evidence used to deduce that belief. Going back to Dharmakīrti's case, what makes the statement "There's water in the valley" true is the fact that there is water below the surface. However, the nomad comes to believe that there is water based on the mistaken belief that a mirage is an oasis, so what makes the belief true is not connected to the reason the nomad believes it. If Harman's condition that the reasoning that leads to belief cannot pass through false steps is added, then the nomad's belief no longer counts as knowledge.

Harman's emendation explains why the nomad does not have knowledge and accounts for the intuition that the man in Russell's case does not actually know what time it is. However, this cannot take care of all Gettier cases. Consider the case of Henry in fake barn country. Henry comes to believe he is looking at a barn based on his perceptual experience of the barn in front of him. And Henry does look at a real barn. He does not reason through any false premises, such as "All the structures on my drive are barns." His inference flows directly from his perceptual experience of a real barn. Yet it is a matter of luck that Henry isn't looking at one of the many barn facades in the area, so his belief still does not seem to count as knowledge. Because Harman's account is vulnerable to the barn counterexample, it does not solve the Gettier problem.

Ruling Out Defeaters and Alternatives

While driving through fake barn country, Henry happens to form the belief "That is a barn" when looking at the only real barn in the area. While Henry's belief is not based on false premises, there still seems to be something wrong with it. Why? The problem is that certain facts about Henry's environment (that it is filled with barn facades), if known, would undermine his confidence in the belief. That the area is predominantly filled with barn facades is what is known as a *defeater* because it serves to defeat the justification for his belief. Contemporary American philosophers Keith Lehrer and Thomas Paxson Jr. suggest that justified true belief is knowledge as long as there are no existing defeaters of the belief (Lehrer and Paxson 1969). S has knowledge that P if and only if (1) P is true, (2) S believes P, (3) S is justified in believing P, and (4) there exist no defeaters for P. The added fourth condition means that there cannot exist evidence that, if believed by S, would undermine S's justification.

The "no defeaters" condition solves all three Gettier cases discussed so far because in each case, there exists evidence that, if possessed by the subject, would undermine their justification. Henry cannot be said to know he's looking at a barn because of the evidence that most of the barns in the area are fake, and Russell's man doesn't know the time because the clock is stopped. The "no defeaters" condition thus helps solve many Gettier cases. However, we now need a thorough account of when evidence counts as a defeater. We are told that a defeater is evidence that *would* undermine a person's justification but not how it does this. It cannot be that all evidence that weakens a belief is a defeater because this would make knowledge attainment much more difficult. For many of our justified true beliefs, there exists some evidence that we are unaware of that could weaken our justification. For example, we get many beliefs from other people. Research indicates that people tell an average of one lie per day (DePaulo et al. 1996; Serota, Levine, and Boster 2010). So when someone tells you something in conversation, often it is true that the person has lied once today. Is the evidence that a person has lied once today enough evidence to undermine your justification for believing what

they tell you?

Notice that because a defeater is evidence that would undermine a person's justification, what counts as a defeater depends on what justification is. Of the theories of knowledge examined so far, all of them treat justification as basic. They state that a belief must be justified but not how to measure or determine justification.

The Problem with Justification

The traditional analysis of knowledge explains that knowledge is justified true belief. But even if we accept this definition, we could still wonder whether a true belief is knowledge because we may wonder if it is justified. What counts as justification? *Justification* is a rather broad concept. Instead of simply stating that justification is necessary for knowledge, perhaps a thorough account of knowledge ought to instead spell out what this means. The next section looks more deeply at how to understand justification and how some theorists suggest replacing the justification condition in order to solve the Gettier problem.

7.3 Justification

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain what justification means in the context of epistemology.
- Explain the difference between internal and external theories of justification.
- Describe the similarities and differences between coherentism and foundationalism.
- Classify beliefs according to their source of justification.

Much of epistemology in the latter half of the 20th century was devoted to the question of justification. Questions about what knowledge is often boil down to questions about justification. When we wonder whether knowledge of the external world is possible, what we really question is whether we can ever be justified in accepting as true our beliefs about the external world. And as previously discussed, determining whether a defeater for knowledge exists requires knowing what could undermine justification.

We will start with two general points about justification. First, justification makes beliefs more likely to be true. When we think we are justified in believing something, we think we have reason to believe it is true. How justification does this and how to think about the reasons will be discussed below. Second, justification does not always guarantee truth. Justification makes beliefs *more likely* to be true, which implies that justified beliefs could still be false. The fallibility of justification will be addressed at the end of this section.

The Nature of Justification

Justification makes a belief more likely to be true by providing reasons in favor of the truth of the belief. A natural way to think of justification is that it provides *logical* support. Logic is the study of reasoning, so logical support is strong reasoning. If I am reasoning correctly, I am justified in believing that my dog is a mammal because all dogs are mammals. And I am justified in believing that $3\sqrt{1332} = 444$ if I did the derivation correctly. But what if I used a calculator to derive the result? Must I also have reasons for believing the calculator is reliable before being justified in believing the answer? Or can the mere fact that calculators are reliable justify my belief in the answer? These questions get at an important distinction between the possible sources of justification—whether justification is internal or external to the mind of the believer.

Internalism and Externalism

Theories of justification can be divided into two different types: internal and external. **Internalism** is the view that justification for belief is determined solely by factors internal to a subject's mind. The initial appeal of internalism is obvious. A person's beliefs are internal to them, and the process by which they form beliefs is also an internal mental process. If you discover that someone engaged in wishful thinking when they came to the belief that the weather would be nice today, even if it turns out to be true, you can determine that they did

not know that it would be nice today. You will believe they did not have that knowledge because they had no reasons or evidence on which to base their belief. When you make this determination, you reference that person's mental state (the lack of reasons).

But what if a person had good reasons when they formed a belief but cannot currently recall what those reasons were? For example, I believe that Aristotle wrote about unicorns, although I cannot remember my reasons for believing this. I assume I learned it from a scholarly text (perhaps from reading Aristotle himself), which is a reliable source. Assuming I did gain the belief from a reliable source, am I still justified given that I cannot *now* recall what that source was? Internalists contend that a subject must have cognitive access to the reasons for belief in order to have justification. To be justified, the subject must be able to immediately or upon careful reflection recall their reasons. Hence, according to internalism, I am not justified in believing that Aristotle wrote about unicorns.

On the other hand, an externalist would say my belief about Aristotle is justified because of the facts about where I got the belief. **Externalism** is the view that at least some part of justification can rely on factors that are not internal or accessible to the mind of the believer. If I once had good reasons, then I am still justified, even if I cannot now cite those reasons. Externalist theories about justification usually focus on the sources of justification, which include not only inference but also testimony and perception. The fact that a source is reliable is what matters. To return to the calculator example, the mere fact that a calculator is reliable can function as justification for forming beliefs based on its outputs.

An Example of Internalism: Ruling Out Relevant Alternatives

Recall that the "no defeaters" theory of knowledge requires that there exist no evidence that, if known by the subject, would undermine their justification. The evidence is not known by the subject, which makes the evidence external. The fourth condition could instead be an internal condition. Rather than require that there exist no evidence, one could say that S needs to rule out any relevant alternatives to their belief. The "no relevant alternatives" theory adds to the traditional account of knowledge the requirement that a person rule out any competing hypotheses for their belief. *Ruling out* refers to a subject's conscious internal mental state, which makes this condition internal in nature. Like the "no defeaters" condition, the "no relevant alternatives" condition is meant to solve the Gettier problem. It does so by broadening the understanding of justification so that justification requires ruling out relevant alternatives. However, it still doesn't solve the Gettier problem. Returning to the barn example, the possibility that there are barn facades is not a relevant alternative to the belief that one is looking at a barn. Unless one is in Hollywood, one would not think that facades are a distinct possibility.

An Example of Externalism: Causal Theories

Externalists hold that a subject need not have access to why their true beliefs are justified. But some theorists, such as American philosopher Alvin Goldman (b. 1938), argue that the justification condition in the account of knowledge should be replaced with a more substantial and thorough condition that effectively explains what justification *is*. Goldman argues that beliefs are justified if they are produced by reliable belief-forming processes (Goldman 1979). Importantly, it is the process that confers justification, not one's ability to recount that process. Goldman's account of knowledge is that a true belief is the result of a reliable belief-forming process.

Goldman's theory is called **historical reliabilism**—*historical* because the view focuses on the past processes that led to a belief, and *reliabilism* because, according to the theory, processes that reliably produce true beliefs confer justification on those beliefs. Reliable belief-forming processes include perception, memory, strong or valid reasoning, and introspection. These processes are functional operations whose outputs are beliefs and other cognitive states. For example, reasoning is an operation that takes as input prior beliefs and hypotheses and outputs new beliefs, and memory is a process that "takes as input beliefs or experiences at an earlier time and generates as output beliefs at a later time" (Goldman 1979, 12). Usually, memory is reliable in

the sense that it is more likely to produce true beliefs than false ones.

Because Goldman's approach is externalist, the justification-conferring process need not be cognitively accessible to the believer. His view has also been called *causal* because he focuses on the causes of belief. If a belief is caused in the right way (by a reliable belief-forming processes), then it is justified. One virtue of this approach is that it accounts for the intuition that someone could have a justified belief without being able to cite all the reasons for holding that belief. However, this view is not without fault. The original impetus behind revising Plato's traditional JTB analysis was to solve the Gettier problem, and Goldman's account cannot do this. Consider again Henry and the barn. Henry looks at a real barn and forms the belief that it is a barn. Henry's belief that he is looking at a barn is caused by a reliable belief-forming process (perception), so according to Goldman's account, Henry does have knowledge. Yet many philosophers think that Henry doesn't have knowledge given the lucky nature of his belief.

Theories of Justification

So far, we have looked at theories of justification as applied to individual beliefs. But beliefs are not always justified in isolation. Usually, the justification of one belief depends on the justification of other beliefs. I must be justified in trusting my perception to then be justified in believing that there is a bird outside of my office window. Thus, some theories focus on the structure of justification—that is, how a system or set of beliefs is structured. The theories on the structure of justification aim to illustrate how the structure of a system of beliefs leads to knowledge, or true beliefs.

Foundationalism

Much of what a subject justifiably believes is inferred from other justified beliefs. For example, Ella justifiably believes the Battle of Hastings occurred in 1066 because her history professor told her this. But the justification for her belief doesn't end there. Why is Ella justified in believing that her history professor is a good source? Furthermore, why is she even justified in believing that her history professor told her this? To the second question, Ella would reply that she is justified because she remembers her professor telling her. But then one can ask, Why is the reliance on memory justifiable? Justified beliefs rest on other justified beliefs. The question is whether the chain of justification ever ends. Foundationalists hold that justification must terminate at some point.

Foundationalism is the view that all justified beliefs ultimately rest on a set of foundational, basic beliefs. Consider a house. Most of what people see of a house is the superstructure—the main floor, columns, and roof. But the house must rest on a foundation that stabilizes and props up the parts of the house people can see. According to foundationalists, most beliefs are like the superstructure of the house—the frame, roof, and walls. The majority of people's beliefs are inferential beliefs, or beliefs based on inference. And according to foundationalism, all beliefs rest on a foundation of basic beliefs (Hasan and Fumerton 2016). One of Ella's foundational beliefs could be that her memory is reliable. If this belief is justified, then all of Ella's justified beliefs derived from memory will rest on this foundational belief.

But what justifies basic beliefs? If basic beliefs function so as to justify other beliefs, then they too must be justified. If the foundation is not justified, then none of the beliefs that rest on it are justified. According to foundationalism, the beliefs that make up the foundation are justified beliefs, but they are justified *non-inferential* beliefs. Foundational beliefs must be non-inferential (not based on inference) because if they were inferential, they would get their justification from another source, and they would no longer be foundational. Foundational beliefs are supposed to be where the justification stops.

The strongest objection against foundationalism targets the nature of basic beliefs. What is a basic belief, and what are the reasons for thinking basic beliefs are justified? French philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650) was a foundationalist, and he held that people's basic beliefs are infallible (Descartes 1986). An infallible belief is one that cannot be mistaken. Clearly, if the foundation is made of beliefs that cannot be mistaken, then it is justified. But why think that foundational beliefs cannot be mistaken? Descartes thought that whatever a

subject can clearly and distinctly conceive of in their mind, they can take to be true because God would not allow them to be fooled. As an illustration of how some beliefs might be infallible, recall that knowledge by acquaintance is direct and unmediated knowledge. Acquaintance is unmediated by other ways of knowing, including inference, so beliefs gained though acquaintance are non-inferential, which is what the foundationalist wants. Beliefs gained via acquaintance are also justified, which is why Russell deems them *knowledge*. As an example, imagine that you see a green orb in your field of vision. You may not know whether the green orb is due to something in your environment, but you cannot be mistaken about the fact that you visually experience the green orb. Hence, knowledge by acquaintance is a possible candidate for the foundation of beliefs.

Coherence

Coherentism is the view that justification, and thus knowledge, is structured not like a house but instead like a web. More precisely, coherentism argues that a belief is justified if it is embedded in a network of coherent, mutually supported beliefs. Think of a web. Each strand in a web is not that strong by itself, but when the strands are connected to multiple other strands and woven together, the result is a durable network. Similarly, a subject's justification for individual beliefs, taken alone, is not that strong. But when those beliefs are situated in a system of many mutually supporting beliefs, the justification grows stronger. Justification emerges from the structure of a belief system (BonJour 1985).

Within foundationalism, the justifications for some beliefs can proceed in a completely linear fashion. Ella believes the Battle of Hastings occurred in 1066 because her professor told her, and she believes that her professor told her because she remembers it and thinks her memory is justifiable. One belief justifies another, which justifies another, and so on, until the foundation is reached. Yet very few beliefs are actually structured in this manner. People often look for support for their beliefs in multiple other beliefs while making sure that they are also consistent. Figure 7.5 offers a simplified visual of the two different structures of belief.

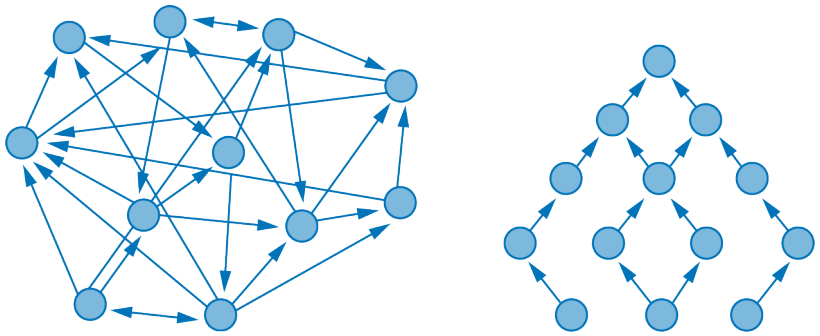

FIGURE 7.5 There are two different ways of conceptualizing belief structures: as a web of interconnected beliefs (left) and as a linear structure (right) in which foundational beliefs justify other beliefs, one after the other in a line. (attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY 4.0 license)

Often, when we think of the justification for our beliefs, we don't just consider the original source of a belief. We also think about how that belief fits into our other beliefs. If a belief does not cohere with other beliefs, then its justification appears weak, even if the initial justification for the belief seemed strong. Suppose you need to go to the bank, and on your way out the door, your roommate tells you not to waste your time because they drove by the bank earlier and it was closed. Your roommate's testimony seems like enough reason to believe the bank is closed. However, it is a weekday, and the bank is always open during the week. Furthermore, it is not a holiday. You check the bank's website, and it states that the bank is open. Hence, the belief that the bank is closed does not cohere with your other beliefs. The lack of coherence with other beliefs weakens the justification for believing what your otherwise reliable roommate tells you.

To be fair, foundationalists also consider coherence of beliefs in determining justification. However, as long as

a belief is consistent with other beliefs and rests on the foundation, it is justified. But consistency is not the same thing as logical support. The beliefs that there is a bird in that tree, it is November, and a person is hungry are all consistent with one another, but they do not support one another. And for coherentists, logical consistency alone does not make a system of belief justified. Justification arises from a system of beliefs that mutually reinforce one another. Support can happen in many ways: beliefs can deductively entail one another, they can inductively entail one another, and they can cohere by explaining one another. Suppose I am trying to remember where my friend Faruq is from. I believe he is from Tennessee but am not sure. But then I remember that Faruq often wears a University of Tennessee hat and has a Tennessee Titans sticker on this car. He also speaks with a slight southern twang and has told stories about hiking in the Smoky Mountains, which are partially in Tennessee. That Faruq is from Tennessee can explain these further beliefs. Note that I can get more assurance for my belief that Faruq is from Tennessee by considering my other beliefs about him. When beliefs mutually reinforce one another, they acquire more justification.

Coherentism more naturally reflects the actual structure of belief systems, and it does so without relying on the notion of basic, justified, non-inferential beliefs. However, coherentism has weaknesses. One objection to coherentism is that it can result in circularity. Within a system of beliefs, any belief can play a roundabout role in its own justification. Figure 7.6 illustrates this problem.

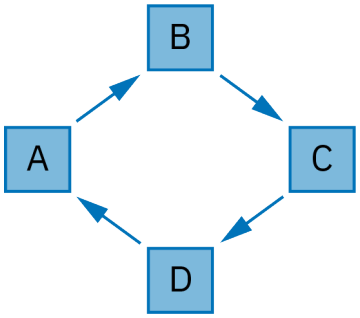

FIGURE 7.6 The circularly problem: Belief A entails belief B, and belief B entails belief C. Belief C entails belief D, and belief D entails belief A. The beliefs are coherent, and all support one another. However, each plays a role in its own justification. D justifies A, but A justifies D through B and C. Circularity results in the beliefs not having any support at all. If D essentially justifies itself, then it has no justification. (attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY 4.0 license)

Another objection to coherentism is called the isolation objection. A network of beliefs can mutually explain and support one another, thus giving them justification. However, it is not guaranteed that these beliefs are connected to reality. Imagine a person, Dinah, who is trapped in a highly detailed virtual reality. Dinah has been trapped for so long that she believes her experiences are of the real world. Because of the detailed nature of Dinah's virtual reality, most of her beliefs are consistent with and support one another, just as your beliefs about the real world do. As long as Dinah's beliefs are consistent and coherent, she will be justified in believing that her experience is of real objects and real people. So Dinah has justification even though all her beliefs concerning the reality of her world are false. Dinah's situation reveals an important feature of justification: while justification makes beliefs more likely to be true, it does not always guarantee that they are true. Justification is often fallible.

The Fallible Nature of Justification

The sources of beliefs are varied. Perception, reason, hope, faith, and wishful thinking can all result in belief. Yet just because something results in belief, that does not mean that the belief is justified. Beliefs that result from wishful thinking are not justified because wishful thinking does not make a belief more likely to be true. A source of justification is a *reliable* basis for belief. Yet while justification is a reliable source, notice that this does not mean that the belief is true; it just makes it more likely. Justified beliefs can turn out to be false. In order to drive this point home, we will briefly look at four different sources of belief. As you will see, each

source is fallible.

One source of belief is memory. Memory is not always reliable. First of all, that you do not remember something in your past does not mean that it did not happen. Second, when you do remember something, does that guarantee that it happened the way you remember it? Because people can misremember, philosophers distinguish between remembering and seeming to remember. When you actually remember P, then this justifies believing P. When you seem to remember P, this does not justify believing P. The problem is that remembering and seeming to remember often feel the same to the person trying to remember.

Most beliefs are the product of inference. When you use reason to come to belief, the justification you have is inferential; hence, inferential justification is equivalent to logical justification. But as discussed in the chapter on logic, not all forms of inference can guarantee truth. Inductive reasoning, which is the most common source of beliefs, is only probable even when done well. Furthermore, people often make mistakes in reasoning. Just because someone reasoned their way to a belief doesn't mean they reasoned well. But assume for a moment that a person comes to a belief using deductive reasoning, which can guarantee truth, *and* they reason well. Is it still possible that their belief is false? Yes. Deductive reasoning takes as its input other beliefs to then derive conclusions. In good inductive reasoning, *if* the premises are true (the input beliefs), *then* the conclusion is true. If the input beliefs are false, then even good deductive reasoning cannot guarantee true beliefs.

Another source of belief is testimony. When you gain beliefs based on the stated beliefs of others, you rely on testimony. Testimony is usually considered something that happens only in a court of law, but in philosophy, the term *testimony* is used much more broadly. Testimony is any utterance, spoken or written, occurring in normal communication conditions. Instances of testimony include news magazines, nonfiction books, personal blogs, professors' lectures, and opinions volunteered in casual conversation. Often, testimony is a reliable source of information and so can be justified. When you form beliefs based on the testimony of experts, it is justified. But even when justified, those beliefs could be false because experts are vulnerable to all of the weaknesses of justification covered in this section. More will be said about testimony in the section on social epistemology.

Last, perception can be used as a source of justification. Perception includes the information received from the senses (smell, taste, touch, sight, hearing). People often automatically form beliefs based on perception. However, not all beliefs that follow from perception are guaranteed to be true, as the possibility of knowledge by acquaintance shows. As discussed earlier, Russell maintained that the only automatically justified beliefs gained from perception are about the existence of sense data (Russell 1948). When looking at the bird outside of my office window, I only have knowledge by acquaintance of *the experience* of seeing the bird on a branch in my visual field. I know that *it seems to me* that there's a bird. But how do I get from those sense data to the justified belief that there really is bird on the branch? I must rely on another belief about the reliability of my perception—a belief that I can only get by inference, specifically induction. I reason from past instances where I believe my perception is reliable to the general belief that it is reliable. And of course, induction is fallible. Whenever one moves from knowledge by acquaintance to further beliefs—such as the belief that sense data is caused by actually existing objects—there is room for error.

Not all philosophers agree that all perceptual beliefs are mediated through sense data (Crane and French 2021). The view called *direct realism* states that people have direct access to objects in the external world via perception. While direct realism holds that one can directly perceive the external world, it still cannot guarantee that beliefs about it are true, for both hallucinations and illusions are still possible. Figure 7.7 is an example of an illusion.

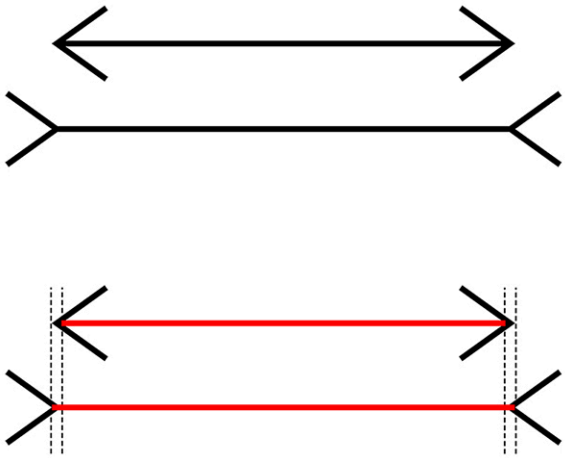

FIGURE 7.7 In the Müller-Lyer illusion, the top two lines appear to be different lengths, but the bottom two lines illustrate that the lines are in fact of equal length. (credit: "Müller-Lyer Counter-Illusion" by Subsidiary account/ Wikimedia, Public Domain)

If you focus only on the top two lines, it appears as though they are of different lengths. Yet the bottom two lines indicate that this appearance is illusory—the lines are actually of equal length. Illusions function as evidence that perception sometimes misrepresents reality. Even direct realists have to contend with the possibility that beliefs gained through sense perception could be wrong. Hence, sources of beliefs, even when they are usually justified, are nevertheless fallible. The possibility that the subject *could* be wrong is what gives rise to philosophical skepticism—the view that knowledge in some or all domains is impossible.

THINK LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Think critically about the sources of justification explained above. Which of these is more reliable than the others? For each source, identify one instance in which it is reliable and one instance in which it is not.

7.4 Skepticism

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Define skepticism as it is used in philosophy.
- Compare and contrast global and local skepticism.
- Offer and explain a skeptical hypothesis.
- Outline the general structure of argument for global skepticism.

Philosophical **skepticism** is the view that some or all knowledge is impossible. A skeptic questions the possibility of knowledge—particularly justification—in some domain. A **global skeptic** rejects the possibility of knowledge in general. But one need not reject the possibility of all knowledge. A **local skeptic** questions the possibility of knowledge only in particular areas of study. One can be a local skeptic about moral knowledge or scientific knowledge. This section will first look at global skepticism and the arguments offered in support of it and then will briefly look at local skepticism.

Global Skepticism

Global skepticism is a view that questions the possibility of all knowledge. To make their case, global skeptics point to the lack of the possibility of certainty in our beliefs. Because we cannot know that our beliefs are true, we cannot know in general. Usually, global skepticism attempts to undermine the possibility of forming justified beliefs. Global skeptics target all beliefs, or all beliefs about the external world (which amounts to

most beliefs). Most beliefs tacitly or explicitly assume the existence of an external world. When I have the experience of seeing a bird in a tree and think, "There is a bird in that tree," I assume that there is an actually existing physical bird in an actually existing physical tree in an actually existing real world outside of me. *There is* means "there exists." I believe the bird, tree, and world all exist independently of my thoughts. The global skeptic questions beliefs such as these.

The Dream Argument

How many times have you realized that you were dreaming *while* you were dreaming? Most people believe that whatever they are dreaming is real during the dream. Indeed, the fact that people think dreams are real while dreaming is what makes nightmares so terrible. If you knew the content of a nightmare was a dream, then it would not be nearly as scary. Zhuang Zhou (c. 369–286 BCE) was a Chinese Taoist philosopher who argued that for all we know, we could currently be dreaming while thinking we are awake. Imagine dreaming that you are a butterfly, happily flitting about on flowers. When you wake, how can you determine whether you have just woken from dreaming you are a butterfly or you are a butterfly who has just started dreaming that you are human? Zhuang Zhou explains:

> While he is dreaming he does not know it is a dream, and in his dream he may even try to interpret a dream. Only after he wakes does he know it was a dream. And someday there will be a great awakening when we know that this is all a great dream. Yet the stupid believe they are awake, busily and brightly assuming they understand things, calling this man ruler, that one herdsman—how dense! Confucius and you are both dreaming! And when I say you are dreaming, I am dreaming, too. (Zhuangzi 2003, 43)

Zhaung Zhou puts forward the possibility that all of what we take to be conscious experience is actually a dream. And if we are dreaming, then all our beliefs about the external world are false because those beliefs take for granted that our current experience is real.

FIGURE 7.8 Is this a picture of a man dreaming of a butterfly, or is it a picture of a butterfly dreaming of a man? The Chinese philosopher Zhuang Zhou asks us to consider the possibility that everything we consider waking experience might actually be a dream. (credit: "Zhuangzi-Butterfly-Dream" by Ike no Taiga/Wikipedia, Public Domain)

The Evil Demon Argument

Nearly two millennia after Zhuang Zhou, René Descartes also proposed a dream hypothesis. Descartes argued that because dreams often incorporate experiences we have in real life, it is impossible to distinguish between dreaming and waking life (Descartes 2008). But Descartes eventually concludes that even if he could be

dreaming, there are still some beliefs he can know, specifically arithmetic. Even in dreams, 1 + 1 = 2, and a square will always have four sides. And so, Descartes devises an even stronger skeptical hypothesis: what if we are being tricked by an evil demon?

Descartes's evil demon is powerful. It can make you believe things, and it can trick you by controlling your experience. The evil demon can make you believe you are currently eating a sandwich by directly feeding you the sensory experience of eating a sandwich (the sight, the smells, the taste, the feel). Under this scenario, you cannot tell the difference between actually eating a sandwich and merely believing you are eating one because the evil demon is tricking you. If we cannot reliably tell the difference between experiences caused by reality and experiences caused by an evil demon, then we cannot know anything. We can represent Descartes's argument as follows:

1. If I cannot rule out the possibility that an evil demon is tricking me, then I do not have any knowledge of the external world.
2. I cannot rule out the possibility that an evil demon is tricking me.
3. Therefore, I do not have knowledge of the external world.

Why does Descartes claim we can't have knowledge if we cannot rule out the evil demon hypothesis? If an evil demon is tricking us, then all our beliefs are wrong. And if we cannot rule out the possibility that we are wrong, then we are not justified. And if we are not justified in our beliefs, then we cannot have knowledge of them.

Putnam's Brain in a Vat

If you don't like evil demons, then consider a more modern version of a skeptical hypothesis: the "brain in a vat" conceived of by American philosopher and mathematician Hilary Putnam (1926–2016). Imagine that while you were asleep last night, a group of scientists kidnapped you and took you to their lab. There, they surgically removed your brain and placed it in a vat of nutrients. The scientists then hooked up your brain to a sophisticated new computer system. They were able to download your memories so as to create new experiences. The result is a seamless experience of consciousness between yesterday and today. When you woke this morning, your life seemed to proceed without disruption. Can you prove that you are not a brain in a vat? No, you cannot. The scenario stipulates that your experience will seem exactly the same whether you are a brain in a vat or not. Other, similar skeptical scenarios are easy to come up with. Consider the possibility that you are caught in a virtual reality world or that you are trapped in the Matrix.

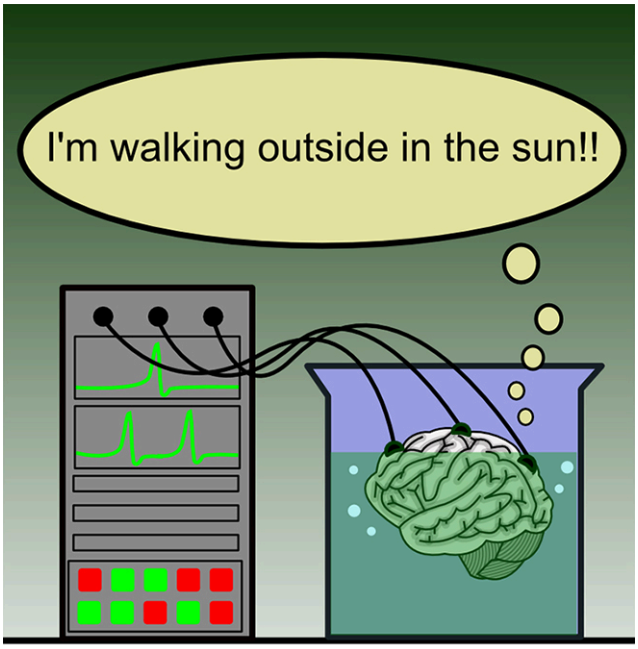

FIGURE 7.9 The "brain in a vat" scenario asks us to consider the possibility that our experiences are the result of deliberate manipulation of our mental processes. (credit: "Brain in a Vat" by Was a bee/Wikimedia, Public Domain)

General Structure of Global Skeptical Arguments

Skeptical hypotheses and the arguments that they inspire all have a similar structure:

1. If I cannot rule out the possibility of SH, then I cannot be justified in believing that P.
2. I cannot rule out the possibility of SH.
3. Therefore, I cannot be justified in believing that P.

SH is a skeptical hypothesis. P is any proposition about the external world. Premise 1 is the skeptic's challenge—that you must rule out skeptical hypotheses. Premise 2 relies on limitations within your perspective. The skeptic claims that you can rule out the possibility of whatever skeptical hypothesis is at hand only if you are able to construct an argument that defeats that hypothesis using the evidence you have (and a priori knowledge). As demonstrated, this is difficult to do. The nature of the skeptical hypotheses used for global skepticism limits your evidence to the contents of your thoughts. What you take to be evidence of the external world (that you perceive things that seem to be separate from yourself) is effectively neutralized by the possibility of a skeptical hypothesis.

Responses to Global Skepticism

The philosopher who wishes to overcome philosophical skepticism must find reasonable grounds for rejecting the skeptic's argument. The different skeptical arguments reveal a specific conception of the level of justification required for knowledge. Skeptical arguments rely on the existence of doubt. Doubt exists when we cannot rule out a possibility. If we have doubt, we are not certain. We cannot be certain that we are not, say, a brain in a vat. And if we cannot be certain, then we cannot know anything that implies we are not a brain in a vat. Certainty is a very strict measure of justification. One clear possible response is to simply deny that one needs certainty in order to be considered justified. This section looks at some of the classical responses to the skeptic's argument that we cannot know anything.

Moore

British philosopher G. E. Moore (1873–1958) presented an argument against skepticism that relies on common sense. In his famous paper "Proof of an External World," Moore begins by raising his right hand and

claiming, "Here is one hand," then raising his left hand and claiming, "Here is another hand" (Moore 1939). Therefore, he concludes that skepticism is false. At first glance, this argument may seem flippant. It is not. Moore means to replace the second premise in the skeptical argument with his own premise: *I know I have hands*. The skeptical argument starts with the premise that if you cannot rule out a skeptical hypothesis, then you do not have knowledge of some proposition pertaining to the external world. Moore uses "I have two hands" as his proposition about the external world. In effect, he accepts the skeptic's first premise, then uses his commonsense belief in the truth of "I have two hands" to defeat the skeptical hypothesis. Here is the argument's structure:

1. If I cannot rule out the possibility of SH, then I cannot be justified in believing that P.
2. I am justified in believing that P.
3. Therefore, I can rule out the possibility of SH.

In claiming that he has two hands, Moore claims that he is justified in believing propositions about the external world. And if he is justified, then he can rule out the skeptical hypothesis. The skeptic's argument takes the form of what is called *modus ponens*, meaning a valid inference where the antecedent of a conditional is affirmed. Moore's argument takes the form of what is known as *modus tollens*, meaning a valid inference where the consequence of a conditional is denied.

But notice that the two arguments contradict each other. If we accept the first premise, then either Moore's or the skeptic's second premise must be false. So why did Moore think his second premise is better? The choice is between thinking you are justified in believing that you have two hands and thinking you are justified in believing the skeptical hypothesis might be true. Moore thinks he has better reason to believe that he has two hands than he does for believing the skeptical hypothesis is true. For Moore, it is just common sense. You have reason to believe that you have two hands—you can see them and feel them—while you have no reason to believe the skeptical hypothesis is true.

Many philosophers remain unconvinced by Moore's argument. Any person who accepts the possibility of the skeptical hypothesis will disagree with his premise 2. The possibility of the skeptical hypothesis effectively undermines justification in the belief that you have two hands.

Contextualism

As we just saw, some theorists reject the notion that you must be certain of a belief—that is, rule out all possible defeaters—in order to have knowledge. Moore thinks he has more justification to believe he has two hands than he does that there's an evil demon tricking him. And in determining whether I am justified in believing in the bird outside my office window, I rarely consider the possibility that I could be a brain in a vat. I'm more likely to focus on my poor vision as a defeater. In the context of bird identification, wild skeptical hypotheses seem out of place. Indeed, we often adjust how much justification we think is needed for a belief to the task at hand. **Contextualism** is the view that the truth of knowledge attributions depends on the context. Contextualism is a theory about knowledge and justification. When we attribute knowledge to a subject S, the truth of the knowledge claim depends on the context that S is in. The context of S determines the level of justification needed for a true belief to count as knowledge. Contextualism comes from the observation that the level of confidence needed for justification changes depending on what the belief is as well as its the purpose and its importance, among other things. We expect a high degree of justification from physicians when they diagnose disease but less justification from friends recalling the title of a movie because there's much more at stake in medical diagnoses.

Contextualism deals with skepticism in a unique way. Rarely are we in situations where we must rule out skeptical hypotheses to consider ourselves justified. Indeed, it is generally only when a skeptical hypothesis has been explicitly raised that we think we need to rule it out to be justified. And in our daily lives, the skeptical hypothesis just does not seem relevant. Yes, the possibility that we are brains in a vat technically still exists; we just do not think of it.

Skepticism in Specific Domains

As explained above, local skepticism questions the possibility of knowledge only in particular areas of study. People can accept that knowledge of the external world is possible while also questioning whether knowledge is achievable in more specific domains. A common form of local skepticism focuses on religious belief, specifically knowledge of the existence of God. Another form of local skepticism concerns the ability to ever have moral knowledge. Skepticism in these domains does not entail that there is no God or that all moral claims are false. Rather, skepticism means that we can never be sufficiently justified in believing that there is a God or that moral claims are true. We simply can never know either way whether, for example, God exists.

Skepticism about morality arises due to the nature of its subject. Moral claims are normative, which means that they assert claims about what ought to be the case rather than what is the case. But moral claims are difficult to prove, given their normative nature. How can you prove what *ought* to be the case? Usually, moral claims are grounded in value claims. An ethicist may say that we ought to help a stranger because well-being is morally valuable. But the skeptic will point out that we cannot *prove* that something is valuable. We do not have sensors that can confirm moral value. Moral claims instead rest on arguments. The problem, as Scottish Enlightenment philosopher David Hume (1711–1776) explained, is that no amount of description can ever help us *logically* derive a normative claim (Hume 1985). This leaves room for doubt, and therefore skepticism.

Skeptical positions about God also focus on the lack of sufficient evidence. A skeptic can reasonably ask, What sorts of evidence would show the existence of God? Certainly, if God unambiguously appeared right now to everyone in the world simultaneously, then we would have reliable evidence. But God has not done so. The most we have is testimony in the form of religious texts. And testimony, particularly a chain of testimony stretching back hundreds and hundreds of years, is not necessarily reliable. Why believe, for example, the Christian Bible? Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), himself a devote Catholic, argued that the very nature of God—having no limits and existing beyond time—precludes the possibility of ever comprehending the full true nature of God or God's existence. He states, "Who then can blame the Christians for not being able to give reasons for their belief, professing as they do a religion which they cannot explain by reason. . . . It is in lacking proofs that they do not lack sense" (Pascal 1973, 93). Pascal contends that not attempting to give proof of God is the sensible thing to do. A person can simply rely on faith, which is belief based on insufficient evidence.

THINK LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

In your view, what is the relationship between reason and faith? Some theologians say that reason can establish the existence of a supreme being. Others think that reason can only partially justify religious belief and that full belief requires faith, or belief without reason. Reason for some is antithetical to faith, which requires blind obedience. For example, in the biblical story of the sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham is willing to sacrifice his only son to God as an act of faith. How do you think we should understand the role of reason in religious belief?

7.5 Applied Epistemology

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Define applied epistemology.
- Describe the social aspect of knowledge and justification.
- Describe standpoint epistemology.
- Identify examples of epistemic injustice.

Applied epistemology, like other areas of applied philosophy, takes the tools of philosophy and applies them to areas of practical concern. Specifically, it applies philosophical methods and theories particular to epistemology to current social issues and practices. Applied epistemology often approaches epistemological questions on a collective or systems level. When looking at systems, applied epistemology investigates whether

the systems of investigation (like those in the sciences) are structured in the best way to lead to true beliefs. When applied to collectives, applied epistemology examines whether and how groups of people conduct deliberation that leads to reliably true and justified beliefs. The groups focused on can range from small groups, such as a jury, to large collectives, such as a democracy.

FIGURE 7.10 We often attribute beliefs to the Supreme Court, even though it is a collection of people that has changed over time. In this photo, former president Donald Trump and first lady Melania Trump stand with members of the US Supreme Court in 2018. (credit: "President Donald J. Trump and First Lady Melania Trump at the Supreme Court of the United States" by Trump White House Archived/Flickr, Public Domain)

Social Epistemology

The traditional epistemology that most of this chapter has covered is singularly focused on individuals. Theories are focused on what *a person* can know or when *a subject* is justified. For the most part, gaining knowledge is often treated as an individual effort. Social epistemology instead investigates how groups pursue knowledge and justification and how an individual can best seek justification and knowledge in a social world. Social epistemology takes seriously the fact that humans are, by and large, social animals that rely on others for belief formation. Because humans are social creatures, we rely on others for much of what we come to know. Our dependence on others for true beliefs eases knowledge acquisition, but it also complicates the task due to concerns regarding the reliability of others.

How much of your knowledge was gained strictly from independent investigation conducted only by yourself? Very little, most likely. We rely on other humans from the past and present for a very large proportion of our knowledge. Scientific endeavors consist of amending and adding to the work of others over the course of centuries. The propositional knowledge learned in school is gained through layers upon layers of individuals trusting the testimony of others—students trusting the testimony of teachers, teachers trusting the testimony of books, the writers of the books trusting the testimony of sources, and so on. The news we view, the books we read, the conversations we overhear—all of these are social means of gaining knowledge.

Testimony

Social means of gaining knowledge are called testimony. Any time you believe something because you read it or heard it somewhere, you believe based on testimony. Of course, people are not always reliable. People sometimes use poor reasoning, misremember, or even lie. Hence, testimony is also sometimes unreliable. And this raises the question, When is testimony justified?

Testimony is clearly of importance to social epistemology. In determining whether to believe what others tell us, we ask whether they are trustworthy. A trustworthy source of testimony is honest, unbiased, rational, well-informed, and clearheaded. We further look for an expert or authority. An expert or authority is a person

whose experience, education, and knowledge in an area make them more reliable. Questions surrounding testimony are questions about justification. When are we justified in believing others? Who are we justified in believing in particular situations? When and how does testimony give us justification for a belief? And what do we do when the testimony of others conflicts with our already held beliefs?

FIGURE 7.11 All of the information contained in libraries is a form of testimonial knowledge. This is one of the public reading rooms in the New York Public Library. (credit: "New York Public Library" by soomness/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Peer Disagreement

When the testimony of another contradicts your own belief, what should you do? In cases where the other person is an expert and you are not, then the testimony ought to weaken your confidence in your belief. You should either change your belief or withhold from believing either way until you can get further justification. But what should you do when the person is not an expert but an **epistemic peer**? An epistemic peer is a person who is in an equal epistemic position relative to some domain—that is, they have the same cognitive ability, evidence, and background knowledge in that domain. A person can be an epistemic peer with respect to one domain but not another. You may know that you are on level epistemic ground with regard to the subject of baseball with your best friend but that they are an authority compared to you on the subject of baking.

Social epistemologists theorize about how peer disagreement ought to function in justification and belief. Some theorists argue that you should always modify your conviction in some way in the face of peer disagreement, though they disagree about exactly how you ought to modify your view. Others maintain that peer disagreement does not always give you reason to think you are mistaken (Frances and Matheson 2018).

THINK LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

When assessing the testimony of a person you believe is an epistemic peer, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Does the person supplying the testimony have a history of lying?
2. Is this person known to have biases that might distort their perceptions?
3. Does this person have a good track record?
4. Does this person's testimony conflict with testimony from others?
5. What are this person's motives?

When assessing the testimony of a purported authority on some subject, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Is this a question on which there is expertise?

2. Is the person supplying the testimony an expert in the relevant field?
3. Is there a consensus among experts in the relevant field on the question at hand?
4. Does this person's testimony reflect agreement with the consensus of experts?
5. Is there reason to think this person is biased?

Group Justification

So far, we have looked at how social factors influence an individual's justification and beliefs. Social epistemology also investigates whether it is possible for groups to have beliefs. We often attribute beliefs to groups of people. We say things like "The United States believes in freedom," "The Supreme Court holds that a right to privacy exists," "Scientists believe in climate change," and "The jury knew he was guilty." When can it rightfully be said that a group believes something? One answer is that a group believes P only in cases in which all or almost all members of the group believe P. However, we do attribute beliefs to groups while not always assuming that every member holds the belief. The Supreme Court example above illustrates that not every member of a group must believe something for us to say that the group does. When the court decides an issue with a 6–3 vote, we still attribute belief to the court as a whole.

Another view is a commitment view. Group belief does not require that all members believe; rather, members of the group are jointly committed to a belief as a body merely by virtue of being members of that group (Goldman and O'Connor 2019). Group commitment to a belief creates a normative constraint on members of a group to emulate the belief. Commitment views may work for any group formed around allegiance to specific ideas. Take religious groups, for example, which coalesce around beliefs pertaining to God and religious dogma.

If groups are capable of beliefs, then clearly the question of justification of group belief is relevant. Note that some of the previous theories on epistemic justification are applicable to questions of group justification. Goldman focused on reliable processes. Social epistemology also focuses on the reliability of processes used in juries, democracies, and the sciences.

Standpoint Epistemology

Social epistemology accounts for the social nature of knowledge and justification. The quality and extent of an individual's knowledge depends heavily on the people that individual deems trustworthy. The same is the case for group or public knowledge (knowledge generally accepted as true by a collective). Individuals and perspectives granted expert status have more influence on what is accepted, but this means that many individuals and perspectives will be ignored. Furthermore, it is often types or groups of people who are excluded, which becomes problematic if the perspectives of those groups are valuable to the task of knowledge creation. Standpoint epistemology takes this worry seriously. **Standpoint epistemology** studies the relationship between an individual's social status and that individual's epistemic position. Of particular importance to the theory is the notion that the relative power of individuals and groups influences who we consider to be reliable sources, causing us to ignore the perspectives of less powerful groups. Furthermore, standpoint theory argues that the exclusion of entire groups harms the entire enterprise of gaining knowledge.

Take as an example the president of a large factory who wants to increase efficiency and cut down on waste. The president convenes all the department heads and managers to identify areas of inefficiency and waste; essentially, they want the perspectives of those individuals with more power within the factory. But if the president doesn't elicit the opinion of any of the workers in the warehouse or on the factory floor, they miss out on potentially valuable perspectives. A manager may think they can adequately identify problems in the way that the manual work is done. But given the *position* of a factory worker—situated day after day on the factory floor—the factory worker has a unique perspective. Standpoint theorists hold that perspectives such as that of the factory floor worker are uniquely valuable and cannot be emulated by those not in that position.

Standpoint epistemology is applied to many areas of study. In the social sciences, where the goal is to describe

social structures, behaviors, and relationships, standpoint theorists advocate for focusing on the perspectives of traditionally marginalized groups. If the general goal is to study how people do things, then it does not do any good to ignore the experiences of entire classes of people. And when the goal is to discover facts about power dynamics within social institutions, focusing only on privileged perspectives is woefully inadequate. If anthropologists in the 1950s wanted to understand racism and the unequal power structure in the American South, interviewing Black citizens would generate more insightful evidence than interviews with White citizens. Black Americans were in a better epistemic position compared to their White counterparts to describe the power structure. Similarly, women are in a better position to explain sexism within a workplace than their male counterparts. People who use wheelchairs are in a much better position to design a truly accessible bathroom. Examples such as these abound.

Standpoint epistemology also critiques the traditional hard sciences and medical research. Hard sciences, such as biology, chemistry, and physiology, are those that rely on controlled experiments, quantifiable data, and mathematical modeling. Hard sciences are generally noted for being exact, rigorous, and objective. Standpoint theorists question this objectivity and reveal how biases and perspectives of researchers can influence these supposedly objective fields. A clear example of this is early research on heart disease. Because medical researchers, who were mostly male, focused their studies on men, heart disease was considered a men's disease. The symptoms of a heart attack that doctors and patients were warned to look out for did not include many symptoms that women experience when having a heart attack (Kourany 2009). Men most often experience chest pain, while women are more likely to experience symptoms such as jaw pain and nausea (American Heart Association n.d.). As a result, many women did not seek medical attention when experiencing heart problems, and doctors failed to properly diagnose them when they did seek medical treatment. Standpoint theory reveals not only that varied standpoints are valuable but also that specific standpoints often include implicit or explicit bias—not including women or people of color in data sets, only including particular variables in modeling, and so on.

Epistemic Injustice

If standpoint epistemology is correct in concluding that valuable perspectives are often excluded from social and scientific discourse, then this is an instance of epistemic injustice. **Epistemic injustice** is injustice related to epistemology. Epistemic injustices include the exclusion and silencing of perspectives, systematic misrepresentation of group or individual views, unfair conferring of expert status, and unjustified distrust of certain perspectives. British philosopher Miranda Fricker (b. 1966), who coined the term *epistemic injustice*, divides epistemic injustice into two categories: testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice (Fricker 2007). **Testimonial injustice** occurs when the opinions of individuals or groups are unfairly ignored or treated as untrustworthy. **Hermeneutical injustice** occurs when a society's language and concepts cannot adequately capture the experience of people living within that society, which thereby limits understanding of their experiences.

Testimonial Injustice

Silencing and distrust of someone's word often occurs by virtue of that individual's membership in a marginalized group. Women, people of color, people with disabilities, low-income individuals, and religious minorities are all examples of marginalized groups. Take as an example a criminal trial. If the jury takes the testimony of a witness less seriously because of their perceived class status or membership in a particular group, this is an example of epistemic injustice, specifically testimonial injustice. Philosophers who focus on testimonial injustice utilize research to show how the voices of individuals and groups are unfairly ignored and discounted compared to others. For example, many studies over the past few decades have illustrated that reports of pain by Black patients are taken less seriously by medical professionals than similar pain reports by White patients. An outcome of this is that Black patients are given less pain medicine and pain management than White patients, even in cases where the patients had the same injury or surgery (Smedley, Stith, and Nelson 2003; Cintron and Morrison 2006). This is clearly a case of testimonial injustice: Black patients receive

less care because their testimony (reporting pain) is not taken as seriously as the testimony of their White counterparts.

But testimonial injustice also occurs when someone's opinions are systematically misrepresented. To misrepresent a view is to interpret that view in a way that does not align with the original intended meaning. As an example, consider the Black Lives Matter movement and a popular response to it. Black Lives Matter was formed in response to police brutality and racially motivated violence against Black people. The idea was to affirm the value of Black lives. However, a popular response to the movement was the phrase "All lives matter." This response implies that the message of Black Lives Matter is really that *only* Black lives matter, which is an unfair and inaccurate representation of the view.

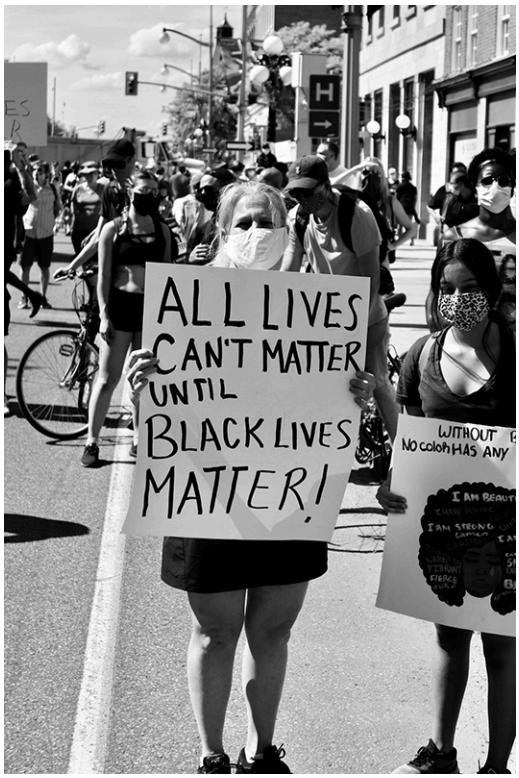

FIGURE 7.12 Interpreting the phrase "Black lives matter" to mean "*only* Black lives matter" is an instance of testimonial injustice. (credit: "Black Lives Matter" by Taymaz Valley/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Hermeneutical Injustice

Hermeneutical injustice occurs when language and concepts cannot adequately capture an individual's experience, resulting in a lack of understanding of that individual's experience by both the individual and those around them. The classic example of hermeneutical injustice focuses on sexual harassment. Before the concept and phrase *sexual harassment* was introduced and understood by society, women had a difficult time describing certain experiences in the workplace. Women experienced unwanted attention and focus, exclusion, comments concerning their bodies and looks, and different treatment based on negative assumptions about their gender. Many women were fired for not going along with such treatment. But there was no word for their experience, so many women could not understand or explain their discomfort. Furthermore, accounts of their distressing experience ran the risk of not being taken seriously by others. The phrase *sexual harassment* was coined to fill a gap in the concepts used to explain and describe experience. Perhaps you have had the experience of being introduced to a word or concept that suddenly illuminated a part of your experience in a way that greatly increased your understanding of yourself and your ability to explain yourself to others.

Summary

7.1 What Epistemology Studies

Epistemology is the study of knowledge and its associated concepts, such as truth and justification. The discipline of epistemology uses many tools, including conceptual analysis, argumentation, and research. Traditional epistemology focuses on propositional knowledge, which is knowledge of facts or statements. There are other types of knowledge, including procedural knowledge and knowledge by acquaintance. Because knowledge and justification are treated as valuable and epistemology studies these concepts, epistemology is both descriptive and a normative discipline.

7.2 Knowledge

The traditional understanding of knowledge, which comes from Plato, is that it consists of justified true belief. Plato's account was generally accepted until the 1960s, when philosopher Edmund Gettier offered counterexamples, known as Gettier cases. Gettier cases reveal that justified true belief is not sufficient for knowledge, a problemed called the Gettier problem. Many theorists attempt to solve the Gettier problem by strengthening Plato's account. Fixes include adding another condition to the definition and clarifying what justification is.

7.3 Justification

Justification for a belief makes the belief more likely to be true. How justification works and the nature of justification are important to the study of epistemology. Internalism is the view that justification is entirely dependent on factors internal to the mind of the knower. Externalism is the view that at least some elements that determine justification are external to the mind of the knower. Attempts to solve the Gettier problem have come in both internal and external forms. Theorists also study justification as it exists in the structure of entire belief systems. Foundationalists believe that all beliefs rest on a foundation of basic beliefs, while coherentists hold that beliefs exist in a web of mutually supporting and consistent beliefs. Justification has many sources, but all of them are fallible, which means that even justified beliefs can be false.

7.4 Skepticism

Skepticism is the view that all or some of our knowledge is impossible. A global skeptic rejects the possibility of all knowledge and often focuses on the possibility of justification for beliefs of the external world. Global skeptics usually put forth a skeptical hypothesis—a way that the world could be that would entail that all our beliefs are false—and show that we cannot rule out the hypothesis. Skeptical hypotheses include the possibility that we are dreaming, that a powerful demon is tricking us, and that we are brains in vats or trapped in virtual reality. All skeptical arguments take advantage of the fact that we cannot rule out skeptical hypotheses on the evidence we have. Those who argue against skepticism claim we do not need the level of justification that skeptics claim we do.

7.5 Applied Epistemology

Applied epistemology uses the concepts, methods, and theories particular to epistemology and applies them to current social issues and practices. An important area of applied epistemology is social epistemology, which focuses on the social facets of knowledge and justification and how groups form beliefs. Testimony refers to how we gain knowledge from and share knowledge with others. Social epistemology studies how to evaluate our beliefs when they conflict with the testimony of others. Social epistemology also illuminates how injustice can arise in epistemological endeavors in a social world. Testimonial injustice occurs when the opinions of individuals are systematically discounted or ignored unfairly. Hermeneutical injustice occurs when a society's language and concepts cannot adequately capture the experience of all its members.

Key Terms

A posteriori knowledge knowledge gained through experience.

A priori knowledge knowledge that can be gained prior to or independent of experience.
Coherentism the theory that a belief is justified if it is part of a coherent system of interconnected beliefs.
Contextualism the view that the truth of knowledge attributions depends on the context.
Epistemic injustice injustice that arises from or is related to epistemological issues.
Epistemic peer a person who is in an equal epistemic position as you relative to some domain.
Epistemology the field within philosophy that focuses on questions pertaining to the nature and extent of human knowledge.
Externalism any epistemological theory that does not solely use a subjects' mental states to determine justification.
Foundationalism the belief that all truth is either self-evident or derivable from some truth that is self-evident.
Gettier case a case, usually presented as a hypothetical scenario, that acts as a counterexample to the traditional account of knowledge as justified true belief.
Global skeptic someone who rejects the possibility of knowledge in general.
Hermeneutical injustice a type of epistemic injustice that occurs when a society's language and concepts cannot adequately capture the experience of people, thereby limiting understanding of their experiences.
Historical reliabilism an epistemological theory that proposes that processes that reliably produce true beliefs confer justification on those beliefs.
Internalism any epistemological theory that focuses solely on subjects' mental states to determine justification.
Knowledge by acquaintance knowledge gained from direct contact with something and not mediated by inference.
Local skeptic someone who question the possibility of knowledge only in particular areas of study.
Procedural knowledge knowledge of how to successfully complete a task.
Propositional knowledge knowledge of facts that can be expressed as statements.
Skepticism the view that some or all knowledge is impossible.
Standpoint epistemology study of the relationship between an individual's social status and their epistemic position.
Statement A declarative sentence that has a truth value, meaning that it must be either true or false.
Testimonial injustice a type of epistemic injustice that occurs when the opinions of individuals or groups are unfairly ignored or treated as untrustworthy.

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Zhuangzi. 2003. "Discussion on Making All Things Equal." In *Zhuangzi: Basic Writings*, translated by Burton Watson, 31–44. New York: Columbia University Press.

Review Questions

7.1 What Epistemology Studies

1. Why is epistemology considered a normative discipline?
2. Why is conceptual analysis important in epistemology?
3. What is the difference between a priori and a posteriori knowledge?
4. What is propositional knowledge?

7.2 Knowledge

5. What is Plato's account of knowledge?
6. What is a Gettier case?
7. Offer one Gettier case and explain how it works.

7.3 Justification

8. Explain the difference between internal and external theories of justification.
9. Describe the similarities and differences between coherentism and foundationalism.
10. Explain how justification is fallible.

7.4 Skepticism

11. What is global skepticism?
12. Offer and explain a skeptical hypothesis.
13. How do arguments for skepticism rely on the notion of doubt?

7.5 Applied Epistemology

14. Define applied epistemology.
15. Why are knowledge and justification a social matter?

16. Define testimonial injustice and offer an example of it.

Further Reading

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Value Theory 8

FIGURE 8.1 This photo of surrealist artist René Magritte captures him painting an unusual self-portrait. Note that the subject of the portrait is observing an egg but painting a bird in flight. The title of the painting is "Clairvoyance," suggesting that Magritte sees art as a way of envisioning the future or imagining possibilities rather than simply presenting the facts at hand. (credit: modification of "[N] Jacqueline Nonkels - Rene Magritte paints Helderzeinheid (1936)" by cea/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

CHAPTER OUTLINE

8.1 The Fact-Value Distinction
8.2 Basic Questions about Values
8.3 Metaethics
8.4 Well-Being
8.5 Aesthetics

INTRODUCTION Chances are you have found yourself in a debate with someone about a matter involving judgments about what is good or bad. Maybe your disagreement was about a contemporary moral issue like abortion or the death penalty. Maybe the conflict had to do with a course of action, like going to college or joining the military, and whether it was the right thing to do. Maybe you got into a disagreement about whether a work of art was beautiful or a movie was good or bad. These types of conversations deal with **values**, and there is a specific area of philosophy that helps people think about these types of debates: value theory.

Value theory is the philosophical investigation of values. In its narrow sense, it refers to ethical concerns. In its

broader sense, it addresses ethical, social, political, religious, aesthetic, and other types of values. Philosophers use value theory to approach questions that require people to think about what they value in life as individuals and as communities, especially in terms of morality, happiness, goodness, and beauty. Value theory provides tools that you can use to navigate difficult debates about what you value and why. This chapter will help you understand what a value is and how it differs from facts, the types of questions and distinctions that help people discuss values and their relations, and specific areas of value theory like metaethics and aesthetics.

8.1 The Fact-Value Distinction

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Articulate the fact-value distinction.
- Distinguish between descriptive and evaluative claims.
- Explain the is-ought problem
- Describe the naturalistic fallacy
- Evaluate objections to the fact-value distinction.

Values are woven into how you live and relate to others. The ideals that guide your life decisions, the morals that shape how you treat others, and even the choices that define your personal aesthetic all express your values. Values signify judgments about the way people *ought* to think, feel, or act based on what is good, worthwhile, or important. For example, you might think you *ought* to read Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* because it is considered a great American novel or because you believe that reading about anti-Black racism in the United States is important for forming a more just worldview. Here, your reasoning for a course of action—reading *Invisible Man*—is based on value judgments about the novel's greatness and the importance of understanding racial injustice.

Values describe how people think things *should* be, not necessarily how they are. Philosophers describe this difference as the *is-ought* distinction or, more commonly, the fact-value distinction. The **fact-value distinction** distinguishes between what is the case (facts) and what people think ought to be the case (values) based on beliefs about what is good, beautiful, important, etc.

The line between facts and values is not always clear. It can be easy to mistake a value for a fact, especially when a person feels strongly about something and believes it is truly good or bad beyond any doubt. For example, the statement "killing an innocent person is bad" may seem like a fact, but it is not a description of how things are. This statement describes the way people think things should be, not the way the world is. For this reason, the fact-value distinction is an important place to begin. This section will give an overview of the fact-value distinction by examining the types of claims you can make about facts and values and how facts and values are related to or distinct from each other.

Descriptive vs. Evaluative Claims

One way to think about the difference between facts and values is through the different types of claims you can make about them. People talk about facts using **descriptive claims** and values using **evaluative claims**. Descriptive claims are statements about matters of fact, whereas evaluative claims express a judgment about something's value.

Descriptive Claims: How the World Is

Descriptive claims make statements about *how the world is.* They describe the facts of something, what you observe to be the case without any form of evaluation or judgment. For example, "the weather today is sunny" is a descriptive claim because it simply describes what someone observes.

Evaluative Claims: How the World Ought to Be

Evaluative claims make statements about *how the world ought to be*. They express judgments of value: what is

good, just, fair, beautiful, healthy, important, etc. Instead of simply describing, evaluative claims interpret facts or assert what should be the case.

Evaluative claims can be *prescriptive*—that is, they state what *should* be the case or what people *ought* to do in a given situation. For example, "I should go outside to get some sunshine" is an evaluative claim. It is based on a descriptive claim ("the weather today is sunny"), but it interprets this fact and ascribes a value to it ("sunshine is good for mental health") in a way that prescribes an action ("I should go outside"). When people make evaluations about the goodness of something, it implies that they should do it. Evaluations are thus connected to actions and choices.

Sometimes people struggle to distinguish between facts and values and mistakenly think an evaluative statement is simply a positive claim about the way things are. As the next section will describe, this mistake is a type of fallacy.

THINK LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Determine whether the statements below are evaluative or descriptive. Propose a descriptive statement and a value statement that form the basis of each statement that you identify as evaluative.

1. You should wear a scarf and mittens to keep warm.
2. People visit Athens to explore the remains of the ancient city.
3. Tomatoes contain vitamin C, which can boost your immune system.
4. The city needs to build more parks where residents can walk, jog, and exercise.

The Naturalistic Fallacy

When thinking about values, it can be easy to make errors. A **fallacy** is an error in logical reasoning. Fallacies involve drawing the wrong conclusions from the premises of an argument or jumping to a conclusion without sufficient evidence. There are many types of logical fallacies because there are many ways people can make mistakes with their reasoning.

CONNECTIONS

Learn more about informal fallacies in the chapter on logic and reasoning, and explore more about cognitive values in the chapter on critical thinking, research, reading, and writing.

The **naturalistic fallacy** is an error in reasoning that assumes you can derive values (what people *ought* to do) from facts about the world (what *is* the case). The British philosopher G. E. Moore (1873–1958) explains the problem with this fallacy in his 1903 book *Principia Ethica*. For Moore, if philosophers based the judgment "x is good" on a set of facts, or natural properties, about x, they have committed the naturalistic fallacy.

There are frequent examples of the naturalistic fallacy in popular discourse. Debates about whether monogamy is good or bad are frequently posed in terms of whether it is "natural," and proponents for either side of the argument often point at monogamous or nonmonogamous animals to justify their answer. Claiming what humans ought to do from observations about animal behavior is an attempt to derive values from facts about the world.

Hume and the Is-Ought Problem

The naturalistic fallacy is related to **the is-ought problem**. This problem asserts the challenge of moving from statements of fact (something *is*) to statements of value (something *ought* to be). The Scottish Enlightenment philosopher David Hume (1711–1776) provides one of the most famous explanations of this problem in his *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–1740).

FIGURE 8.2 The descriptive claim "Having pets has been shown to improve people's mental health" can easily become the evaluative claim "People ought to have pets." This is known as the is-ought problem. (credit: "My cat Toby" by Richard J/Flickr, Public Domain)

At the time Hume was writing the *Treatise*, philosophers were rejecting a morality based on religious faith or dogmatic beliefs and were instead trying to find justifications for morality that relied on undeniable reasons for being a good person or trying to build a better society. Hume countered that you cannot derive *ought* from *is* because morality has to do with sentiments, not facts. In other words, morality has to do with what people believe and how we feel, and beliefs and feelings are not factual or derivable from facts. As Hume explains in the passage below, facts have to do with relations between objects. Morality, however, has to do with a human subject expressing their sentiments about a matter.

READ LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Read this excerpt from David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book 3, Part 1. As you read, pay attention to how he describes propositions that use "ought." Does he seem to think they are justified with proper reasoning? Why or why not? Think of an example where using "ought" statements without rational justification could be a problem.

> "I cannot forbear adding to these reasonings an observation, which may, perhaps, be found of some importance. In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remarked, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surprized to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this ought, or ought not, expresses some new relation or affirmation, it is necessary that it should be observed and explained; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it. But as authors do not commonly use this precaution, I shall presume to recommend it to the readers; and am persuaded, that this small attention would subvert all the vulgar systems of morality, and let us see, that the distinction of vice and virtue is not founded merely on the relations of objects, nor is perceived by reason."

(Source: Hume, David. (1739–1740) 2002. *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book III, Part I, Section I. Project Gutenberg. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/4705/4705-h/4705-h.htm - link2H_4_0085)

The Open-Question Argument

Hume's description of the is-ought problem lives on in contemporary philosophy, especially in 20th-century ethics. In his 1903 book *Principia Ethica*, G. E. Moore introduces the **open-question argument** to argue against the naturalistic fallacy, which he sees as trying to derive non-natural properties, such as "right" and "good," from natural properties. Unlike claims in the natural sciences, which extend understanding of or express a discovery about natural properties of the world, goodness and rightness are non-natural properties that cannot establish their truth based on natural properties and thus are always open to questioning. For example, the natural properties of water (H_20) are not open to questioning in the same way that the non-natural properties of things that people judge to be "good" or "right" are.

In order to answer the question "Is x good?" people frequently have to assert that something else is good. Is being kind to your neighbor good? Yes. Why? Because compassion for others is good. This does not "close" the question because it amounts to saying "good is good." It is circular and thus uninformative, so the question remains open. Moore did believe that claims about moral properties can be true, but not in the same way as claims about natural properties.

READ LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Search social media platforms for examples of "is" presented as "ought" statements. What types of beliefs do you notice people presenting as facts? What types of justifications are given for these claims?

Objections to the Fact-Value Distinction

Not all philosophers agree that there is a strict distinction between facts and values. **Moral realists** argue for a more objective concept of morality. They feel that there are certain moral facts about the world that are objectively true, such as the claim "murder is immoral." **Moral skeptics**, on the other hand, often use the fact-value distinction to argue against an objective basis for morality by emphasizing that moral values are *not* factual and involve a different mode of thinking that is distinct from logical or scientific reasoning. Disagreements with the fact-value distinction come in different forms.

Putnam's Objection to the Fact-Value Distinction

Some philosophers reject the concept of empirical facts by demonstrating that scientific reasoning uses values to establish facts. In his 1982 article "Beyond the Fact-Value Dichotomy," American philosopher and mathematician Hilary Putnam (1926 – 2016) argues that scientists frequently must choose between conflicting theories and use desirable principles like simplicity or coherence to devise an explanation for complex observational data. To illustrate his point, he explains that Einstein's theory of gravity was accepted over competing theories because it was simpler and preserved other laws of physics. Putnam argues that science's creation of facts is an evaluative practice and does not necessarily stand on a firmer ground than conclusions about values like goodness or kindness. This approach to refuting the fact-value distinction is provocative because it challenges the idea that science is an objective presentation of facts.

Lack of Distinction Claims

Another approach to challenging the fact-value distinction is to emphasize how people connect them in their everyday ways of speaking. Some philosophers argue that certain types of descriptive claims imply an evaluative claim, especially if they are linked by the concept of *purpose* or *function*. For example, if a person says, "This knife is too dull to cut anything," then you can assume they also mean "This is a bad knife" because it does not fulfill its function. If you understand the purpose of function of the knife, you can follow this implication easily. Since people make these types of connections easily in everyday speech, the distinction between facts and values may not hold much meaning.

Claims of Objective Moral Reasoning

Finally, some philosophers reject the fact-value distinction through the concept of **telos** (purpose, end, or goal). They argue that values are based on the fulfillment of a goal. You can objectively assess whether an action does or does not fulfill a goal. For example, if your goal is to help others in need, an action will be good if it fulfills that goal, like volunteering at a homeless shelter. Using this goal, you can objectively determine whether any action is good, bad, or neutral. Telos, therefore, establishes an objective morality.

To investigate the is-ought distinction further, you must explore what a value is. The following section will take up this question.

8.2 Basic Questions about Values

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Relate extrinsic values to intrinsic values.
- Distinguish between monism and pluralism in value theory.
- Explain the concept of incommensurability in value theory.
- Compare and contrast moral pluralism and moral relativism.

People spend much of their time trying to accomplish goals that they deem as "good." But what do people mean when they say something is "good"? What does it mean to value something? Can conflicting values be resolved? This section will explore different answers to these questions and, in doing so, help you understand the meaning of value.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Value

One way to think about what a value is has to do with whether it is valuable for its own sake or valuable for the sake of something else. Something has **intrinsic value** if it is valuable for its own sake. For example, Aristotle asserted that happiness has intrinsic value because it is an end in itself. He believed that all actions ultimately aim at happiness, but happiness is pursued for its own sake. If someone were to ask, "What is happiness good for?" Aristotle would reply that it simply good in and of itself.

Something has **extrinsic value** if it is valuable for the sake of something else. It is a means to an end. For example, you probably engage in a variety of activities that are good insofar as they help your health. Eating a well-balanced diet, going to the doctor regularly, and keeping an active routine all contribute to health and well-being. Health is thus the intrinsic good that makes each of those activities extrinsically good.

FIGURE 8.3 Eating fruits and vegetables is an extrinsic good, in that it contributes to the intrinsic value of human

health. If eating fruits and vegetables were found to not contribute to health, this would no longer be viewed as a desirable action. (credit: "Healthy and tasty fruits and vegetables" by Marco Verch Professional/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Fundamentality

One could argue, however, that health is yet an extrinsic value because people only value health because it contributes to happiness. When people distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic values, they think about not only what is valuable but also how values are related to each other. The example of health and happiness raises the question of **fundamentality**—whether there is only one intrinsic value or many.

Monism argues that there is only one fundamental intrinsic value that forms the foundation for all other values. For example, hedonists think that pleasure is a fundamental intrinsic value and that something must be pleasurable to be good. A monist believes that if people evaluate their values carefully—and the relationship between their values—then one value will be more important than the others and the others will serve that intrinsic value. For a monist, it is important to identify which value is more fundamental so that it can guide your beliefs, judgments, and actions.

Pluralism argues that there are multiple fundamental intrinsic values rather than one. A pluralist can still evaluate which values are intrinsic and which are extrinsic, but that process does not lead them to identify one ultimate intrinsic value that forms the foundation for all other values. Pluralism holds that people have two or more fundamental values because these values are not reducible to each other. For example, knowledge and love are both intrinsic goods if what is good about knowledge cannot be summed up in terms of love and if what is good about love cannot be summed up in terms of knowledge.

Philosophers who argue for monism often see pluralism as a type of relativism that can prevent people from resolving moral issues when values come into conflict. Consider physician-assisted suicide. A monist would want to address the issue of ending one's life for medical reasons by evaluating it according to one ethical principle. For example, if monists hold that pleasure is the intrinsic good, they might argue that physician-assisted suicide is good when it allows the cessation of pain, particularly in cases where the patient's suffering prohibits any pleasure of mind or body. Pluralists, however, would have to evaluate this physician-assisted suicide based on multiple intrinsic values, such as pleasure and life. In this case, the cessation of pain and the continuation of life are both good, and neither is better than the other. As a result, pluralists may not find a way to resolve the conflicting values or may not be able to identify whether this action is right or wrong. By contrast, monism allows someone to hold a unified and coherent metaethical framework because it asserts one fundamental value rather than many.

Pluralists, however, consider life to have many intrinsic goods including satisfying one's desires, achieving one's aims, developing one's abilities, and developing deep personal relationships. In *Women and Human Development*, American feminist and moral philosopher Martha Nussbaum (1947 - present) describes many intrinsic goods—including life, health, emotional attachment, affiliation, play, reason, and more (2000). A flourishing life will have many goods, not just one. Pluralists, moreover, are concerned with the consequences of monism. Asserting that there is only one intrinsic good, despite differences in opinion, could potentially restrict individual's freedom, especially when their values differ from the mainstream.

Incommensurability

Pluralism frequently relies on the concept of **incommensurability**, which describes a situation in which two or more goods, values, or phenomena have no standard of evaluation that applies to them all. You can compare the size of one object in feet and another object in centimeters by converting feet to centimeters. But you cannot compare the speed of a running cheetah to the size of the Taj Mahal because one involves measuring miles per hour and the other involves measuring square feet.

Similarly, some values are simply too different to be evaluated in the same way. For example, there are some things in life that you cherish and cannot describe in terms of a dollar amount, such as love or friendship. The

value of friendship is not commensurate with the value of money. Furthermore, physical health and supportive friends are both valuable, but they are good in different ways, so they are incomparable values. Even if you can evaluate values in the same way, you might not be able to compare them in the sense of judging what is better or worse than the other. For example, you might have many friendships that you value highly but not be able to rank them or determine who your best friend is.

Moral Pluralism vs. Moral Relativism

Moral pluralism argues that there are different moral frameworks that cannot be unified into one. One implication of this is that one culture may have difficulty understanding the values of another culture because they have completely different concepts of what is good, and we might not be able to find a way to reconcile these differences. Cultural differences play an important role in value pluralism and the idea that there can be multiple frameworks for understanding morality.

At the same time, pluralism is not the same as relativism. **Moral relativism** makes a larger claim than pluralism because it not only asserts that there are multiple moral frameworks, it also asserts that each framework is equally valid insofar as individuals, communities, and cultures determine what is moral. Moral relativism thus prohibits cultures from judging each other's value systems.

Nussbaum uses the example of genital mutilation as an example of why moral relativism raises issues (1999). If morality is completely relative to a culture's own traditions and values, it would be impossible for any outsiders to condemn female genital mutilation or other practices that harm women or keep them in a weakened or exploited state. Nussbaum argues that feminist issues should not be evaluated by local traditions and that a global notion of justice is needed to address gender inequality. She thus argues for a universal account of justice that is sensitive to differences between cultures, which she calls reasonable pluralism.

Pluralism and relativism get at the heart of many real-world ethical issues that people navigate in life, especially when they look at moral beliefs from historical or cultural perspectives that show how different values can be. Situating different values in relation to each other is difficult, and how people do so has practical outcomes for how they define what is right or wrong, which actions they consider ethical or unethical, and what aims they pursue in life.

8.3 Metaethics

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify the meaning of the phrase "ontology of value."
- Identify the significance of realism and anti-realism for moral discourse.
- Compare and contrast different theories regarding the foundations for moral theory.
- Explain the importance of the Euthyphro problem for metaethics.

Ethics is the broad study of morality and is often divided into metaethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics. Normative ethics and applied ethics are covered in separate chapters. Each field is distinguished by a different *level* of inquiry and analysis. **Metaethics** focuses on moral reasoning and foundational questions that explore the assumptions related to moral beliefs and practice. It attempts to understand the presuppositions connected to morality and moral deliberation. Metaethics explores, for example, where moral values originate, what it means to say something is right or good, whether there are any objective moral facts, whether morality is (culturally) relative, and whether there is a psychological basis for moral practices and value judgements.

In the previous two sections, in asking whether there is a fact-value distinction and what values are, we encountered a central question in metaethics—whether morality is grounded in objective or subjective values. We have also encountered questions about what is good or bad and right or wrong, which is the main concern of normative ethics. This section dives deeper into these questions and explores different foundations for moral values, such as God, religious faith, nature, society, politics, law, and rationality.

Ontology of value

An important area of metaethics is the ontology of value. Ontology is the study (ology) of being (ōn). It gets at the nature of what makes something what it is. **Ontology of value** is the study of the being of values. What is a value? Is it a statement about reality? A subjective idea or belief? A mental state or emotion? As you will see, there are different ontological accounts of value.

Realism and Anti-realism

Do moral values have a basis in reality, or are they purely subjective and relative to individuals or communities? Depending on your answer, your approach to ethics will look completely different. Thus, the first major distinction between different types of ethical reasoning is the difference between realism and anti-realism. Moral realists, as discussed earlier, object to the fact-value distinction. **Realism** asserts that ethical values have some basis in reality and that reasoning about ethical matters requires an objective framework or foundation to discover what is truly good. For a realist, values are not simply subjective opinions. **Anti-realism** asserts that ethical values are not based on objective facts about the world but instead rely on subjective foundations like individuals' desires and beliefs.

THINK LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Are you a moral realist or anti-realist? Before answering this question, consider the list of actions below. For each, consider both whether you think the action is objectively wrong and why or why not you take this position. Both your responses and your reasons for your responses will help you to determine which category you fall into,

- Murder
- Lying
- Corporal punishment
- Harming an innocent person

This section extends moral realism beyond the fact-value distinction to examine why many argue that moral realism is an important position to take and the types of objective realities people have used to establish a moral reality.

The Importance of Debate within Moral Realism

Moral debate poses a challenge to moral realism because it makes morality seem subjective. If people disagree on important moral issues, such as abortion, or on how to justify moral beliefs, how are we to determine who is right? Maybe no one has the right answer and moral claims are simply subjective opinions.

For a realist, moral disagreements do not mean that morality is subjective. Many fields, including the natural sciences, have vibrant debates and disagreements that do not necessarily indicate that their claims are subjective. For example, astronomers used to think that the sun and planets revolved around Earth, and the heliocentric concept of the universe was considered heretical. This disagreement does not mean that astronomy is subjective but instead that astronomy requires ongoing observation and debate to improve its understanding of reality. Along similar lines, moral debates do not necessarily prove morality is subjective and in fact can even improve one's understanding of a moral issue. Moral realism asserts that morality has an objective framework or foundation, which means that you can make true moral claims. People do not necessarily, however, agree on which claims are true.

The Importance of Moral Resolution

Moral relativism, discussed earlier, is an anti-realist position because it denies that there is an objective or universal justification for moral beliefs. Instead, morality is always relative to an individual or community. This means there is no way to say what is truly good or bad.

Moral relativism has taken many different shapes throughout the history of philosophy, and it is debated in popular discourses—especially politics and religion—as well as in metaethics. It is controversial because it seems to undermine the possibility of finding common ground in ethical debates that shape practical action or political policies. Thus anti-realism and moral relativism seem to create insurmountable barriers for overcoming moral disagreements.

For contemporary philosopher Michelle Moody-Adams, however, moral disagreements between different cultures—and even within cultures—do not require us to adopt an anti-realist position. She takes moral disagreements seriously but also argues for "cautious optimism" about moral objectivity (1997). For Moody-Adams, irresolvable moral disagreements are an "unavoidable feature of moral experience" and not a reason to be skeptical about moral reasoning (1997, 107).

Since anti-realism is a form of moral skepticism, it can lead not only to relativism but also to pessimism about whether we can resolve moral debates or whether moral reasoning has any legitimacy. Being able to explain what is right or wrong is important not only for ethics but also for the lives of individuals within communities because people's actions and decisions impact each other. This is one of the critiques that moral realists employ against anti-realists. If morality is purely subjective, then values are arbitrary and people are unable to make true claims about moral values.

Moral realism requires one to find objective justifications for moral beliefs and claims. These justifications take a variety of forms—including God and nature—which the following sections will explain.

Divine and Religious Foundations for Moral Values

One way to analyze moral reasoning is by examining its **foundation**—that is, how it supports claims about morality. Throughout history, many humans have relied upon a concept of the divine to justify moral claims and values.

Ethical frameworks that are based on God can function in a variety of ways depending on the concept of the divine. God can function as the highest good. In this case, God provides an exemplar for the virtues and values that should guide human action. For example, if God is a loving being, humans should develop their ability to love, and performing loving actions will be the basis for morality. The concept of God can function as an ultimate judge who decides what is right and wrong from an omnipotent and infallible position. In this case, God provides an objective standpoint for moral judgment. With this ethical framework, humans may disagree on what is right or wrong because of their limited perspectives, but morality is not relative or arbitrary because it rests on eternal truths from an all-knowing God.

FIGURE 8.4 This medieval engraving of the Great Chain of Being from the *Rhetorica Christiana* by Fray Diego de Valadés (1579) depicts God on a throne ruling over all that exists. The concept of God can function as a foundation for deciding what is right and wrong. (credit: "The Great Chain of Being from the Rhetorica christiana by Fray Diego de Valades (1579)" by Diego de Valadés/Wikimedia, Public Domain)

Religions frequently claim knowledge about the nature and source of reality, the meaning of human existence, the foundations for morality, the purpose of suffering in the world, and what happens when people die. Many religions consider the tenets of their faith to come from a divine source, sacred revelations, or prophets. Religions also look to scripture, sacred practices and customs, images, and objects to determine moral values.

Augustine on Faith and Knowledge

Those who challenge the divine as a source of moral authority question whether these moral beliefs are based on only faith or whether they are justified true beliefs that can be accepted as knowledge. **Faith** refers to beliefs that are not proven, including beliefs that cannot be proven. The medieval monk, theologian, and philosopher Augustine of Hippo (354–430) argued that there are many things in life people claim to know that are actually based on faith. His argument attempts to blur the distinction between faith and knowledge. For example, if people are not adopted, they typically claim to know who their parents are and take that as firm knowledge, not belief. Yet people are not able to remember their own births or the earliest years of their lives, so they did not confirm this belief with their own observations. For Augustine, this is how faith works. In this sense, faith and knowledge serve a similar purpose in human life and the values people hold.

The Euthyphro problem

Using God as the basis for moral values can introduce challenging philosophical questions that are difficult to answer. The **Euthyphro problem** describes such a challenge in theistic ethical systems. It asks whether something is good because God commands it or if God commands it because it is good. The name comes from the Platonic dialogue *Euthyphro*, which features a conversation between the philosopher Socrates and a man named Euthyphro who claims to be an expert on piety. Socrates asks, "Is the pious being loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is being loved by the gods?" (Plato, *Euthyphro* 10a). In the former case, the gods do not determine what is good, so there must be a higher authority above the gods. In the latter

case, the gods remain the ultimate authority, but there are no discernible principles for why they love what they love. That means that piety is a command from above without reason, which limits one's ability to theorize about it. This idea is called **divine command theory**.

The former case, however, introduces a problem regarding God's sovereignty and omnipotence because it places moral principles above the divine and seems to set up a situation in which there are rules not even God may violate. In other words, if God cannot act immorally, is God truly all-powerful?

Natural and Human Foundations for Moral Values

Different ethical frameworks rest on different foundations or justifications: some appeal to a nonhuman principle like nature; others appeal to shared human institutions like culture, tradition, society, or law; and still others appeal to the individual and their resources for moral reasoning. This section examines moral reasoning based on nature, society, politics, the self, or reason.

Nature and Natural Law

One approach to ethics appeals to nature or natural law to make claims about what is good or bad. An action, goal, or characteristic is good if it accords with nature or natural law and is bad if it violates it. Here, *nature* can refer to human nature or the observed features of the natural world.

According to the medieval philosopher Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), there are four types of laws: eternal, natural, human, and divine. Eternal laws govern the universe, natural laws govern the natural world, and human laws govern human societies. Divine laws are supernatural and allow humans to reach salvation but cannot be known through human reason alone. Instead, they must be revealed by God (e.g., the Ten Commandments, Scriptures, and other divine revelations). Humans can use reason, however, to discover natural laws and create human laws. For Aquinas, human laws must align with natural law. Human laws that violate the laws of nature are "no longer a law but a perversion of law" (Aquinas [1485] 1948, 649). Aquinas's argument contributes to classical **natural law theory**, which sees laws as upholding natural order. Because nature is not subjective, natural law theory sees values as objective.

Ethical Naturalism

As discussed earlier, some philosophers believe that an essential link between values and telos, or purpose, creates an objective moral reality. **Ethical naturalism** argues that performing good actions fulfills human nature, while performing evil actions distorts it. If this is the case, moral values and "what is good" are based on natural facts about the world, not individuals' subjective feelings or beliefs. Ethical naturalism often relies on concepts of pleasure, desire, happiness, or flourishing to define what is naturally good or bad.

The 20th-century philosopher Philippa Foot (1920–2010) provides one of the most famous philosophical arguments for ethical naturalism. In *Natural Goodness* (2003), Foot argues that moral values like "goodness" are not about statements, as G. E. Moore suggested in *Principia Ethica*, or about mere emotions that individuals feel, but are instead about human flourishing. Just as bees have qualities that help them thrive and build strong colonies, so humans have virtues that help them to thrive in life and build flourishing communities. Foot's description of flourishing is influenced by Aristotle, who based his concept of ethics on an examination of different virtues, which involve fulfilling one's telos, or purpose. This approach to morality is called **virtue ethics**. In ethical naturalism and virtue ethics, discovering moral values requires understanding one's nature, which must be based on an objective understanding of human life.

CONNECTIONS

The chapter on normative moral theory explores virtue ethics in greater depth.

In *Natural Goodness*, Foot further argues that moral evaluations are similar to the types of evaluations that people make about other living things in the natural world. Moral goodness describes how one should live

according to human nature. Just as you can know what is good for an animal by studying its nature, you can know what is good for humans by understanding their nature.

More importantly, Foot argues that part of understanding *what* an organism is involves knowing what is good for it based on its vital processes. For example, you know what is good for a duck based on knowledge of what a duck is. This knowledge would include an understanding of the duck's nature and what helps it live a good life. A duck is an aquatic bird, so a habitat with water will be good for it. Along similar lines, you can know what is good for a human based on knowledge of human nature.

In this sense, she connects morality to biological flourishing, or achieving the goals of human life. For example, if the purpose of human life is to develop meaningful relationships and to actualize one's potential, then morality is based on the virtues that allow someone to achieve these ends. For example, one could argue that humans, like other primates, have evolved to cooperate and care for others as a part of their survival, so actions that promote cooperation and care are good, and actions that harm others are bad.

Reason

Some ethical theories focus exclusively on certain human capacities, like reason. **Reason** is a methodical way of thinking that uses evidence and logic to draw conclusions. The use of reason as the grounds for morality became particularly important in Enlightenment philosophy because philosophers wanted to assert the validity of moral principles without relying on religious beliefs or God.

FIGURE 8.5 Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant argued that an action is moral if it can be universal. (credit: "Bildnis des Immanuel Kant" by Johann Friedrich Schleuen (senior)/Leipzig University Library, Public Domain)

The Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) argued that as rational agents, humans express general principles or maxims when they act. You always act for a reason—namely, a goal or end in mind. For Kant, an action or decision is moral if you can universalize it, which he formulates in the **categorical imperative**. Kant's categorical imperative states: "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law" (Kant [1785] 1998, 31). That means you know an action is moral if can be universal for everyone. The categorical imperative works best when we note that an action

contradicts it. For example, lying cannot be moral because it is not universalizable. It is impossible for everyone to lie. Even the act of lying assumes that people usually tell the truth.

Self

Other approaches to ethical theory argue that morality originates in the self. How do people know what is right or wrong? What motivates them to be good and care for others? Some argue that the **conscience**, an individual's inner sense of right and wrong, forms the basis for ethics. But where does one get this inner sense? Some argue that it comes through **intuition**—cognition that seems completely self-evident and impossible to deny—while others assert that individuals develop it through education or reason.

Other approaches to ethics rely upon the individual's psychology, moral sentiments, or feelings. Multiple moral theories emphasize **compassion** and **empathy**, the ability to suffer with and share others' feelings. For the ancient Chinese philosopher Mencius (371–289 BCE), the feeling of compassion allows benevolent actions, which are the basis for ethics and well-being. Compassion and empathy might also be considered virtues that individuals cultivate. Virtue ethics bases its moral theory on virtues as personal characteristics that an individual can develop.

Feminist care ethics bases ethics on individuals' feelings for the people who play a significant role in their lives. In her book *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, the American philosopher Nel Noddings (b. 1929) argues that an "ethics built on caring" is "characteristically and essentially feminine" insofar as it arises out of women's experiences, which are traditionally defined through caregiving roles (2013, 8).

An important debate within ethical theory is the importance of **altruism**, which is the selfless care for others' well-being. Some moral philosophers argue that only altruistic actions are completely moral, while others assert that self-interest can motivate the moral treatment of others. It is this issue that the next section addresses.

THINK LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

In the above section, you learned that there are many different possible sources for moral knowledge. Do you think there are objective sources of moral knowledge? Why or why not?

8.4 Well-Being

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Describe Epicurean hedonism and utilitarianism.
- Analyze arguments for and against satisfactionism as a determinant of well-being.
- Identify objective goods that contribute to well-being.
- Outline different approaches to eudaimonism.

Well-being—or flourishing, as it is sometimes called—is a widely discussed topic in value theory because it helps us to understand what we value and why. The things people value in life—for example, a just society, good health, beautiful art, physical pleasure, and supportive friendships—contribute to their well-being. For some philosophers, well-being determines values. If you want to define whether an action is valuable, you must determine whether it promotes the well-being of a person.

Well-being focuses on what is good *for a person*, not simply what is good in an abstract sense. It also focuses on intrinsic goods that contribute to a flourishing life. In what follows, you will learn about different concepts of well-being and how they can help you think about what is valuable and good. There are three general ways philosophers approach the value of well-being: (1) pleasure, (2) desire, and (3) objective goods.

Hedonism

Some philosophers describe well-being as obtaining pleasure and avoiding pain. The general term for this approach is **hedonism**. The term *hedonism* has a different meaning in philosophy than in popular usage. In everyday language, *hedonism* refers to extravagant indulgence in bodily pleasures. By contrast, philosophical hedonism is not about just bodily pleasure—it takes emotional and mental pleasure and pain into account as well. A philosophical hedonist will prioritize intellectual pleasures or long-lasting pleasures that contribute to a good and meaningful life, rather than momentary and fleeting pleasures.

Hedonism is based on the idea that pleasure and pain are the two most fundamental emotions or states of being. For a hedonist, pleasure is good and pain is bad, and for this reason they can serve as principles for determining well-being.

Epicurus's Hedonism

Hedonism has a long philosophical history. The ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus (341–270 BCE) founded a school of philosophy called Epicureanism, which taught that pleasure is the highest good. Epicurus's concept of pleasure, however, is not simply physical and is far from being extravagant, materialistic, or indulgent. He taught that a life of moderation, virtue, and philosophy would be the most pleasurable. He believed it was important to tame wild desires that are impossible to satisfy and that cause unhappiness and dissatisfaction with life. His philosophy focused on methods for achieving freedom from mental, emotional, and physical pain through **ataraxia** (tranquility). For Epicurus, achieving ataraxia requires confronting irrational fears, especially the fear of death.

The concept of hedonism and even the word *Epicurean* have very different meanings in popular usage now. Hedonism describes reveling in indulgent bodily and sensory pleasures like food, alcohol, and sex. The term *Epicurean* often refers to individuals who take especial pleasure in food and drink, like a wine connoisseur or someone obsessed with Michelin star restaurants. However, for Epicurus, the best thing in life was having good friends who want to discuss philosophy.

Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism is considered hedonistic because it bases moral theory on maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain. For the utilitarian philosophers Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), values rest on pleasure and pain, which are psychological states of mind. Pleasure is a psychological state of mind that is intrinsically good, while pain is a psychological state of mind that is intrinsically bad. The value of an action thus rests on the psychological state it causes. Utilitarians evaluate actions based on the intensity, duration, certainty, and extent of pleasure or pain and the number of people it affects. In general, utilitarian philosophers believe that an action is moral if it leads to the greatest benefit for the greatest number of people. Thus, utilitarianism can be described as a method for maximizing well-being.

Qualitative Distinctions in Pleasure

Pleasure can be a slippery term. It is experiential, but it can be experienced in many different ways. For this reason, philosophers often create distinctions to explain different types of pleasure. Pleasure can be sensory or bodily, affective or emotional, and mental or emotional. You can describe the pleasure of biting into a juicy apple, watching light reflect on water, and feeling soft textures. You can describe the elation of achieving a goal, the joy of receiving good news, and the comfort of spending time with a close friend. You can also describe the gratification of learning something new, the satisfaction of sharing ideas with others, and the euphoria of immersing one's focus entirely in an activity.

Pleasure as a State of Mind

Pleasure seems to be a feeling or sensation, but also much more. For example, savoring an apple means taking pleasure in its taste. Here the pleasure depends on the taste being good, but the pleasure we take in tasting it is not the same as simply tasting it. For this reason, some philosophers have argued that pleasure is not simply

sensation but instead involves a notion of good. That is, pleasure satisfies a desire for what is good, which involves a state of mind, not just a sensation—and so involves reasoning, beliefs, or the satisfaction of a desire.

CONNECTIONS

The chapter on normative moral theory explores utilitarianism in greater depth.

As a result, critics of hedonistic philosophies complain that pleasure is too varied, indeterminate, subjective, and conditional to be a solid basis for ethics, well-being, or any philosophical theory, and that well-being consists of more than pleasure. The experience machine illustrates this issue.

The Experience Machine (a Thought Experiment)

The **experience machine** is a critique of hedonism and pleasure-based concepts of well-being. In this thought experiment created by American thinker Robert Nozick (1938 – 2002) in 1974, a person can be plugged into an "experience machine" that gives them every experience they value and enjoy. Moreover, they would be completely unaware of the machine, which means they would experience everything as real even though it would all be an illusion. The thought experiment prompts one to think about what makes life good. Is well-being simply a state of mind that a machine could replicate, or is there more to it? For Nozick, it is not a good life because it is not real. People want what is real, and they want to really do things. Pleasure alone does not satisfy that need and desire.

Well-Being and the Satisfaction of Desire

Another way to think of well-being is the satisfaction of desire. There are multiple ways to define desire and think about its satisfaction. One approach is to describe desire as action based. A person's desires dispose them to take certain actions—for example, you eat because you desire food. Another approach is to think of desire as related to beliefs about what is good. In this case, you would say that you eat because you believe it is good to do so. This theory of desire explains why it is relevant to philosophical concepts of well-being. Well-being is satisfying one's desires. This concept of well-being is called **satisfactionism**.

In satisfactionism, if an individual is able to satisfy larger desires in their life, they live a good life. Flourishing is thus a matter of desire satisfaction that is dependent upon the individual's preferences. However, individuals can be wrong about what is good and can make choices that they think will bring them happiness but do not. For example, a person may believe that being an astronaut will make them happy in life but then discover that they do not deal well with the loneliness of long space flights. Had they understood what being an astronaut entails, they would not have desired it. So only the satisfaction of informed desires leads to happiness, while the satisfaction of uninformed desires might not.

Cognitivism and Non-cognitivism

Explaining well-being in terms of desire and preferences exposes specific disagreements in how philosophers think about values—more specifically, whether values have content. In other words, do values express explicit ideas and beliefs that you can put in a statement, or are values the emotional states of an individual? **Cognitivism** argues that values are cognitive (involve thought) and express statements about properties of things (e.g., this apple is healthy) or states of events (e.g., the sinking of the Titanic was a tragedy). **Non-cognitivism** argues that values are not cognitive because they do not necessarily make statements about properties of things or states of events and have more to do with a psychological state of mind.

Emotivism

Emotivism is a branch of non-cognitivism that argues that value judgments express someone's emotions, which unlike a belief cannot be true or false. English philosopher A. J. Ayer (1910–1989), a proponent for moral emotivism, proposed that people do not hold moral beliefs; instead, they emote moral feelings. That means that if someone says, "Killing innocent people is bad," they are expressing how they *feel* about killing

innocent people rather than making a statement that can be proven or disproven or that is up for debate.

Contemporary moral philosophers often argue against emotivism because it means that values are dependent on individuals' feelings and thus are completely subjective. Moral philosophy often attempts to assert that there are objective values, particularly when it comes to well-being. The following section will explain such philosophical approaches.

Well-Being and Objective Goods

Another approach to well-being is to create lists of objective goods that contribute to a flourishing life. Unlike desire-based concepts of well-being, objective goods can argue against personal preferences. Distinguishing between desire and objective goods can be useful in situations where personal desire conflicts with what is good for the person. As an example, consider a good that clearly contributes to well-being, like health. One could argue that a balanced diet and frequent physical activity are objective goods. Even if an individual desires to eat unhealthy food or live a sedentary lifestyle, their individual preferences do not change what is objectively good. Philosophers who propose that there are objective goods frequently focus on knowledge, virtue, and friendship as ways to evaluate and understand well-being.

Knowledge

Aristotle began his *Metaphysics* with the idea that the desire to know is a universal human quality. Part of being human is to seek knowledge. People are curious. They have a sense of wonder. They value discovery. By contrast, having a lack of knowledge about the world can lead to poor decisions, confusion, anxieties, delusions, and other states of minds and activities that detract from well-being. For these reasons, knowledge can be considered an important part of well-being and flourishing in life.

Virtue

Virtue is also considered an objective good. The ancient Greek philosophers Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle considered virtue to be essential to a good life. In ancient Greek, the word for virtue was **arête**, which can also be translated as "excellence." To determine the arête, or excellence, of something, you have to know what its purpose or function is. For example, the purpose of a knife is to cut things, so its arête is sharpness. A good knife is a sharp knife. It is easier to determine the arête of a practical object like a knife than the arête of a person. For this reason, Socrates argues that people need to "discuss virtue everyday" and continually examine their lives (Plato [399–360 BCE] 2002, 41). Virtue is not simply a characteristic or personality trait for the ancient Greeks. It is a way of living.

FIGURE 8.6 Determining the arête, or excellence, of objects is often a straightforward undertaking. These teacups, for example, should fulfill their function of holding tea very well. Determining the function of human existence,

however, is more difficulty, making determining arête in this context much trickier. (credit: "Teacups" by Heather/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* describes virtue as promoting human well-being. To determine what actions are virtuous, Aristotle proposes that virtue is the mean between a deficiency and excess. Vices, the opposite of virtues, are deficiencies or excesses. Aristotle uses bravery as an example (Book II, Chapter 7, §2). Bravery is virtue that involves having the right amount of fear and confidence. It is the mean between excessive fear and deficient confidence on one hand (cowardice) and deficient fear and excessive confidence (rashness) on the other hand. In this way, the virtuous action will be the golden mean, neither too much nor too little. Virtue thus describes being able to do the right thing in the right way, a quality that contributes to one's well-being.

Friendship

Friendship is also considered an objective good. A person's social relations and close ties to others also allow them to flourish. For Aristotle, friendship is "necessary for our life" (1155a5). In Book VIII of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle identifies three different types of friendships: (1) friendships of pleasure, (2) friendships of utility, and (3) friendships of character. The first two types of friendship are instrumental in the sense that these friends are not appreciated for themselves but instead are a means to another end (pleasure or usefulness). Aristotle thinks that these friendships dissolve easily. For Aristotle, friendships based on an appreciation of someone's character are stronger and do not dissolve when circumstances change. These types of friends recognize what is good in each other as people and want what is good for each other. In these ways, friendships contribute to our well-being.

Eudaimonia (Human Flourishing)

Philosophers sometimes use the word **eudaimonia**, the ancient Greek term for "happiness" or "human flourishing," to describe well-being. Eudaimonia is a hard word to translate. People often associate the word happiness with a fleeting moment of elation or personal satisfaction rather than a state of overall well-being. However, eudaimonia is not a mere feeling or temporary high. It describes one's life as a whole, not just how one feels, which is why the term flourishing is used more often. Flourishing also has the sense of thriving according to one's nature. We add human to flourishing to specify that we mean excelling in the things that are proper to a human life.

Ancient Greek View of Eudaimonia

Eudaimonia is derived from the words for "good" (eu) and "spirit" (daimon). A daimon was a guardian spirit that would help someone through life and guide them to the underworld. The ancient Greek philosopher Socrates claimed his daimon told him to philosophize so he could awaken the Athenian people. Eudaimonia is more than a temporary feeling of joy or elation. It is having a good spirit through life, or—to put in more modern terms—having a flourishing life, full of all the good things a life can provide.

For Plato and Aristotle, eudaimonia is related to the virtue or excellence of something (arête). Virtue or excellence is determined by the nature and purpose of something. For humans, one simply needs to determine the virtues that are proper to human nature and practice them to flourish in life. Moreover, flourishing in life gives an indication that one is acting well or virtuously. For Aristotle, virtue alone was not sufficient for flourishing. After all, someone could be very virtuous and suffer a grave misfortune. Suffering seems antithetical to flourishing. However, ancient Stoics believed that virtue was sufficient for flourishing and that tragic circumstances could not rob someone of their flourishing, because it could not take away their virtue. These debates in ancient Greek and Roman philosophy help us to think about whether an individual cultivates flourishing through their own agency alone or whether circumstances determine flourishing, or whether perhaps both are true.

G. E. M. Anscombe and Modern Eudaimonism

The British philosopher Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe (1919–2001), known as G. E. M. Anscombe,

critiqued Aristotle's ethics and eudaimonism in her 1958 article "Modern Moral Philosophy." For Anscombe, Aristotle's concept of eudaimonism is too vague to be useful to moral philosophy, and many of the virtues he describes in *Nicomachean Ethics* do not fit within a moral framework.

At the same time that Anscombe critiqued ancient Greek eudaimonism as a principle for moral philosophy, she denied that modern philosophy had provided any better alternatives. For Anscombe, modern moral philosophies, such as Kantian ethics and utilitarianism, use "oughts" that have no firm foundation. She argues that an "ought" implies a command or law, which requires a legislator. This concept of morality works well within a theistic framework where God serves as a legislator, but modern moral philosophy presents itself as secular, not religious. Anscombe's contemporaries took up the challenge of describing human flourishing and virtues in a more rigorous manner that could form the foundation for modern moral philosophy.

Perfectionism

Another way to approach human flourishing is to think of the highest attainable good for an individual, human nature, or society. This approach to ethics is called **perfectionism**. There are a variety of ways that perfectionism can be articulated. For Thomas Aquinas, one's goal in life is to become a perfect image of God (Aquinas [1485] 1948, 439). Enlightenment philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) argued in his *Ethics* ([1677] 1985) that people pursue what will increase and perfect their powers and capacities. For example, joy allows people to rise to greater perfection, while sadness leads to less perfection. There are many other philosophies of self-perfection across the history of ideas. In each of them, you can see how the concept of well-being is tied to perfecting oneself.

Kant's Kingdom of Ends

For Kant, values are not psychological states but instead are rational maxims. As explained previously, Kant bases his moral philosophy on the categorical imperative, which helps one recognize moral and immoral actions based on whether they can be turned into a universal maxim that applies to everyone. Kant provides other formulations of the categorical imperative, where he states that one must always treat humans as "ends in themselves" rather than "a means to an end." This means that you cannot use other people as instruments to achieve your goals.

Kant states that another way to arrive at a universal maxim is to imagine you are creating laws for a kingdom of ends. The **kingdom of ends** is a hypothetical, ideal society in which every individual is treated as an end and no one is treated as a means to an end. It would be a society of equals, where everyone flourishes. In this sense, Kant's moral philosophy uses the concept of an ideal or perfect society as a guiding principle.

Japanese Notion of *Ikigai* (Reason for Being)

Japanese psychology takes up the concept of **ikigai** (reason for being) to describe well-being. Contemporary psychologist Michiko Kumano describes two senses of well-being in Japan: (1) *shiawase*, or hedonic well-being, and (2) *ikigai*, or reason for being. He explains that while shiawase is a state of contentment or happiness and freedom from worry, ikigai deals more with what makes life meaningful. He explains that ikigai is "less philosophical and more intuitive, irrational, and complicated in its nuances than other related terms in Western languages" (Kumano 2017, 421). How does one experience this nuanced, intuitive sense of purpose in life? For Kumano, ikigai has to do with devoting oneself to goals and activities that are aligned with one's values.

8.5 Aesthetics

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Compare and contrast objective and subjective concepts of beauty.
- Describe aesthetic judgment.
- Explain the relation between aesthetics and environmentalism.
- Explain the relation between aesthetics and feminism.
- Describe everyday aesthetics.

Thus far, the chapter has touched on fairly abstract concepts related to value. However, value theory has very concrete applications. Aesthetics is an area of value theory that examines how people evaluate works of art and other aesthetic experiences in nature and their everyday lives.

Beauty

A central concept in aesthetics is beauty. What is beauty? Is beauty an objective or subjective value? Even if you take beauty to be a subjective judgment, there are different ways to approach thinking about it. Are judgments of beauty completely "in the eye of the beholder," as the popular phrase indicates, or are there criteria or patterns that determine individuals' responses? Is beauty arbitrary, or can we discover some framework for explaining our experiences of it?

Objective Concepts of Beauty

For ancient philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, beauty is a quality of an object. These thinkers asserted that there was objective criteria for explaining what is beautiful. Plato believed that beauty is a quality of an object and that there is one true "form" or essence of the beautiful that explains why individual things are beautiful. The beautiful itself has to do with harmony, proportion, and balance.

This concept of the beautiful makes sense if you look at ancient Greek art. The ancient Greeks used mathematical ratios to determine the perfect proportions for their temples and sculptures. The Greek sculptor Polykleitos (5th century BCE) developed mathematical rules for sculpting the human form so that the proportions of the body would be beautiful and lifelike.

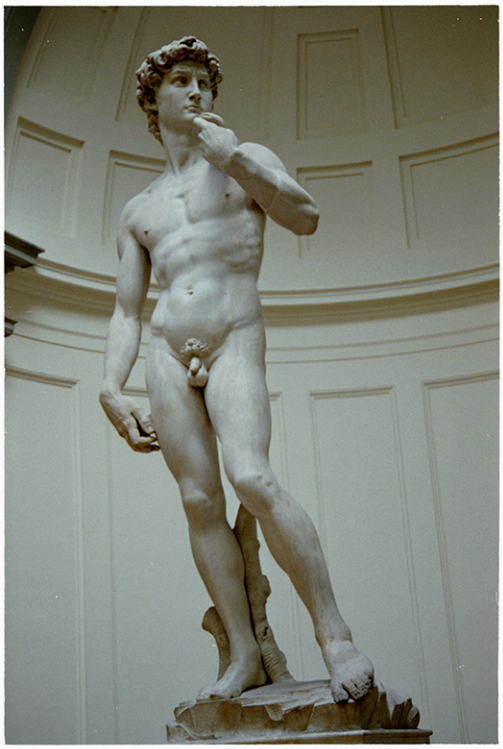

FIGURE 8.7 Michaelangelo was heavily inspired by Greek and Roman mythology, and Michaelangelo's David displays the mathematical ratios and proportions that were an integral part of the Greek understanding of beauty. This sculpture exhibits the contrapposto stance: one foot forward and the opposite arm raised as if about to shift its weight. The contrapposto position expresses balance and harmonious movement. (credit: "Florence1988" by David Wright/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

In Plato's philosophy, moreover, beauty is not simply a sensory or emotional response to things of this world; it is transcendent and immaterial and involves one's soul and mind. The experience of beauty is ecstatic in the sense that it lifts one beyond this world. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato describes the soul sprouting and growing wings when it beholds something beautiful. As the wings grow, the soul is able to ascend to new heights.

Subjective Concepts of Beauty

In contrast to Plato and Aristotle, Enlightenment philosophers argued that beauty is a subjective judgment, meaning it is a statement about what a person feels rather a quality of an object. For Hume, judgments of beauty are statements of taste. In Hume's "Of the Standard of Taste" (1757), he points out that we witness great variety in taste, even among people who share similar cultural and educational backgrounds. He also notes the way that debates about taste frequently descend into condescension and defensiveness. Taste is very personal, and people feel passionately about their judgments of taste. Yet Hume still asserts that people can educate, develop, and refine their taste, which can then give their judgments more weight. For Hume, critics with refined taste ultimately decide what is good or bad art.

Aesthetic Judgment

Aesthetic theory also examines how people make judgments about art. Are aesthetic judgments rational? Do they have justifications, and if so, what kind of justifications?

Kant and Aesthetic Judgment

In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790), Kant, like Hume, considers judgments of taste to be subjective—that is, a statement about the subject's response to an object. However, he thinks that when people experience beauty, they also think that others *ought* to feel the same way. Moreover, Kant thinks that art and

beauty are not a matter of personal preference because values and ideals are involved. If you enjoy something that is a mere personal preference, like an ice cream flavor, you will not necessarily expect others to like it and will not feel insulted if they dislike it. But the same is not necessarily true for art. For example, maybe you cannot explain why you prefer chocolate ice cream—it simply tastes better to you. However, you can explain why you love Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and think that others should read it too. Kant cares about the values involved with aesthetic judgments because he believes that the beautiful prepares people to love what is good.

Sibley and Aesthetic Judgment

How do people justify aesthetic judgments? Are there rules or a specific rationale that are needed? In "Aesthetic Concepts," British philosopher Frank Sibley (1923 – 1996) distinguishes between two types of remarks people make about art: sensory observations—what anyone with the sense of sight or hearing can observe—and aesthetic judgments, which require sensitivity to details and discernment (1959). Sibley notes that people frequently base aesthetic judgments on sensory observations. For example, you might describe a painting as melancholic because of its blue palette. However, Sibley argues that this does not mean that a person's sensory observations require that they arrive at a particular aesthetic judgment. Someone could disagree with your assessment of the painting and describe it as calm rather than melancholic. In this sense, aesthetic judgments have justifications but not necessary rules, conditions, or relations between what a person sees and how they interpret or judge it.

The Intentional Fallacy

Who determines what a work of art means? Its audience? Art historians or critics? Some people assert that it is the intention of the artist that determines the meaning of the work of art. For literary theorist William Kurtz Wimsatt (1907 – 1975) and philosopher of art Monroe Beardsley (1915 – 1985), both Americans, this is a fallacy: the **intentional fallacy**. Wimsatt and Beardsley point out that people are able to describe, interpret, and evaluate a work of art without any reference to the artist's intentions and, furthermore, that these intentions are often unknown and unavailable (1946).

There are other reasons not to limit the meaning of a work of art to the artist's intentions. A work of art takes on a life of its own as it becomes known to the public and incorporated into spaces where it is discussed, compared, analyzed, and catalogued. Additionally, intentions do not always land correctly. An artist might intend to provoke a particular reaction and fail to do so, or the work of art might incite a response that the artist could not possibly anticipate. Audiences' reactions to the work of art are meaningful and, more importantly, not always a misinterpretation if they differ from the intentions of the artist.

Art and Values

Studying aesthetics can lay bare what societies value, how they express that value, and who gets to create values. Since aesthetic values are shaped by culture, society, class, religion, politics, ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, and ability, art intervenes in ethical and social-political issues—and vice versa.

Feminist Aesthetics

Feminism, as defined by American social activist bell hooks (1952 – 2021), "is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (hooks 2015, 1). Art provides one way to investigate the exploitation and oppression of women, particularly since women have been excluded from art. In past centuries, women were not allowed to study at art academies or exhibit their work at galleries. Additionally, the women who managed to create art were often marginalized and at times brutally punished for trying to make their way into the art world, like the 17th-century Italian artist Artemisia Gentileschi, who was sexually assaulted by a man from her father's art circle and then dishonored and tortured in court. Women of color have been excluded from the art world to an even greater degree, particularly if their works of art do not fit within the classical "canon" of art, which focuses on "great" works of art like large-scale paintings, epic novels, and other traditionally masculine arts. Often, works of art that are tied to handicraft and domestic arts are excluded from the canon of great

works of art, which means that many creations by a variety of women are ignored.

In the 1980s, a group of anonymous women artist-activists called the Guerrilla Girls—a reference to guerrilla fighters and the fact that they used gorilla masks to hide their identities—started a billboard campaign to shed light on this issue. They created a poster that pointed out the exclusion of women artists from the Metropolitan Museum. It provided the statistic that "less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art Sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female" (Guerrilla Girls 1989) and raised the question of whether women have to be naked to be in a museum. The Guerilla Girls are still active and continue to use playful campaigns to raise awareness about feminist issues.

FIGURE 8.8 In the 1980s, a group of feminists calling themselves The Guerrilla Girls' created this poster about women's objectification and lack of representation in art museums. (credit: "Guerrilla girls" by Ryohei Noda/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Environmental Aesthetics

People often think about art in terms of spaces like a museum or gallery, not the great outdoors. Moreover, some philosophers, like Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 – 1831), draw a sharp distinction between natural beauty and artistic beauty to assert the superiority of human creation over the natural world. Some art, however, challenges the elevation of art over nature and uses art to immerse people in nature. There are many examples of land art in prehistoric and Indigenous cultures—for example, earthworks and mounds made by pre-Columbian Native Americans. Contemporary land art blurs the distinction between nature and art in ways that allow one to contemplate the profound effect people have had the natural world and to reorient themselves to the sublime beauty and grandeur of natural landscapes.

FIGURE 8.9 *Sun Tunnels*, by American artist Nancy Holt (1938 – 2014) is an art installation of massive concrete tunnels placed in the Great Basin Desert of Utah. The tunnels are large enough for people to sit inside, and they are

placed so that their openings frame the sun on the horizon during solstices. Holt described the purpose of the art installation as bringing "the vast space of the desert back to human scale." (credit: "Nancy Holt, Sun Tunnels, 1973-1976" by Retis/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Land art was an art movement in the 1960s and 1970s that sought to relocate works of art from the commercialized spaces of museums and galleries to the natural world. Some examples of land art challenge the distinction between the human world and the natural world. The Cuban-American artist Ana Mendieta (1948–1985) did an "earth-body" series of works that involved pressing her body into natural landscapes and photographing the impressions, as well as still and moving film of her interacting with natural landscapes. Her intention was to develop a spiritual connection with the earth using her body. Art can help people think about their relationship to the natural world and their responsibility for the environment.

At times, works of art have also served as environmental interventions. For example, in her 2020 art project *The Distant Is Imminent*, American photographer Camille Seaman (b. 1969) projected images of melting icebergs from Antarctica and the Artic onto buildings in cities that will be affected by the rising sea level. The projections showed the estimated water line for 2050, which allowed spectators to envision their surroundings swallowed by the ocean due to climate change. These works of art are meant to create more than an aesthetic experience—they are calls to collective action and change.

Everyday Aesthetics

While many approaches to aesthetics focus on works of art and artistic creations, you can find aesthetically significant objects, experiences, and practices all around you. **Everyday aesthetics** asserts the prevalence of aesthetically meaningful experiences in one's ordinary day-to-day life—for example, listening to the rain fall on a roof, admiring the pattern of leaves on the ground, and even choosing what shirt to wear or how to decorate your living spaces.

FIGURE 8.10 Everyday aesthetics calls attention to the aesthetically meaningful experiences in day-to-day life. (credit: "Tall Grass" by Tom Shockey/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Japanese aesthetics is a rich source of inspiration for everyday aesthetics. Japanese aesthetics often incorporates Zen Buddhism to encourage mindful attention to the beauty of things around us. Additionally, Japanese aesthetics focuses on the small and impermanent, such as cherry blossoms and tea ceremonies, as opposed to the large-scale grandiose "masterpieces" favored by traditional European aesthetics. As Japanese scholar Okakura Kakuzo (1863 – 1913) explains in *The Book of Tea*, Japanese tea ceremonies are "founded on the adoration of the beautiful among the sordid facts of everyday existence" (Kakuzo [1906] 1956, 3). In Japanese culture, everyday aesthetic practices are a moral and religious form of self-cultivation.

Contemporary Japanese American philosopher Yuriko Saito's approach to everyday aesthetics brings

Japanese aesthetics and environmental aesthetics together to address the moral dimensions of aesthetics and its impact on the world. She explains that everyday aesthetics decenters works of art in ways that broaden people's discussions and help them understand the way questions of taste and beauty enrich their lives and impact the environment (Saito 2007). By focusing on the many aesthetic dimensions of life, people can examine what they value.

WRITE LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Write a short essay (2-3 paragraphs) addressing the following: What in your everyday life do you consider to be aesthetically meaningful? Describe why you think of it as aesthetic. How is it different from a work of art that you might encounter in a museum or gallery? How is it similar?

Value theory gives people tools for identifying, formulating, and questioning the values that are important to them as individuals and as a society. Even if you never take another philosophy course, you can use these ideas to think about your choices in life, what you desire or find pleasurable and good, and how you define well-being or a just society.

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Summary

8.1 The Fact-Value Distinction

The fact-value distinction distinguishes between what is the case (facts) and what we think ought to be the case (values) based on beliefs about what is good, beautiful, important, etc. Descriptive claims are statements about matters of fact, whereas evaluative claims express a judgment about something's value. Descriptive claims make statements about *how the world is.* Evaluative claims make statements about *how the world ought to be*.

The naturalistic fallacy is an error in reasoning that assumes we can derive values (what we *ought* to do) from facts about the world (what *is* the case). The is-ought problem asserts the challenge of moving from statements of fact (something *is*) to statements of value (something *ought* to be).

Moral realists argue for a more objective concept of morality. They feel that there are certain moral facts about the world that are objectively true. Moral skeptics, on the other hand, argue against an objective basis for morality by emphasizing that moral values are *not* factual and involve a different mode of thinking that is distinct from logical or scientific reasoning.

8.2 Basic Questions about Values

Something has intrinsic value if it is valuable for its own sake. Something has extrinsic value if it is valuable for the sake of something else. The question of fundamentality is the question of whether there is only one intrinsic value or many. Monism argues that there is only one fundamental intrinsic value that forms the foundation for all other values. Pluralism argues that there are multiple fundamental intrinsic values, rather than one.

Pluralism frequently relies on the concept of incommensurability, which describes a situation in which two or more goods, values, or phenomena have no standard of evaluation that applies to them all. Moral relativism makes a larger claim than pluralism because it not only asserts that there are multiple moral frameworks, it also asserts that each framework is equally valid insofar as individuals, communities, and cultures determine what is moral.

8.3 Metaethics

Metaethics focuses on moral reasoning and foundational questions that explore the assumptions related to our moral beliefs and practice. Realism asserts that ethical values have some basis in reality and that reasoning about ethical matters requires an objective framework or foundation to discover what is truly good. Anti-realism asserts that ethical values are not based on objective facts about the world but instead rely on subjective foundations like individuals' desires and beliefs.

Different ethical frameworks rest on different foundations or justifications: some appeal to a non-human principles like nature, while others appeal to shared human institutions. Ethical frameworks that are based on God can function in a variety of ways depending on the concept of the divine. Augustine of Hippo argued that there are many things in life we claim to know that are actually based on faith. The Euthyphro problem asks whether something is good because God commands it or if God commands it because it is good. According to Thomas Aquinas, there are four types of laws: eternal, natural, human, and divine. Ethical naturalism argues that doing good actions fulfills human nature, while doing evil actions distorts it.

8.4 Well-Being

Well-being focuses on what is good *for a person*, not simply what is good in an abstract sense.

There are three general ways philosophers approach the value of well-being: (1) pleasure, (2) desire, and (3) objective goods. Some philosophers describe well-being as obtaining pleasure and avoiding pain. The general term for this approach is hedonism. Epicurus founded a school of philosophy called Epicureanism, which taught that pleasure is the highest good. Utilitarianism is considered hedonistic because it bases moral theory on maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain. Critics of hedonistic philosophies complain that pleasure is too

varied, indeterminate, subjective, and conditional to be a solid basis for ethics.

Another way to think of well-being is the satisfaction of desire. There are multiple ways to define desire and think about its satisfaction. Cognitivism argues that values are cognitive and express statements about properties of things or states of events. Non-cognitivism argues that values are not cognitive because they have more to do with a psychological state of mind. Another approach to well-being is to create lists of objective goods that contribute to a flourishing life. Philosophers who propose that there are objective goods frequently focus on knowledge, virtue, friendship, and perfection as ways to evaluate and understand well-being.

8.5 Aesthetics

Aesthetics is an area of value theory that examines how we evaluate works of art and other aesthetic experiences in nature and our everyday lives. For ancient philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus, beauty is a quality of an object. In contrast, Enlightenment philosophers argue that beauty is a subjective judgment. Aesthetic theory also examines how we make judgments about art. Studying aesthetics can lay bare what societies value, how they express that value, and who gets to create values.

Key Terms

Altruism the selfless care for others' well-being.
Anti-realism the philosophical position that argues that morality is subjective, not objective.
Arête the ancient Greek word for virtue. It can also be translated as "excellence."
Ataraxia the goal of Epicurus's hedonism: tranquility, or freedom from mental, emotional, and physical pain.
Categorical imperative Kant's concept of moral reasoning and action. "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law" (Kant [1785] 1998, 31). This means you know an action is moral if can be universal for everyone.
Cognitivism the philosophical position that values are cognitive and express statements about properties of things or states of events.
Compassion the ability to care or share in others' suffering.
Conscience an individual's inner sense of right and wrong.
Descriptive claims statements that describe matters of fact or how the world is.
Divine command theory the philosophical position that uses God as the principle for morality. What is good is determined by God's commands.
Emotivism a branch of non-cognitivism that argues that value judgments only express emotion.
Empathy the ability to share others' feelings.
Ethical naturalism the philosophical position that argues that moral values are based on natural facts about the world, not individuals' subjective feelings or beliefs.
Eudaimonia the ancient Greek term for "happiness" or "human flourishing." It literally means "good" (eu) "spirit" (daimon).
Euthyphro problem a challenge to theistic ethical systems. It asks whether something is good because God commands it or if God commands it because it is good.
Evaluative claims statements that express a judgment about something's value or how the world ought to be.
Everyday aesthetics an approach to aesthetic theory that focuses on aesthetically meaningful experiences in people's ordinary day-to-day lives.
Experience machine a thought experiment in which the possibility is raised that a person might lead a pleasurable life by being plugged into a machine stimulating pleasurable experiences in their brain.
Extrinsic value the quality of being valued for the sake of something else.
Fact-value distinction the distinction between what is the case (facts) and what people think ought to be the case (values) based on beliefs about what is good, beautiful, important, etc.
Faith beliefs that are not or cannot be proven.
Fallacy an error in logical reasoning—for example, jumping to a conclusion without proper evidence.
Feminist care ethics an ethical theory that proposes that morality is based on caring for others and that

caring for others arises out of women's experiences as caregivers.

Foundation a principle, concept, or assumption on which a philosophical position is founded.

Fundamentality the issue of foundations, the philosophical inquiry into the basis for an idea or system of ideas.

Hedonism a philosophical approach to moral theory based on the idea that pleasure dictates what is good and pain dictates what is bad.

Ikigai reason for being; what makes life meaningful in an intuitive way.

Incommensurability when there is no standard of evaluation between two or more goods or values.

Intentional fallacy the faulty argument that the intention of the artist determines the meaning of the work of art.

Intrinsic value the quality of being valued for its own sake.

Intuition cognition that seems completely self-evident and impossible to deny.

Is-ought problem problem that asserts the challenge of moving from statements of fact (something *is*) to statements of value (something *ought* to be).

Kingdom of ends Kant's hypothetical, ideal society in which every individual is treated as an end and no one is treated as a means to an end. It is an idea that can be used to judge the morality of an action.

Metaethics branch of philosophy that focuses on moral reasoning and foundational questions that explore the assumptions related to moral beliefs and practice.

Monism theory that argues that there is only one fundamental intrinsic value that forms the foundation for all other values.

Moral realism the philosophical position that morality is objective, not subjective.

Moral relativism the philosophical position that there are multiple moral frameworks that are equally valid because values are relative to individuals, communities, and cultures.

Moral skepticism the philosophical position that morality is not objective.

Natural law theory an ethical position that asserts that morals are objective and derived from nature.

Naturalistic fallacy an error in reasoning that assumes one can derive values (what people *ought* to do) from facts about the world (what *is* the case).

Non-cognitivism the philosophical position that values are not cognitive because they do not necessarily make statements about properties of things or states of events and have more to do with a psychological state of mind.

Ontology of value the study of the being of values.

Open-question argument G. E. Moore's argument against the naturalistic fallacy, which he sees as trying to derive non-natural properties from natural properties. For Moore, arguing that something is "good" (a non-natural property) based on natural properties is circular and leaves an open question.

Perfectionism an approach to ethics that bases morality on the highest attainable good for an individual, human nature, or society.

Pluralism theory that argues that there are multiple fundamental intrinsic values rather than one.

Realism the philosophical position that asserts that ethical values have some basis in reality and that reasoning about ethical matters requires an objective framework or foundation.

Reason a methodical way of thinking that uses evidence and logic to draw conclusions, or the capacity to think this way.

Satisfactionism a philosophical position that defines well-being as satisfying desires.

Telos the purpose, end, or goal of something.

Utilitarianism an ethical theory that bases morality on maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain.

Value theory the philosophical investigation of values. In its narrow sense, it refers to metaethical concerns. In its broader sense, it addresses a variety of values (ethical, social, political, religious, aesthetic, etc.)

Values beliefs and evaluations about morality, politics, aesthetics, and social issues. They often express a judgment about what people think ought to be the case.

Virtue ethics a philosophical approach to ethics based on the examination of different virtues.

Well being concept referring to what is good *for a person*, not simply what is good in an abstract sense.

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Review Questions

8.1 The Fact-Value Distinction

1. What is the fact-value distinction?
2. How are evaluative claims different from descriptive claims?
3. How does Hume describe the is-ought problem?
4. Why does Moore object to the naturalistic fallacy?
5. Why do moral realists object to the fact-value distinction?
6. How does ethical naturalism argue for moral objectivity?

8.2 Basic Questions about Values

7. What is an intrinsic value?
8. What is an extrinsic value?
9. What is monism? Why would someone argue for this position?
10. What is pluralism? Why would someone argue for this position?
11. What is incommensurability? Why would it lead to pluralism?
12. What is moral relativism?

8.3 Metaethics

13. What does "ontology of value" mean?
14. What does moral realism argue?
15. What does moral anti-realism argue?
16. How does the concept of God serve as a possible foundation for morality? How does religion serve as a possible foundation for morality?

17. What is the Euthyphro problem? How is it related to divine command theory?

18. How does nature serve as a possible foundation for morality and moral reasoning?

19. What is feminist care ethics?

20. What is Kant's categorical imperative? How does it use reason to establish morality?

8.4 Well-Being

21. What is hedonism, and how is it used to philosophize about well-being?

22. What is Epicurus's concept of pleasure?

23. How do utilitarians determine what is valuable?

24. What is Nozick's experience machine, and how does it help you think about the limitations of hedonism?

25. What is satisfactionism? Why is it important to consider informed desire?

26. How do objective goods like knowledge, virtue, and friendship contribute to well-being?

27. What is eudaimonia? How did Anscombe revive eudaimonism?

28. What is Kant's "kingdom of ends"?

29. What is ikigai, and how is it distinct from hedonistic well-being?

8.5 Aesthetics

30. What is Plato's concept of beauty? Why does it make sense within the ancient Greek art world?

31. What is Hume's concept of beauty?

32. What is Kant's concept of aesthetic judgment?

33. According to Sibley, how do people justify aesthetic judgments?

34. What is the intentional fallacy? Why is limiting the meaning of a work of art to the artist's intention a problem?

35. How is art related to environmentalism?

36. How does feminism use art?

37. What is everyday aesthetics? How is it related to Japanese aesthetics?

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Normative Moral Theory

9

FIGURE 9.1 Moral issues are a common impetus for protests and activism. (credit: modification of work "Hundreds of protesters march in down San Diego, CA in support of transgender rights" by Laurel Wreath of Victors/Wikipedia, CC0 1.0)

CHAPTER OUTLINE

9.1 Requirements of a Normative Moral Theory
9.2 Consequentialism
9.3 Deontology
9.4 Virtue Ethics
9.5 Daoism
9.6 Feminist Theories of Ethics

INTRODUCTION How do you decide what to do when you face a difficult moral dilemma? When you are unsure what is right in a situation, what do you rely on, if anything, to guide you so you can do the right thing? Say, for example, you have borrowed a friend's car. You want to fill the gas tank before returning the car, but you don't know what fuel the car uses. You are in a hurry and can't reach your friend on the phone. What do you do? Do you return the car without filling it up? Do you take a wild guess or ask a person at the gas station and hope the fuel you pick doesn't damage the engine?

What you might need is a good normative moral theory. Normative ethics focuses on establishing norms and standards of moral conduct for effectively guiding our behavior. A normative moral theory is a systematized

account of morality that addresses important questions related to effectively guiding moral conduct. By the end of this chapter, you will be able to apply different types of normative moral theories to help guide your decisions at gas stations and elsewhere.

9.1 Requirements of a Normative Moral Theory

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify the meaning and purpose of normative moral theory.
- Distinguish between the three areas of ethics.

This section focuses on the how normative moral theories relate to other branches of ethics, examines the requirements of normative moral theories, and introduces three major types of moral theories.

Three Areas of Ethics

Ethics is the field of philosophy that investigates morality and engages in "systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong behavior" (Fieser 1995). It is divided into three main areas—metaethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics—each of which is distinguished by a different *level* of inquiry and analysis.

Metaethics focuses on moral reasoning and "whether morality exists" (Dittmer 1995). It is concerned with questions that are more abstract, ones that explore the foundations and assumptions related to our moral beliefs and practice. It attempts to understand the beliefs and presuppositions connected to morality and moral deliberation. Metaethics explores, for example, where moral values originate, what it means to say something is right or good, whether there are any objective moral facts, whether morality is (culturally) relative, and the psychological basis for moral practices and values.

Normative ethics focuses on moral behavior, on what we should do. It thus deals with questions concerning human agency, responsibility, and moral evaluation. Normative ethics attempts to establish criteria or principles for identifying norms and standards to guide correct behavior. Philosophers offer systematized accounts of morality that provide standards and norms of right conduct. There are three main approaches to normative moral theory: consequentialist, deontological, and virtue ethics. Each approach differs based on the criterion (consequences, duty, or character) used for determining moral conduct.

Applied ethics focuses on the application of moral norms and principles to controversial issues to determine the rightness of specific actions. Issues like abortion, euthanasia, the use of humans in biomedical research, and artificial intelligence are just a few of the controversial moral issues explored in applied ethics, which is covered in the next chapter.

A normative moral theory provides a framework for understanding our actions and determining what's right. A fully worked out moral theory often addresses all three areas of ethics (metaethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics), but its aim will be establishing and defending the norms of conduct it recommends.

Three Coherent Frameworks for Understanding Morality

A moral theory should make it possible to effectively guide behavior by providing a framework for determining what is morally right and arguments justifying its recommendations. Such a framework must be based on a logical foundation for its principles and provide consistent recommendations. It should, in short, make sense.

This chapter examines three distinct moral framework approaches to normative ethics: consequentialist, deontological, and virtue. **Consequentialism** looks at an action's outcome or consequences to determine whether it is morally right. Consequentialists think an action is right when it produces the greatest good (e.g., happiness or general welfare). **Deontology** focuses on duties or rules to determine the rightness of an action. Deontologists argue that an action is right when it conforms to the correct rule or duty (e.g., it is always wrong to lie). **Virtue ethics** focuses on character and the development of the right habits or traits. Virtue ethicists

argue that right action flows from right character. These three main approaches are distinguished by the criterion (i.e., consequences, duty, or character) used for determining moral conduct.

9.2 Consequentialism

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify the meaning and purpose of the consequentialist approach.
- Summarize Mohist and utilitarian interpretations of consequentialism.

Most people make at least some decisions based on the likely consequences of their actions. You might, for example, appeal to costs and benefits to justify a decision. For example, you might consider the happiness your friend will feel when discovering that you've filled the gas tank (a benefit) and weigh that against the price of a tank of gas (cost). In doing so, you are analyzing consequences to yourself and to your friend. Consequentialists, however, ask you to take a wider view. In consequentialism, an action is right when it produces the greatest good for everyone. An agent is tasked with assessing possible consequences to determine which action will maximize good for all those who might be impacted. This section looks at two consequentialist approaches, Mohism and **utilitarianism**.

Mohism

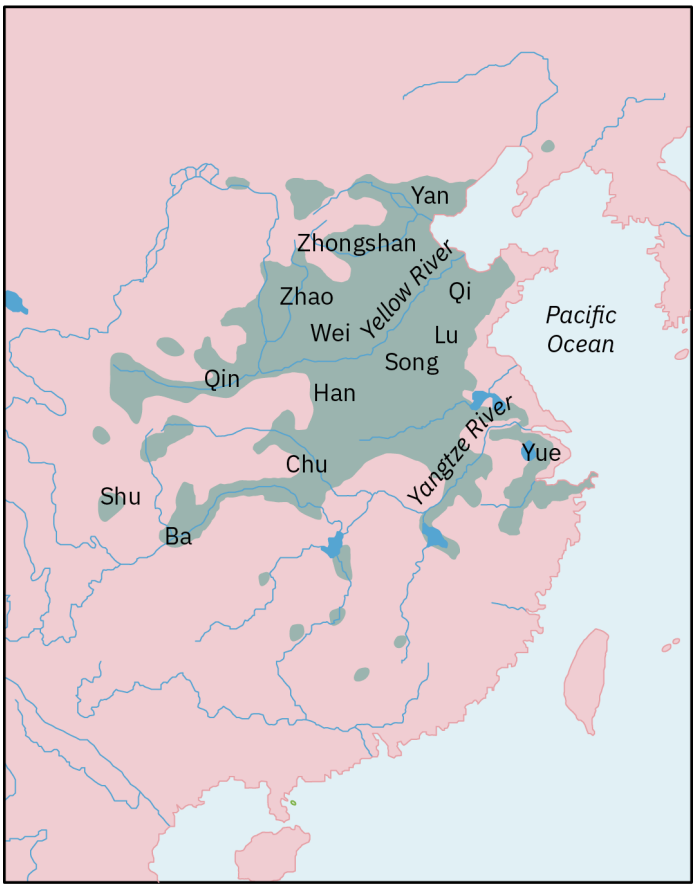

FIGURE 9.2 The Warring States period (ca. 475–221 BCE) saw intense warfare as older states located along the Yellow River declined and Qin, Qi, and Chu rose until Qin conquered the others in 221 BCE and established an imperial government. (attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY 4.0 license)

The **Warring States period** in ancient China (ca. 475–221 BCE) was a period of widespread social unrest and discord, one characterized by warfare, suffering, and a fractured society. Thinkers in ancient China responded by exploring ways to unite people and discover (or rediscover) moral norms and standards that would promote

a better life and social harmony. Philosophies like **Mohism**, Confucianism, and Daoism were developed, making it a period marked by intellectual and cultural expansion. These philosophies, while different in important respects, are similar in that each is born as a response to the social disharmony and widespread suffering experienced during the Warring States period. Each one shows a desire to facilitate and foster change in order to overcome social challenges and improve the lives of the people.

Very little is known about the founder of Mohism, Mo Di or Mozi (ca. 430 BCE). He lived around the time of Confucius (ca. 479 BCE), the founder of Confucianism, and Laozi, the founder of Daoism. Mozi, like Confucius and Laozi, was considered a great teacher. He and early Mohists sought to establish rational, objective standards for evaluating actions and establishing ethical norms.

Four Concepts of Mohist Ethical Theory

Four interrelated concepts are at the heart of Mohist ethical theory: morality, benefit, benevolence, and care. Morality (*yì*) is determined by benefit (*lì*), which shapes how we understand our duties and define what is right. Benefit (*lì*) is defined loosely as a set of material and social goods, including virtues and practices that strengthen social order. Benefit, in turn, rested on the concept of benevolence or kindness (*rèn*), which requires that we look outside our own interests and treat others with care (*ài*). Practicing kindness is crucial for promoting social order and fair treatment. Mohists believed that we are more likely to achieve social stability and general welfare when we focus not simply on ourselves, but the betterment of others and the community.

Mohists thought ethical norms should be established by looking at what increases overall benefit. To this end, Mozi argued that we should promote the immediate welfare of individuals and consider the welfare of all when acting. If people are suffering or in need now, it makes sense, Mozi thought, to address those issues first.

As the theory developed, Mohists also came to associate benefit with happiness or delight (*xǐ*). However, most essential to Mohism is the value of impartial care of all, or universal love. They thought we should treat everyone impartially and that we shouldn't give preference to some people's welfare over others. Mohists opposed the rulers and elites during the Warring States period who had focused only on their own pleasure and gain to the detriment of everyone else.

Normative Practices: The Ten Doctrines

There are ten doctrines that form the core of early Mohism. These ten doctrines correspond to Mozi's original work, and they were treated as central even by later Mohists who developed and expanded upon early Mohist thinking. The ten doctrines are normally split into five pairs as follows:

1. "Promoting the Worthy" and "Identifying Upward"
2. "Inclusive Care" and "Condemning Aggression"
3. "Moderation in Use" and "Moderation in Burial"
4. "Heaven's Intent" and "Understanding Ghosts"
5. "Condemning Music" and "Condemning Fatalism"

The "Promoting the Worthy" and "Identifying Upward" doctrines highlight the Mohists' concern for a meritocratic system. They believed that an individual should be appointed to a position based on their performance and moral goodness. These officials should serve as models to all. Mohists assumed that people are motivated to act in ways that conform to their beliefs about what is right. They therefore believed that people needed proper moral education informed by rational, objective moral standards. Once people possess the proper knowledge, they conform their behavior accordingly. This, in turn, would address the social upheaval and disharmony that plagued their world. Mozi realized that if people adopt the same morality, they will use the same standards to judge their own actions and the actions of others, which will improve social order and harmony.

The "Inclusive Care" and "Condemning Aggression" doctrines affirm the importance of considering and caring

for everyone equally. They reinforce the idea that it is not just the individual's own benefit that matters, but the benefit of all people. Mohists therefore condemn aggression because others are harmed in the pursuit of personal benefit. During a period in which warlord battled against warlord, Mohists condemned these attempts at military conquest as selfishly immoral.

Mohists promoted the practices of "Moderation in Use" and "Moderation in Burial." They rejected lavish funerals, customs, and practices that were wasteful. Resources should be used to the benefit of individuals and society. They viewed excessive displays of wealth that only benefit the few as selfish.

Mohists use the ideas of "Heaven's Intent" and "Understanding Ghosts" to argue that there is an objective *moral world order* that individuals and society should hasten to emulate. Heaven acts as their principal standard for evaluating and understanding our moral responsibilities.

Early Mohists, in particular, also saw heaven as way to motivate individuals to act selflessly, as moral deeds would be rewarded, whereas immoral ones would be punished. Later, however, Mohists seemed to abandon or at least put less emphasis on this appeal to heaven to justify ethical norms and principles, favoring a greater emphasis on rational argumentation.

Finally, Mohists promoted the norms of "Condemning Music" and "Condemning Fatalism." The Mohist views on music stemmed from their condemnation of the powerful for being wasteful when they enjoyed lavish displays and luxuries. They felt those with wealth had a responsibility to others and should behave morally.

Mohists also believed in social mobility, such that capable, moral individuals should rise. Their support of meritocracy further underscores a belief that the individual has the power to change, to direct their own life, and to determine their own path. The Mohists condemn fatalism because it suggests that human effort is futile and undermines Mohist goals of achieving social order and a large and economically thriving population. Mohists believed that our lot in life is not set in stone, nor does fate determine our path (Fraser 2020).

Utilitarianism

The term *utility* means "useful" or "a useful thing." Utilitarians argue that what is right is whatever produces the most utility, the most usefulness. The question, then, is how do we define usefulness? The utilitarian's answer is that something is useful when it promotes happiness (or pleasure). According to utilitarians, we have a moral obligation or responsibility to choose the action that produces the most happiness.

Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill

Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) was the first philosopher to articulate the principle of utility. James Mill (1773–1836), an economist, political philosopher, and historian, was Bentham's friend and a follower of utilitarianism. James Mill naturally raised his son to be a utilitarian as well. John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) received a rigorous homeschooling under his father's tutelage. Scholars in the fields of philosophy, political science, and economics continue to apply the insights of Bentham and Mill to this day.

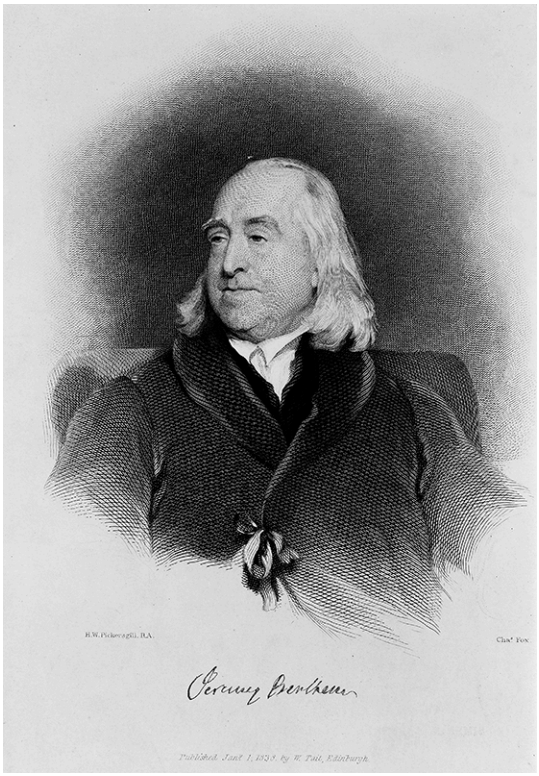

FIGURE 9.3 Portrait of Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) by Henry William Pickersgill, 1838. (credit: "Jeremy Bentham. Line engraving by C. Fox, 1838, after H. W. Pickersgill." by C. Fox/Wellcome Collection)

The Principle of Utility

The **principle of utility** states that "actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness" (Mill [1861] 2001, 7). Utilitarians argue that moral conduct is conduct that maximizes the good (or produces the most value). In economics, for example, utility is defined as the amount of enjoyment a consumer receives from a good or a service. You might, for example, choose between buying an oatmeal raisin cookie and a chocolate chip cookie. If you like them both equally, the right action would be to compare the prices and buy the cheaper one. Utility, however, is not always so easy to determine, particularly in more complex situations.

CONNECTIONS

The chapter on Value Theory covers the topic of well-being in greater detail.

The Trolley Problem

Trolley problems are classic thought experiments first invented by Philippa Foot and widely employed by ethicists to explore moral reasoning (Foot 2002). Consider one such trolley problem, referred to as the *bystander case*. Imagine you are standing by trolley tracks observing the trolley cars in action. To your horror, you realize that one of the trolley cars is out of control. If nothing is done, the trolley will continue down the track, killing five workers who are performing track maintenance. You happen to be standing near a lever you can pull that will divert the trolley. If you divert the trolley, you will change its path so that it takes a different track where only one worker is performing maintenance. Is it morally permissible to pull the lever?

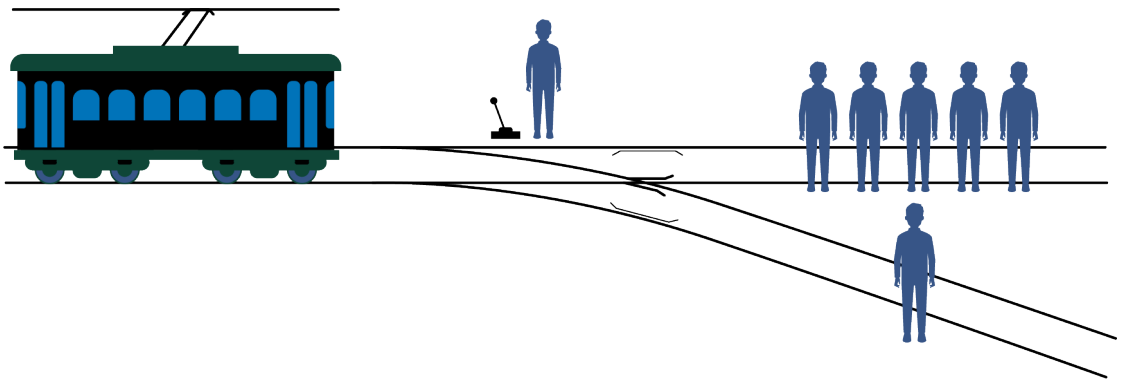

FIGURE 9.4 Trolley problems are thought experiments that use a difficult ethical dilemma to explore moral reasoning and deliberation. (attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY 4.0 license)

The simplest utilitarian response would be "yes." You would save the lives of four workers. The right decision involves making a simple quantitative calculation: five workers minus one worker is four workers. So the right, moral decision is to divert the trolley. Yet, John Stuart Mill recognized that not all questions of utility can be answered quantitatively.

Higher and Lower Pleasures

Raised to continue in the footsteps of Bentham and his father, John Stuart Mill had a nervous breakdown as a young man. Mill emerged from the crisis with new ideas about utilitarianism, including the realization that Bentham's characterization of pleasure could be improved upon (Durham 1963). He realized that pleasures differ both quantitatively and qualitatively. Mill identified what he calls higher and lower pleasures to distinguish between different qualities of pleasure. With his revised and more nuanced account of pleasure, Mill set out to develop Bentham's earlier formulation of utilitarianism. He refined the calculus and assigned a greater significance or preference to higher-quality pleasures (e.g., mental pleasures).

Mill distinguished between different (higher and lower) qualities of pleasure in his formulation of utilitarianism. What he called **higher pleasures** are those pleasures associated with the exercise of our higher faculties. For example, higher pleasures are often associated with the use of our higher cognitive faculties and/or participation in social/cultural life. **Lower pleasures**, in contrast, are those pleasures associated with the exercise of our lower faculties. For example, lower pleasures are (basic) sensory pleasures like those experienced when we satisfy our hunger or relax after difficult physical activity. As Mill saw it, we have higher cognitive faculties (e.g., reason, imagination, moral sense) that distinguish us from other living things. Our higher cognitive faculties give us access to higher pleasures, and these pleasures are a defining feature of human life.

> It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are of a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question. (Mill [1861] 2001, 10)

Mill's claim that "it is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied" suggests that it is better to be dissatisfied and aware that you are capable of experiencing different qualities of pleasure than to forfeit the higher pleasures merely for the sake of basic satisfaction.

Some Mill scholars have even suggested that our dissatisfaction is a potential source of higher pleasures. In *Mill and Edward on Higher Pleasures*, Susan Feagin (1983) points out that dissatisfaction stems from a recognition that our situation could be improved. Feagin argues that our ability to formulate plans to improve our situation is a source of higher pleasure. Dissatisfaction motivates us to improve things and pursue a better world and life.

The Greatest Happiness Principle

To apply the principle of utility in broad social and political contexts, Mill formulated the **greatest happiness principle**, which stipulates that those actions are right that produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. When agents (individual decision makers) approach a decision, they review and evaluate their possible actions and should choose the action that will promote the most happiness for the most people. It is not simply the agent's own happiness that matters, but the happiness of all individuals involved or affected by the consequences produced. The "happiness which forms the utilitarian standard of what is right in conduct is not the agent's own happiness but that of all concerned" (Mill [1861] 2001, 17). Mill argued that the right action is the one that maximizes happiness or produces the most net happiness.

Mill emphasizes the importance of putting personal interests aside. Mill writes that if an individual is faced with a decision "between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator" (Mill [1861] 2001, 17). Impartiality makes us able to assess possible consequences without giving preference to how they might impact us or those we are biased toward (e.g., friends, family, or institutions we are affiliated with). Utilitarians, therefore, strive to apply the principle in an informed, rational, and unbiased way.

WRITE LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

A Utilitarian Approach

Choose a moral dilemma you are facing or that you have faced. Devise and implement a method of calculating the greatest happiness, such as identifying all the individuals affected by your decision and estimating the impact of your decision on their happiness. Then examine and explain the assumptions that are inherent in the method you are using to calculate happiness.

Act vs. Rule Utilitarianism

Within this moral theory, there is a major division between act and rule utilitarianism. **Act utilitarians** argue that we should apply the greatest happiness principle on a case-by-case basis. Factors may vary from one situation to the next making it possible that different actions are morally right even in two seemingly similar situations. Act utilitarians believe morality requires us to maximize the good every time we act.

Some have argued that act utilitarianism is problematic because it seems to justify doing actions that go well beyond ordinary moral standards. For instance, act utilitarianism could justify a vigilante killing a person, an action that is contrary to our normal sense of right conduct, if it saves lives and so maximizes happiness. However, if many people were to take the law into their own hands, the long-term consequence would be to undermine the security of all individuals within society. Consider also the case in which a jury or a judge were to find an innocent person guilty and sentence them to prison in order to avoid widespread riots. In this particular case, such an act would increase happiness but reduce the overall level of trust in the judicial system.

To avoid such problems, **rule utilitarians** argue that we should apply the greatest happiness principle not to each act, but instead as a means of establishing a set of moral rules. We can test possible moral rules to determine whether a given rule would produce greater happiness if it were followed. Assuming the rules pass the test, they argue that following such rules will maximize happiness and should be followed. Rule utilitarians think this list of rules can be modified as needed by reexamining each one through application of the greatest happiness principle. However, it is not easy and may not be possible to formulate all the exceptions to each rule.

Character and Intent in Utilitarianism

For utilitarians, the only intrinsic value is happiness. Utilitarians believe that no action in itself is right or

wrong, nor is it right or wrong based on an agent's character or intent. Only the scope of consequences should be considered when assessing the rightness of an action. An agent might intend to produce certain consequences when they act, but what they intend may not come about or their action might produce other unintended consequences. If an action produces consequences a person didn't intend or foresee and so does harm, they are still morally at fault, even if at the time it seemed reasonable to assume those outcomes wouldn't happen. For utilitarians, an agent's intent and character are not morally relevant factors. In this, utilitarianism differs from the other normative ethical theories that will be considered in the remainder of this chapter.

9.3 Deontology

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify the meaning and purpose of the deontological approach.
- Articulate the role of duty and obligation within deontological reasoning.
- Compare and contrast the Kantian and pluralist interpretation of deontology.

The word *deontology* derives from the Greek words *deon*, meaning duty, and *logos*, meaning the study or science of, so that deontology literally means "the study or science of duty." Unlike consequentialists, deontologists do not evaluate the moral rightness of an action based solely on its consequences. Rightness in deontological theories is established by conformity to moral norms or rules that we have a duty to follow (Alexander 2020). Deontologists attempt to establish our moral duties, the set of rules that are morally binding, and using these we can guide our behavior and choices.

Later deontologists—for instance, W. D. Ross (1877–1971)—argue that consequences are morally relevant when considered in light of our moral duties. Ross believed that a moral theory that ignored duty or a moral theory that ignored consequences "over-simplifies the moral life" (Ross 1939, 189).

Kantian Formulation

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) is one of the most important figures in modern philosophy. The first philosopher to advance a deontological approach, he has influenced contemporary philosophy significantly in areas such as aesthetics, political philosophy, and ethics.

Good Will

Kant argued that when we focus on outcomes rather than our duty, we prefer something of merely conditional value—beneficial outcomes—over the only thing that has unconditional value—**good will**, a concept that for Kant meant the decision to carry out our moral duties. Kant establishes the unconditional value of good will.

> A good will is good not because of what it effects, or accomplishes, not because of its fitness to attain some intended end, but good just by its willing, i.e. in itself; and, considered by itself, is to be esteemed beyond compare much higher than anything that could ever be brought about by it in favor of some inclination. (Kant 1997a, 4:394)

When we perform an action because it is our duty (or from duty), without influence from outside, merely conditional factors, we act in a way that contributes to the goodness of our will.

Human Reason and Morality

Kant's normative moral theory rests on how he defines what it means to be human. Kant argued that what separated us from other animals is our ability to think rationally. Animals are driven by impulses and so are irrational. As humans, however, we can reason, make decision independent of our desires, and so exercise agency. We can rise above animal instincts. In this sense, humans have freedom and free will. Kant used the term "good will" to refer to our will to rise above our passions and biases and act rationally

Furthermore, through our capacity to act rationally and so exercise "good will," we establish our value above all other (living) things. At the same time, we have a duty to act rationally—which, in Kant's view, is to act morally. We should always act rationally because it is only through rational, moral action that we realize our freedom and affirm our worth and dignity.

FIGURE 9.5 "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence, the more often and more steadily one reflects on them: *the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me*" (Kant 1997a, 5:161). (credit: "The Milky Way" by Erick Kurniawan/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Moral Laws

Kant believed that moral laws, or maxims, could be discovered a priori. No matter what religion we follow or culture we grew up in, we can use our reason to figure out what is right and what is wrong. We use our reason alone to arrive at the moral rules by which we should abide.

In *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* ([1785] 1997, 4:415–416), Kant set out to explore these moral laws by first examining common-sense morality—that is, ideas that most people share about morality, such as do not steal or do not murder. The will, Kant noted, always presents its rules in the form of commands, which he called imperatives. He divided these imperatives into two categories: hypothetical and categorical.

Hypothetical Imperatives

A **hypothetical imperative** "says only that the action is good for some *actual* or *possible* purpose" (Kant 1997a, 4:414–415). In other words, we may follow rules, such as "study hard," "get a job," and "save money." But each of these commands determine only what should be done in order to achieve some (proposed) end. We say "study hard to get good grades," "get a job to earn money," and "save money to buy a house for your family." Through the hypothetical imperative we establish subjective rules for acting. We use these rules regularly to navigate the world, solve problems, and pursue various ends. A hypothetical imperative is thus not a moral rule, but a means to achieve a goal—to fulfill a desire.

Categorical Imperative

Unlike hypothetical imperatives, **categorical imperatives** are universal laws that we must obey regardless of our desires. Kant writes, "For only the *law* carries with it the concept of an *unconditional* and indeed objective and hence universally valid *necessity*, and commands are laws that must be obeyed, i.e. must be complied with even contrary to inclination" (Kant 1997a, 4:416). Categorical imperatives are derived by reason and we have a moral duty to follow them.

Kant suggested that we derive categorical imperatives through four formulations that serve as a standard or guide to test whether our reasons for acting conform to the standard of rationality and thus moral law. The two

most widely examined formulations are the *universal law* formulation and the *humanity* formulation.

The Universal Law Formulation

The **universal law formulation** of the categorical imperative states: "Act only according to that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law" (Kant 1997a, 4:421). Kant thought the maxim (or rule for acting) should be able to be made universal in the sense that it is a rule that could bind all rational beings (e.g., always tell the truth). When we lie, for example, we want to act as an exception to the rule for reasons other than fulfilling our moral obligation. In such cases, we wish that everyone else abide by the rule, so that when we lie, we are believed and can operate as an exception to the norm in order to fulfill a desire. Yet, if everyone lied—that is if we universalized lying—then we would no longer achieve our desired end. Everyone would lie, and so you would not necessarily be believed.

Say, for example, members of a specific group, such as university students, get discounted rates at a bookstore. If you, as a nonstudent, tell the bookseller that you are a student even though you are not, you can get the discounted rate. But once you universalize your action—and all nonstudents begin to lie—the bookseller will catch on and likely begin to ask for identification. Therefore, the rule you are following, "I can lie to get a discount," cannot be made universal and is immoral. Moral law must be applicable to all rational beings.

The Humanity Formulation

The **humanity formulation** focuses on how we ought to treat rational beings, whether oneself or others. Kant thought that every person possesses the same inherent value and worth because we are all rational beings. Kant writes, "*So act that you use humanity, in your own person as well as in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means*" (Kant 1997a, 4:429). The humanity formulation therefore asks us to consider whether our actions treat others and ourselves as ends, as entities valuable in themselves, or whether we seek to reduce rational beings to the status of a mere means, as valuable only in that they help us achieve our goal. When we lie to someone, we fail to treat them as a person. We have obstructed their ability to act as a human, as a rational being that has the ability to rise up above impulses and make decisions based on reason. By telling a lie, we have failed to provide the basic information another human needs to make a rational decision. To do so, is always wrong, for it overlooks the inherent value we all possess as rational beings who possess a will and who are capable of acting as free, rational agents.

Note that Kant is not saying that we cannot rely on other humans to help us achieve a goal. Kant uses the term "never merely as a means" and so indicates that so long as we treat others as humans, and do not impair their ability to act as rational agents, we can derive benefit from others. Humans must cooperate, but in doing so, should treat each other as ends-in-themselves, as rational beings.

Notice that we can arrive at the same imperative from either the universal law formulation or the humanity formulation. If you lie to the bookseller about being a student, you are treating the bookseller as a means to an end. Indeed, scholars often view Kant's four formulations as different means to achieving the same ends—that is, different ways of arriving at the same or a similar list of categorical imperatives.

Pluralism

Some philosophers argue that classic utilitarianism (e.g., Mill) and deontology (e.g., Kant) offer accounts of morality that do not adequately explain our common experience of morality in practice. Do we, like Mill, really think that morality is all about increasing happiness? Do we, like Kant, really treat all moral rules as absolute and always binding? Deontology and utilitarianism seem to offer an overly simplistic account of what is good.

Pluralists offer a more complex, complete account of morality that explains our common experience. In contrast to classic utilitarianism and deontology, **pluralism** recognizes a plurality of intrinsic values and moral rules.

William David Ross

Sir William David Ross (1877–1971) believed (classic) utilitarianism and deontology fail because they "over-simplify the moral life" (Ross 1939, 189). He thought each of these earlier moral theories reduced morality to a single principle (e.g., Mill's greatest happiness principle and Kant's categorical imperative), leaving them unable to adequately account for our common experience of morality. Ross also thought Mill was wrong to assume that rightness is reducible to simply the production of good, just as Kant was wrong to assume that moral rules are absolute and never admit any exceptions. Ross therefore set out to create a moral theory that was not susceptible to the shortfalls of these earlier positions, one that would make sense of our common sense moral life (Skelton 2012).

Competing Duties

Pluralists point out that most people do not treat moral obligations as equally weighty or pressing. Doing so would make it difficult, if not impossible, to determine our moral duty in situations where two or more competing moral obligations are applicable. Let's say you are approached by a woman carrying a gun who asks you what direction your neighbor ran off in. You know in what direction he was headed. Do you follow Kantian moral law not to tell a lie? What if she intends to use her gun on your neighbor? Do you potentially risk your neighbor's life? This example and others suggest that we must consider factors beyond the (relevant) moral rule or weigh more than one rule when we determine our duty in a specific situation. For example, the rule "don't lie" might compete with the rule "don't take actions that will get innocent people killed."

Prima Facie Duties

Ross argued that our obligations are not absolute and derived from pure reason, as Kant would have it, but rather are **prima facie duties** (Ross 1930, 33). He called them prima facie, which means "at first sight," because he believed these duties to be self-evident. They are moral commitments that we come to recognize through experience and maturity.

Ross identified five prima facie duties that represent our main moral commitments: (1) a duty of *fidelity*, or to keep promises and be truthful; (2) a duty of *reparation*, or to make up for wrongs done to others; (3) a duty of *gratitude*, or to express gratitude when others do things that benefit us and to reciprocate when possible; (4) a duty *to promote a maximum of aggregate good*, or to increase the overall good in the world; and (5) a duty of *non-maleficence*, or to not harm others (Ross 1930, 21, 25; Ross 1939, 65, 75, 76; Skelton 2012).

Ross believed each duty each represents an important moral commitment, but they are not absolute or equally important. He thought our duties of gratitude and reparation, for example, are generally more pressing than our duty to promote a maximum aggregate of good, and a duty of non-maleficence is weightier than a duty to promote maximum good (Ross 1930, 19, 21, 22, 41, 42; Ross 1939, 75, 76, 77, 90).

Resolving Conflicts between Duties

Our prima facie duties represent our moral responsibilities and commitments, other things being equal. In situations where two or more prima facie duties are relevant and our actual duty is not clear, Ross argued that we determine our duty using a quasi-consequentialist approach that accounts for a plurality of intrinsic goods. When we face such situations, Ross argued that our duty is whatever action will result in "the greatest balance of prima facie rightness . . . over . . . prima facie wrongness" (Ross 1930, 41, 46).

FIGURE 9.6 If you are the only witness to a bad car accident on your way to get your hair cut, William David Ross would argue that you might judge that your prima facie duty to help anyone who might be injured in the accident outweighs your prima facie duty to be on time for your appointment. (credit: "car accident @ vestavia hills" by Rian Castillo/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

In life, it is not always clear what morality requires of us, especially when we face situations where we have multiple, conflicting moral responsibilities and must figure out which one is our (actual) duty. In other words, our actual duty will be whichever duty is most pressing and immediate, the one that we are most responsible for (Ross 1939, 85).

Imagine, for example, that you make a promise to meet a friend after work. As you leave your office building after work, however, you discover a coworker on the ground who is experiencing chest pains. You have a duty to keep your promise, but you also have a duty to help your coworker. You help your coworker because, given the circumstances, it is more pressing than the duty to fulfill your promise. It is clear which obligation is your actual duty in this example. When you are able to, you apologize to your friend and explain what happened. Your apology, Ross thought, is in part motivated by a recognition that you were prima facie wrong; that is, you recognize that had your coworker not needed help, your actual duty would have been to fulfill your promise and meet your friend.

The Role of Judgment

Judgment, Ross thought, plays an important role in moral life. We will often need to determine our actual duty in situations where multiple contradictory prima facie duties are relevant. Ross thought we rank the relevant prima facie duties and use facts of the situation to determine which duty is our actual duty.

In the case in which you are approached by a woman with a gun who seems to be chasing your neighbor, your duty to protect your neighbor from harm probably outweighs your duty to tell the truth. But what if the woman is wearing a blue uniform and wearing a badge indicating that she is a police officer? What if you know that you watched your neighbor carry a carload of computers, televisions, expensive jewelry, and nice paintings into his apartment last night? In this case, to make the best decision, you must make a judgement informed by your own experience and observations.

In practice, it can be difficult to know what our actual duty is in a situation. Sometimes, the best we can do is make an informed decision using the information we have and keep striving to be good. Indeed, this uncertainty can, for pluralists, be an important part of the experience of a moral life.

9.4 Virtue Ethics

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify the central principles of virtue ethics.
- Distinguish the major features of Confucianism.
- Evaluate Aristotle's moral theory.

Virtue ethics takes a character-centered approach to morality. Whereas Mohists and utilitarians look to consequences to determine the rightness of an action and deontologists maintain that a right action is the one that conforms to moral rules and norms, virtue ethicists argue that right action flows from good character traits or dispositions. We become a good person, then, through the cultivation of character, self-reflection, and self-perfection.

There is often a connection between the virtuous life and the good life in virtue ethics because of its emphasis on character and self-cultivation. Through virtuous development, we realize and perfect ourselves, laying the foundation for a good life. In *Justice as a Virtue*, for example, Mark LeBar (2020) notes that "on the Greek eudaimonist views (including here Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and Epicurus) our reasons for action arise from our interest in [*eudaimonia*, or] a happy life." The ancient Greeks thought the aim of life was ***eudaimonia***. Though *eudaimonia* is often translated as "happiness," it means something closer to "a flourishing life." **Confucianism**, with its strong emphasis on repairing the fractured social world, connects the promotion of virtuous development and social order. Confucians believe virtuous action is informed by social roles and relationships, such that promoting virtuous development also promotes social order.

Confucianism

As discussed earlier, the Warring States period in ancient China (ca. 475–221 BCE) was a period marked by warfare, social unrest, and suffering. Warfare during this period was common because China was comprised of small states that were not politically unified. New philosophical approaches were developed to promote social harmony, peace, and a better life. This period in China's history is also sometimes referred to as the era of the "Hundred Schools of Thought" because the development of new philosophical approaches led to cultural expansion and intellectual development. Mohism, Daoism, and Confucianism developed in ancient China during this period. Daoism and Confucianism would later spread to Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, where they would be adopted and changed in response to local social and cultural circumstances.

Confucius

Confucius (551–479 BCE) rose from lowly positions to become a minister in the government of a province in eastern China. After a political conflict with the hereditary aristocracy, Confucius resigned his position and began traveling to other kingdoms and teaching. Confucius's teachings centered on virtue, veering into practical subjects such as social obligations, ritual performance, and governance. During his lifetime, Confucius despaired that his advice to rulers fell on deaf ears: "How can I be like a bitter gourd that hangs from the end of a string and can not be eaten?" (Analects 17:7). He did not foresee that his work and ideas would influence society, politics, and culture in East Asia for over 2000 years.

FIGURE 9.7 This statue of Confucius, the largest in the world, stands at the Yushima Seido, a Confucian temple in Japan. (credit: "Confucius Statue at the Yushima Seido" by Abasaa/Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain)

Confucius is credited with authoring or editing the classical texts that became the curriculum of the imperial exams, which applicants had to pass to obtain positions in government. His words, sayings, and exchanges with rulers and his disciples were written down and recorded in the *Lun Yu*, or the *Analects of Confucius*, which has heavily influenced the moral and social practice in China and elsewhere.

Relational Aspect of Virtue

Like Mohism, Confucianism aimed to restore social order and harmony by establishing moral and social norms. Confucius believed the way to achieve this was through an ordered, hierarchical society in which people know their place in relationship to other people. Confucius said, "There is government, when the prince is prince, and the minister is minister; when the father is father, and the son is son" (Analects, 7:11). In Confucianism, relationships and social roles shape moral responsibilities and structure moral life.

A cornerstone of Confucian virtue is filial piety. Confucius felt that the role of the father was to care for and educate his son, but the duty of the son must be to respect his father by obediently abiding by his wishes. "While a man's father is alive, look at the bent of his will; when his father is dead, look at his conduct. If for three years he does not alter from the way of his father, he may be called filial" (Analects, 1:11). Indeed, when the Duke of Sheh informed Confucius that his subjects were so truthful that if their father stole a sheep, they would bear witness to it, Confucius replied, "Among us, in our part of the country, those who are upright are different from this. The father conceals the misconduct of the son, and the son conceals the misconduct of the father. Uprightness is to be found in this." The devotion of the son to the father is more important than what Kant would call the universal moral law of truth telling.

There is therefore an important relational aspect of virtue that a moral person must understand. The virtuous person must not only be aware of and care for others but must understand the "human dance," or the complex practices and relationships that we participate in and that define social life (Wong 2021). The more we begin to understand the "human dance," the more we grasp how we relate to one another and how social roles and relationships must be accounted for to act virtuously.

Ritual and *Ren*

Important to both early and late Confucian ethics is the concept of *li* (ritual and practice). ***Li*** plays an important role in the transformation of character. These rituals are a guide or become a means by which we develop and start to understand our moral responsibilities. Sacrificial offerings to parents and other ancestors after their death, for example, cultivate filial piety. By carrying out rituals, we transform our character and become more sensitive to the complexities of human interaction and social life.

In later Confucian thought, the concept of *li* takes on a broader role and denotes the customs and practices that are a blueprint for many kinds of respectful behavior (Wong 2021). In this way, it relates to ***ren***, a concept that refers to someone with complete virtue or specific virtues needed to achieve moral excellence. Confucians maintain that it is possible to perfect human nature through personal development and transformation. They believe society will improve if people abide by moral and social norms and focus on perfecting themselves. The aim is to live according to the *dao*. The word *dao* means "way" in the sense of a road or path of virtue.

Junzi and Self-Perfection

Confucius used the term ***junzi*** to refer to an exemplary figure who lives according to the *dao*. This figure is an ethical ideal that reminds us that self-perfection can be achieved through practice, self-transformation, and a deep understanding of social relationships and norms. A *junzi* knows what is right and chooses it, taking into account social roles and norms, while serving as a role model. Whenever we act, our actions are observed by others. If we act morally and strive to embody the ethical ideal, we can become an example for others to follow, someone they can look to and emulate.

The Ethical Ruler

Any person of any status can become a *junzi*. Yet, it was particularly important that rulers strive toward this ideal because their subjects would then follow this ideal. When the ruler Chi K'ang consulted with Confucius about what to do about the number of thieves in his domain, Confucius responded, "If you, sir, were not covetous, although you should reward them to do it, they would not steal" (Analects, 7:18).

Confucius thought social problems were rooted in the elite's behavior and, in particular, in their pursuit of their own benefit to the detriment of the people. Hence, government officials must model personal integrity, understand the needs of the communities over which they exercised authority, and place the welfare of the people over and above their own (Koller 2007, 204).

In adherence to the ethical code, a ruler's subjects must show obedience to honorable people and emulate those higher up in the social hierarchy. Chi K'ang, responding to Confucius's suggestion regarding thievery, asked Confucius, "What do you say to killing the unprincipled for the good of the principled?" Confucius replied that there was no need to kill at all. "Let your evinced desires be for what is good, and the people will be good." Confucius believed that the relationship between rulers and their subjects is and should be like that between the wind and the grass. "The grass must bend, when the wind blows across it" (Analects, 7:19).

FIGURE 9.8 The elaborate Temple of Confucius in Beijing, China was initially built in 1302, with additions added in the centuries that followed. (credit: "Temple of Confucius, Beijing, China" by Fabio Achilli/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Japanese Confucianism

Although Confucianism was initially developed in China, it spread to Japan in the mid-sixth century, via Korea, and developed its own unique attributes. Confucianism is one of the dominant philosophical teachings in Japan. As in China, Japanese Confucianism focuses on teaching individual perfection and moral development, fostering harmonious and healthy familial relations, and promoting a functioning and prosperous society. In Japan, Confucianism has been changed and transformed in response to local social and cultural factors. For example, Confucianism and Buddhism were introduced around the same time in Japan. It is therefore not uncommon to find variations of Japanese Confucianism that integrate ideas and beliefs from Buddhism. Some neo-Confucian philosophers like Zhu Xi, for example, developed "Confucian thinking after earlier study and practice of Chan Buddhism" (Tucker 2018).

Aristotelianism

FIGURE 9.9 This painting by Gerard Hoet depicts Olympias presenting the young Alexander the Great to Aristotle. Aristotle traveled to Macedonian in 343 BCE to tutor the 13-year-old boy, Alexander, who would later become

Alexander the Great. (credit: "Olympias presenting the young Alexander the Great to Aristotle" by Gerard Hoet/ Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain)

Aristotle (384–322 BCE) was a preeminent ancient Greek philosopher. He studied with Plato (ca. 429–347 BCE) at the Academy, a fraternal organization where participants pursued knowledge and self-development. After Plato's death, Aristotle traveled, tutored the boy who would later become Alexander the Great, and among other things, established his own place of learning, dedicated to the god Apollo (Shields 2020).

Aristotle spent his life in the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom. His extant works today represent only a portion of his total life's work, much of which was lost to history. During his life, Aristotle was, for example, principal to the creation of logic, created the first system of classification for animals, and wrote on diverse topics of philosophical interest. Along with his teacher, Plato, Aristotle is considered one of the pillars of Western philosophy.

Human Flourishing as the Goal of Human Action

In the first line of Book I of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, he observes that "[every] art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good" (Aristotle [350 BCE] 1998, 1094a). If everything we do aims at some good, he argues, then there must be a final or highest good that is the end of all action (life's *telos*), which is *eudaimonia*, the flourishing life (Aristotle [350 BCE] 1998, 1097a34–b25). Everything else we pursue is pursued for the sake of this end.

CONNECTIONS

See the chapter on epistemology for more on the topic of *eudaimonia*.

Nicomachean Ethics is a practical exploration of the flourishing life and how to live it. Aristotle, like other ancient Greek and Roman philosophers (e.g., Plato and the Stoics), asserts that virtuous development is central to human flourishing. *Virtue* (or *aretê*) means "excellence. We determine something's virtue, Aristotle argued, by identifying its peculiar function or purpose because "the good and the 'well' is thought to reside in the function" (Aristotle [350 BCE] 1998, 1097b25–1098a15). We might reasonably say, for example, that a knife's function is to cut. A sharp knife that cuts extremely well is an excellent (or virtuous) knife. The sharp knife realizes its function and embodies excellence (or it is an excellent representation of knife-ness).

Aristotle assumed our rational capacity makes us distinct from other (living) things. He identifies rationality as the unique function of human beings and says that human virtue, or excellence, is therefore realized through the development or perfection of reason. For Aristotle, virtuous development is the transformation and perfection of character in accordance with reason. While most thinkers (like Aristotle and Kant) assign similar significance to reason, it is interesting to note how they arrive at such different theories.

Deliberation, Practical Wisdom, and Character

To exercise or possess virtue is to demonstrate excellent character. For ancient Greek and Roman philosophers, the pursuit of intentional, directed self-development to cultivate virtues is the pursuit of excellence. Someone with a virtuous character is consistent, firm, self-controlled, and well-off. Aristotle characterized the virtuous character state as the mean between two vice states, deficiency and excess. He thought each person naturally tends toward one of the extreme (or vice) states. We cultivate virtue when we bring our character into alignment with the "mean or intermediate state with regard to" feelings and actions, and in doing so we become "well off in relation to our feelings and actions" (Homiak 2019).

Being virtuous requires more than simply developing a habit or character trait. An individual must voluntarily choose the right action, the virtuous state; know why they chose it; and do so from a consistent, firm character. To voluntarily choose virtue requires reflection, self-awareness, and deliberation. Virtuous actions, Aristotle claims, should "accord with the correct reason" (Aristotle [350 BCE] 1998, 1103b30). The virtuous person

chooses what is right after deliberation that is informed by practical wisdom and experience. Through a deliberative process we identify the choice that is consistent with the mean state.

The Role of Habit

Aristotle proposed that humans "are made perfect by habit" (Aristotle [350 BCE] 1998, 1103a10–33). Habit therefore plays an important role in our virtuous development. When we practice doing what's right, we get better at choosing the right action in different circumstances. Through habituation we gain practice and familiarity, we bring about dispositions or tendencies, and we gain the requisite practical experience to identify the reasons why a certain action should be chosen in diverse situations. Habit, in short, allows us to gain important practical experience and a certain familiarity with choosing and doing the right thing. The more we reinforce doing the right thing, the more we grow accustomed to recognizing what's right in different circumstances. Through habit we become more aware of which action is supported by reason and why, and get better at choosing it.

Habit and repetition develop dispositions. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, for example, Aristotle reminds us of the importance of upbringing. A good upbringing will promote the formation of positive dispositions, making one's tendencies closer to the mean state. A bad upbringing, in contrast, will promote the formation of negative dispositions, making one's tendencies farther from the mean state (Aristotle [350 BCE] 1998, 1095b5).

READ LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Artistotle on Virtue

Read this passage from from Book II of Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics (https://openstax.org/r/nicomachaen-2), considering what Aristotle means when he states that moral virtues come about as a result of habit. How should individuals make use of the two types of virtue to become virtuous?

> Virtue, then, being of two kinds, intellectual and moral, intellectual virtue in the main owes both its birth and its growth to teaching (for which reason it requires experience and time), while moral virtue comes about as a result of habit, whence also its name (ethike) is one that is formed by a slight variation from the word ethos (habit). From this it is also plain that none of the moral virtues arises in us by nature; for nothing that exists by nature can form a habit contrary to its nature. For instance, the stone which by nature moves downwards cannot be habituated to move upwards, not even if one tries to train it by throwing it up ten thousand times; nor can fire be habituated to move downwards, nor can anything else that by nature behaves in one way be trained to behave in another. Neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature do the virtues arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit.
>
> Again, of all the things that come to us by nature we first acquire the potentiality and later exhibit the activity (this is plain in the case of the senses; for it was not by often seeing or often hearing that we got these senses, but on the contrary we had them before we used them, and did not come to have them by using them); but the virtues we get by first exercising them, as also happens in the case of the arts as well. For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them, e.g. men become builders by building and lyreplayers by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts.
>
> This is confirmed by what happens in states; for legislators make the citizens good by forming habits in them, and this is the wish of every legislator, and those who do not effect it miss their mark, and it is in this that a good constitution differs from a bad one.
>
> Again, it is from the same causes and by the same means that every virtue is both produced and destroyed, and similarly every art; for it is from playing the lyre that both good and bad lyreplayers are produced. And

> the corresponding statement is true of builders and of all the rest; men will be good or bad builders as a result of building well or badly. For if this were not so, there would have been no need of a teacher, but all men would have been born good or bad at their craft. This, then, is the case with the virtues also; by doing the acts that we do in our transactions with other men we become just or unjust, and by doing the acts that we do in the presence of danger, and being habituated to feel fear or confidence, we become brave or cowardly. The same is true of appetites and feelings of anger; some men become temperate and good-tempered, others self-indulgent and irascible, by behaving in one way or the other in the appropriate circumstances. Thus, in one word, states of character arise out of like activities. This is why the activities we exhibit must be of a certain kind; it is because the states of character correspond to the differences between these. It makes no small difference, then, whether we form habits of one kind or of another from our very youth; it makes a very great difference, or rather all the difference.

Social Relationships and Friendship

Aristotle was careful to note in *Nicomachean Ethics* that virtuous development alone does not make a flourishing life, though it is central to it. In addition to virtuous development, Aristotle thought things like success, friendships, and other external goods contributed to *eudaimonia*.

In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle points out that humans are social (or political) beings (Aristotle [350 BCE] 1998, 1097b10). It's not surprising, then, that, like Confucius, Aristotle thinks social relations are important for our rational and virtuous development.

When we interact with others who have common goals and interests, we are more likely to progress and realize our rational powers. Social relations afford us opportunities to learn, practice, and engage in rational pursuits with other people. The ancient Greek schools (e.g., Plato's Academy, Aristotle's Lyceum, and Epicurus's Gardens) exemplify the ways individuals benefit from social relations. These ancient schools offered a meeting place where those interested in knowledge and the pursuit of wisdom could participate in these activities together.

Through social relations, we also develop an important sense of community and take an interest in the flourishing of others. We see ourselves as connected to others, and through our interactions we develop social virtues like generosity and friendliness (Homiak 2019). Moreover, as we develop social virtues and gain a deeper understanding of the reasons why what is right, is right, we realize that an individual's ability to flourish and thrive is improved when the community flourishes. Social relations and political friendships are useful for increasing the amount of good we can do for the community (Kraut 2018).

Friendship

The important role Aristotle assigns to friendship in a flourishing life is evidenced by the fact that he devotes two out of the ten books of *Nicomachean Ethics* (Books VIII and IX) to a discussion of it. He notes that it would be odd, "when one assigns all good things to the happy man, not to assign friends, who are thought the greatest of external goods" (Aristotle [350 BCE] 1998, 1169a35–b20). Aristotle distinguishes between **incidental friendships** and **perfect friendships**. Incidental friendships are based on and defined by either utility or pleasure. Such friendships are casual relationships where each person participates only because they get something (utility or pleasure) from it. These friendships neither contribute to our happiness nor do they foster virtuous development.

Unlike incidental friendships, perfect friendships are relationships that foster and strengthen our virtuous development. The love that binds a perfect friendship is based on the good or on the goodness of the characters of the individuals involved. Aristotle believed that perfect friends wish each other well simply because they love each other and want each other to do well, not because they expect something (utility or pleasure) from the other. He points out that "those who wish well to their friends for their sake are most truly friends" (Aristotle [350 BCE] 1998, 1156a27–b17). Aristotle argues that the happy man needs (true) friends

because such friendships make it possible for them to "contemplate worthy [or virtuous] actions and actions that are [their] own" (Aristotle [350 BCE] 1998, 1169b20–1170a6). This affords the good individual the opportunity to contemplate worthy actions that are not their own (i.e., they are their friend's) while still thinking of these actions as in some sense being their own because their friend is another self. On Aristotle's account, we see a true friend as another self because we are truly invested in our friend's life and "we ought to wish what is good for his sake" (Aristotle [350 BCE] 1998, 1155b17–1156a5).

Perfect friendships afford us opportunities to grow and develop, to better ourselves—something we do not get from other relationships. Aristotle therefore argues that a "certain training in virtue arises also from the company of the good" (Aristotle [350 BCE] 1998, 1170a6–30). Our perfect friend provides perspective that helps us in our development and contributes to our happiness because we get to participate in and experience our friend's happiness as our own. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that Aristotle considered true friends "the greatest of external goods" (Aristotle [350 BCE] 1998, 1169a35–b20).

9.5 Daoism

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Summarize the metaphysical context and ethical properties of the *dao*.
- Analyze the relationship between *wu wei* and Daoist ethics.
- Compare and contrast Mohist, Confucian, and Daoist ethics.

Daoism (also written as Taoism) finds its beginnings during the Warring States period of ancient China. Like Mohism and Confucianism, Daoism is a response to the social unrest and suffering characteristic of that period. Daoism aims to foster harmony in both society and the individual. To do so, it seeks to understand the source of evil and suffering. It locates the cause of most suffering and conflict in desires and greed. Daoists believe that even when we try to regulate human action with moral systems and norms, we still fail to realize a flourishing society and good life. Harmony is possible by living life in accordance with what is natural. While Mohism and consequentialism judge the morality of an action based on the happiness it creates, Daoism equates moral actions with those that promote harmony and accord with the natural way.

Chinese sources tell us that Laozi, also written as Lao Tzu, the founder of philosophical Daoism, lived during the sixth century BCE (Chan 2018). He authored a short book, the *Daodejing* (sometimes written as *Tao Te Ching*). Laozi's teachings emphasize the importance of simplicity, harmony, and following the natural way of things. His basic teachings were expanded upon by Zhuangzi (fourth century BCE). Zhuangzi criticized the artificial way of life humans had created and argued that it led to suffering by creating desire and greed.

FIGURE 9.10 A bust of the founder of Daoism, Laozi, who lived during the sixth century BCE. (credit: "Laozi" by edenpictures/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

The Dao

In Daoism, the ***dao*** is often translated as "the way." Daoists rejected the narrow Confucian view of *dao* as a way of behaving in society to ensure order and social harmony, and instead view the *dao* as the natural way of the universe and all things. The *dao* is represented as the source or origin of all that exists. Daoism tells us that we must live in accord with the dao if we want to live a good life or live well.

Properties

In the very first chapter of the *Daodejing*, we learn that the "*dao*" that can be spoken of or named is not *dao*: "Nameless: the origin of heaven and earth. Naming: the mother of ten thousand things" (Laozi [ca. 6th century BC] 1993, 1). When you name something, when you speak about it, you pick it out and give it a definite identity. *Dao* is the source of all that exists, of all characteristics and properties, but it is itself without limits and impossible to define. It represents the underlying connectedness and oneness of everything. *Dao* is an inexhaustible source of existence, of things, and it is that to which all things return.

Naturalism

In moral philosophy, **naturalism** is the belief that ethical claims can be derived from nonethical ones. In Daoism, "moral *dao* must be rooted in natural ways" (Hansen 2020). It emphasizes living in accord with nature by following the *dao*, or natural way of things. The individual who lives in the right way lives in accord with nature and exists in harmony with it. Daoism characterizes a fulfilling life as a calm, simple life, one that is free from desires and greed. Its focus on returning to nature, on naturalness, and on living in harmony with the natural world makes Daoism a naturalistic philosophy.

Daoist Metaphysics

The *Daodejing* offers a metaphysical perspective. The *dao* is characterized as the source of all things that exist, as the source of being and nonbeing. In Chapter 4 of the *Daodejing*, *dao* is said to be "empty—Its use never

exhausted. Bottomless—The origin of all things" (Laozi [ca. 6th century BC] 1993, 4). The source of all that exists, of change, the *dao* nevertheless remains unchanging. Daoism, then, can be read as a philosophy that provides answers to important metaphysical questions in its exploration of the underlying nature of existence.

The metaphysical account of reality found in Daoism provides a foundation for other Daoist positions. Daoism's naturalistic philosophy is supported by its metaphysical claims. The *dao* is the *source* of all, and living in accordance with it is living in accordance with the natural way, with the flow of all existence. Daoists claim, therefore, that we act morally when we act in accord with the *dao* and thus in accord with the natural way of things. Their metaphysics suggests a view of the world that recognizes the dynamic connections and interdependence of all things that exist. When we name things, when we differentiate things and treat them as individual, existing entities, we ignore the fact that nothing exists on its own independent of the whole. To truly understand existence, then, Daoists urge us to be more aware of and sensitive to the way everything depends on and is connected to everything else. Each thing is a part of a larger, ever-changing whole.

Skepticism, Inclusion, and Acceptance

In the *Daodejing*, it can be hard to grasp or form a clear conception of the *dao*. In fact, when Zhuangzi expands upon the earlier teachings of Laozi, he "repeatedly brings forth the issue of whether and how the *Dao* can be known" (Pregadio 2020). The *dao* cannot be known in the sense in which we normally know things about ourselves, objects, or our world. Daoism is thus skeptical not only about those things humans have so far claimed to know and value, but also skeptical that knowledge of the *dao* is possible. This **skepticism** regarding the extent to which we can know the *dao* pushes Daoism to be inclusive and accepting. It makes Daoism open to and accepting of various interpretations and readings of the *Daodejing* so long as through them we are able to live in accordance with the *dao*—to live a fulfilling life.

Paradox and Puzzles

Throughout the *Daodejing*, there is paradoxical and puzzling language. For example, it says that the *dao* "in its regular course does nothing . . . and so there is nothing which it does not do" (Laozi [ca. 6th century BC] 1993, 37). The paradoxical ways the *dao* is described within the texts is a way to bring attention to or highlight a way of thinking that is fundamentally different from our everyday experience of the world. Indeed, Daoists believe that our problems are a consequence of our regular way of being in the world and living without awareness of the *dao*. We are accustomed to treating things as distinct, definable entities, and we think of ourselves in the same terms. Unaware of the *dao*, of the true nature of reality, we act against it and cause pain and suffering. Through paradoxical language and expressions, Daoism attempts to make us aware of something greater that is the generative source of existence. It challenges us to look at things differently and change our perspective so that we can see that our pain and suffering is a consequence of conventional values and beliefs. It attempts to sidestep the limitations of language by using paradoxes and puzzles to encourage and promote a deeper awareness of the nature of existence. Daoists criticize the way humans normally live because it fosters and encourages bad thinking, problematic values, and resistance to living differently.

Wu Wei

The Daoist approach to life is one that recommends reserve, acceptance of the world as it is, and living in accordance with the flow of nature. In ancient China, Laozi and other thinkers responded to the unrest, conflict, and suffering they witnessed in their society. Laozi's response (and Zhuangzi's development of it) is critical of the way we normally live in the world. For example, we are normally wasteful, we resist change, and we try to transform the natural world to suit our needs. Daoism recommends instead that we move with the current of the natural way of things, accept things as they are, and find balance and harmony with the *dao*. The Daoist call this the practice of ***wu wei***, which involves what is often described as nonaction (Chan 2018). Offering a clear account of *wu wei* can prove challenging because it is a paradoxical concept. Our normal concept of action includes motivated, directed, purposeful activity aimed at desire satisfaction. To act is to impose your strength and will on the world, to bring something about. Practicing *wu wei*, in contrast, suggests

a natural way of acting that is spontaneous or immediate. When you practice *wu wei*, you act in harmony with the *dao*, you are free of desire and of striving, and you spontaneously move with the natural flow of existence.

Attitude toward the Dao

One who practices *wu wei*, or nonaction, is someone free of unnecessary, self-gratifying desires. The normal way we act in the world fosters an attitude of separateness and causes us to act against nature or in ways that resist the natural way. Practicing nonaction brings one in harmony with the *dao*. The individual develops an attitude of connectedness rather than individuality, of being one with the natural world and the way of things rather than separate from or against it.

Receptivity and "Softness"

The Daoist way of living in the world is one that values being receptive to the natural flow and movements of life. We practice a "soft" style of action when we practice *wu wei* (Wong 2021). Daoists think we normally practice a "hard" style of action, we resist the natural flow. The common view or understanding of the natural world treats it as separate from the human world, as something valuable only for its usefulness. Such a view promotes values like strength, dominance, and force because we view nature as something that must be overpowered and transformed to fit the human, social world. The Daoist conception of softness suggests living in the world in a way that is in accord with the natural way of things. Instead of acting against the current of the stream, you move easily with the flow of the waters. A "soft" style suggests being receptive to the natural flow and moving with it. When you are sensitive to the natural movements and processes of life, you are free of desire, calm, and able to live in harmony with it.

READ LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Excerpt from the *Daodejing* by Laozi

Identify ethical norms that you feel are communicated through the passages below. How do they compare to the systematic normative theories that you have encountered in this chapter so far? Note that this translation uses the spelling "tao" rather than "dao". These two spellings refer to the same concept.

Laozi (Lao-tzu) *Daodejing (Tao Te Ching) (https://openstax.org/r/Daodejing)*, translated by James Legge.

Chapter 1

1. The Tao that can be trodden is not the enduring and unchanging Tao. The name that can be named is not the enduring and unchanging name.
2. (Conceived of as) having no name, it is the Originator of heaven and earth; (conceived of as) having a name, it is the Mother of all things.
3. Always without desire we must be found,
   If its deep mystery we would sound;
   But if desire always within us be,
   Its outer fringe is all that we shall see.
4. Under these two aspects, it is really the same; but as development takes place, it receives the different names. Together we call them the Mystery. Where the Mystery is the deepest is the gate of all that is subtle and wonderful.

Chapter 4

1. The Tao is (like) the emptiness of a vessel; and in our employment of it we must be on our guard against all fulness. How deep and unfathomable it is, as if it were the Honoured Ancestor of all things!
2. We should blunt our sharp points, and unravel the complications of things; we should attemper our brightness,

and bring ourselves into agreement with the obscurity of others. How pure and still the Tao is, as if it would ever so continue!
3. I do not know whose son it is. It might appear to have been before God.

Chapter 8

1. The highest excellence is like (that of) water. The excellence of water appears in its benefiting all things, and in its occupying, without striving (to the contrary), the low place which all men dislike. Hence (its way) is near to (that of) the Tao.
2. The excellence of a residence is in (the suitability of) the place; that of the mind is in abysmal stillness; that of associations is in their being with the virtuous; that of government is in its securing good order; that of (the conduct of) affairs is in its ability; and that of (the initiation of) any movement is in its timeliness.
3. And when (one with the highest excellence) does not wrangle (about his low position), no one finds fault with him.

Chapter 13

1. Favour and disgrace would seem equally to be feared; honour and great calamity, to be regarded as personal conditions (of the same kind).
2. What is meant by speaking thus of favour and disgrace? Disgrace is being in a low position (after the enjoyment of favour). The getting that (favour) leads to the apprehension (of losing it), and the losing it leads to the fear of (still greater calamity):--this is what is meant by saying that favour and disgrace would seem equally to be feared. And what is meant by saying that honour and great calamity are to be (similarly) regarded as personal conditions? What makes me liable to great calamity is my having the body (which I call myself); if I had not the body, what great calamity could come to me?
3. Therefore he who would administer the kingdom, honouring it as he honours his own person, may be employed to govern it, and he who would administer it with the love which he bears to his own person may be entrusted with it.

Daoist, Mohist, and Confucian Ethics

Daoism, Mohism, and Confucianism were created in response to widespread social unrest, conflict, and suffering. All three aim to end suffering and promote harmony. Daoism's approach is unlike either Mohism or Confucianism in important respects. Daoists reject traditional morality because it promotes a way of life that supports acting against the natural way or against the flow of nature. They therefore reject the Mohist and Confucian affirmation of traditional moral norms. Daoists believe social norms and practices won't solve our problems, because they promote a way of life that is unnatural. Instead, Daoism affirms simplicity, the elimination of desires and greed, and naturalness. Daoists believe we need to look beyond social life, beyond traditional human constructs, and instead find harmony with the natural way, the *dao*.

In contrast, Mohist and Confucian ethics attempt to establish norms and standards for acting and emphasize the important role of social relations in informing our obligations. They reaffirm the value and importance of moral norms and social practices, arguing that widespread adherence will heal social discord and promote well-being. Confucianism focuses on character and argues that through the cultivation of virtue we perfect ourselves. Mohism, however, focuses on consequences to determine rightness, and Mohists believe actions that promote general welfare are right.

9.6 Feminist Theories of Ethics

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain the framework of care ethics.
- Summarize feminists' historical critique of normative moral teachings concerning gender.
- Evaluate the purpose and potential of intersectional moral discourse.

Feminism is, among other things, a political and philosophical movement that aims to end sexism and promote social justice. Feminists argue that the long-standing dominance of the male perspective has caused women's interests to be ignored and their autonomy to be limited. In ethics, feminist thinkers have traditionally explored, criticized, and sought to correct the role gender has historically played in the development and application of moral beliefs and practices. They examine, for example, the ways in which power defines relationships within society and the extent to which it has influenced social/cultural development. Feminist ethics places special emphasis on exploring the role of gender and gendered thinking in shaping our views, values, and our understanding of ourselves and the world.

Historical Critique

At its core, feminism is a response to a world that has by and large ignored the perspectives, interests, and lived experiences of women. Feminists explore historical factors that have caused and perpetuate gender discrimination and oppression. They aim to identify, critique, and correct traditional assumptions about gender. Feminists criticize "institutions, presuppositions, and practices that have historically favored men over women" (McAfee 2018). They point out that the male perspective has been treated as the norm and the stand-in for the human perspective. When theorists and thinkers have historically made claims about universality and objectivity, they ignored the fact that it was their own (male) perspective that was treated as the norm, as a standard human experience. Feminists therefore criticize traditional moral theory for pretending to be universal and objective even though it favored the male perspective and experience (McAfee 2018).

At its core, feminist ethics seeks to understand, uncover, and correct the traditional role gender has played in social/cultural development. The male perspective has celebrated man as the norm, the standard human. We see in all areas of life a celebration of traits associated with men. The belief that we should pursue science and technology to dominate and control the natural world, for example, celebrates strength and reason, values that are used to characterize men. Women, on the other hand, have traditionally been characterized as delicate, weak, submissive, and emotional (as opposed to rational).

The Concept of the Feminine

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir points out that **femininity** is not something given, but something learned, a social construct. "It would appear, then, that every female human being is not necessarily a woman; to be so considered she must share in that mysterious and threatened reality known as femininity" (Beauvoir [1949] 2011). The concepts of *femininity* and *masculinity* represent society's idea of what it means to be either a woman or a man. These concepts are based on traditional gender roles and the norms, practices, and values tied to them. As Mari Mikkola suggests in her article "Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender" (2019), "females become women through a process whereby they acquire feminine traits and learn feminine behavior." Feminine behavior has historically been associated with being delicate, submissive, and emotional. Feminists critique this concept of femininity for being used to justify limits on female autonomy and contributing to the marginalization of women.

Gender Binarism and Essentialism

Most feminists in the 1970s and 1980s believed that gender was binary. **Gender binarism** is the view that each person can be categorized by one of the two genders (male or female). Some feminist thinkers have used

gender binarism as a starting point to explore different, alternative ethical systems in which the norms for human nature are defined by women. Others have suggested that women approach moral problems from a fundamentally different perspective than men. Psychologist Carol Gilligan's work, for example, found that men and women often approach moral problems from different perspectives: men from the perspective of *justice* and women from the perspective of *care*.

Feminists criticize traditional normative ethics for treating man as the human norm. In the traditional view, characteristics associated with masculinity are those characteristics that embody the ideal person.

Some feminists have argued that women should not deny or reject these characteristics, but instead adopt them as essential. **Essentialism** is the view that a set of characteristics makes something what it is. Essentialism suggests that there are certain essential characteristics that make a woman a woman or a man a man. Traditionally, women have been defined by characteristics that define them as morally bad and subversive. Rather than view these characteristics as negative or argue that they are not essential to woman, some feminist ethicists have argued that women should adopt these essential traits as positive.

Ethics of Care

Gilligan's research led to the development of **care ethics** (Gilligan 1982). Gilligan discovered that men and women often approach ethical dilemmas from different perspectives. Gilligan found that men value things like justice, autonomy, and the application of abstract principles and norms. In contrast, she found that women value things like caring for others, relationships, and responsibility. She called the approach favored by men the perspective of justice and the approach favored by women the perspective of care (Norlock 2019).

The ethics of care is an approach that values caring, the relationships of the individuals involved, and the interests of individuals. In contrast to the emphasis on the application of abstract rules and principles found in traditional ethics, the ethics of care emphasizes the complexities of real life and is more sensitive to unique, concrete situations. Gilligan's approach asks agents to consider the specific interests of individuals and their relationships. The ethics of care values caring and moral reasoning that accounts for the unique factors of concrete situations.

The Caring Relation as an Ethical Paradigm

Traditionally, the role of caretaker has been viewed as a woman's role. The caring relationship is one between an individual and their caregiver. A caretaker is compassionate, takes responsibility, understands the importance of relationships, and acts in the best interests of the one they care for. Care ethics uses the caring relationship as an ethical paradigm. It is the model that should be used to determine what's right and guide behavior. The caring relationship emphasizes the importance of concrete situations, the specific individuals involved, and acting to promote their interests.

Nel Noddings on Caring

In her influential work *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (1984), Nel Noddings argues that the care perspective is both feminine and feminist (Norlock 2019). The emphasis on abstract, universal principles in traditional ethics makes the agent insensitive to situational factors and relationships. In contrast, Noddings endorses the moral value of partiality (Norlock 2019). From this perspective, the agent considers specific situational and relational factors in moral deliberation. When we consider the needs of the actual individuals involved in a situation, we are more likely to be sensitive to the interests of those in marginalized or oppressed positions.

Intersectionality

Some feminists have highlighted the important role intersectionality plays in social relations and argue it must be accounted for to end inequality and correct identity-based oppression and discrimination. **Intersectionality** refers to different aspects of identity (e.g., gender, race, sexuality, and class) that intersect in a person's identity and define or influence their lived experience. When we use or assume identity norms (e.g.,

the normal woman) without considering other aspects of identity, it is possible that we advance only some women and not others because there is a tendency to assume a position of privilege (Norlock 2019).

Some feminists have argued that intersectional approaches compromise and weaken the strength of potential advocacy. Naomi Zack (2005), for example, argues that otherwise broad categories of social identity (e.g., woman) are fragmented by intersectional approaches because diverse aspects of identity (e.g., race, class, and/or sexuality) are treated as changing the individual's perspective and experience of oppression. In other words, a group of individuals who all share one aspect of identity (woman) may be fragmented into smaller groups when intersectionality is considered because other aspects of identity shift a given individual's perspective and shared experience (Norlock 2019). This has the adverse effect, Zack argues, of weakening the category and the strength of advocacy.

In response to feminists who question intersectional approaches on the grounds that they compromise and weaken advocacy, other feminists have pointed out that identity categories like *women* include diverse members. If intersectionality is ignored, we ignore the diverse perspectives, interests, and experiences of individuals and cannot advocate effectively. Identities are complex, and different aspects of identity (e.g., race, class, and/or sexuality) may make an individual more or less likely to experience oppression in different circumstances. Intersectional approaches bring a deeper awareness of aspects of identity and sensitivity to the ways social identities contribute to experiences of oppression. A greater emphasis on aspects of identity, they argue, can unite individuals with diverse social identities by increasing awareness of the common struggle of oppressed groups. Intersectionality can therefore foster solidarity among oppressed groups because it makes individuals more aware of their common experiences.

Traditionally, it was thought that oppressed identities had a compounding effect and individuals were worse off if their identities included aspects of multiple oppressed identities. In this view, someone whose identity included multiple oppressed categories would be considered worse off than someone whose identity only included one oppressed category.

Development of Alternative Normative Moral Frameworks

Feminists critiqued traditional moral beliefs and practices for using norms and standards that prioritize certain groups and perspectives. Traditional normative moral frameworks favored the dominant, privileged position by, for example, ignoring actual individuals in concrete situations and therefore making us blind to the ways in which some individuals suffer. Social identities, like people, are diverse and complex. In an attempt to correct oppression based on gender (and identity), feminists have pursued alternative normative moral frameworks.

Feminists have criticized deontological moral theories and duty-centric frameworks. They take issue with the separation of rationality and emotion. Traditionally, woman have been associated more with a capacity for emotion. Historically, philosophers like Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Kant, and many others have located the source of human worth and dignity in our rational capacity. Their theories imply, explicitly or implicitly, that women have less worth and dignity, suggesting they are deserving of less respect. The seemingly benign claim that humans are rational creatures has grave implications when what is normal is determined by those who are in a privileged position. Feminists also critique Kant's normative moral framework because it prioritizes abstraction and generalization over consideration of situational factors and the people involved. They argue that such abstraction is problematic because it pretends to be impartial while ignoring the interests of oppressed or vulnerable groups.

In ethics, feminist scholars have explored alternative moral frameworks using all major approaches. They criticize traditional normative moral theories for ignoring the interests and perspectives of women (and oppressed groups) and for failing to consider important facts of the concrete situation and the individuals involved when applying norms or standards. A viable alternative moral framework must find ways to account for the interests of all persons, focus on the vulnerable and invisible, and lead to moral choices that advance

true equality rather than only advancing the interests of the privileged.

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Summary

9.1 Requirements of a Normative Moral Theory

Ethics is the philosophical study of morality. It is commonly divided into three main areas: metaethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics, each of which is distinguished by a different *level* of inquiry. A normative moral theory is a systematized account of morality that addresses important questions related to effectively guiding moral conduct. This chapter reviews three main approaches (consequentialist, deontological, and virtue) to normative ethics distinguished by the criterion (consequences, duty, or character) used for determining moral conduct.

9.2 Consequentialism

Consequentialism is the view that the rightness of an action is determined by its consequences. Mohism is a consequentialist theory founded by Mozi. It was created as a response to widespread social unrest and suffering characteristic of ancient China's Warring States period. Mohists thought ethical norms could be established by looking at what increases overall welfare. They thought everyone should be treated impartially or equally and that preference shouldn't be given to some people's welfare over others. A key virtue in Mohism is benevolence, or kindness (*rèn*). The concept of benevolence is important because it requires one to look outside one's own interests and treat others with care (*ài*). Mozi realized that if people adopt the same morality, they will use the same standards to judge their own actions and the actions of others, which will improve social order and harmony.

Utilitarianism is a consequentialist theory developed by Jeremy Bentham and later modified by John Stuart Mill. Utilitarians argue that what is right is whatever produces the most utility, the most usefulness. They identify happiness with utility. The principle of utility states that "actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness" (Mill [1861] 2001, 7). Classic utilitarians like Bentham and Mill believed that pleasure and pain are basic, primary means by which people navigate the world and find motivation. The greatest happiness principle (or principle of utility) tells us that actions are right that produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number. When an agent evaluates the moral rightness of an action, they consider the happiness of all affected by the consequences.

9.3 Deontology

Deontological approaches focus on duties (e.g., always tell the truth) to determine whether an act is morally right. Immanuel Kant was the first philosopher to advance a deontological approach. He conceived of morality as rules that any rational being can and should accept because they are norms of rational conduct or agency. He called these rules categorical imperatives. There are two important formulations of the categorical imperative: the universal law formulation and the humanity formulation. Kant distinguished the categorical imperative from the hypothetical imperative, which is an action one takes to achieve a specific goal.

Pluralists like Sir William David Ross attempted to offer a more complex, complete account of morality that explains the common human experience. Ross believed (classic) utilitarianism and deontology fail because they "over-simplify the moral life" (Ross 1939, 189). He thought earlier moral theories reduced morality to a single principle (e.g., Mill's greatest happiness principle and Kant's categorical imperative), leaving them unable to adequately account for our common experience of morality. Ross argued that our duties are not absolute, as Kant would have it, but rather are obligatory, other things being equal, or so long as other factors and circumstances remain the same.

9.4 Virtue Ethics

Virtue ethics takes a character-centered approach to morality. Right action is said to flow from right character. To do what is right requires having the right character traits or dispositions. You become a good person, then, through the cultivation of character and self-perfection.

Confucius developed Confucianism in response to the widespread social unrest and suffering characteristic of

ancient China's Warring States period. Confucians maintain that it is possible to perfect human nature through personal development and transformation, and they maintain the importance of *junzi*, a person who is an exemplary ethical figure and thus lives according to the *dao*. *Ren* refers to moral excellence, whether in full or regarding specific characteristics or traits. Important to both early and late Confucian ethics is the concept of *li* (ritual and practice). *Li* plays an important role in the transformation of character. Social and cultural norms and practices shape and influence our interactions with others. These rituals are a guide or become a means by which we develop and start to understand our moral responsibilities.

Aristotle believed virtuous development is central to human flourishing, *eudaimonia*. Aristotle identifies rationality as the unique function of human beings, and human virtue or excellence is therefore realized through the development or perfection of reason. To exercise or possess virtue is to demonstrate excellent character. Someone with a virtuous character is consistent, firm, self-controlled, and well-off. Aristotle thought people "are made perfect by habit" (Aristotle [350 BCE] 1998, 1103a10–33). When people practice doing what's right, they get better at choosing the right action in different circumstances. Through habituation, people gain practice and familiarity, bring about dispositions or tendencies, and gain the requisite practical experience to identify the reasons why a certain action should be chosen in diverse situations.

Like Confucius, Aristotle thinks social relations are important for people's rational and virtuous development. When people interact with others who have common goals and interests, they are more likely to progress and realize their rational powers. Through social relations, people also develop an important sense of community and take an interest in the flourishing of others.

9.5 Daoism

Like Mohism and Confucianism, Daoism is a response to the social unrest and suffering characteristic of ancient China's Warring States period. Daoism aims to foster harmony in both society and the individual. Philosophical Daoism was founded by Laozi. Daoists reject the narrow Confucian view of *dao* as a way of behaving in society to ensure order and social harmony and instead view the *dao* as the natural way of the universe and all things. Daoism characterizes a fulfilling life as a calm, simple life, one that is free from desires and greed. The practice of *wu wei* suggests a natural way of acting that is spontaneous or immediate. When people practice *wu wei*, they act in harmony with the *dao*, are free of desire and striving, and spontaneously move with the natural flow of existence.

9.6 Feminist Theories of Ethics

The ethics of care is often associated with feminism, and its approach is modeled on a woman's moral perspective. Psychologist Carol Gilligan's research led to the development of care ethics. It is an approach that values caring, the relationships of the individuals involved, and the interests of individuals. Gilligan's approach asks agents to consider the specific interests of individuals and their relationships. The ethics of care values caring and moral reasoning that accounts for the unique factors of concrete situations rather than abstraction.

Feminist scholars criticize traditional normative moral theories for ignoring the interests and perspectives of women (and oppressed groups) and for failing to consider important facts of the concrete situation and the individuals involved when applying norms or standards. They have explored alternative moral frameworks using all major approaches. A viable alternative moral framework must find ways to account for the interests of all persons, focus on the vulnerable and invisible, and lead to moral choices that advance true equality rather than only advancing the interests of the privileged.

Key Terms

act utilitarianism a utilitarian approach that proposes that people should apply the greatest happiness principle on a case-by-case basis

applied ethics a branch of ethics that focuses on the application of moral norms to determine the permissibility of specific actions

care ethics an approach to ethics that emphasizes the importance of subjective factors, specifics of concrete situations, and the relationships of individuals

categorical imperative a moral law that individuals have a duty to follow and that is rationally devised through Kant's four formulations

Confucianism a normative moral theory that arose in ancient China during the Warring States period that proposes the development of individual character is key to the achievement of an ethical and harmonious society

consequentialism a moral theory that looks at an action's outcome or consequences to determine whether it is morally right

dao in Confucianism, ethical principles or path by which to live life; in Daoism, the natural way of the universe and all things

Daoism a belief system developed in ancient China that encourages the practice of living in accordance with the *dao*, the natural way of the universe and all things

deontology a moral theory that focuses on duties or rules to determine the rightness of an action

essentialism a view that a set of characteristics makes something what it is

ethics the field of philosophy that investigates morality

eudaimonia the flourishing life, which ancient Greek philosophers (e.g., Aristotle, the Stoics, and Epicurus) set as the aim of life

femininity a social construct that categorizes specific traits as female and establishes society's expectation of women

feminism a political and philosophical movement that aims to end sexism and promote social justice for women

gender binarism the view that each person can be categorized by one of two genders (male or female)

good will the capacity to be a good person

greatest happiness principle a principle that holds that actions are right when they produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people

higher pleasures pleasures associated with the exercise of a person's higher faculties (e.g., the use of higher cognitive faculties and/or participation in social/cultural life)

humanity formulation a rational method of devising moral laws that specifies that each person be treated as an end, never merely as a means

hypothetical imperative a rule that needs to be followed in order to achieve some (proposed) end

incidental friendship casual relationships that are based on utility or pleasure

intersectionality different aspects of identity (e.g., gender, race, sexuality, and class) that intersect in a person's identity and define or influence their lived experience

junzi in Confucianism, a person who is an exemplary ethical figure and lives according to the *dao*

Li ritual and practice that develop a person's ethical character as they interact with others

lower pleasures pleasures associated with the exercise of a person's lower faculties (e.g., basic sensory pleasures)

metaethics a branch of ethics that focuses on foundational questions and moral reasoning

Mohism a type of consequentialism established in ancient China by Mozi (ca. 430 BCE) during the Warring States period

naturalism a belief that ethical claims can be derived from nonethical ones

normative ethics a branch of ethics that focuses on establishing norms and standards of moral conduct

perfect friendship relationships that foster individual virtue as they are based on love and the wish that another flourishes rather than the expectation of personal gain

pluralism an approach to normative ethical theory that suggests a more complex, complete account of morality that provides for conflicting rules

prima facie duties duties that are obligatory, other things being equal, or so long as other factors and circumstances remain the same

principle of utility a principle that holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote pleasure

and diminish pain

ren a central concept in Confucianism that is used to mean either someone with complete virtue or to refer to specific virtues

rule utilitarianism a utilitarian approach that proposes that people should use the greatest happiness principle to test possible moral rules to determine whether a given rule would produce greater happiness if it were followed

skepticism a philosophical position that claims people do not know things they ordinarily think they know

trolley problems classic thought experiments that use difficult ethical dilemmas to examine moral reasoning and deliberation

universal law formulation a rational method of devising moral laws that proposes that a moral law must be applied universally to the whole of society

utilitarianism a type of consequentialism introduced by Jeremy Bentham and developed by John Stuart Mill

virtue ethics an approach to normative ethics that focuses on character

Warring States period a period of widespread conflict, suffering, and social unrest in Chinese history that gave rise to highly influential philosophical approaches, including Mohism, Confucianism, and Daoism

wu wei a natural way of acting—also called nonaction—that is spontaneous or immediate, one in which a person's actions are in harmony with the flow of nature or existence

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Review Questions

9.1 Requirements of a Normative Moral Theory

1. Briefly explain how the three main areas of ethics (metaethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics) differ.
2. What is the purpose of a normative moral theory?
3. What are the three main approaches to normative ethics, and how do they differ?

9.2 Consequentialism

4. What are the ten doctrines of Mohism?
5. Why is the concept of "benefit" important in Mohism?
6. Bentham believed that pleasures only differ quantitatively. Mill, in contrast, believed that pleasure differ both quantitatively and qualitatively. What are the different qualities of pleasure that Mill identifies?
7. For utilitarians, which consequences must be considered when determining the rightness of an action?
8. What is the main difference between act and rule utilitarianism?

9.3 Deontology

9. Why do deontologists like Kant argue that consequences are not morally relevant?
10. Why is good will important in Kant's ethics?
11. Why does Kant distinguish between categorical imperatives and hypothetical imperatives?
12. Contrast Kant's and Ross's view of moral rules.
13. Why did Ross think classic utilitarians and deontologists oversimplified morality?

9.4 Virtue Ethics

14. Why is the exemplary person important in virtue ethics?

15. Why is the concept of *li* (ritual and practice) important in Confucianism? Why role does *li* play in a person's virtuous development?

16. Explain why Confucians believe relationships and social roles shape people's moral responsibilities and structure moral life.

17. Why did Aristotle think virtuous development is important for achieving *eudaimonia*, or a flourishing life?

18. In Aristotle's view, why are perfect friendships an important part of a good or flourishing life?

9.5 Daoism

19. How is the *dao* in Daoism different from the *dao* in Confucianism?

20. Explain why Daoism is thought to offer a naturalistic approach.

21. Explain the practice of *wu wei*.

22. Why does practicing *wu wei* result in a soft style of action rather than a hard style of action?

9.6 Feminist Theories of Ethics

23. Why is the concept of femininity a social construct?

24. How has the treatment of the normal human in traditional ethics ignored the perspective of women?

25. In care ethics, why is the caring relationship treated as the ethical paradigm?

26. Carol Gilligan identified the perspective of justice and the perspective of care. How do these perspectives differ?

27. Explain why some feminists have highlighted the important role intersectionality plays in social relations and argue it must be accounted for if we want to end inequality and correct identity-based oppression and discrimination.

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Applied Ethics

10

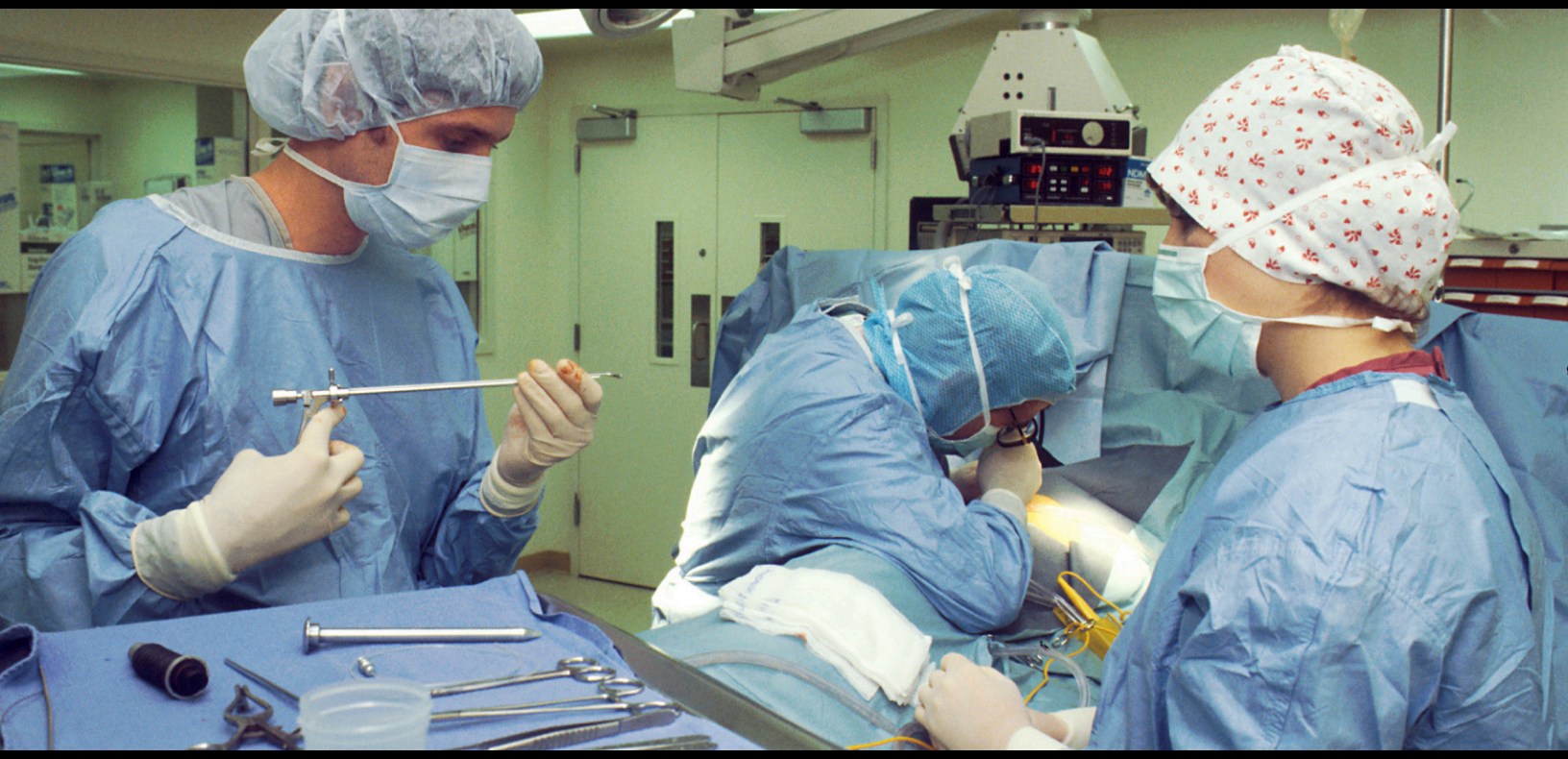

FIGURE 10.1 Bioethics is an area of applied ethics that explores the many potential ethical dilemmas that can arise in medicine and related areas. Bioethics addresses questions like: "What is informed consent?" "When, if ever, can a physician assist a patient in ending their own life?" "Under what conditions is it morally permissible to conduct research using human test subjects?" (credit: modification of "Operating Room" by John Crawford/National Cancer Institute/National Institutes of Health/Wikimedia, Public Domain)

CHAPTER OUTLINE

10.1 The Challenge of Bioethics
10.2 Environmental Ethics
10.3 Business Ethics and Emerging Technology

INTRODUCTION Most of us think about ethical issues in our everyday lives. We might wonder, for instance, whether we have an obligation to reduce our use of plastics because of their impact on the environment. We might question whether we treated someone fairly at work or whether we acted in a way that was morally problematic. When we reflect on whether a given action is right or wrong, we are doing applied ethics. We attempt to determine the rightness of some specified action through moral deliberation and the application of ethical principles and norms. Questions in applied ethics focus on whether some action is right, and philosophers apply diverse perspectives when analyzing the morality of a specific action.

Developments and advances in areas like technology and medicine can potentially create otherwise unforeseen or unexpected ethical dilemmas. In most cases, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to predict

potential ethical issues pertaining to an innovation until it is already in use and in the world. Imagine, for instance, trying to predict what moral dilemmas and disruptions the internet would cause before it was created and widely used. Indeed, even after its creation and widespread adoption in the 1990s, there were still many innovations and challenges to come that would have been hard to predict. Ethical dilemmas created by new innovations emerge with use and are often confronted and debated only after they become apparent. This is why it can sometimes seem like ethical debates are always playing catch-up, that we are motivated to debate the ethical implications of something only after issues become apparent.

Metaethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics are the three main areas of ethics, which are each distinguished by a different level of inquiry and analysis. **Applied ethics** focuses on the application of moral norms and principles to controversial issues to determine the rightness of specific actions. While people have done applied ethics throughout human history, as a field of study, applied ethics is relatively new, emerging in the early 1970s. Issues like abortion, environmental racism, the use of humans in biomedical research, and online privacy are just a few of the controversial moral issues explored in applied ethics.

Making sense of these complicated issues often requires a multidisciplinary approach. Applied ethics rarely finds answers within the philosophical frame alone. While philosophy provides the normative framework for analysis by way of the ethical theories, philosophy often generates more questions than functional answers, and in the field of ethics, concerns about the right to life, social justice, and the like sometimes fall into the arena of politics. As a result, many applied dilemmas are solved and resolved through law and policy. As such, applied ethics becomes an interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary field of study.

This chapter explores major subfields in applied ethics including bioethics, environmental ethics, and business ethics and emerging technology.

10.1 The Challenge of Bioethics

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Summarize current scientific advances and social and political factors that contribute to our understanding of today's bioethical controversies.
- Explain the main philosophical positions in major areas of bioethical debate including abortion, euthanasia, clinical trials, and human augmentation.
- Propose a position on each bioethical issue.

The term **bioethics**, which essentially means "life ethics," was coined in 1970 by Van Rensselaer Potter (1911–2011), an American biochemist. It is a field that studies ethical issues that emerge with advances in biology, technology, and medicine. For example, bioethics deals with issues related to patient autonomy, the distribution of and access to medical resources, human experimentation, online privacy, and life-and-death decisions in medicine. When confronted with issues like these, ethicists consider a multiplicity of views, any potentially relevant interests, and complex situational factors. The bioethicist, like anyone doing applied ethics, must be prepared to wear many hats in order to explore all sides and perspectives. This section looks at current areas of controversy and debate in the field of bioethics.

The Abortion Debate

This section investigates biological, political, legal, and moral aspects of the issue of abortion. Unlike a miscarriage, a spontaneous loss of pregnancy due to injury or natural defect, an **abortion** is the intentional ending of a pregnancy. When abortions are medically induced, a pregnancy is terminated using drugs, surgery, or a combination of the two. In some cases, abortions are performed out of medical necessity to save the life of a pregnant person (therapeutic abortion), while in others a person who is pregnant elects to have the procedure for other reasons.

Political efforts to legalize contraception and later abortion arose as part of many women's rights movements.

As shown in Figure 10.2, some countries still prohibit abortion, and others place limits on when it is allowed, such as when the life of the person carrying the pregnancy is at risk.

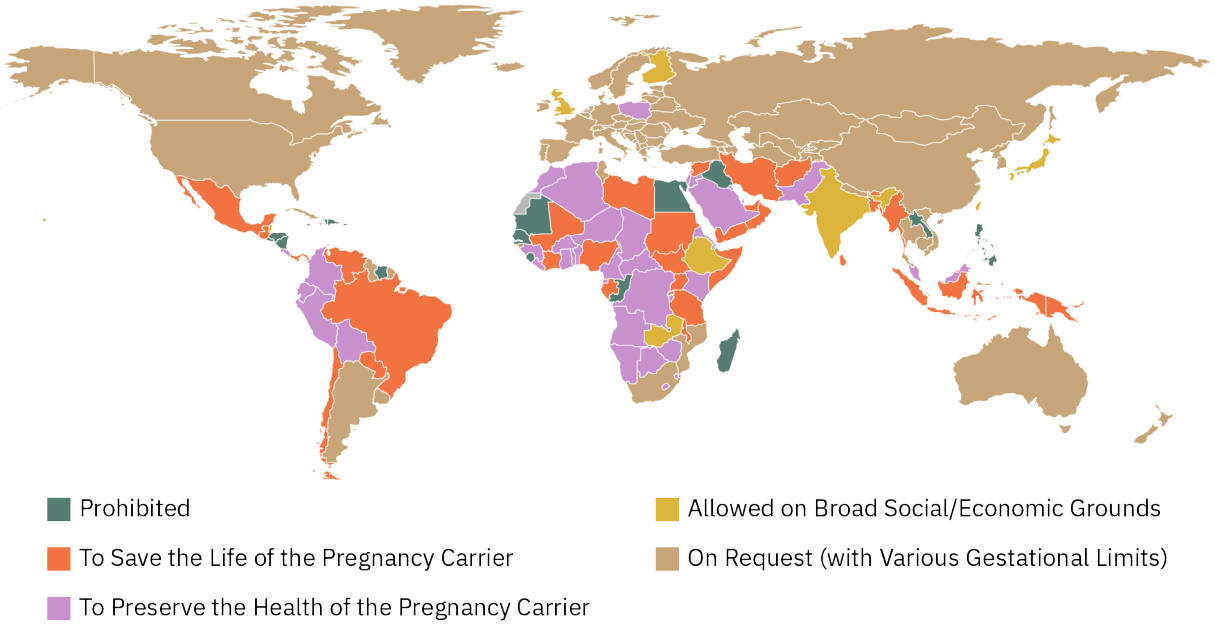

FIGURE 10.2 Legal status of abortion around the world as of March 2022. (source: Center for Responsive Politics; attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY 4.0 license)

In the United States, the right to an abortion prior to the viability of the fetus was deemed protected by the Constitution in the historic Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade* (1973). The court established a trimester system to guide abortion decisions. The court initially acknowledged an unmitigated right to abort in the first three months of pregnancy but left it up to the government to regulate abortion in the second trimester and restrict or ban it in the last trimester if the life of the person carrying the pregnancy was not in danger.

A subsequent Supreme Court decision, *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992), reaffirmed *Roe v. Wade* and ruled that state abortion regulations could not place serious obstacles in the path of someone who chose to seek an abortion before a fetus was viable. The decision also replaced the trimester system with the notion of fetal viability—or the fetus's ability to survive outside the womb (approximately at 25 to 28 weeks). Someone therefore cannot freely seek an abortion if the fetus is viable.

Utilitarianism and Liberal Views on Individual Rights

Normative moral theories, such as those we considered in the previous chapter, factor into how societies view abortion. In Hinduism, for example, moral actions are based on the principle of *ahimsa*, or "non-harming," which means that in considering abortion, the choice is governed by what does the least harm to all involved (e.g., to the parents, the fetus, and society). Portions of the Vedas, Hinduism's most sacred texts, condemn abortion (BBC 2009). Hinduism considers abortion wrong unless it is necessary to save the life of the person carrying the pregnancy. At the same time, in practice, abortion is common in India because some families prefer to have boy children (Dhillon 2020).

Utilitarianism, the consequentialist approach first advanced by Jeremy Bentham, judges an action to be moral if it provides the greatest good to the greatest number. John Stuart Mill's work *On Liberty* popularized and adapted this idea so that it could be implemented within representative governments. Mill recognized that the natural rights of various individuals in society will often come into conflict. To maximize individual freedom, Mill proposed the harm principle. It states that a person's actions should only be limited if they harm another person. A person's speech should therefore not be curtailed unless it harms another by, for example, directly inciting violence. The harm principle became the cornerstone of 19th-century liberalism. As a result, many

people living in liberal societies today evaluate the morality of abortion by weighing the rights of the pregnant person against the rights of the living organism inside the womb. Those who support abortion tend to use the term *fetus* for the living organism and do not regard it as a person with rights. Those who oppose abortion use the term *unborn child* and maintain that it has the rights of personhood.

Metaphysical perspectives heavily inform the debate over whether or under what circumstances an abortion is a moral act. For some, the question revolves around what constitutes a person and what rights persons and nonpersons possess. For those who embrace the Judeo-Christian view that humans have a mind, body, and soul, the question often becomes about when the soul enters the body.

Personhood

Central to the abortion debate, the concept of **personhood** is best understood as a capacity humans possess that distinguishes them as beings capable of morality. Historically, philosophers like Aristotle and Immanuel Kant have identified reason as a principal factor that justifies the special value assigned to humans. Aristotle argued that rational activity is the peculiar function of humans. He thought we perfect ourselves by perfecting our rational nature. Kant located our worth and dignity in our capacity for rationality. He tells us that "rational beings are called persons inasmuch as their nature already marks them out as ends in themselves" (Kant 1997, 4:428). In other words, personhood, for Kant, is contingent on possessing a rational nature.

The question, then, is when personhood begins. No one is a fully functioning rational agent the moment they are born. In fact, we categorize some humans as dependents, as unable to act as rational agents, when their reason is not fully functioning or formed (e.g., children or those with late-stage Alzheimer's). Is there some threshold or line of demarcation that distinguishes the point at which reason is sufficiently developed for a human being to be considered a person by this definition? What would it mean for a society if only those who met that threshold were guaranteed the right to life?

Aristotle and Potentiality

The opening of the chapter on metaphysics considered the acorn and oak tree, asking how a being (in this case the acorn) can change so radically and yet remain essentially the same thing. Plato suggested that beings in the physical world are imperfect reflections of perfect **forms** that are part of an invisible, nonmaterial world. Whereas forms represent an unchanging ideal, beings in this world change. Aristotle proposed the theory of **hylomorphism**, which states that form is actually present in the material world and responsible for causing the acorn to actualize its potential as an oak tree. From this perspective, just as the acorn contains the essential identity of the fully grown oak tree, so does the human embryo contain the essential identity of a human being. Since the embryo contains the human essence, pro-life advocates argue that it is just as immoral to kill an embryo as to kill a human that has been born (Lee 2004).

CONNECTIONS

Aristotle's concept of hylomorphism is explored in greater depth in the chapter on metaphysics and the chapter on value theory.

Aristotle and the Soul

For Aristotle, the soul is the form of the living body. In his work *On the Soul*, Aristotle identifies three types of souls. The soul of a plant acts upon the body so that it can survive and reproduce. The soul of a lower-level animal acts on the body so that it can survive, reproduce, perceive, and act. The soul of a human makes it possible for the body to fulfill all the purposes of a lower-level animal and carry out rational thought. Some have argued that Aristotle believed that the rational soul only entered the human body once it was equipped with organs, at 40 days or more after conception. However, this is likely a misinterpretation promoted by the Greek philosopher Alexander of Aphrodisias from 200 CE onward. In his text *Generation of Animals*, Aristotle conveys the belief, shared by others of his day, that **ensoulment** occurs upon fertilization (Bos 2012). Yet the

belief that the soul enters the body after 40 days—whether or not Aristotle supported it—became widespread within monotheism and has greatly impacted the abortion debate.

Ensoulment in the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Traditions

Today major monotheistic religions object to or seek to limit abortions because they believe that a fetus has a God-given soul. To abort then is to destroy God's creation. The Hebrew Bible, which is part of both Jewish and Christian scripture, is silent on this issue of ensoulment. Genesis 2:7 describes how God created the first man, Adam: "then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being." One of the Hebrew words for soul, *neshama*, also means "breath." In Judaism, the introduction of form or soul into the body becomes an act of God that gives life. No mention is made in the first five books of Moses, the Pentateuch, about when this occurs in natural procreation. The later Babylonian Talmud, compiled between 200 and 500 CE, divulges that "the embryo is considered to be mere water until the fortieth day" (quoted in Schenker 2008, 271). This pronouncement may reflect the influence of Greek ideas.

The Aristotelian view of ensoulment is expressed within Christianity. The influential Christian theologian Saint Augustine (354–430 CE) saw the killing of a 40-day-old fetus as an act of murder. A century later, the code of the Byzantine Emperor Justinian I, who reigned from 529 to 565 CE, declared that fetuses under 40 days did not possess a soul (Jones 2004). In the 12th century, the philosopher and theologian Thomas Aquinas also followed Aristotle's thinking and suggested that a human soul was not fully "formed" until a period of time after conception (40 days for boys and 90 days for girls). Moreover, while Aquinas did not sanction abortion at any stage of pregnancy, he specifically notes that murder has been committed only after the fetus has become animated or ensouled. Aquinas's understanding of ensoulment remained the official church view until late into the 19th century. Pope Pius IX (1792–1878) altered the official position of the church on ensoulment in order to address theological concerns regarding the Immaculate Conception (McGarry 2013). Beginning with Pope Pius IX, then, the church's view has been that the soul is present at conception.

According to the Hadith, which along with the Quran constitutes the central written texts of Islam, the soul enters the body 120 days after conception. Yet Islamic clerics have restricted abortions to the first 40 days or prohibited them altogether—as the Quran implores parents not to kill their children for fear of want (Albar 2001). Like in Judaism and Christianity, opposition to abortion arises from a belief in the sanctity of life that God has bestowed on his creations.

READ LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

This excerpt from Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* (https://openstax.org/r/summatheologica) addresses questions of how and why the soul should be viewed as distinct from the body and how we might go about defining the soul.

> To seek the nature of the soul, we must premise that the soul is defined as the first principle of life of those things which live: for we call living things "animate," [*i.e., having a soul] and those things which have no life, "inanimate." Now life is shown principally by two actions, knowledge and movement. The philosophers of old, not being able to rise above their imagination, supposed that the principle of these actions was something corporeal: for they asserted that only bodies were real things; and that what is not corporeal is nothing: hence they maintained that the soul is something corporeal. This opinion can be proved to be false in many ways; but we shall make use of only one proof, based on universal and certain principles, which shows clearly that the soul is not a body.
>
> It is manifest that not every principle of vital action is a soul, for then the eye would be a soul, as it is a principle of vision; and the same might be applied to the other instruments of the soul: but it is the first principle of life, which we call the soul. Now, though a body may be a principle of life, as the heart is a

> principle of life in an animal, yet nothing corporeal can be the first principle of life. For it is clear that to be a principle of life, or to be a living thing, does not belong to a body as such; since, if that were the case, every body would be a living thing, or a principle of life. Therefore a body is competent to be a living thing or even a principle of life, as "such" a body. Now that it is actually such a body, it owes to some principle which is called its act. Therefore the soul, which is the first principle of life, is not a body, but the act of a body; thus heat, which is the principle of calefaction, is not a body, but an act of a body.

Secular Notions of Personhood

Some contemporary philosophers have laid aside a belief in a God-given soul and turned to modern views of personhood to justify both support for and opposition to abortion. Mary Anne Warren, for example, identifies five characteristics essential to the concept of personhood (Warren 1973):

- Consciousness (in particular, the capacity to feel pain)
- Reasoning (the developed capacity to solve new, complex problems)
- The presence of self-awareness and self-concepts
- Self-motivated and self-directed activity
- The capacity to communicate messages that are not definite or limited in terms of possible content, topic, or type

Warren argues that a fetus is not a person because it does not satisfy any of the characteristics essential to personhood. Abortion, Warren argues, is always morally permissible because a fetus is not a person and does not have rights (e.g., it does not have a right to life). The rights of the person carrying the pregnancy will always override or outweigh any consideration that might be given to a fetus. Warren believes there is no moral basis for limiting or restricting abortion, but she recognizes the possibility that we might do so on nonmoral (practical or medical) grounds. For example, we might justify restricting abortion in a situation where someone would suffer serious harm from medical complications if the procedure were performed.

Others argue that it is not the rational ability present in an individual that makes them a person or secures their moral status, but rather that our rational nature grounds our moral status—and if human nature is the source of our worth, then any human, even a child, has value whether their reason and agency has fully developed. Children, for example, are not fully functioning rational agents. We recognize this distinction, but we do not use it to justify intentionally harming children or using them as a means to our own ends. We assume that children, like all humans, possess a worth and value that prohibits such treatment. Similarly, people who oppose abortion say that the unborn are potential persons, which is sufficient to grant the unborn child at least a right to life.

Some philosophers, like Ronald Dworkin, go a step further, arguing that full moral status is assigned to any human in virtue of being a member of the human species (Dworkin 1993). Dworkin's approach focuses on whether an entity is human and uses that as a basis for assigning full moral status rather than making such status contingent on whether a specific individual has fully formed rational capacities.

The Right to Bodily Autonomy

When the issue of abortion is couched in terms of rights, the debate centers on the conflict between the right(s) of the fetus or unborn child and the rights of the pregnant person. If a fetus has a right to life, then the question is whether its right is sufficiently strong to outweigh someone's right to bodily autonomy—the right of individuals to determine what happens to their bodies.

In *A Defense of Abortion*, for example, Judith Jarvis Thomson (1929–2020) set out to show that granting a fetus a right to life does not mean that its right is unlimited. She proposed the following thought experiment: Imagine that you wake up one morning and find yourself in the hospital lying next to a famous violinist, currently unconscious, with a fatal kidney ailment. The Society of Music Lovers has reviewed all the available

medical records and found you to be the only suitable match for the violinist. They kidnapped you and plugged his circulatory system into yours so that your kidneys can filter out the poisons in his bloodstream. This will cure him within nine hours. Do you have an obligation to stay plugged in? What if the time needed to cure him is nine days? Nine months? Nine years? At what point does your freedom trump the violinist's right to life? Thomson thus asserts that the right to life does not necessarily require someone to carry a fetus to term (Thomson 1976). Because every person has a right to bodily autonomy, abortions are permissible in at least some cases.

The Sanctity of Human Life

One of the most pervasive moral arguments against abortion is based on the idea of the sanctity of human life. Those who oppose abortion on religious grounds often equate abortion with murder. Broader concerns warn that if a society abandons the sanctity of human life, then it becomes easier to justify other types of killing (Singer 1993). Within the United States, it was just a decade or so after abortion was legalized that the debate on euthanasia arose.

Euthanasia

Euthanasia, the ending a human life to avoid suffering, is controversial, as, like abortion, it confronts our belief in the sanctity of human life. Because of advances in medical technology and increased longevity, we can now preserve and extend life in a variety of ways, even when someone is critically ill—and as a result, we face new and difficult end-of-life decisions. Many families now grapple with the issues of euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide.

Euthanasia translated from Greek simply means "good death." Euthanasia can be either passive or active. In **passive euthanasia**, treatment is withheld or withdrawn with the expectation that a patient will die sooner than they would with continued medical intervention. In **active euthanasia**, a patient's life is terminated using medical interventions (e.g., administering a lethal dose of medication). In addition, euthanasia can be voluntary, when it is at the patient's request, or nonvoluntary, when a patient is incapable of voluntarily expressing their wishes (e.g., a patient in a persistent vegetative state) and the decision must be made by someone else acting in their best interests.

FIGURE 10.3 What role should the field of medicine play in end-of-life decisions? Should modern medicine facilitate termination of a patient's life in at least some situations? These are ethical concerns that did not face our ancestors, who did not have the technology to make these questions possible. (credit: "100614-A-2082K-024" by U.S. Army Photo/David Kidd/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

While voluntary active euthanasia is illegal in the United States, in countries such as Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Canada, various laws mandate dosages for lethal injection for the

terminally ill who request help with this form of euthanasia (Ashford 2019). Voluntary passive euthanasia is legal in the United States and involves the withholding of lifesaving or life-sustaining measures with the consent of the patient. The most common form of this kind of euthanasia is an advanced directive known as a DNR, or "do not resuscitate," order, in which a person provides written instructions ahead of time, in the form of a "living will," not to restart the heart if it stops and/or not to put the person on a respirator if they cannot breathe on their own. Nonvoluntary passive euthanasia is the same withholding of treatment but without consent of the patient. This form of euthanasia can occur when a person has not made a living will, another form of advanced directive, and is not conscious or competent to make the decision about whether to extend care on their own behalf.

Physician-assisted suicide (PAS) refers to a practice in which a physician provides the means (i.e., a prescription for a lethal dose of medication) and/or information to assist a patient in ending their own life. The American Medical Association has denounced physician-assisted suicide as unethical and is aligned with some significant court cases in its position (AMA 2016). Though a controversial practice, the passage of "death with dignity" laws has legalized the practice of physician-assisted suicide in California, Colorado, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, Maine, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, and Washington (Death with Dignity 2021). Physician-assisted suicide is distinguished from euthanasia because the patient terminates their own life, whereas euthanasia involves the active or passive termination of the patient's life by a physician.

Utilitarian Views of Euthanasia

Utilitarian philosophers generally advocate seeking the greatest happiness for the largest number of people. Utilitarians weigh the benefits of keeping a person alive against the suffering of the patient and their loved ones and the expense and **opportunity costs** of caring for the individual. Opportunity cost refers to what is lost by choosing one option over another. For example, choosing to keep a patient alive on a respirator means that this respirator cannot be used by another patient. A utilitarian would argue that if the patient on the respirator has no chance of recovery while other patients who may recover need the respirator, the respirator should be given to those with hope of recovery. In such a system of considerations, the benefits of keeping a patient alive may include the extra time the patient or the loved ones need to prepare for death and/or the preservation of the sanctity of life as a value within the community.

Australian moral philosopher Peter Singer (b. 1946), arguing from the utilitarian point of view, supports euthanasia in most of its forms. In Singer's view, whether euthanasia is morally permissible depends in part on whether a person's life is still worth living, whether they still have quality of life. Singer holds that it is moral to help someone avoid the unnecessary pain of a prolonged death and immoral to withhold assistance when a person has voluntarily and consciously waived their right to life. The only form of euthanasia Signer opposes is involuntary euthanasia. Euthanasia is involuntary when the decision to euthanize is made without patient input and against their interests.

Other Philosophical Views on Euthanasia

American ethicist James Rachels (1941–2003) famously challenged the conventional view that active euthanasia is morally wrong whereas passive euthanasia is (at least sometimes) morally permissible. Rachels pointed out that in both active and passive euthanasia the intent is the same, to end suffering, and the result is the same, the termination of the patient's life. The difference, however, is that active euthanasia causes the immediate cessation of patient suffering, whereas passive euthanasia may result in prolonged suffering for the patient because death is not immediate. Passive euthanasia results in greater suffering than active euthanasia. Therefore, Rachels argued not only that active euthanasia is permissible in all cases where passive euthanasia is permissible but that active euthanasia is preferrable because it brings an immediate end to patient suffering.

Some philosophers believe that euthanasia should be morally prohibited. They argue that the ethical harm to the community done by permitting euthanasia is greater than the benefit of ending suffering. They focus on

the wrongness of killing, the physician's role, and the potential slippery slope if euthanasia were widely practiced. Those who oppose active euthanasia argue, for example, that it is wrong to kill another person or that killing is incompatible with our concept of what it means to be a physician. In cases of active euthanasia, a physician must take action to cause the termination of their patient's life. Physicians, however, first and foremost aim to help others and above all do no harm. Practicing active euthanasia seems to therefore be at odds with the very idea of a physician. Additionally, the practice of active euthanasia carries with it the potential for misuse or abuse.

Clinical Trials

In order to test new medical interventions and establish a drug's dosage, determine possible side effects, and demonstrate efficacy, scientists run **clinical trials**. Clinical trials can involve both animal and human subjects. While it is essential to determine whether treatments are safe for general consumption, clinical trials, especially those using human subjects, have been a source of ethical dilemmas. Since the Enlightenment, many societies have adopted the Kantian value that humans should not be treated as a means to an end. Many societies have likewise embraced the view, grounded in social contract theory, that all individuals have natural rights, which make everyone equal before the law. (For more on social contract theory, see the chapter on political theories.) These ethical and political values have consequences for clinical trials. They have raised issues related to, for example, informed consent, access to medical resources, and whether the ends of using human subjects justify the means. Identifying and debating these ethical issues can promote, where applicable, changes to the way trials are conducted to address areas of concern.

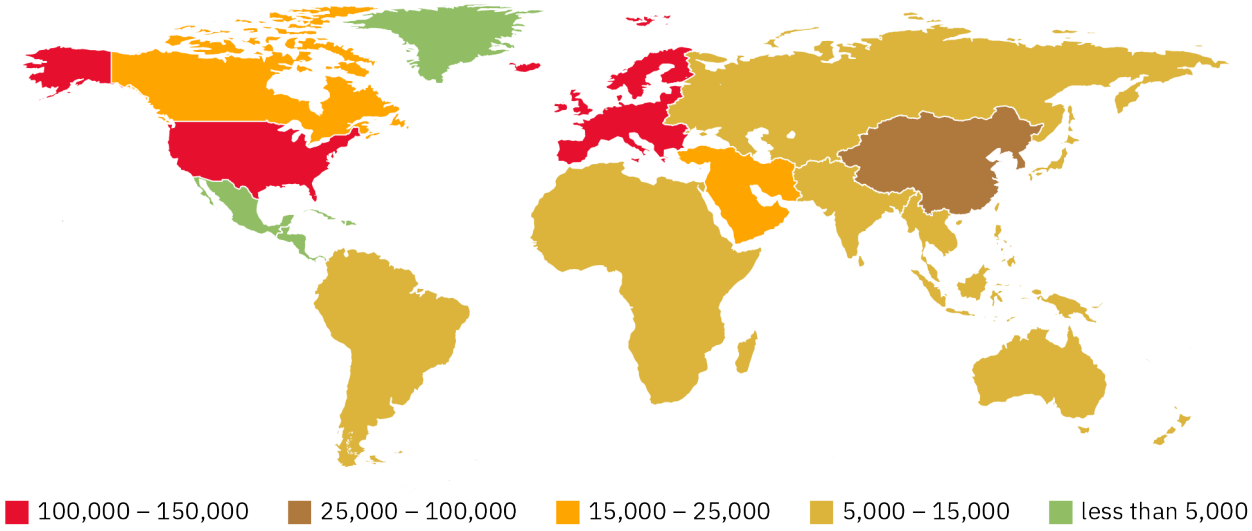

FIGURE 10.4 Ongoing clinical trials nationwide as of November 14, 2021. (source: National Library of Medicine; attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY 4.0 license)

Equipoise and Double-Blind Methods

In randomized clinical trials, a random process determines the treatment each participant receives. Randomization is used to ensure that researchers don't influence data by assigning treatments based on clinical assessment or other factors. Double-blind methods in clinical research refer to trials in which information about the treatment a participant receives is not disclosed to either the patient or the researcher. Randomization and double-blind methods create potential ethical issues because they seem to favor producing good data over patient interests. In other words, such methods seem to value the science more than the individual lives and health of the participants.

The **principle of clinical equipoise** offers a way to conduct randomized trials in a way that balances the interests of participants and aims of science. A trial satisfies the principle of clinical equipoise when (1) there are no treatments that exist that are better than the ones being used in the trial and (2) clinical evidence does

not favor the use of one of the treatments in the trial for the participants involved. If it obtains, clinical equipoise suggests that a trial does not sacrifice the interests of participants in the pursuit of scientific information and data. It balances the interests of trial participants and scientific interests in a clinical trial so one isn't pursued at the expense of the other.

Four Guiding Principles

Trials involving human subjects have historically been a source of difficult ethical issues. There are four main ethical principles that can guide our thinking whenever faced with ethical issues in physician and patient or researcher and participant relationships, namely the principles of autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, and justice.

Principle of autonomy: The principle of autonomy states that in clinical settings, patients have a right to exercise agency or self-determination when it comes to making decisions about their own health care. In clinical trials, participant autonomy is protected when potential participants are entered in a trial only after giving their informed consent. Informed consent means an individual is provided all the relevant information about a trial to make their own decision about whether to participate. Participant autonomy and informed consent protect participants from exploitation.

Principle of beneficence: The principle of beneficence proposes that we should act in ways that benefit others or that are for the good of others. In research settings involving human subjects, researchers satisfy beneficence by considering the interests of participants, ensuring participants are treated fairly, and considering the good of research subjects in addition to advancing science (see clinical equipoise above).

Principle of nonmaleficence: The principle of nonmaleficence states that we should act in ways that do not cause harm to others. In clinical settings, nonmaleficence requires that patients are not unnecessarily harmed. In some cases, a procedure, treatment, or test may result in some harm to the patient. Physicians practice nonmaleficence when any potential harms are considered and patients are subjected only to those that are necessary for effective treatment. In research trials, nonmaleficence requires that trials are designed in ways to limit harm to participants as much as possible.

The principle of justice: The principle of justice insists that the distribution and practice of health care should be equitable or fair. In clinical settings, the way patients are treated and the care they receive should be similar in relevant circumstances, and similar cases should be treated similarly. In clinical trials, the principle of justice dictates that researchers treat all participants fairly and equally. Researchers should not, for instance, give special treatment to some participants. Additionally, trial design and participation requirements should be fair and promote the impartial treatment of participants.

In the arena of human experimentation, modern safeguards and guidelines were created in response to historical cases of exploitation and abuse. The Nuremburg Code, for example, represents the first attempt to establish guidelines for clinical trials created in response to the abuses and horrors perpetrated by Nazi physicians during World War II. The creation of **institutional review boards** (IRBs) was another method to mitigate ethical issues posed by clinical trials. IRBs comprised of experts in science, medicine, and the law are tasked with reviewing and vetting parameters of trials to protect participants and identify potential issues. Clinical trial guidelines and IRBs aim to promote that all trials with human subjects adhere to the four ethical principles above and protect participant privacy and confidentiality.

Human Trials in Historically Marginalized Communities

Historically marginalized communities and members of vulnerable populations have been especially susceptible to exploitation when participating in trials and research involving human subjects. Vulnerable populations have been particularly susceptible to coercion. Coercion, whether explicit or implicit, undermines a person's autonomy because it makes informed consent and the exercise of agency impossible. It can occur, for instance, in cases where researchers do not explain the parameters of a trial or misrepresent it in some

way to elicit consent from prospective trial participants.

In the United States, the Tuskegee syphilis study (1932–1972) is perhaps the most notorious example of a trial that exploited individuals from marginalized communities. Over a period of 40 years, researchers tracked the progression of syphilis in a group of some 400 Black men to determine whether it differed in any way when compared to its progression in White men. The subjects were Black sharecroppers who, like many Americans, were experiencing increased hardships and difficulties because of the Great Depression (1929 to late 1930s). The desperate situation of potential subjects was exploited by recruiters who used the allure of free food and medical care to get their consent to participate in the study. The trial aimed to study the progression of untreated syphilis in human subjects. Researchers not only withheld the fact that participants had syphilis but also intentionally withheld treatment as well. Even when a treatment for syphilis was discovered in 1947 (penicillin), subjects in the Tuskegee experiment still received no treatment. The interests and rights of trial participants (e.g., their health, well-being, autonomy, and life) were ignored and abused for the sake of science (Taylor n.d.).

The Tuskegee experiment and experimentation conducted by Nazi physicians on human subjects during World War II are examples in which vulnerable populations are exploited and treated as expendable in the pursuit of scientific knowledge. When subjects are recruited in exploitative trials, their "consent" is often a consequence of coercion, whether explicit or implicit. Issues of coercion occur when recruiters, for example, withhold important information about the trial, misrepresent trial goals, take advantage of participants' desperate situations, and fail to adequately bridge language barriers to ensure trial parameters and participation requirements are understood.

Normative Moral Frameworks Applied to Clinical Trials

The four main ethical concepts discussed above can (and should) guide decision-making in a clinical setting. Not only do normative moral frameworks provide additional and more robust guidance for moral decision making and conduct, but their application to specific issues can also shed light on why we support the adoption of ethical practices.

Utilitarians like Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) proposed that the rightness of an action is determined by its consequences, by what it produces. They argued that we act morally when our actions produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number. In clinical trials, the utilitarian emphasis on consequences and, in particular, happiness provides a framework that may help us balance scientific/research goals and the interests of human research subjects. Mill argued that we should assess the morality of an action from the standpoint of an impartial, benevolent spectator. We are impartial when we consider everyone's happiness, including our own, equally and don't give preference to some individuals' or some groups' happiness or interests over others. We are benevolent when we strive to choose those actions that produce the most overall happiness and do not sacrifice the happiness of some for the happiness of others. Clinical trials ought to weigh the interests of human subjects carefully and be conducted in ways that do not sacrifice the subjects' interests for the sake of science. Research is often funded by the private sector. Companies pursuing new treatments and interventions must balance their interests in profits, the costs associated with research and clinical trials, the aims of science, and the interests of the human subjects in their trials. If decisions are not made with these interests in mind, it is possible that choices in how clinical trials are conducted may be made not based on producing the greatest overall happiness but rather to increase overall profits for certain individuals or private groups.

CONNECTIONS

The chapter on normative moral theory provides a framework for the philosophy of utilitarianism and deontology.

A **deontologist** like Kant would examine the relevant rules and norms that apply to clinical trials. For Kant, an

important rule that must be considered when using human research subjects is the imperative to always treat all persons as ends in themselves, never as means only. In other words, Kant believed that all people have inherent worth and value that is not dependent simply on usefulness for some end or goal. Kant's ethics emphasizes the rights of human subjects and makes clear that potential research subjects must make an informed, free decision whether to participate in a clinical trial. Additionally, human beings' rights cannot be ignored or denied because some other end (e.g., the goals of science, profits, or even greater human interests) is deemed more valuable. A Kantian approach would affirm the rights, choice, and autonomy of trial participants.

Care ethics takes a character-centered approach, but it makes the values of caring central in our moral deliberation and decision-making. Care ethics uses the caring relationship as the ethical paradigm and thus highlights the importance of subjective and concrete factors when evaluating the rightness of certain actions and choices. In clinical trials, care ethics reminds us to value all humans and consider the importance of virtues like compassion and empathy when interacting with and treating patients.

CONNECTIONS

The chapter on normative moral theory provides a framework for care ethics.

Human Augmentation and Genetic Modification

Human augmentation refers to attempts to enhance or increase human capabilities through technological, biomedical, or other interventions. While the notion of enhancement is broad, philosopher Eric Juengst and psychiatrist Daniel Moseley define it as "biomedical interventions that are used to improve human form or functioning beyond what is necessary to restore or sustain health" (Juengst and Moseley 2019). Human augmentation, then, refers to interventions sought not for individual health but for the sake of improving an individual's capabilities and functioning. For example, the cyclist Lance Armstrong famously won the Tour de France seven years in a row (1999–2005). Armstrong became infamous, however, when he was later stripped of his titles after it became clear that he had practiced "blood doping" to improve his performance when competing in the Tour de France. He used illegal and banned interventions to enhance his performance and gain an unfair edge over competition. There are many potential biomedical interventions (e.g., pharmacological) that can be used to improve or enhance capabilities in certain areas, and it can often be difficult to clearly define why some raise moral concerns and others do not. Many people, for instance, ingest caffeine on a regular basis. Caffeine is a mild stimulant that may enhance capabilities, but caffeine use is accepted and generally does not raise moral concerns. In contrast, using Adderall, a pharmaceutical amphetamine salt, not as prescribed for medical and health reasons but to enhance energy levels and memory is the sort of intervention that is often viewed as ethically problematic.

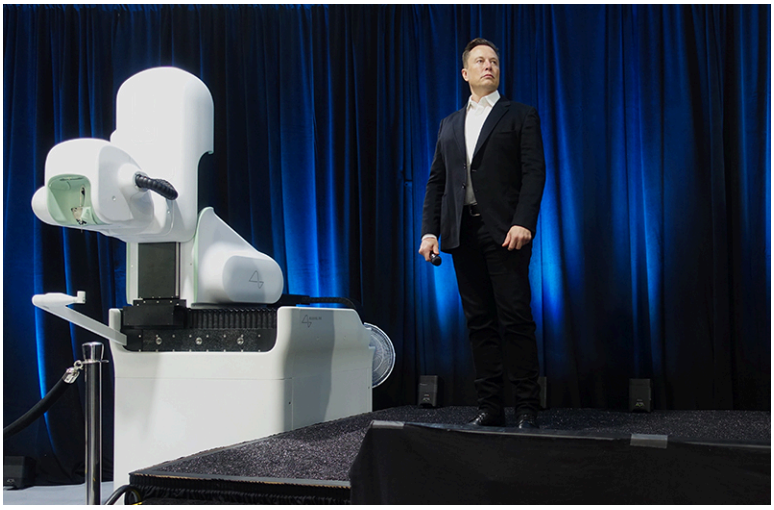

FIGURE 10.5 Elon Musk stands next to a machine for inserting a Neuralink implant in the human brain. This implant is designed to make it possible for people to operate devices like smartphones and computers using their minds. (credit: "Elon Musk and the Neuralink Future" by Steve Jurvetson/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Advancements in human biotechnology have created an opportunity for some people to exercise genetic choices that could yield potential therapeutic benefits and make it possible to augment human capacities through genetic modification. Developments in gene editing technologies like CRISPR (clustered regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats), for example, have made genetic modification easier, faster, and more affordable. New technologies have also demonstrated the potential of gene editing.

The characteristics of an organism can be deliberately modified and altered through genetic engineering. Genetic modification has been practiced in agriculture to intentionally alter the characteristics of certain crops (e.g., rice and corn) so that plants, for example, produce higher yields, are more robust, and have increased nutritional properties. Human augmentation through genetic engineering raises numerous ethical concerns. If genetic information is altered to promote certain traits, then how we define "positive" and "negative" genetic traits could have far-reaching consequences. Positive genetic traits will naturally be ones that are promoted and reinforced, whereas negative genetic traits will be reduced and eliminated. In the future, if human genetic modification becomes widely practiced, it is possible that a focus on "positive" genetic traits will decrease human genetic diversity, making us less adaptable and more vulnerable.

A Utilitarian Approach to Genetic Engineering

Whether a utilitarian would find the practice of genetic engineering morally permissible when applied to humans would depend, as it so often does, on how it is used. Utilitarians would likely find human augmentation through gene editing a morally worthwhile endeavor if it improved overall human welfare and happiness. For instance, utilitarians would support the use of genetic modification to eliminate disease and disability. If it turns out to be an extremely costly intervention, however, utilitarians might not support it on the grounds that only the very wealthy would be able to access it.

New advancements in biotechnology often come with high costs, making it so only the wealthiest can afford them. If the costs of human genetic modification are too high, many people won't be able to access such interventions, and it will worsen the inequality gap. Imagine if prospective parents were able to access gene editing technologies to modify their offspring's genetic traits. If these services are only accessible to the very wealthy, then naturally only the select few and their offspring will benefit from them. Such a scenario would no doubt have negative social implications. The inequality gap would widen, the children of wealthy parents would have numerous advantages over other children, and it might even lay the groundwork for new forms of discrimination and oppression.

Utilitarians argue that conduct is morally right if it promotes the greatest happiness for the greatest number.

Human augmentation through genetic engineering has the potential to increase quality of life by curing or preventing illness and eliminating certain forms of disability, but it could also negatively impact society by, for example, widening the inequality gap, benefiting only a very small percentage of the population, and laying the groundwork for new forms of discrimination. Whether utilitarians support the use of gene editing technologies on humans depends on how such technologies are used and whether their use promotes the greatest good for the greatest number. There are numerous ethical quagmires ahead in the arena of gene editing, but at the same time, this technology holds the promise of eradicating the most terrible of human diseases and thus eliminating unnecessary suffering and improving quality of life. Utilitarians argue that all potential benefits and harms need to be carefully considered and weighed to determine whether gene editing technologies are used in a morally responsible way.

Gene Editing and Biodiversity

Some ethicists argue that we should distinguish between somatic cell interventions and germ-line interventions when discussing the morality of human genetic modification. In **somatic cell interventions**, genetic changes cannot be inherited or passed to a patient's offspring. In **germ-line interventions** (inheritable genetic modification), however, genetic changes can be passed down to future generations (Gannett 2008). Any genetic modifications that result from germ-line interventions are inheritable and therefore have the potential to become part of the larger human gene pool. Ethicists have identified numerous ethical issues and concerns related to inheritable genetic modification. For example, it is unclear what long-term effects would result from gene modification, future generations cannot consent to genetic modification, and germ-line interventions may have a negative effect on biodiversity.

Some ethicists also argue that the distinction between therapy and enhancement is morally relevant when considering genetic modification. A gene editing therapy (or negative genetic modification) is an intervention that is pursued to "restore normal function," whereas a gene editing enhancement (or positive genetic modification) is an intervention that is pursued to enhance or increase normal capacities and functioning (Gannett 2008). Ethicists argue that genetic modification is morally permissible when it aims at therapy and morally impermissible when it aims at enhancement. A therapy only aims to return an individual to a normal state of health, but an enhancement aims to go beyond an individual's normal capabilities. In cases of enhancement, however, interventions are pursued because patients possess a desire to go beyond their current capacities. The latter run a greater risk of having unknown and long-term effects on the gene pool and genetic diversity.

Genetic diversity is important for any species to thrive, evolve, and adapt. If genetic engineering is widely practiced, it is possible that modification will focus on certain favored traits. This would result in less biodiversity within the species and would threaten humanity in unforeseen ways. For instance, it is possible that a less diverse gene pool would make the human species vulnerable to some unknown future illness. The concern is that the more homogenous and narrow our gene pool becomes, the less adaptable we become as a species. Like all technologies that are new and that push the boundaries of what's possible, it is hard to imagine all the possible (positive or negative) consequences that exist on the horizon until we use them and are able to gather data to help us better understand the implications of their use.

Patenting of Genetic Material

Before 1980, the United States did not consider living organisms patentable because they were considered naturally occurring entities. This changed in 1980 when the US Supreme Court issued its decision in *Diamond v. Chakrabarty*, which found that a genetically modified bacterial strain could be patented because "it was 'man-made' and not naturally occurring" (Gannett 2008). The court's decision opened a door that allowed individuals, institutions, and private entities to patent organisms that they genetically modified and even patent specific genes when they were first to identify them. This made it possible for private entities to gain the exclusive rights to develop diagnostics for specific genes. Myriad Genetics, for example, "patented BRCA1 and BRCA2 breast and ovarian cancer genes and granted Eli Lilly exclusive rights to market applications based on

the BRCA1 sequence" (Gannett 2008). Eli Lilly's exclusive rights allowed it to charge patients thousands of dollars to get tested for cancers resulting from the BRCA mutations, as well as charge researchers who worked to develop a deeper understanding of these genes and their role in the development of cancer.

Philosophers debate whether patenting genetic material is an ethical practice. Some philosophers think gene patents are generally beneficial and not morally problematic. They argue, for example, that patents are an important reward and help motivate researchers, they incentivize progress and scientific advancement, and gene patents benefit society because they lead to the development of better, more affordable medical testing and intervention. Other philosophers, in contrast, raise doubts about the morality of gene patents. They argue, for example, that gene patents impede scientific progress by encouraging secrecy, they reward the pursuit of commercial interests, they award private entities the exclusive right to develop market applications and embolden them to drive up the costs of medical testing and treatment, and genes are naturally occurring and not the sort of thing that should be patentable.

An ethical position on gene patenting depends on what factors and outcomes are considered to be morally relevant. Ethicists debate whether gene patents are generally beneficial or not, whether they produce more good or harm. They explore how they impact scientific progress and development, question whether they create conflicts of interest that harm patients or contribute to higher medical costs, and debate what makes something intellectual property.

THINK LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Genetic engineering is the process by which scientists modify or alter a gene to improve an organism in some way. Genetic engineering is currently a common tool of science: for example, some crops such as corn have been modified to be more resistant to certain types of bugs and pests. More recently, the COVID-19 vaccine was created by using mRNA genetic sequencing to help an individual's body recognize the COVID virus. However, many have raised concerns about the potential for genetic engineering to be used to change attributes of human beings.

In one or more paragraphs, address the following questions, and provide examples to support your position. Is it moral for parents to genetically engineer an embryo for the purposes of producing a healthier child than they would otherwise produce without such technology? How about a more physically beautiful or intelligent child? Why or why not? Do you consider there to be significant differences between the two aims (health versus beauty or intelligence)?

10.2 Environmental Ethics

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain the current environmental and climate crisis.
- Describe different philosophical positions pertaining to humanity's relationships to the natural environment.
- Identify the circumstances that have led to marginalized groups being especially affected by climate disasters.

Before environmental ethics emerged as an academic discipline in the 1970s, some people were already questioning and rethinking our relationship to the natural world. Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*, published in 1949, called upon humanity to expand our idea of community to include the entire natural world, grounding this approach in the belief that all of nature is connected and interdependent in important ways. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) drew attention to the dangers of what were then commonly used commercial pesticides. Carson's essays drew attention to the far-reaching impacts of human activity and its potential to cause significant harm to the environment and to humanity in turn. These early works inspired the environmentalist movement and sparked debates about how to deal with emerging environmental challenges.

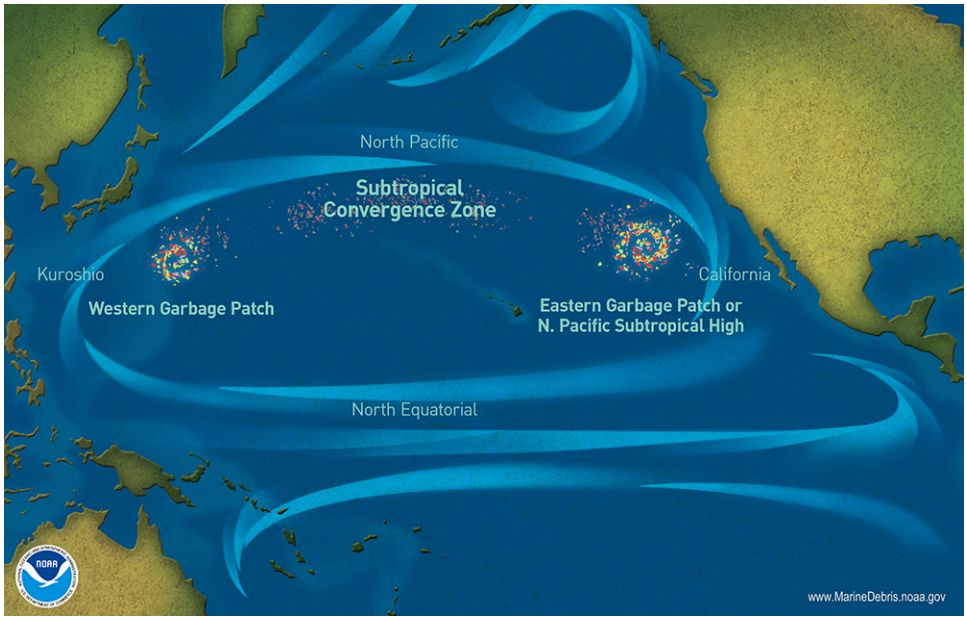

FIGURE 10.6 This map indicates areas in the Pacific Ocean where small particles of plastic and other waste collect in enormous clusters. (credit: "Garbage Patch Illustration" by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Public Domain)

The Emerging Crisis

Humans directly and indirectly change and shape the natural world. Our reliance on fossil fuels to meet our energy needs, for example, releases a key greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide (CO_2), into the air as a result. Greenhouse gases trap heat in Earth's atmosphere, resulting in changes in the planet's climate. The two countries that produce the most CO_2 are the United States and China. The United States is the biggest gasoline consumer in the world, using approximately 338 million gallons of gasoline per day. China is the biggest coal consumer, burning approximately three billion tons of coal in 2020—more than half of the worldwide total consumption of coal. Our demand for the energy provided by fossil fuels to power our industries, heat our homes, and make possible travel between distant locations is the main factor that has contributed to increased levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

Human activities have had and continue to have significant impacts on the natural world. The term **anthropogenic climate change** refers to changes in Earth's climate caused or influenced by human activity. Severe weather and natural disasters are increasing in frequency and intensity because of the changing climate. As just one example, record-setting wildfires were experienced in recent years in both the United States and Australia. In a span of just five years (2017–2021), the United States experienced four of the most severe and deadliest wildfires in its history, all of which occurred in California: the 2017 Tubbs Fire, the 2018 Camp Fire, the 2020 Bay Area Fire, and the 2021 Dixie Fire. In 2020, Australia experienced its most catastrophic bushfire season when roughly 19 million hectares burned, destroying over three thousand homes and killing approximately 1.25 billion animals.

FIGURE 10.7 The wildfires that affected Australia in 2020 are one among many effects of climate change that have harmed both human and animal life in recent years. (credit: "Australian Wildfires" by National Interagency Fire Center/Flickr, Public Domain)

Environmental ethics is an area of applied ethics that attempts to identify right conduct in our relationship with the nonhuman world. For decades, scientists have expressed concern about the short- and long-term effects that human activities are having on the climate and Earth's ecosystems. Many philosophers argue that in order to change our behaviors in ways that result in healing of the natural world, we need to change our thinking about the agency and value of the nonhuman elements (including plants, animals, and even entities such as rivers and mountains) that share the globe with us.

Political and Legal Dimensions

The environmental movement began with specific worries about air and water pollution and the effects of pesticides on food crops. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* was influential in the creation of nonprofit organizations and government agencies, such as the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), designed to protect human health and the environment. Agencies like the EPA can significantly affect national policy and aspects of the economy related to emissions from factories, use of and disposal of toxic chemicals, and nearly anything else that can adversely impact the environment or human health.

Legal approaches to protecting the environment vary from country to country. The economic drive to produce quickly and efficiently with little to no regulation pits many industrializing countries against the more established economies in Western Europe and North America. China, for example, which currently contributes 43 percent of the world's annual carbon emissions, is attempting to enact policies that extend beyond mere cleanup to foster regeneration of ecological systems (Gardner 2019). With unaddressed environmental concerns, China is currently facing a loss of financial and intellectual capital as 60 percent of citizens with a net worth of $1.5 million or more have emigrated.

International efforts to address the climate crisis have met with mixed success. In 1985, after scientists discovered that some aerosol sprays were causing holes in the ozone layer in the atmosphere, 20 countries initiated the Montreal Protocol, which banned the use of these sprays. The international community rapidly adopted the agreement, and today 197 countries have signed the treaty. One major reason for this success, however, is that these sprays were relatively easy and inexpensive to replace. Such is not the case for global climate change. Currently, there is no single, viable alternative to the carbon economy—a term used to reference our current economic dependence on carbon-based fuels such as petroleum and coal. Renewable energy sources, such as solar panels, are available, but not at the scale needed to fuel high-energy and high-

consumption lifestyles. More than 150 countries have signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which laid the groundwork for the Kyoto Protocol (1997) and the Paris Agreement (2015). With these agreements, most nations have committed to future goals for reducing fossil fuel emissions, but to date no nation has made significant progress toward these goals. Climate change is a complex problem, intrinsically tied to an economy that depends on access to inexpensive and abundant fuel sources. It is also a problem that cannot be addressed by one nation or group alone but rather calls attention to the shared nature of our planetary ecosystem and the impact that activities in one location have on every other life.

Philosophical Contributions to Environmental Ethics

Instrumental Value of Nature

Traditional Western philosophies have been anthropocentric (human-centered), as discussed in the chapter on value theory. Humans are regarded as the sole possessors of **intrinsic value**, meaning that each human life is understood to possess value in itself and for its own sake. The natural world, on the other hand, has been viewed as having **instrumental value**, understood as having value solely as a means to satisfy human needs and desires. From ancient Greece to the Enlightenment, philosophers and scientists have studied the natural world with the goal of understanding how better to use it to achieve the goals of human societies.

Anthropocentric Obligations

Empiricism is often traced back to the work of Francis Bacon (1561–1626), whose experimental techniques led to the development of the scientific method and who advocated an inductive approach to scientific inquiry in his essay *Novum Organum*. According to Bacon, when nature becomes the object of study, it can be completely manipulated and used in accordance with God's original plan for humanity on Earth. Bacon held the prevailing Christian view that God gave human beings dominion over the nonhuman world. Unlike an autonomous subject, an object can be treated without regard, manipulated for study, and exploited as a resource—all of which occurred as capitalism evolved in Western countries (Bacon 1878). Contemporary Western societies have viewed science and technology as an important vehicle for empowering humanity to manipulate and control nature, to force nature to bend to our will.

Early advocates of the environmental movement in the West associated this **anthropocentric** (human-centered) perspective with the environment crisis. In a well-known essay, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" (1967), Lynn White argues that the way we think about the environment has its roots in Judeo-Christian thinking that maintains the superiority of humans over the nonhuman world and teaches that the natural world was created for human use. If nature only has instrumental value, then we do not violate morality when we manipulate, destroy, or otherwise harm nature.

Some philosophers, however, point out that this same anthropocentric approach has the potential to foster an ethics of environmental care. According to this perspective, moral obligations concerning our treatment of the natural world can be justified by appealing to human interests and the desire for self-preservation. For example, we might argue that all humans have an interest in having access to clean air and drinkable water and in ensuring the longevity of Earth for future generations to enjoy. These basic interests that all humans share can be used as a basis for establishing moral obligations to reduce pollution, create more sustainable practices, and take actions to diminish harm caused to the environment by human activity.

In *People or Penguins: The Case for Optimal Pollution* (1974), for example, William Baxter offers an unapologetically anthropocentric environmental ethic. Baxter adopts a traditional view that assigns intrinsic value only to persons. He proposes that the fact that some harm has come to certain aspects of the nonhuman world is, in itself, not enough to justify moral responsibility. "Damage to penguins, or sugar pines, or geological marvels is, without more, simply irrelevant" (Baxter 1974, 5). That acknowledged, Baxter goes on to state that a moral obligation to the nonhuman world does exist, because human interests are intrinsically tied to the natural world. When it comes to pollution, for example, Baxter argues that we have a moral obligation to balance the benefits we get from causing pollution with the harm caused by pollution to establish a level of

pollution that is optimal.

One proposed solution to the environmental crisis, in line with an anthropocentric approach, is to levy taxes on people and corporations when their activities are deemed detrimental to society and/or to planetary health. Currently, in the United States, many states levy extra taxes on the purchase of cigarettes and alcohol, above and beyond the established sales tax. These extra taxes are justified by pointing out that these products are detrimental to human health and that their consumption puts an unnecessary burden on the state's health care systems. Some economists recommend using a similar approach to control environmental impact. In this scenario, a tax cost or liability would be imposed on companies or individuals who cause harm to the environment. A carbon emissions tax is an example of a such a tax. Of course, rewarding positive behavior could also work, for example, by giving tax breaks or other types of rewards to organizations that are working toward environmental sustainability. These policies align with the anthropocentric approach in that they hold organizations accountable for the harm they are doing to human society and human interests.

Deep Ecology and the Intrinsic Value of Nature

In stark contrast to the anthropocentricism that has long dominated Western thinking about the environment, **deep ecology**, a term first coined by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess (1912–2009), assumes that all living things are valuable in their own right (Naess 1973). If all life has intrinsic value, then all life is deserving of respect. Deep ecology thus advocates a practice of restraint when it comes to the environment and to nonhuman life.

Deep ecology argues that we need to fundamentally change how we think about ourselves and our relationship to nature. This approach proposes that it is wrong to view ourselves as individual, separate entities. Instead, all of nature, including human beings, should be understood in terms of their relationships with everything else. This interrelatedness implies a responsibility to act in ways that respect the intrinsic value of all living things and promote life in the broadest sense. For deep ecologists, a first step in this approach is to become sensitive to and aware of the deep relationships that exist between everything in nature. Aware that we are more than this body and this mind, that we are members of a larger whole, we recognize that we have an obligation to promote and care for the natural world. Naess thought of deep ecology as a movement promoting a radical new worldview that contrasted sharply with the traditional view that valued nature only as a means to human ends.

Critics of deep ecology sometimes note that it is a position of privilege taken by people in developed nations and that less industrialized countries may not be in a position to respect the environment in the same way when their own survival is at risk. Environmental initiatives may be challenging for smaller, less industrialized countries to pursue. In these nations, the call to environmentalism may ring hollow to those who face a daily struggle for food or clean water.

Social Ecology

Social ecologists see environmental problems as stemming from the same faulty political and economic system that promotes inequity and is responsible for racism, sexism, and classism. In this view, capitalism has created a system of domination over both humanity and nature and has turned nature into just one more commodity. Murray Bookchin (1921–2006), an American political philosopher and a founder of social ecology, was highly influential in this line of thought. Bookchin believed that most, if not all, of the problems that make up our current environmental crisis are the result of long-standing social problems. He argued that the only way to address our ecological problems is to address our social problems. Bookchin proposed that we change society by rejecting large political structures and big business and empowering smaller, locally based groups that are more tied to their environments and thus more environmentally aware.

FIGURE 10.8 Wind is a renewable energy source, in that there is theoretically an infinite supply of it. Wind farms have been popping up in the landscape in many parts of the world. (credit: "Wind Turbines" by Zechariah Judy/ Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Concerns have also been raised about the unequal impact environmental problems have on different segments of society. Robert Bullard's 1990 book *Dumping in Dixie* argues that environmentalism is intertwined with issues of racial and socioeconomic equity. It is thus not just an issue of individual health but rather a concern about the health of communities. Historically marginalized communities in particular are statistically more likely to be exposed to environmental dangers. One egregious and well-publicized example of these types of dangers is the water crisis in Flint, Michigan. In 2014, it was realized that drinking water in Flint was contaminated with high levels of lead. This contamination was the result of a decision made by emergency managers appointed by the state government to switch Flint's water supply from the Detroit water system to the Flint River, in order to save money. The Flint River water not only contained bacteria and carcinogens but also leached lead from the pipes that brought water to people's homes. As a result, many suffered from rashes, hair loss, and elevated blood levels of lead (Denchak 2018). Another example can be seen in the South Bronx, in New York City. This area is sometimes referred to as an "island of pollution," as it lies at the confluence of three major highways. The pollution from the traffic has resulted in an increase in asthma diagnoses and asthma-related hospitalizations in those living in this neighborhood, the majority of them Black Americans, Latinos, and new immigrants (Butini 2018).

Similar differences in environmental dangers can be observed on a global scale. A 2016 United Nations report reported that people in developing countries are more likely to live on land that has been exposed to contamination and chemical pollutants than those in wealthier nations (United Nations 2016).

VIDEO

Environmental Racism

Click to view content (https://openstax.org/books/introduction-philosophy/pages/10-2-environmental-ethics)

10.3 Business Ethics and Emerging Technology

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Describe the role of codes of ethics within business and technology.
- Assess how much responsibility corporations should take for social, economic, and environmental problems.
- Evaluate the difficulty of establishing ethical practices pertaining to emerging technologies.

Ethical questions pertaining to business and to emerging technology raise a number of broad issues, including

corporate responsibility and the potential dangers of artificial intelligence. Additionally, a great deal of work in these subfields supports the development and implementation of codes of ethics used by organizations to guide the conduct of their members. This section explores both these broader issues and the practical concerns.

Codes of Ethics

A business is defined as an organization that engages in selling goods and services with the intent to make a profit. Governments generally restrict the activities of businesses through laws and regulations. To ensure that their members act in accordance with these laws and regulations and to meet additional goals that reflect the values of the societies in which they operate, businesses often create a code of ethics. These codes outline what actions are and are not permissible for an organization and for its individual employees. They address concrete matters, such as bribery, discrimination, and whistleblowing, while also laying out guidelines for how to accomplish environmental and social goals and how to build and maintain trust and goodwill.

Businesses are not the sole entities, however, that issue such codes of ethics. Professional organizations serving specific groups, such as nurses and teachers, also issue these codes, and members must study them and commit to abide by them in order to be qualified as members of these professional organizations. Within the fields of science and technology, for example, the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers Computer Society (IEEE-CS) provides a wealth of resources for computer science and engineering professionals, including education, certification, research, and career and solutions centers. In 2000, the IEEE-CS adopted the Software Engineering Code of Ethics and Professional Practice, which defines the ethical obligations of software engineers. These obligations include a commitment to approve software only if it meets certain specifications and passes appropriate tests, is deemed safe, and does not threaten to diminish the quality of human life, impinge on privacy, or harm the environment (IEEE-CS/ACM Joint Task Force 2001). Determining what would constitute outcomes such as diminishing the quality of life or impinging on privacy ties these concrete codes of ethics to larger questions that involve normative moral theories and political debate.

Corporate Responsibility

Businesses range from small family-owned organizations to large corporations. Governments often allow for businesses to classify themselves as one or more legal entities, each of which must fulfill specific legal requirements. Corporations are considered to be single entities distinct from the individuals who compose them. Early in the modern era in the West, a business was understood to be a collection of individuals who could be held responsible if something went wrong. Historians of business trace the birth of the modern corporation to the Dutch East India Trading Company, founded in 1602. As noted, modern corporations are legal entities understood to be separate from the individuals who work there. This definition allows individuals to engage in business practices without necessarily bearing the legal consequences of the business's actions. Instead, the business entities are held accountable and usually punished with financial penalties.

The status of corporations is a hotly debated topic in the United States, with many arguing that the rights of corporations have expanded in inappropriate ways in recent decades. For example, the Supreme Court of the United States recently ruled that companies can contribute to political elections and that some for-profit corporations may refuse on religious grounds to cover birth control in their employee health plans (Totenberg 2014). Some argue that these legal rights challenge or threaten other ethical expectations acknowledged in contemporary US society. We can rationally ask whether the legal rights of corporations also imply that these entities have moral responsibilities. Moreover, to whom are corporations morally responsible: shareholders, employees, customers, or the community?

Interests of Shareholders and Stakeholders

In 1970, Milton Friedman published a now-famous essay in the *New York Times* in which he argues that businesses have a moral responsibility to increase profits (Friedman 1970). Friedman makes the case that all individuals acting on behalf of a firm have an obligation to make decisions that will result in the increase of a

business's profits and thus the profits of shareholders. He argued that employees that make decisions on behalf of a company are obligated to take whatever actions will maximize profits. From Friedman's perspective, it is the responsibility of government to impose regulations that rein in businesses, which should be motivated only by a desire to benefit themselves, so that they don't act in ways that cause harm to society.

A company, Friedman argued, is owned by shareholders, who have a right to the maximum return possible on their investment. **Shareholders**, also referred to as stockholders, are individuals who own a share of a corporation. Shareholders invest capital and receive a positive return on their investment when a company is profitable. Friedman's position favors the interests of the shareholders. **Stakeholders**, in contrast, are any individuals who have a stake in a business's operations. Stakeholders include but are not limited to employees, customers, shareholders, communities, and the like. So while the term *shareholders* refers to a relatively narrow group of individuals who have invested capital and own a portion of a given corporation, the term *stakeholders* refers to a much wider group and includes individuals who have not simply invested money but who are affected by the business's operations.

Some argue for the view of shareholder primacy—that a firm's managers ought to act solely for the interests of shareholders—based on deontological grounds. Such positions appeal to the concept of duty to justify an obligation to promote the interests of shareholders. In this view, shareholders invest capital and own (a portion of) a company, and executives are tasked with running the firm in the shareholders' best interests. In contrast to shareholder primacy, stakeholder theory argues that "managers should seek to 'balance' the interests of all stakeholders, where a stakeholder is anyone who has a 'stake,' or interest (including a financial interest), in the firm" (Moriarty 2021). While shareholder theory asserts that the principal obligation is to increase the wealth of shareholders, stakeholder theory differs insofar as it advocates using corporate revenue in the interests of all stakeholders.

Safety and Liability

Today, corporations in the United States are held to standards of workplace safety established by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), created in 1971. Such government regulation of corporations is relatively new. After the Industrial Revolution, which began in the mid-18th century, manufacturing created new work models based on production efficiency, some of which created hazards for workers. Early classical economists like Adam Smith (1723–1790) advocated for a laissez-faire, or "hands off," approach to business, in which there was minimal interference on the part of government in the activities of companies or manufacturing firms (Smith 2009). Once the Industrial Revolution was well established, workers in factories were expected to labor for long hours with few breaks, in very dangerous conditions. They received little pay, and children were commonly part of the workforce. While philosophers like Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels called for a revolutionary change—to replace the capitalist economic system with a communistic system—others called for political reforms (Marx and Engels 2002). Little by little, laws were passed to protect workers, beginning with the 1833 Factory Act in the United Kingdom (UK Parliament n.d.).

FIGURE 10.9 Safety helmets and other protective equipment are a common sight at construction sites today, but safety was not always a primary concern in the workplace. (credit: "SRR Construction Employees Reach 12-Year Milestone of Working Safe" by Savannah River Site/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

More recent legislation affords employees the right to lodge confidential complaints against their employer. Complaints may point to hazards in the workplace, work-related illnesses, or anything else that endangers employee health and safety. If concerns are verified, the company must correct these violations or face fines from the government. Cutting costs in manufacturing processes, while it theoretically should increase shareholder profits, can be dangerous to both employees and the public and ultimately harm a company's long-term profits. For example, consider the Firestone/Ford tire controversy at the turn of the 21st century. An investigation into unusually high rates of tire failure, which resulted in thousands of accidents and 271 fatalities worldwide, brought forth multiple lawsuits and a congressional investigation in the United States. These were Firestone tires on Ford vehicles. Millions of tires were recalled, costing Firestone and Ford billions of dollars. Consequently, a number of executives at both companies resigned or were fired (Jones 2000).

Meaningful Work

Modern multinational corporations are entities that operate throughout the world, the largest employing over a million people. The relationship between corporations and their employees is an important area of focus in business ethics. Analyzing the moral obligations that corporations have toward their employees is more important than ever as large firms continue to gain power and control within the market.

We spend a significant part of our lives at work. The experience of working is one that most people are familiar with. The Scottish moral philosopher Adam Smith (1723–90), famously expressed concern with the trend he observed toward increased specialization in work in order to improve efficiency and increase production. While good for production and profits, Smith observed that specialization made work repetitive, mindless, and mechanical (Smith 2009). Smith worried that such work was harmful because it wasn't meaningful in the sense that it didn't require skill, offered workers no opportunities to make choices, and was highly repetitive and uninteresting. While Smith expressed concern about the lack of meaningful work, he did not believe businesses have an obligation to provide it.

Unlike Smith, later philosophers such as Norman Bowie have argued "that one of the moral obligations of the firm is to provide meaningful work for employees" (Bowie 1998, 1083). Applying a Kantian perspective, Bowie develops a robust concept of meaningful work based on the belief that people must always be treated as ends in themselves. To treat people as ends means respecting them as rational agents capable of freely directing their own lives. He argues that to treat a person as anything other than an end is to strip them of their moral status. Bowie characterizes **meaningful work** as work that (1) a worker freely chooses, (2) pays enough for a worker to satisfy their basic needs, (3) provides workers opportunities to exercise their autonomy and

independence, (4) fosters rational development, (5) supports moral development, and (6) does not interfere with a worker's pursuit of happiness. As Bowie sees it, meaningful work recognizes the important role work plays in a person's development. It is through work that we develop our ability to act autonomously and live independently (Bowie 1998). Importantly, when workers earn a living wage, they acquire the means to be independent, live their own lives, and pursue their idea of a happy life. When workers are not paid a living wage, they are not treated as human beings deserving of respect. We see this, for instance, in the United States, where some workers who are employed full time by large corporations earn so little that they qualify for government assistance programs. In such cases, Bowie believes that workers cannot be truly independent because they do not earn enough to cover their basic needs.

Fair Treatment of Workers in an Age of Globalization

In some countries, labor laws are minimal or nonexistent, and workers may face the same level of danger that factory workers experienced in the West in the 19th century. Often such operations supply goods for US companies and a Western market. During the 20th century, most US corporations relocated their manufacturing overseas in order to save money. These savings were passed on to consumers as cheaper goods but also resulted in large-scale job loss for American workers and the economic decline of many US cities and towns (Correnti 2013). Outsourced labor has also been accused of exploiting workers in other countries, where government regulation and protection may not even exist. On the one hand, if there is no law to violate, some may argue that corporations are not doing anything wrong. Moreover, people working in these factories are paid a wage that may be more than they can earn any other way. Nonetheless, most would acknowledge that there must be some standard of morality and fair employment practices, even when the government does not provide it. Regardless of where labor is procured, it carries dilemmas regarding balancing just treatment of workers with company profits.

Equity through Affirmative Action

Affirmative action refers to taking positive steps "to increase the representation of women and minorities in areas of employment, education, and culture from which they have been historically excluded" (Fullinwider 2018). The goal of increasing representation of underrepresented and historically excluded groups is understood to be desirable not simply to increase diversity but also to provide examples that affirm possibilities for those in underrepresented and marginalized groups. Affirmative action has never mandated "quotas" but instead has used training programs, outreach efforts, and other positive steps to make the workplace more diverse. The goal has been to encourage companies to actively recruit underrepresented groups. In application processes (e.g., for employment or college admissions), affirmative action sometimes entails giving preference to certain individuals based on race, ethnicity, or gender. Such preferential selection has been the driver of much of the controversy surrounding the morality of affirmative action.

Critics of affirmative action argue that it encourages universities to admit or companies to hire applicants for reasons other than their merit. If preference is given to individuals based on race, ethnicity, or gender, then admissions and employment become not about what a person has done and shown they can do but about factors unrelated to performance. The concern is that we unfairly preference less qualified individuals over those who are more qualified simply to achieve greater diversity and representation. This raises an important question about the purpose of the application process. Is the goal of having individuals compete through an application process to ensure that a university or business is able to select only the best candidates, or is it to promote social goals like the representation of underrepresented groups?

Some argue that employers who hire or promote based on qualifications, regardless of race or gender, are doing the right thing and that specifically seeking members of a particular race or gender for a position challenges the institution's own success and competitiveness. An institution's ability to compete and succeed depends on the quality of its workforce. Instead of focusing on the hiring or application process, we should instead focus on ensuring that individuals from underrepresented groups are able to be competitive on their own merit. Another potential problem concerning preferential selection is that individuals from groups that

have historically been excluded may be viewed as less qualified even when they were admitted or hired solely based on their own merit and achievements. In other words, affirmative action may inadvertently make it harder for qualified and competitive individuals from underrepresented groups to be taken seriously or to fulfill their responsibilities.

Contemporary American philosophers have provided various supports for affirmative action practices. James Rachels (1941–2004) argued that giving preference based on race is justifiable because White people have enjoyed privileges that have generally made it easier for them to achieve. While so-called reverse discrimination may harm some White people, Rachels thought by and large it was a positive practice that helped groups who have historically faced discrimination. Judith Jarvis Thomson (1929–2020) similarly "endorsed job preferences for women and African-Americans as a form of redress for their past exclusion from the academy and the workplace" (Fullinwider 2018). Mary Anne Warren (1945–2010) similarly argued in favor of preferences as a way to make the admission and hiring process fair. As Warren saw it, "in a context of entrenched gender discrimination," such preferences could very well "improve the 'overall fairness'" of the process (Fullinwider 2018).

Ethics and Emerging Technologies

Almost everyone in the contemporary world uses technologies such as cell phones and computers, but few of us understand how these devices work. This ignorance hampers our ability to make informed decisions as a society regarding how to use technology fairly or judiciously. A further challenge is that the pace of technological evolution is much faster than the human ability to respond at societal level.

FIGURE 10.10 This image of an android makes many people uncomfortable because it appears so humanlike. Is artificial intelligence a threat to human existence? Will there come a time when robots are afforded what we now call human rights? (credit: "Lipstick" by Steve Jurvetson/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Artificial intelligence (AI), originally a feature of science fiction, is in widespread use today. Current examples of AI include self-driving cars and quantum computers. Philosophers and engineers sort AI into two categories: strong and weak. **Strong artificial intelligence** refers to machines that perform multiple cognitive tasks like humans but at a very rapid pace (machine speed). **Weak artificial intelligence** refers to artificial intelligence that performs primarily one task, such as Apple's Siri or social media bots. Philosophers of mind such as John Searle (b. 1932) argue that truly strong artificial intelligence doesn't exist, since even the most sophisticated technology does not possess intentionality the way a human being does. As such, no computer could have anything like a mind or consciousness.

Despite Searle's assessment, many people—including leaders within the field of computer science—take the

threat of AI seriously. In a Pew Research Center survey, industry leaders expressed common concerns over exposure of individuals to cybercrime and cyberwarfare; infringement on individual privacy; the misuse of massive amounts of data for profit or other unscrupulous aims; the diminishing of the technical, cognitive, and social skills that humans require to survive; and job loss (Anderson and Rainie 2018). These concerns may reflect a deeper problem—what Swedish philosopher Nick Bostrom (b. 1973) calls a mismatch between "our ability to cooperate as a species on the one hand and on the other hand our instrumental ability to use technology to make big changes in the world." Although leaders express more immediate concerns reflected in the Pew report, Bostrom's fundamental worry—like those expressed in science fiction literature—is the emergence of a superintelligent machine that does not align with human values and safety (Bostrom 2014).

Summary

10.1 The Challenge of Bioethics

Bioethics studies ethical issues that emerge with advances in biology, technology, and medicine. Important contemporary ethical issues in bioethics include abortion, euthanasia, and clinical trials. Different philosophers view these issues in different ways, resulting in various ethical or moral positions, each privileging certain social obligations, individual rights, and/or ideas about personhood.

10.2 Environmental Ethics

Environmental ethics is an area of applied ethics that attempts to rethink our relationship to the natural world and identify right conduct in our dealings with the nonhuman world. This section explores important aspects of environmental ethics like the political and legal dimensions, the value of nature, deep ecology, social ecology, and inequalities in environmental impact globally.

10.3 Business Ethics and Emerging Technology

Although business and information technology (IT) ethics raise broad issues such as corporate responsibility and the potential dangers of artificial intelligence, a great deal of work in these subfields serves to support the development and implementation of codes of ethics that organizations use to guide the conduct of their members. The relationships between firms and their employees and between firms and shareholders is an important area of focus in business ethics. This section also explores important issues related to equality with a discussion of the important ethical issues related to affirmative action in university admissions and the hiring process. Finally, ethical issues pertaining to emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence are considered.

Key Terms

Abortion the intentional ending of a pregnancy.
Active euthanasia a form of euthanasia in which a patient's life is terminated using medical interventions (e.g., administering a lethal dose of medication).
Anthropocentric human-centered.
Anthropogenic climate change changes in Earth's climate caused or influenced by human activity.
Applied ethics an area of ethics that focuses on the application of moral norms and principles to controversial issues to determine the rightness of specific actions.
Bioethics a field that studies ethical issues that emerge with advances in biology, technology, and medicine.
Clinical trials trials designed to test new medical interventions and establish a drug's dosage, determine possible side effects, and demonstrate efficacy.
Deep ecology an approach to environmental ethics that assumes all living things are valuable in their own right and not only because of their usefulness.
Deontologist someone who believes that ethical actions follow universal moral laws.
Ensoulment the point in time when a developing life is believed to possess a soul.
Environmental ethics an area of applied ethics that attempts to rethink our relationship to the natural world and identify right conduct in our dealings with the nonhuman world.
Euthanasia means "good death" and refers to the ending of a human life to avoid suffering.
Forms the means by which an invisible, unchanging creator gives rise to the material world that we live in.
Germ-line interventions inheritable genetic modification.
Human augmentation refers to attempts to enhance or increase human capabilities through technological, biomedical, or other interventions.
Hylomorphism the idea that being is composed of matter and form that causes the being to actualize its potential.
Institutional review boards (IRBs) committees tasked with reviewing and vetting parameters of trials to

protect participants and identify potential issues.

Instrumental value possessing value as a means to something else or for the sake of something else.

Intrinsic value possessing value in itself or for its own sake.

Meaningful work work that is at the same time understood as an end and a possessor of moral status.

Opportunity cost the cost incurred by not pursuing other options.

Passive euthanasia a form of euthanasia in which treatment is withheld or withdrawn with the expectation that a patient will die sooner than they would with continued medical intervention.

Personhood the capacity humans possess that distinguish them as beings capable of morality.

Physician-assisted suicide (PAS) a practice in which a physician provides the means (e.g., a prescription for a lethal dose of medication) and/or information to assist a patient in ending their own life.

Principle of autonomy principle that states that patients have a right to exercise agency or self-determination when it comes to making decisions about their own health care in clinical settings.

Principle of beneficence principle that states that we should act in ways that benefit others or that are for the good of others.

Principle of clinical equipoise principle that states that randomized trials should be conducted in a way that balances the interests of participants and aims of science.

Principle of justice principle that states that the distribution and practice of health care should be equitable or fair.

Principle of nonmaleficence principle that states that we should act in ways that do not cause harm to others.

Shareholders individuals who own a share of a corporation.

Somatic cell interventions genetic interventions in which genetic changes cannot be inherited or passed to a patient's offspring.

Stakeholders any individual who has a stake in a business's operations.

Strong artificial intelligence machines that perform multiple cognitive tasks like humans but at a very rapid pace (machine speed).

Weak artificial intelligence machines that perform primarily one task, such as Apple's Siri or social media bots.

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Review Questions

10.1 The Challenge of Bioethics

1. Define *applied ethics*.
2. Why does bioethics often require a multidisciplinary approach?
3. Historically, what have philosophers like Aristotle and Kant identified as the principal factor that justifies the moral status of human beings?
4. What are the five characteristics Mary Anne Warren identifies as essential to the concept of personhood?
5. What is the difference between active and passive euthanasia?
6. What is the most common view in the United States on the morality of euthanasia?
7. What is the principle of clinical equipoise?
8. What are the four main ethical principles that can be used to guide our thinking whenever faced with ethical issues in physician and patient or researcher and participant relationships?

10.2 Environmental Ethics

9. Historically, Western thinking has been dominated by the anthropocentric perspective. What does Lynn White attribute this to?
10. Why does William Baxter adopt an anthropocentric environmental ethic?
11. What are some of the main beliefs held by deep ecologists?
12. For social ecologists, what is the root cause of most of our environmental problems?

10.3 Business Ethics and Emerging Technology

13. In Milton Friedman's view, what is the moral responsibility of businesses?
14. What are shareholders?
15. What are stakeholders?
16. How does Norman Bowie characterize meaningful work?
17. What are some reasons cited by philosophers to support the morality of affirmative action?
18. What is the difference between strong AI and weak AI?

Further Reading

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Political Philosophy

11

FIGURE 11.1 *Guernica* (1937), a large oil painting on canvas by Pablo Picasso, is a powerful example of politically engaged artwork. Originally displayed at the 1937 International Exposition in Paris, *Guernica* depicts the bombing of the Basque town of Guernica in northern Spain by Italian and German forces on behalf of General Franco during the Spanish Civil War. (credit: "Gernika - Guernica" by Andy Roberts/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

CHAPTER OUTLINE

11.1 Historical Perspectives on Government
11.2 Forms of Government
11.3 Political Legitimacy and Duty
11.4 Political Ideologies

INTRODUCTION Politics invades much of our daily lives. Whether we are actively engaged in politics or not, it is difficult to interact on social media, watch television, or even have a casual conversation without political topics creeping in. Many of the things integral to our lives, such as getting an education, working, or even traveling, are dependent upon political systems. However, we rarely think about what grounds these systems. This chapter examines that grounding by introducing **political philosophy**. A branch of philosophy that looks at how society determines governance, political philosophy also considers core concepts such as justice, citizenship, and authority; investigates questions of legitimacy in political institutions; and examines the rights, freedoms, and responsibilities a citizen may hold in a society. This chapter begins by looking at a few key historical figures from different parts of the world and discovering how they pictured an ideal society. Next, it examines different types of rule and theories about how best to govern a society and address the roles

leaders and citizens play. Finally, the chapter looks at some of the issues currently being discussed by political philosophers.

11.1 Historical Perspectives on Government

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain the connection between Aristotle's theory of virtue and political philosophy.
- Compare views of a just society across cultures.

As political philosophies emerged in different cultures, their followers adopted notions of ideal societies and systems of government. This section examines the ideas of Aristotle and Plato in ancient Greece, Mozi in ancient China, and Al-Farabi in the early Islamic world.

The Just City in Ancient Greece

FIGURE 11.2 The history of political philosophy in the West is typically traced to ancient Greece. (credit: "parthenon" by claire rowland/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

The history of political philosophy in the West can be traced back to ancient Greece. The term *polis*, from which is derived the word *political*, refers to the city-state, the basic unit of government in ancient Greece. Early inquiries were concerned with questions such as "Which qualities make for the best leader?" "Which is the best system of government for a city-state?" and "What is the role of a citizen?" For many philosophers, the most fundamental moral questions—such as "How should I treat others?" and "What constitutes a good life?"—are the basis for corollary political considerations. The philosopher Aristotle (384–322 BCE) links the two through the concept of *telos*, which means "goal directed." All things in life have a goal, or an end purpose, he says. It is the goal of human beings to live a good life, which is only achievable by living a virtuous life. Acquiring virtue is a difficult task, requiring constant practice. The acquisition of virtue necessarily involves a community to provide education, model virtues, and provide opportunities for a person to behave virtuously. Therefore, living in a well-constructed political society is an essential part of living a good life. According to Aristotle, "This truth is attested by the experience of states: lawgivers make the citizens good by training them in habits of right action—this is the aim of all legislation, and if it fails to do this it is a failure; this is what distinguishes a good form of constitution from a bad one" (1996, 1103b20).

Plato and *The Republic*

Plato's *Republic* is perhaps one of the best-known early texts examining the concept of a just society and the role of the citizen. Plato (ca. 428–348 BCE) uses a method of guided argumentation, known today as the Socratic method, to investigate the nature of justice. Using his mentor, Socrates, as the main interlocutor, Plato

opens *The Republic* by asking what it means to live a just life, and the text evolves into a discussion about the nature of justice. Socrates asks, Is justice simply an instrument used by those in power, or is it something valuable in itself?

Socrates believes that behaving justly provides the greatest avenue to happiness, and he sets out to prove this idea by using the analogy of the just city. If a just city is more successful than an unjust one, he argues, it follows that a just man will be more successful than an unjust man. Much of Plato's *Republic* imagines this just city. First, society is organized according to mutual need and differences in aptitude so that all the people can receive essential goods and services. For example, some people will be farmers, while others will be weavers. Gradually, the city begins to develop trade and introduce wages, which provide a basis of a good society. But commerce with outsiders opens the city to threats, so soldiers are needed to protect and defend the city. Soldiers of a just society must be exceptional in all virtues, including skill and courage, and must seek nothing for themselves while working only for the good of the society. Plato calls these soldiers *guardians*, and the development of the guardians is the main focus of the text because the guardians are the leaders of the society.

The Role of the Guardians

The guardians' training begins when they are quite young, as they must be exposed only to things that will develop a strong character, inspire patriotic feelings, and emphasize the importance of courage and honor. The guardians must not be exposed to any narrative that dwells on misery, bad luck, illness, or grief or that portrays death or the afterlife as something to fear. Furthermore, they must live communally, and although allowed to marry, they hold children and property in common. Because the guardians begin their education at such an early age, they are taught to view their lifestyle not as a sacrifice but as the privilege of their station. The guardians who are considered to be the most virtuous, both morally and intellectually, eventually become the city's rulers, known as philosopher-kings: "Until philosophers are kings, or the kings and princes of this world have the spirit and power of philosophy, and political greatness and wisdom meet in one . . . cities will never have rest from their evils" (1892, 473d–e).

Plato establishes the four virtues upon which the state should be founded: wisdom, courage, discipline, and justice. While wisdom and courage must be present in the guardians, all members of the city must be at least partially disciplined, performing their jobs and roles to maintain the peace and harmony of the state. Even for those who are allowed private property, accumulating wealth is discouraged because it encourages laziness and selfishness, traits that endanger the peace of the city. The theme of communal property appears several times in *The Republic*. Socrates claims that when things are shared in common (including women and children), sufferings and joys are also shared (461e). Thus, when one person loses something, the whole community loses, but when one gains something, the whole community gains. Second, when words such as *mine* are eliminated, conflicts over property are also eliminated, along with a sense of lack or suffering when someone else prospers. Communal sharing helps eliminate rebellion, strikes, and other forms of discontent and promotes social harmony, which is essential for a good society.

Plato's notion of three tiers of society—guardians, auxiliaries, and laborers—corresponds with elements of the soul. Just as these three groups work together for the good of the city, reason and knowledge work together with discipline to overrule passions that threaten to disrupt the harmony of individuals. These three qualities allow individuals to be just and virtuous.

The Tradition of Exclusion

When thinking about foundational texts, we must pause to consider the missing voices of those denied a role in governance, which ironically represents a significant injustice embedded in early theories of justice. In ancient Greek texts, as in many texts that make up the foundational base of political philosophy, the citizenry generally consists of wealthy men. Women are excluded from consideration, as are those born into slavery (rights are occasionally extended to enslaved individuals obtained through war). According to Aristotle, women are by nature born into a lower hierarchy than men and are not reasonable enough to engage in political life. Aristotle

also deems the elderly to be no longer competent to engage politically, while children (presumably male children) are not yet old enough to be competent: "The slave is wholly lacking the deliberative element; the female has it but it lacks authority; the child has it but it is incomplete" (1984, 1260a11). Aristotle's requirements for citizenship are a bit murky. In his view, an unconditional citizen is one who can participate in government, holding either deliberative or judicial office. Nonetheless, Plato's *Republic* does imagine a role for women as members of the ruling guardian class: "Men and women alike possess the qualities which make a guardian; they differ only in their comparative strength or weakness" (1892, 456a).

Mohism in China

Roughly 8,000 miles east of the birthplace of *The Republic*, a group of thinkers called Mohists were engaged in similar conversations about justice and governance. **Mohism** arose during China's Warring States era (481–221 BCE), a period of great social upheaval. Though this conflict was eventually resolved by the unification of the central states and the establishment of the Qin dynasty, the constant shifting of political boundaries led to a massive exchange of cultural, economic, and intellectual information. For this reason, this era is also known as the "'hundred schools' of thought" period (Fraser 2020, xi). The chapter on normative moral theory discusses the central tenets of Mohist thought; this section will examine its political ideals.

The Book of Mozi

The central tenets of Mohism can be found in the *Mozi*, an important text in Chinese philosophy. Compiled by followers of the teacher and reformer Mo Di, or Mozi (470–391 BCE), the *Mozi* explores a range of topics, including logic, economics, science, and political and ethical theory. Like Plato's *Republic*, the *Mozi* explores what constitutes virtuous behavior and arrives at ideas of universal love and benevolence. Mohists evaluate behavior according to how well it benefits others. Governance should focus on how best to promote social welfare. The morality of an action or policy is determined by its outcome. According to the *Mozi*, aggression and injury to others, even in military operations, should be opposed.

CONNECTIONS

The chapter on normative moral theory covers consequentialism in greater detail.

The Mohist Ruler in China

The Mohists believed that individuals are essentially good and want to do what is morally right, but they often lack an understanding of moral norms. Therefore, a virtuous and benevolent ruler is necessary to provide a standard of moral education and behavior. The *Mozi* describes social disorder in antiquity:

> In the beginning of human life, when there was yet no law and government, the custom was "everybody according to his own idea." Accordingly each man had his own idea, two men had two different ideas and ten men had ten different ideas—the more people the more different notions. And everybody approved of his own view and disapproved the views of others, and so arose mutual disapproval among men. (Mozi n.d., I.1)

To combat this disorder and establish a form of peaceful cooperation, it became necessary to identify a ruler. Thus, "Heaven" chose a sage ruler, "crown[ing] him emperor" and "charging him with the duty of unifying the wills in the empire" (Mozi n.d., II.2).

The sage ruler in turn chose three wise ministers to help him. However, they realized "the difficulty of unifying all the peoples in mountains and woods and those far distant," so they further divided the empire and appointed feudal lords as local rulers, who in turn chose "ministers and secretaries and all the way down to the heads of districts and villages, sharing with them the duty of unifying the standards in the state" (Mozi n.d., II.2). Once this governmental hierarchy was established, the ruler issued an edict to the people to report moral misconduct among both the citizenry and the leaders. In this way, the *Mozi* says, people would behave

judiciously and act in good character.

In the Warring States period, Mohism competed with Confucianism. With the rise of the Qin and Imperial dynasties that followed, it declined, although many of its tenets were absorbed into Confucianism, whose influence in China lasted over 2,000 years.

Al-Farabi's View of Rulership

The emphasis on virtuous behavior as a condition for a civic peace can also be seen in the work of Islamic philosopher Al-Farabi (870–950 CE). While there is not much information regarding Al-Farabi's life, it is known that he came to Baghdad during the golden age of Islam, likely from central Asia. Alongside Arab geographers and historians and Christian scholars translating texts from Greek to Arabic, Al-Farabi wrote and taught. Baghdad was home not only to the largest urban population at the time but also to great libraries and educational centers that produced advances in math, optics, astronomy, and biology. Al-Farabi fled Baghdad due to political turmoil later in his life and is believed to have died in Damascus. He remains an important thinker who influenced later, and perhaps better known, philosophers such as Avicenna and Averroes. Early biographers emphasize his contributions to the fields of logic and metaphysics, which are still recognized as pivotal today. Al-Farabi was one of the first Islamic philosophers to study Greek political philosophy and write about it (Fakhry 2002). He advances some of the Greeks' ideas in his discussion of the supreme ruler and the city of excellence (Galston 1990). For this reason, he is often called the "second master," with Aristotle being the first.

FIGURE 11.3 This woodcut from the fifteenth century depicts Al-Farabi as a wise, old man. Al-Farabi made important contributions to philosophy as well as to the fields of science, sociology, medicine, mathematics, and music. (credit: "Al-Farabi" by Michel Wolgemut/Europeana, Public Domain)

The Supreme Ruler

Al-Farabi's supreme ruler is the founder of the city—not a historical founder, but rather one who possesses both practical and theoretical knowledge and is not bound by any precedent or prior authority. While a supreme ruler bases their decisions on careful analysis, their "successor" accepts and builds upon the

judgments of the supreme ruler without subjecting those judgments to philosophical scrutiny (Galston 1990, 97).

The supreme ruler has knowledge of both political philosophy and political science. For Al-Farabi, political science is the practical understanding of statecraft, which includes managing political affairs. It is the job of political science to investigate the ways in which people live their lives, including their moral dispositions and inclinations, and to look at the motivations behind actions and determine whether their aim is "true happiness." True happiness comes about through virtuous actions and the development of moral character. By contrast, presumed happiness focuses on things that corrupt, such as power, money, and material pleasures. Political philosophy is the theoretical knowledge needed to identify virtuous behavior.

Philosophical and Nonphilosophical Rulers

Al-Farabi draws a distinction between philosophical and nonphilosophical rulers. Nonphilosophical rulers may possess practical knowledge and be able to make judgments based on their experience observing and interacting with individuals in the city. They will be able to recognize patterns and similarities in conflict and thus make the fairest decisions possible to ensure the peace, even as they rely on the wisdom of the supreme ruler. On the other hand, philosophical rulers possess theoretical as well as practical knowledge and will be able to determine the wisdom of actions themselves (Galston 1990, 98). A philosophical ruler can become a supreme ruler, while a nonphilosophical ruler cannot.

Cities of Excellence

Like Plato's *Republic*, Al-Farabi's city must be ruled by a philosopher and seek to educate a class of philosopher-elites who can assist in the city's management. The classes to which the citizens of the city belong are determined by the supreme ruler and are based on their natural attributes, actions, and behaviors (Galston 1990, 128). The overarching goal is to create a virtuous city or nation that gives its citizens the greatest chance of attaining true happiness.

This is in stark contrast to the immoral city, in which people embrace vices such as drunkenness and gluttony and prioritize money and status over virtuous actions. Citizens act in this way not out of ignorance but rather by choice. Such a people can never attain true happiness because their happiness is based on temporary things (Galston 1990). If a city is not ruled by a supreme ruler, however, it is not necessarily destined to become an immoral city, and its citizens may still be able to achieve true happiness through the pursuit of virtue. In the *Political Regime*, Al-Farabi states:

> Among the necessary cities, there may be some that bring together all of the arts that procure what is necessary. Their ruler is the one who has fine governance and excellent stratagems for using [the citizens] so that they gain the necessary things and fine governance in preserving these things for them or who bestows these things on them from what he has. (quoted in Germann 2021)

Nonetheless, such a city can never be considered a city of excellence; its aim is to provide for the material well-being of its citizens, but it lacks philosophical understanding of well-being in a larger sense.

The city of excellence is governed by the practice of the "royal craft," or the management of political affairs. The royal craft attempts to establish a social order based on positive character, virtuous behavior, and moral action. When the citizens of the city embody these principles and encourage others to embody them as well, a harmonious society results, one in which all inhabitants can achieve their greatest possible level of happiness and fulfillment

THINK LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Plato and Al-Farabi both thought that a just city should be ruled by a philosopher. What factors determine whether a government will make good decisions? Do you agree with Plato and Al-Farabi that these factors are the virtue and

abilities of its leader or leadership? What role does the structure of the government play in how it makes decisions and how good those decisions are? Identify two or three good decisions your government has made. Using the SIFT or four moves approach from the chapter on critical thinking, research each decision. Then write a paragraph about each decision, describing how the decision was made. Explain why it does or does not support Plato's and Al-Farabi's position.

11.2 Forms of Government

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain the difference between absolute and constitutional monarchies.
- Distinguish between representative and totalitarian forms of government.
- Relate social classes and caste systems to political systems.

Political schools of thought from ancient Greece, China, and the Islamic world have influenced governments for centuries. The ideological beliefs of individuals holding power within a government play a large role in the way that government operates. In addition, these ideas may inspire people to reform the structure of their political system. This section looks at some of the most common forms of government and examines their social and ideological roots.

Monarchy

Monarchy is a system of rule in which authority resides in one individual, who is head of state. Generally, monarchical rule is passed down through a line of succession. Monarchies have existed at least since 3000 BCE and have been a common form of government around the globe. Some examples are the Germanic Franks and Visigoths of the third and fourth centuries, the kingdoms of Spain and France, and the African countries of Morocco and Eswatini, which are still in existence today (Kostiner 2020).

Absolute Monarchies

A monarchy can be either absolute or constitutional. In an absolute monarchy, the ruler retains complete control and is not beholden to any other state authority. In the Zoroastrian tradition, following the idea of the divine right of kings, rulers were chosen by the gods and bestowed with *khvarenah*, or royal glory, which gave them wisdom, marked them as "supreme among the people, and indicated that they had been divinely endowed with kingship" (Choksky n.d.).

Constitutional Monarchies

A constitutional monarch, on the other hand, works within the framework of a constitution and with other political figures of the state. In a constitutional monarchy, the monarch acts as head of state and has some executive powers but does not personally make policy. The British monarchy is an example of a constitutional monarchy, although prior to the mid-1600s, it was an absolute monarchy. As a result of agricultural and industrial revolutions and religious conflict, a middle class arose in England that demanded political power through Parliament. Today, the United Kingdom is ceremonially headed by the royal family, but the right to create policy and develop legislation belongs to the democratically elected Parliament, which acts under the leadership of a prime minister. For this reason, the British system is also considered a parliamentary democracy. While the power they exercise is limited, the royal family is still considered by many in the UK to represent tradition and serve as the physical embodiment of the nation (Royal Household at Buckingham Palace 2021).

Watch the video for a discussion on the types of monarchies still governing today.

VIDEO

Types of Monarchies

Click to view content (https://openstax.org/books/introduction-philosophy/pages/11-2-forms-of-government)

Aristocracies and Caste Systems

Ruling authority in an **aristocracy** is in the hands of a small number of individuals considered to be elite members of society. Similar to monarchy, an aristocracy is determined through lines of succession. Generally, the higher a person's class, the closer they get to the actual seat of power.

Greek Class Systems

In a class system, members of society are placed in different groups based on their perceived worth and benefit. From these social hierarchies arise a system of political obligations from which rulers and their governments derive power and authority.

A classic example of a class system is found in *The Republic*, when Plato divides society into five classes of citizens: agricultural or industrial producers, sailors and shipowners, merchants (i.e., importers and exporters), retail traders, and manual laborers. In Plato's view, individuals should keep to the jobs they know best. Moreover, because people are not equal in aptitude, "we must infer that all things are produced more plentifully and easily and of a better quality when one man does one thing which is natural to him and does it at the right time, and leaves other things" (Plato 1892, Book 2).

Indian Caste Systems

A current example of a class-based system is the Hindu caste system in India, called *jati*, which assigns people their role in society according to the social class into which they are born. There is a great deal of debate about the origin of the caste system, but the *Rig Veda*, the oldest texts in Hinduism's most sacred scriptures, offer a mythical origin of *jati*. In one poem in the *Rig Veda*, primordial man, called Purusha, sacrifices himself to create humanity, and from Purusha's body the castes are created. The four original castes (*varnas*, or social classes) are the Brahmins (priests and scholars), the Rajanya or Kshatriya (rulers and warriors), the Vaishya (workers, farmers, and craftsmen), and the Sudra (servants and laborers) (Johnson and Johnson 2008). In addition, outcastes or "untouchables" make up a fifth group, now called Dalits (Mayell 2003). The Hindu caste system is intimately bound with religious beliefs about karma and reincarnation. Hindus, who make up the majority of people in India, believe that the fruits of a person's good and bad deeds (karma) are carried from one life to the next when the soul reincarnates. Therefore, a person's place in the social hierarchy is determined by fate or karma, based on their behavior from life to life.

In the 20th century, with the establishment of self-rule, the modernization of its economy, and the establishment of a democratic system, India reformed its social system. Today, caste discrimination is no longer legal, although it is still rampant in India. From four primary castes, the caste system grew to encompass some 3,000 subcastes over time, along with further subdivisions of the subcastes. Proponents of the caste system, including some within Hindu nationalist parties, argue that caste is a way of organizing society. Lone individuals lack power, they argue, but if individuals see themselves as part of a larger group, they may function as a de facto union. These defenders of the status quo argue that it is extraordinarily rare for wealthy, politically powerful families to give up their power, just as it is extremely rare for impoverished people to increase their political power.

Representative Government

In representative government systems, individuals are chosen by various means to represent the larger group. Representative government likely has deeper roots than monarchies or aristocracies. Cheyenne, Iroquois, Huron, and other Native American peoples established tribal democracies prior to European settlement of the Americas, and San (Bushmen), Pygmies, and other African peoples practice "campfire democracy" (Glassman

2017). These examples and others suggest that cooperation between bands of peoples may have featured elements of representative government prior to urban settlements.

The story of **democracy** in urban settings is often linked to ancient Greece, specifically Athens, where the hand of government was extended to the people, but only to individuals in particular classes. The Athenian mode of government was unique in the region. Before 700 BCE, Athens was ruled by single individuals or small groups who often encountered social and economic problems that brought about instability. Around the year 600 BCE, the Athenian ruler Solon (c. 630–c. 560 BCE) implemented a proto-democratic system. He did not allow nonaristocratic individuals to hold certain offices, but he did allow all male citizens (which is not to say all inhabitants) to vote on local leaders, and he did his best to outlaw debt slavery. His successes were short-lived, but he paved the way for an impressive span of democratic rule in Athens.

In Thucydides's (c. 460–c. 404 BCE) *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Pericles (c. 495–429 BCE) praises the Athenian constitution, in particular the idea that all members of a state should be allowed to participate in its governance. The Athenian constitution "favors the many instead of the few," he says, and the laws "afford equal justice to all in their private differences" (Thucydides [1996] 2008, 112).

Pericles links the notion of freedom to success both in governance and in people's daily lives. On both fronts, he holds that happiness is "the fruit of freedom" (Thucydides [1996] 2008, 115). His view is that, despite the imperfections in its implementation of democracy, Athens has the best form of government in existence. Athenians are happy in a way that members of other polities are not, says Pericles, so much so that Athens is worth defending in battle.

Current forms of democracy center on the notion of rule by the people, but today's democracies are not administered by direct rule, with all policy decisions voted on by a majority. For example, the United States has a representative democracy, which means that individuals are elected to make legislative decisions on behalf of the people.

American philosopher Richard Arneson (b. 1945) holds that "what renders the democratic form of government . . . morally legitimate . . . is that its operation over time produces better consequences for people than any feasible alternative mode of governance" (2009, 197). This statement is an instrumental defense of democracy, arguing that democracy is a good in itself and that democracies must prove themselves over time. Many argue that democracies seem to outperform extant rival systems. Indian philosopher and Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen (b. 1933) has argued that democratic nations are the wealthiest in the world, and because positions of power are determined through elections, their leaders are more likely to try to meet the needs of the population.

According to Sen, "No substantial famine has ever occurred in any independent country with a democratic form of government and a relatively free press" (quoted in Christiano and Bajaj 2021). What is more, democracies are less likely to go to war with one another than are nondemocratic states. Sen also points out that democratic governments allow people with different moral and political views to coexist. He observes that democracy has allowed multiple religions to exist relatively peacefully in India. Nonetheless, democracy is not a flawless system; some of the problems found in the system are discussed in Section 11.4 below.

Totalitarian Forms of Government

Totalitarianism

Totalitarianism is a system of government that exercises complete control over its population in both personal and public life by eliminating free press and imposing censorship and mass surveillance, along with other social controls. In a totalitarian system, opposition to the state is prohibited, and repercussions for disobedience are generally severe. Totalitarianism can also take the form of autocracy, in which power is concentrated in the hands of an individual, through a dictatorship under a single leader. For example, in the 20th century, the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin (1878–1953) and the Italian Fascist regime under Benito

Mussolini (1883–1945) were totalitarian regimes. A totalitarian system is different from tyranny, fascism, or communism, although there are enough similarities among these terms that the terms are often *incorrectly* used interchangeably.

Communism

Communism, an ideology that has engendered totalitarian governments, is largely associated with the Soviet Union (1922–1991) and the People's Republic of China (1949–present). While traces of communist ideas can be found much earlier in history, modern communism springs from the work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who called for a "dictatorship of the proletariat" to seize the means of production from private control and establish instead a system of labor and goods distribution that would benefit the working class.

In modern communist countries, the state owns the means of production, sets wages, regulates production, and controls prices. Although these countries may hold elections, the leadership of the ruling political party monopolizes political power, dictating policies that cross over from public life into private life and severely restrict individual freedom. Between 1932 and 1933, for example, the leader of the Soviet Union, Joseph Stalin, implemented an agrarian collectivization program in Ukraine. Stalin ordered that any family that owned 24 acres or more of land lose all their possessions and be deported to work camps in Siberia. Somewhere between four and seven million people starved to death.

Fascism

Fascism is another ideology that produced totalitarian political systems. As an ideology, fascism is characterized by a strong sense of nationalism, a disdain for democratic principles, and a belief in social hierarchy (Soucy 2021). Fascism was largely popular during the time known as the interwar years, meaning the years between the two world wars (roughly 1920–1938), although the fascism of Italy and Germany continued through World War II (1939–1945) and fascism under Francisco Franco in Spain, which began in 1936, continued until 1975. In Italy, Benito Mussolini rose to power and established a fascist dictatorship beginning in 1925. The devastation caused by World War I (1914–1918), after which Europe struggled to rebuild and cope with food shortages and unemployment, created conditions that were ripe for the emergence of charismatic strongmen who promised to bring prosperity back to their nations.

It was during this same period that German citizens, suffering under heavy sanctions from the Allied powers at the close of World War I, embraced the leadership of Adolf Hitler, who was elected as Germany's chancellor in 1933. Hitler quickly moved to consolidate power and establish himself as absolute dictator in what had formerly been a democratic country. Hitler's National Socialism was a fascist ideology, with the added component of a genocidal program carried out against Jews and the Romani as well as other groups (Wiener Holocaust Library n.d.).

Hannah Arendt on Totalitarianism

In the seminal book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), philosopher and political theorist Hannah Arendt (1906–1975) argues that totalitarianism is a relatively new form of government that seeks to exert control over every aspect of not just social and political life but citizens' personal lives as well. She says that a key difference between dictatorships, including those operating under fascism, and totalitarian regimes is that while the former assumes power and seeks to install members of its party in all offices of government, the latter includes a proliferation of the party into all arenas, including the state, the police, elite groups, and so forth. Furthermore, under a totalitarian system, laws are fungible, meaning they can change day by day. The ultimate goal of such regimes, Arendt says, is the eradication of any notion of the self as an individual in favor of the creation of the self as an extension of the government (Arendt 1951). The power of totalitarianism lies in the use of systematic violence to create a sense of total terror at the thought of countering the government and the dismantling of one's capacity for independent thought until people are wholly dependent on the government. The survival of the regime depends on eliminating any factor of identity for individuals beyond that of "citizen"—although people under totalitarian rule are more captives than citizens.

FIGURE 11.4 Hannah Arendt wrote extensively on the origins and power of totalitarianism, following the upheaval and suffering caused by totalitarian regimes in the first half of the twentieth century. (credit: Portrait of Hannah Arendt in 1924; Wikimedia, Public Domain)

Table 11.1 summarizes these various forms of government.

Form of Government	Description	Examples
Monarchy	Authority resides in one individual, who is the head of state	Numerous, including past kingdoms, such as Spain and France, and modern kingdoms, such as Morocco
Aristocracy	Authority is in the hands of a small number of individuals considered to be elite	Greek class system, Indian caste system
Representative Government	Individuals are chosen to represent the larger group	Tribal democracies of Native American peoples; the majority of contemporary governments in North America, South America, and Europe
Totalitarianism	Government limits individual freedom through controls over the press, mass surveillance, and other social controls	Soviet Union under Stalin, Italian regime under Mussolini

TABLE 11.1 Forms of Government

Form of Government	Description	Examples
Communism	The state owns the means of production, sets wages, regulates production, and controls prices	People's Republic of China
Fascism	Totalitarian political system characterized by a strong sense of nationalism, a disdain for democratic principles, and a belief in social hierarchy	Germany under Hitler, Spain under Franco

TABLE 11.1 Forms of Government

WRITE LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

View Hannah Arendt's revisions to the introduction of the third edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (https://openstax.org/r/The-Origins-of-Totalitarianism) at the Library of Congress. Read through the hand-edited, typewritten manuscript. Then, answer these questions.

- Arendt's passion inspires every word she writes. She is obviously not impartial. What is Arendt's attitude toward her topic?
- What are the main points Arendt raises in her introduction?
- Consider what you learned about critical thinking and logic in the chapter on critical thinking. Is Arendt's passion an asset or a barrier to her ability to reason and write philosophy? Explain your reasoning.
- What edits to the third edition does Arendt make? What is the purpose of those edits?
- What can you learn from this manuscript about writing philosophy?

11.3 Political Legitimacy and Duty

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify two key arguments for political legitimacy.
- Explain how a person might have a duty to others without having an obligation to the state.

No matter what system of government a society adopts, a government needs authority to rule. What gives rulers their authority, and what rights, if any, do citizens have? One fundamental question of political theory becomes, What are the sources of the **legitimacy** of a political system, and by extension, how much authority do rulers or leaders have over citizens? Further, what obligations does a state owe its citizens, and vice versa? This section will explore different ideas and characteristics of the source of authority and the obligations of its members.

Divine Rule

The Mohists claimed that the emperor is chosen by heaven rather than the people. In order to fight against social chaos, heaven identifies a wise ruler to establish control and act as a model of virtuous behavior (Mozi n.d.). This is an example of **divine rule**, which legitimizes the rule of monarchs and lines of succession in a royal family by stating that monarchs are chosen by divine authority and therefore are not answerable to the people. The idea of divine rule became prevalent in Europe after the Roman Empire adopted Christianity. Yet with the rise of Protestantism and the middle classes in Europe, new ideas emerged about authority and the rights and responsibilities of leaders and citizens. Philosophers in western Europe, such as Thomas Hobbes

and John Locke, began to argue that the legitimacy of government rests on a **social contract** between the ruler and the ruled.

Thomas Hobbes and Absolute Monarchy

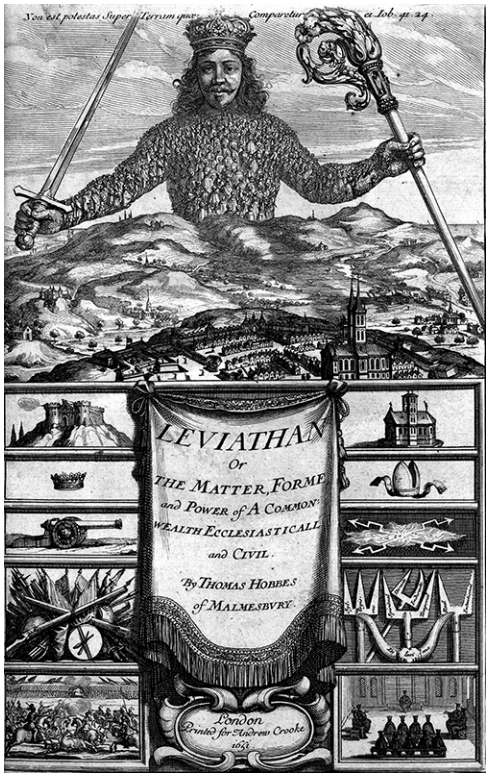

FIGURE 11.5 Thomas Hobbe's *Leviathan*, first published in 1651, presents absolute monarchy as an order-creating and necessary force in society. (credit: "Frontispiece of Leviathan engraved by Abraham Bosse, with input from Thomas Hobbes, the author" by Abraham Bosse by unknown author/Wikimedia, Public Domain)

Leviathan, written by the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) and first published in 1651, looks at the structure of systems of government and develops the social contract theory. In the text, Hobbes imagines a time prior to the creation of social institutions, when humans were motivated solely by satisfying their desires. When land and food are plentiful, people can meet their needs and even store surplus for lean times. But as population increases, people compete for resources, which means that one person's gain is another's loss. Scarcity leads to conflict when people fight to obtain what they need. Prior to the establishment of political authority, there is no check on violence, and thus human beings enter a state of perpetual war, which Hobbes considers the state of nature. In this state,

> there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain; and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short. (Hobbes [1968] 2002, ch. 13)

To successfully leave the state of nature, people must form a political community that ensures their basic needs are met, moderates conflicts, and codifies rules of behavior. Part of that project includes identifying a power that can hold authority. Hobbes believed that power should be held by the monarchy, arguing that one absolute and central authority is the best method of maintaining peace and avoiding discord and factionalism.

John Locke and Representative Government

Other proponents of the social contract, including French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) and English philosopher John Locke (1632–1704), rejected absolute monarchy. Instead, they argued for representative government. In fact, John Locke's *Second Treatise on Civil Government* (1689) served as a major inspiration for the American founding fathers. Some of his well-known ideas can be found in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Locke defends the necessity of the separation of the church and state, for example, and provides the origin of the edict on self-preservation that leads to retaining the right to bear arms.

Similar to Hobbes, Locke imagines that people begin in the state of nature and eventually agree to give up some liberties to an impartial authority in exchange for peace and security. But unlike Hobbes, Locke says that we exist peacefully for the most part and can be counted on to act in our interests when necessary. Locke invokes **natural law**, which is the notion that humankind is granted rationality by God and can use that rationality to determine moral laws. These laws are obligatory and include respect for others and the recognition of individual liberty. As Locke sees it, humans are born into "a state also of equality, wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal" (Locke 2016, 122). We are naturally free and equal; no one person has more natural power or right to rule than another. Locke maintains "that all men are naturally in that state, and remain so, till by their own consents they make themselves members of some politic society" (129).

In Locke's state of nature, we have the right to own ourselves and can do what we like with ourselves, and we can own limited property. At first, property is things from nature that God gave to us in common to fulfill our basic needs and survival. Later, as society develops and begins using money, property is extended to include what we improve through our labor. Even in this early state, we are not free to abuse others. We are not free to take more than we need, for example. The law of self-preservation is prominent throughout Locke's treatise and can be found in his discussion of war as well in his solution to a tyrannical government (that people exercise their right to change it). Locke's philosophy is based on the assumption that moral law, which precedes the establishment of any political structure, leads to a type of natural justice.

Locke also differentiates between natural liberty, which grows out of natural law, and civil liberty, which is the product of governance by a commonwealth. Remember that Locke establishes that we are allowed to gain property. We do so through our labor, when we improve the land that was given to us in common. This work, in turn, benefits others. As we gain more and more property, we develop a need to defend our property. If a person does not have property, they will still be under the protection of the laws of the civil society, though they will not have a hand in determining those laws. We agree to move from the state of nature into a society to protect property, both ourselves (as property) and our goods. By moving into a civil society, we gain the protection of laws, an impartial judge, and a means to enforce laws. The legislative power of civil society establishes its laws. These laws presumably are created with the interests of the entire commonwealth in mind, so individual interests may not supersede the interests of the whole. The executive power enforces these laws and should not have a hand in establishing laws. Locke views this requirement as a safeguard against personal interest.

After civil society is established, Locke addresses the question of how much freedom the government should have to act without consulting the commonwealth as a whole and what limits should be put on its power. Above all, the good of the society must be the goal of government. Those who make up the legislative and executive powers must be cautious that these powers do not become a micro society. The longer individuals stay in positions of power, the greater the chance they may fall into corruption. If that happens, then the civil state will become worse than the state of nature. For that reason, people then have the right to remove the governmental powers; a state that has become tyrannical can justly be dissolved. The people may reestablish the structure that previously worked best or change to a system that better protects their interests. Ultimately, it is the commonwealth (the people) who oversee the society at large and determine its ability to function properly. Thus, Locke's safeguard against tyranny allows people to return to the state of nature, if necessary, and begin

again.

Watch a short overview of Locke's ideas about government.

VIDEO

John Locke on Government

Click to view content (https://openstax.org/books/introduction-philosophy/pages/11-3-political-legitimacy-and-duty)

Max Weber and Descriptive Legitimacy

Legitimacy can be descriptive (an explanation of authority) or normative (a justification for authority). Hobbes and Locke tackled issues of normative legitimacy. A descriptive account of legitimacy can be found in sociologist Max Weber's (1864–1920) influential essay "Three Types of Legitimate Rule," in which he identifies three sources of legitimacy: traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal.

Traditional Legitimacy

Traditional legitimacy, not surprisingly, relies on tradition, or long-standing practice, to determine authority. Once a system is deemed legitimate, power is granted to certain individuals based either on inheritance or a belief that they are given rule through divine right. Al-Farabi's idea of a supreme ruler is one such example. Perhaps the most common form of traditional legitimacy, however, is monarchy: a system in which the state is ruled by a single individual, usually for the duration of their lifetime. In an absolute monarchy, the right to rule usually is grounded in the notion that the monarchy was established by God and derives its authority from God (known as the divine right of kings). As such, the monarchies in medieval Europe, for example, were not beholden to any form of constitutional authority. In a constitutional monarchy, the head of state is subject to a constitution.

Charismatic Legitimacy

Charismatic legitimacy is granted to an authority figure who has tremendous social appeal. Citizens of society grant these figures power to speak and act on their behalf due to their perceived ability to understand and empathize with the people they represent. Charismatic figures may or may not hold official government positions. Nelson Mandela (1918–2013) is an example of a charismatic authority figure who held great influence as an anti-apartheid activist even prior to becoming president of South Africa. Weber maintained that this is the most unstable form of authority because it is dependent on the individual and can be lost through death or a failure to live up to expectations.

FIGURE 11.6 Two leaders often described as charismatic: South African president Nelson Mandela (center) with US

president Bill Clinton (left). Prior to serving as the first Black president of South Africa, Mandela spent 27 years in prison for leading the anti-apartheid movement. (credit: "Philadelphia Freedom Festival & Awards" by Robert McNeely/White House Photograph Office/Clinton Digital Library, Public Domain)

Rational-Legal Legitimacy

Finally, rational-legal legitimacy comes from belief in the government itself rather than a specific individual. A leader is justified in upholding laws and setting policy as long as they are working within the established structure. Modern representative democracies are examples of this form of authority. Individuals are elected to hold positions within the government for a specified period of time, or term. When the term is over, the position is turned over to another elected individual. While people may not always have faith in the individual elected to office, they retain faith in the legitimacy of the office itself. Weber saw this form of legitimacy as the most stable.

Political Obligations

So far, this chapter has examined the role of rulers in society. But what responsibilities do citizens have to the government and to each other, and what responsibilities does the government have to its citizens?

Communitarianism

Building on the idea of an individual's responsibility to community, communitarianism is a theory about human identity that holds that people's values and worldviews are contingent on their social environment. Most of us spend our lives as members of one community or another, and often these communities provide us with our first introductions to moral values, which in turn influence our interactions with others and our political views. The implication of this position is that individuals have obligations to their communities that may supersede their individual interests. While communitarian ideas can be found in many historical texts, including Plato's *Republic*, the modern understanding of communitarianism has its roots in early sociological theories. Later, communitarianism grew as a reaction against John Rawls and the liberal position (Bell 2020).

Constraints on Universalism

Communitarians deny the notion of universal values and assert that values, being determined by society, can vary. Moreover, they argue that reliance on tradition and a belief in shared goals can help stabilize a society. Communitarians reject the notion of individualism, or the idea that self-reliance and personal goals should take precedence over social interests, and hold that "it makes no sense to begin the political enterprise by abstracting from the interpretive dimensions of human beliefs, practices, and institutions" (Bell 2020). A Rawlsian framework that asks us to imagine ourselves in a theoretical position in which personal facts are unknown to us doesn't make sense, when our values are in fact determined by the society we find ourselves in. According to this view, the community is the focal point for enforcing a sense of responsibility for protecting the fundamental rights of others.

Principles of Communitarianism

Sociologist Amitai Etzioni (b. 1929), the founder of the Communitarian Network, elaborates on three main principles at the heart of communitarianism. First, human beings need social interaction. Etzioni points to existing literature showing that individuals in solitary confinement in prisons, as well as elderly persons living alone and without a support network, experience significant psychological and physiological harm. Societies that embrace community and prioritize community involvement have a much greater chance of remaining healthy than societies that do not (Etzioni 2015).

Next, societies have moral norms that are enforced by members of the community. We are motivated to obey moral rules, such as picking up our trash when in public places, keeping our promises, and helping others whenever possible, due to the corresponding praise or blame we receive from our communities. Etzioni claims that this sort of community oversight can take the place of laws that must be enforced by police and other authorities. He explains, "We will agree with each other on what's right and what's wrong, and we reinforce it

by nothing more than by public education and by mutually appreciating when people do what needs doing and express our concern when they do not" (Etzioni 2015).

Finally, people have not only rights but also responsibilities. In the United States, for example, the notion of individual rights is so strong that often the connection between rights and social responsibility is overlooked. Etzioni gives the example of the competing concerns of personal privacy and national security. We recognize that it is important to maintain our right to privacy; however, we also recognize that sometimes it is necessary to make certain information public to protect the general welfare of the society. Rather than positioning this scenario as a war of competing values, the communitarian sees it as an opportunity to balance the needs of the individual with those of the community (Etzioni 2015).

Mahatma Gandhi and *Ahimsa*

Some political obligations are primarily to individuals. This view can be seen in the writings of the Indian activist Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869–1948), better known as Mahatma Gandhi, who believed his primary responsibility was to the people of India. He and many other Indians wanted to drive the British colonizers out of their country. Gandhi's obligation to bring about Indian independence existed independent of any obligation to obey the government. According to Gandhi, "Civil disobedience . . . becomes a sacred duty when the State has become lawless or, which is the same thing, corrupt. And a citizen that barters with such a State shares in its corruption or lawlessness" ([1969] 1994, 172). Thus, it becomes a duty to disobey the government predicated on the obligation to serve both oneself and others. Gandhi offers the following injunction: "Let each do his duty; if I do my duty, that is, serve myself, I shall be able to serve others" (n.d., "Hind Swaraj"). Gandhi is not advocating that people simply serve their own self-interest; he says that "service without humility is selfishness and egotism" ([1940] 1998, 443).

Gandhi recommends robust restraints while disobeying the government. The doctrine of ***ahimsa***, or non-harming—a key idea in Indian philosophy and religion—constrains how one may disobey the government and even governs all interactions in the process of nonviolent noncooperation with the government. Speaking of *ahimsa*, Gandhi notes, "For one who follows this doctrine there is no room for an enemy" (n.d., "Ashram"). Gandhi calls his particular doctrine *satyagraha*, or embodying or holding to the truth. One who follows this doctrine is a *satyagrahi*. For Indians resisting the British, satyagraha took the form of passive, nonviolent resistance to the injustice perpetrated by India's colonial invaders. The person grounded in ahimsa and satyagraha does not act out of anger or violence, which is why Gandhi says, "A satyagrahi loves his so-called enemy even as he loves his friend. He has no enemy" (n.d., "Epigrams"). For Gandhi, a person's first duty was to practice *ahimsa*. Indeed, he practiced ahimsa to the extent that he went on a hunger strike to end Hindu–Muslim infighting once India began to establish its own government. Moreover, he refused to defend himself when he was physically attacked multiple times throughout his life. These obligations to his moral code, as he saw it, existed apart from the government or any law it might have passed.

Gandhi's writings and political work raise the question, What are people's obligations when it comes to obeying specific laws? Most theorists separate the obligations to the state from those to the law. For example, American civil rights leaders and activists such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Medgar Evers, and Rosa Parks recognized the legitimacy of the government, but they opposed laws that they felt were unjust. They popularized the idea of civil disobedience as a means of opposing unjust laws.

READ LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Mahatma Gandhi gave his "Quit India" speech on August 8, 1942, calling for the adoption of his plan of passive resistance to British colonial rule in order to achieve independence, which India did five years later. Read the excerpt below. In it, Gandhi proposes using "the weapon of ahimsa." Is this phrase a contradiction? What duty does Gandhi feel to his people? Do you feel that he is carrying it out appropriately?

> There are people who ask me whether I am the same man that I was in 1920, or whether there has been any change in me. You are right in asking that question. Let me, however, hasten to assure that I am the same Gandhi as I was in 1920. I have not changed in any fundamental respect. I attach the same importance to nonviolence that I did then. If at all, my emphasis on it has grown stronger. There is no real contradiction between the present resolution and my previous writings and utterances.
>
> Occasions like the present do not occur in everybody's and but rarely in anybody's life. I want you to know and feel that there is nothing but purest ahimsa in all that I am saying and doing today. The draft resolution of the Working Committee is based on *ahimsa*; the contemplated struggle similarly has its roots in ahimsa. If, therefore, there is any among you who has lost faith in *ahimsa* or is wearied of it, let him not vote for this resolution.
>
> Let me explain my position clearly. God has vouchsafed to me a priceless gift in the weapon of *ahimsa*. I and my ahimsa are on our trail today. If in the present crisis, when the earth is being scorched by the flames of *himsa* [harm, the opposite of *ahimsa*] and crying for deliverance, I failed to make use of the God-given talent, God will not forgive me and I shall be judged unwrongly of the great gift. I must act now. I may not hesitate and merely look on, when Russia and China are threatened.
>
> Ours is not a drive for power, but purely a nonviolent fight for India's independence. In a violent struggle, a successful general has been often known to effect a military coup and to set up a dictatorship. But under the Congress scheme of things, essentially nonviolent as it is, there can be no room for dictatorship. A nonviolent soldier of freedom will covet nothing for himself; he fights only for the freedom of his country. The Congress is unconcerned as to who will rule, when freedom is attained. The power, when it comes, will belong to the people of India, and it will be for them to decide to whom it placed in the entrusted.

(source: https://www.mkgandhi.org/speeches/qui.htm)

11.4 Political Ideologies

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify key ideologies or theories in political philosophy, such as conservatism, liberalism, egalitarianism, socialism, and anarchism.
- Discuss distributive justice within political ideologies.
- Demonstrate how alienation continues to be a problem for workers in modern industrial societies.

When Bernie Sanders, the American senator from Vermont, ran for president of the United States in 2016 as a democratic socialist, he set off an intense debate in the country. What exactly was democratic socialism? This was a debate about political ideologies, or people's beliefs about how a society should be run. Ideology can shape policies and laws, as the individuals holding office and positions of authority and the people who elect them are often influenced by ideological beliefs. This section looks at some key ideologies that have influenced how people think about their rights and the responsibilities of government.

Distributive Justice

One of the important differences among the ideologies examined below is how they approach the question of distributive justice. Distributive justice can be seen as a moral framework made up of principles that seek to ensure the greatest amount of fairness with respect to distributions of wealth, goods, and services (Olsaretti 2018). However, there is much debate surrounding what amounts to fairness. Is a just society one that provides for its members, allocating resources based on need, or is it one that allows for the greatest amount of personal freedom, even if that means that some members are radically better off than others? Furthermore, given that individuals begin at varying positions of social and economic status, should a society focus on meeting the needs of its disadvantaged members even if that results in an unequal distribution of goods, or should there be

as little governmental interference as possible?

It is tempting to see distributive justice as a theoretical moral concern. However, views on what constitute basic needs, what resources should be considered public versus private, and whether or not there should be restrictions on the free market have real, practical ramifications when considered by governing bodies. Given this, it is important to keep in mind the role that principles of distributive justice play in the ideologies discussed below.

Conservatism

Conservativism is a political theory that favors institutions and practices that have demonstrated their value over time and provided sufficient evidence that they are worth preserving and promoting. Conservatism sees the role of government as serving society rather than controlling it and advocates gradual change in the social order, if and when necessary.

Edmund Burke and the French Revolution

Modern conservatism begins with the 18th-century Irish political theorist Edmund Burke (1729–1797), who opposed the French Revolution and whose *Reflections on the French Revolution* (1790) served as an inspiration for the development of a conservative political philosophy (Viereck et al. 2021). Shocked by the violence of the French Revolution, Burke advocated against radical revolution that destroyed functioning institutions that, though flawed, served a purpose. However, Burke supported the American Revolution because the colonists had already established political institutions, such as courts and administrations, and were taking the next gradual step: asking Britain to let them run these institutions on their own.

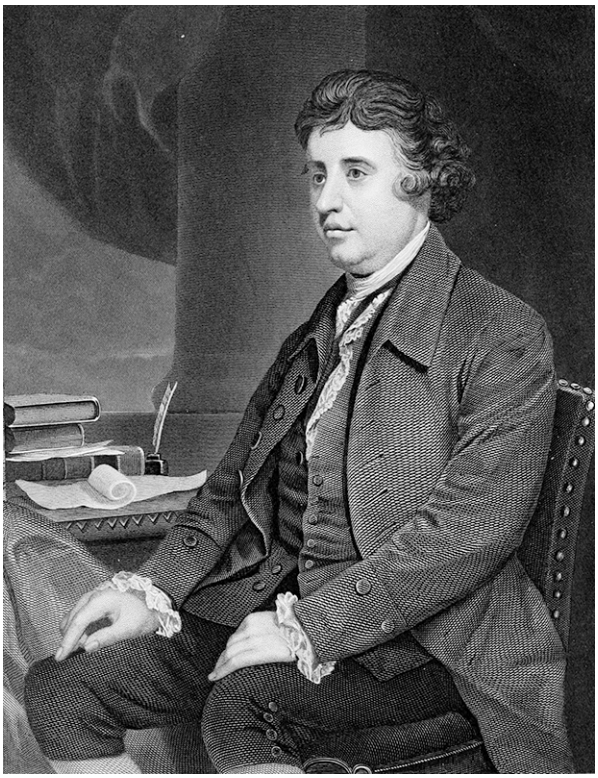

FIGURE 11.7 The Irish political thinker Edmund Burke is credited with developing the theories that form the basis of modern conservatism. (credit: "Edmund Burke" by Duyckinick, Evert A. Portrait Gallery of Eminent Men and Women in Europe and America. New York: Johnson, Wilson & Company, 1873. p. 159/Wikimedia, Public Domain)

Fundamental Principles

Conservatives such as Burke are not opposed to reform, but they are wary of challenges to existing systems

that have generally held up well. They believe that any sudden change is likely to lead to instability and greater insecurity. Moreover, conservatives are not against redistribution of resources, especially when it serves to alleviate severe poverty. However, they believe that such actions are best carried out at a local level (as opposed to a state or national level) by those who understand the needs of the individual community. Finally, conservatives are staunch supporters of property rights and oppose any system of reform that challenges them. Property rights serve as a check on governmental power and are seen as an essential part of a stable society (Moseley n.d.). As such, conservatism aligns with some principles of liberalism.

Conservatism maintains that human nature is fundamentally flawed and that we are driven more by selfish desires than by empathy and concern for others. Therefore, it is the job of social institutions such as church and school to teach self-discipline, and it is the job of the government to protect the established, fundamental values of society. Along with this rather Hobbesian view of humankind and belief in the preservation of historical traditions, conservatives believe that weaknesses in institutions and morals will become apparent over time and that they will either be forced to evolve, be discarded, or be gradually reformed (Moseley n.d.).

Liberalism

Liberalism in political philosophy does not have the same meaning as the word *liberal* in popular American discourse. For Americans, *liberal* means someone who believes in representative democracy and is politically left of center. For example, liberals generally favor regulating the activities of corporations and providing social welfare programs for the working and middle classes. Liberalism as a political philosophy, however, has quite a different emphasis.

Fundamental Principle of Liberty

British philosopher John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) expresses the fundamental principles of liberalism in his work *On Liberty* (1859), arguing for limited government on the grounds of utility. His interest is in "Civil, or Social Liberty: the nature and limits of the power which can be legitimately exercised by society over the individual" (Mill [1869] 2018). In this regard, he defends "one very simple principle," which is the minimizing of government interference in people's lives:

> 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 rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant. (Mill [1869] 2018)

In Mill's view, real freedom is when people are able to pursue their own individual idea of "the good" in a manner they see fit. Mill's claim is at the heart of most variants of liberalism.

Positive and Negative Liberty

We are at liberty when we are neither constrained to act nor obligated to refrain from acting in a certain way. At least since Isaiah Berlin's (1905–1997) "Two Concepts of Liberty" (1958), this sort of liberty has been called **negative liberty**. Berlin, a British political theorist, suggests that negative liberty is "the area within which a man can act unobstructed by others" (Berlin 1969, 122). Negative liberty in the political realm often refers to the absence of government control over the lives of individuals, or in what we are reasonably able to do without interference. Conversely, Berlin thinks of positive liberty as "the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master" (131). We want our life decisions to depend on ourselves and not on external forces. "I wish to be the instrument of my own, not of other men's, acts of will," says Berlin (131). The ability to participate in democratic institutions, for example, is a form of positive liberty.

The Welfare State and Social Justice

Some theorists hold that negative liberty has limits when it comes to how much liberty, in practice, a person has at their disposal. The theory of justice that sees individuals as having claims on resources and care from others is often called *welfare liberalism*. Such theorists are not in favor of limited government and believe that

the well-being of citizens must be a vital component of our agreement to obey a government. American philosopher John Rawls (1921–2002) famously makes this argument in his seminal book *A Theory of Justice* (1971), in which he attempts to articulate an account of fairness that satisfies our intuition that human freedom and social welfare are both important.

Rawls begins with the idea that society is a system of cooperation for mutual advantage. Given the fact of today's pluralistic societies, people reasonably disagree about many important issues, which means we must find a way to live peaceably together with our differences and collectively determine our political institutions. In addition, Rawls believes that there are deep inequalities embedded in any basic social structure, which result from the fact that we are all born into different positions and have different expectations of life, largely determined by the political, economic, and social circumstances that attend those positions. Therefore, Rawls says, we must find a way to distance ourselves from our own particular concepts of such ideas as justice, the good, and religion and begin with relatively uncontroversial facts about human psychology and economics. We should then imagine ourselves in an "original position" behind the "**veil of ignorance**"; that is, we should imagine we do not know any facts about our personal circumstances, such as our economic status, our access to education and health services, or whether we have any talents or abilities that would be beneficial to us (Rawls 1999, 11). We also remain ignorant of any social factors such as our gender, race, class, and so forth. Because Rawls assumes that no one wants to live in a society in which they are disadvantaged, operating from this position offers the greatest chance of arranging a society in a way that is as fair and equitable as possible. For instance, we would not support a system that forbade all left-handed individuals from voting because we ourselves might fall into that group.

Rawls argues that two major principles should govern society. First, the "liberty principle" states that each person has an equal right to the same basic, adequate liberties. Basic liberties are liberties such as freedom of speech, freedom to hold property, and freedom of assembly. Second, the "difference principle" states that any social and economic inequalities must satisfy two conditions: (1) they must be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of "fair equality of opportunity," and (2) they must be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society. Note that Rawls is *not* advocating for an equal distribution of goods or advantages; rather, he says that any distribution of goods or power that *is not equal* can further disadvantage already disadvantaged individuals. His goal is to create a society that seeks to address inherent structural inequalities as well as possible (Rawls 1999, 13).

Egalitarianism

Rawls's theory of justice has much in common with egalitarian theories. The term **egalitarianism** refers to a broad family of views that gives primary place to equality. The root *egal* (from the French) means "equal." Egalitarian theories assert that all individuals should enjoy equal status and moral worth and that any legitimate system of government should reflect this value. More specifically, egalitarian theories do not argue that all individuals should be treated exactly the same; rather, they insist that individuals are all deserving of rights, including civil, social, and political rights.

Some theorists argue that equality of opportunity for welfare, meaning equality of opportunity to obtain resources, is the most important type of equality. In addition to resources, equality of opportunity includes a consideration of how individuals have acquired certain advantages. For example, nepotism (giving opportunities based on familial connections) and biases based on personal traits such as gender or race interfere with an individual's ability to compete for resources. Any society that seeks a truly level playing field needs to contend with these issues.

One way to examine equality is to look at what individuals are able to do. The Indian economist Amartya Sen popularized a framework now known as the *capability approach*, which emphasizes the importance of providing resources to match individual need. This approach creates opportunities for each person to pursue what they need to live a flourishing life. An example of the capability approach is basic income, in which a city, state, or country might combat poverty by awarding everyone below a certain income level $1,000 per month.

FIGURE 11.8 Amartya Sen, an Indian philosopher and economist and winner of the 1998 Nobel Prize, with India's 13th prime minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, in 2008. (credit: "The Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh with Prof. Amartya Sen at a Meeting with the Members of Nalanda Mentor Group, in New Delhi on August 13, 2008" by Prime Minister's Office, Government of India/Wikimedia Commons, GODL-India)

The capability approach advocates "treating each person as an end" and "focus[ing] on choice and freedom rather than achievements" (Robeyns and Byskov 2021). According to American philosopher Martha Nussbaum (b. 1947), the capability approach would improve both justice outcomes and quality of life. She argues that a certain number of resources are necessary to enjoy a basic set of positive capabilities that all humans possess. Thus, each individual should be provided with those resources so that their life is not "so impoverished that it is not worthy of the dignity of a human being" (Nussbaum 2000, 72). What is beneficial about the capability approach is that it recognizes and respects the diverse needs of individuals based on different experiences and circumstances.

Listen to philosopher Martha Nussbaum discuss how the capabilities approach aids in creating a positive quality of life.

VIDEO

Martha Nussbaum

Click to view content (https://openstax.org/books/introduction-philosophy/pages/11-4-political-ideologies)

Socialism

Rather than look to the individual, the often confused triad of socialism, Marxism, and communism examines inequality from an economic perspective. While socialism and communism both seek to address inequalities in goods and resources, socialism says that goods and resources should be owned and managed by the public and allocated based on the needs of the community rather than controlled solely by the state. A socialist system allows for the ownership of private property while relegating most control over basic resources to the government. Sometimes, as with democratic socialism, this is done through the democratic process, with the result that public resources, such as national parks, libraries, and welfare services, are controlled by a

government of elected representatives.

VIDEO

Concepts of Socialism

Click to view content (https://openstax.org/books/introduction-philosophy/pages/11-4-political-ideologies)

Critique of Capital

While what are commonly called "Marxist ideals" did not originate solely with Karl Marx, he is responsible for coauthoring perhaps the most famous treatise criticizing capitalism, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), and laying out a vision of a yet-unrealized true communist society. As such, it is important to examine his ideas in more detail.

Marx is critical of the private accumulation of **capital**, which he defines as money and commodities. Stockpiling of capital allows for private accumulation of power. Marx holds that the value of an object is determined by the socially necessary amount of labor used in the production of that object. In a capitalist system, labor is also a commodity, and the worker exchanges their work for a subsistence wage. In Marx's view, workers' labor in fact creates surplus value, for which they are not paid and which is claimed by the capitalist. Thus, the worker does not receive full value for their labor.

Alienation

Marx identifies several kinds of **alienation** that result from the commodification of labor. To illustrate this, imagine some factory workers who have recently moved to a large city. Prior to the move, they lived in a small village, where they worked as furniture makers. They were responsible for each stage of the production, from imagining the design to obtaining the materials and creating the product. They sold the product and kept the profits of their labor. Now, however, they work on an assembly line, where they are responsible for producing a small part of an overall product. They are alienated both from the product and from their own productive nature because they have no hand in the product's design and are involved in only a small part of its construction. They begin to see their labor, and by extension themselves, as a commodity to be sold.

The result of selling their labor is that they begin to see others as commodities as well. They begin to identify people not by who they are but by what they have accumulated and their worth as a product. In this way, they become alienated from themselves and from others, seeing them always as potential competition. For Marx, this leads to a sense of despair that is filled with material goods, thus solidifying the worker in their dependence on the capitalist system.

Anarchism

While the idea of negative liberty decries unnecessary government intervention in people's lives, **anarchism** literally means "no ruler" or "no government." The absence of a political authority conjures an image of the state of nature imagined by Thomas Hobbes—that is, a state of chaos. Anarchists, however, believe that disorder comes from government. According to this view, rational individuals mostly desire to live peaceful lives, free of government intervention, and this desire naturally leads them to create societies and institutions built on the principles of self-governance.

Motivations for Anarchism

One defense of anarchism is that governments do things that would be impermissible for private individuals. French philosopher Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809–1865) observes that governments monitor citizens' activities and attempt to control their behavior through force. The more technology governments have, the greater their attempts to control people. Proudhon ([1849] 2012) observes that such treatment is against human dignity.

Proudhonian anarchists are aware of the argument that people may have consented to give up some of their

power to the government (as people do in a representative democracy, for example), which means that they must accept the treatment they receive. Yet Proudhon would deny that there is any example in history of a just government. Lysander Spooner (1808–1887), the 19th-century anarchist, says that all governments have come into existence through force and maintain their existence through force (Spooner 1870). Thus, some defend anarchism on the grounds that governments violate human rights.

Limits of Anarchism

Criticisms of anarchy are often twofold. The first is that without an organized police force, society would be unable to control outbreaks of violence. A related concern is that without a judicial system to arbitrate disputes and mete out justice, any resolution would be arbitrary. Anarchists, on the other hand, claim that most incidents of violence are the result of socioeconomic imbalances that would be resolved if the government were dismantled. Social anarchism, for instance, points to community involvement and mutual exchange of goods and services as a solution (Fiala 2021).

Yet some people associate anarchism with political violence, and in fact, some anarchists see violence as an unavoidable result of clashes with a violent and oppressive government. One of the most famous anarchists, Emma Goldman (1869–1940), wrote in her essay "The Psychology of Political Violence," "Such acts are the violent recoil from violence, whether aggressive or repressive; they are the last desperate struggle of outraged and exasperated human nature for breathing space and life" (1917). However, many anarchists favor nonviolent tactics and civil disobedience, such as protests and the creation of autonomous zones, as opposed to political violence (Fiala 2018).

FIGURE 11.9 Born in Lithuania in 1869, Emma Goldman experienced anti-Semitic persecution before moving to the United States at age 16 and becoming a factory worker. She was quickly introduced to the anarchist movement and became a prolific writer and passionate speaker advocating the movement's principles. (credit: "Emma Goldman on a Street Car, Library of Congress)

Anarchism and Feminism

Within anarchism, anarcha-feminism seeks to fight against gendered concepts that create inequity.

Traditional gender roles only serve to cement unequal power distribution and further the class divide. Particularly, traditional concepts of women's role in the domestic sphere mirror the depersonalization of the worker, with the woman seen as an extension of the home and domestic labor, rather than an independent autonomous person. It is worth noting that anarcha-feminism is in direct opposition to Proudhon, who believed that family was an essential aspect of society and that the traditional role of women within the family was necessary for its success (Proudhon 1875).

The author and poet bell hooks believes that the concerns driving anarchism can provide a motivation for current social action. She notes that the gaps between the rich and the poor are widening in the United States and that because of the "feminization of poverty" (by which she means the inequality in living standards due to gender pay disparity), a grassroots radical feminist movement is needed "that can build on the strength of the past, including the positive gains generated by reforms, while offering meaningful interrogation of existing feminist theory that was simply wrongminded while offering us new strategies" (hooks 2000, 43). She sees such a "visionary movement" (43) as grounded in the real-life conditions experienced by working-class and impoverished women.

Feminists historically have had to fight to make space for themselves within anarchist movements. The Spanish female collective Mujeres Libres formed during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) in reaction to what they saw as a dismissal of women's issues by the anarchist movement. Members of Mujeres Libres sought to support female activists and improve the lives of working-class women through literacy drives, employment programs, and child care facilities in both neighborhoods and factories (Ackelsberg 1985). These and other initiatives that focused on creating opportunities for women helped develop a sense of social engagement and foster a desire for social change.

FIGURE 11.10 Lucía Sánchez Saornil, pictured here in 1933, was a Spanish anarchist and cofounder of Mujeres Libres. (credit: "Lucía Sánchez Saornil in 1933" by Unknown/Wikimedia Commons, CC0 1.0)

Table 11.2 summarizes the political ideologies discussed in this chapter.

Political Ideology	Description	Key Concerns
Conservatism	Favors institutions and practices that have demonstrated their value over time	Favors action at the local level, supports property rights, believes in the importance of self-discipline, sees the role of government as protecting the fundamental values of society
Liberalism	Favors limited government on the grounds of utility (different from current meaning of “liberalism” in the United States)	Attempts to maximize individual liberty, including both negative liberty (the absence of government control) and positive liberty (people’s power to control their own lives)
Egalitarianism	Gives primary place to equality	Aims to guarantee equal rights and equal opportunities to all, but not necessarily equal outcomes
Socialism	Favors public ownership and management of goods and resources	Typically allows for the ownership of private property, but gives most control over basic resources to the government
Anarchism	“No ruler” or “no government”; instead of a central government, sees people as capable of governing themselves	Believes that government is the cause of, rather than the solution to, most problems; views human nature as rational and peaceful

TABLE 11.2 Political Ideologies

Summary

11.1 Historical Perspectives on Government

Early political philosophers were concerned with ideas of justice and how best to ensure the most virtuous city. In Plato's imagined city, the most just city is one in which each member of society occupies the social role they are the best equipped for based on their talents. The city is governed by guardians, who are trained from infancy to protect the needs of the society, with the wisest and most virtuous of these becoming philosopher-kings, the natural rulers. Al-Farabi borrows much from Plato but considers those best able to rule to be determined by heaven. Al-Farabi's supreme ruler is the founder of the city—not an historical founder, but rather one who possesses both practical and theoretical knowledge and is not bound by any precedent or prior authority. The Mohists, in turn, think that we must have leaders that display virtues so that we may emulate them and become virtuous ourselves. The Mohists believed that individuals were essentially good and wanted to do what was morally right, but they often lacked an understanding of moral norms.

11.2 Forms of Government

Whereas Plato and Al-Farabi believed that good government could be achieved by having a virtuous leader, philosophers and laypeople have advanced other structures of government that they feel might better accomplish this purpose. Monarchies placed political decisions in the hands of a ruler who was chosen by God and so must be virtuous. Ruling authority in an aristocracy is in the hands of a small number of individuals considered to be elite members of society. However, ideas of representative government arose as class systems changed and social contract theory became popular. Later, totalitarian governments emerged as the new ideologies of communism and fascism sparked revolutions in the 20th century.

11.3 Political Legitimacy and Duty

The concept of political legitimacy grounds the authority of a political system. This is important because it is difficult to defend the right to rule if a system of government is not accepted by the people. The sociologist Max Weber identifies three sources of legitimacy: traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal. If we accept the legitimacy of a political system, then one must consider what obligations exist between the state and its citizens—and what avenues exist if these obligations are not met. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Medgar Evers, and other members of the civil rights movement recognized the legitimacy of the United States government but felt it was not fulfilling its obligations to all of its citizens equally.

11.4 Political Ideologies

Political ideology refers to beliefs about the ways in which society should be governed. Generally, this includes beliefs about what rights and responsibilities individuals have as well as how goods and resources should be distributed. Often, individuals will hold similar views in some respects, and likewise, many ideologies have features in common. This can make it difficult to create sharp distinctions between them. However, because ideological beliefs influence the actions of those who hold positions of authority in a society, it is important to attempt to understand their major underlying features. Some of the most common ideologies fall under the umbrellas of egalitarianism and conservatism, including liberalism, socialism, and anarchism, among others.

Key Terms

Ahimsa a foundational principle in Indian philosophy to refrain from harming oneself or others.
Alienation in Marxism, the estrangement of workers from their work and from themselves due to capitalist exploitation.
Anarchism a state of no governance or political oversight.
Aristocracy a class of people considered to be elite members of society.
Capital money and commodities.
Democracy government either by elected representatives of the people or directly by the people themselves.
Divine rule a doctrine of political authority in which the legitimacy of the monarch or ruler is derived from the

will of the divine.

Egalitarianism the notion that all individuals enjoy equal status and moral worth and that any legitimate system of government should reflect this in its policies and procedures.

Legitimacy in governance, acceptance of one's right to rule by the people being ruled.

Mohism the philosophy of the Chinese philosopher Mozi or the teachings of the *Mozi*, a book thought to be a collection of writings by followers of Mozi's teachings.

Monarchy a system of rule by one individual, who usually inherits their position.

Natural law moral law naturally intuited by humankind, according to the rationality given to them by God.

Negative liberty a state in which one is neither constrained to act nor obligated to refrain from acting in a specific way.

Political philosophy the branch of philosophy that investigates concepts of justice and legitimacy as well as the relationships among political systems, governments, and the people.

Social contract an agreement among members of society to cooperate and allow some limits of their natural rights in exchange for protection and mutual benefits provided by government.

Totalitarianism a system of government that exercises complete control over its people in terms of both their personal and their public lives.

Veil of ignorance an imagined scenario in which a person deliberately remains unaware of any personal traits and does not know what social, political, or economic group they are in.

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Review Questions

11.1 Historical Perspectives on Government

1. What are the four virtues that Plato thinks the state should be founded upon?
2. What is the definition of a citizen, according to Aristotle?
3. Why was China's Warring States era also known as the "hundred schools of thought" period?
4. Why is Mohism considered one of the earliest forms of consequentialism?
5. What are some of the similarities between Plato's republic and Al-Farabi's cities of excellence?

11.2 Forms of Government

6. What is the difference between absolute and constitutional monarchy?
7. What led to the formation of constitutional monarchies?
8. How do ideas about social class or castes inform different forms of government?
9. What is the ultimate goal of totalitarian regimes, according to Hannah Arendt?

11.3 Political Legitimacy and Duty

10. What is the state of nature, according to Thomas Hobbes?
11. Identify Max Weber's three sources of legitimacy.
12. What is normative legitimacy?
13. What role does the concept of ahimsa play in politics, according to Gandhi?

11.4 Political Ideologies

14. What does John Stuart Mill consider to be real freedom?
15. What does negative liberty mean in the political sense?
16. What two principles does John Rawls say should govern society?
17. What is the focus of egalitarian movements?
18. Where do anarchists believe disorder comes from?
19. Why does Karl Marx believe workers are alienated from their labor?

Further Reading

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Contemporary Philosophies and Social Theories

12

FIGURE 12.1 Contemporary philosophy has focused both on both practical questions such as how to encourage and measure human progress and engaged in more conceptual grappling with the nature of meaning itself. (credit: "Walking (flickrfriday)" by d26b73/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

CHAPTER OUTLINE

12.1 Enlightenment Social Theory
12.2 The Marxist Solution
12.3 Continental Philosophy's Challenge to Enlightenment Theories
12.4 The Frankfurt School
12.5 Postmodernism

INTRODUCTION The modern era has witnessed rapid change that improved the lives of many but also created new social problems. The 17th to 19th centuries included the Enlightenment, the scientific revolution, and the Industrial Revolution. During this period, great unrest occurred, with social contract theory spawning revolutions in Europe and the Americas. The emergence of capitalism on the ruins of feudalism fueled the rise of a low-paid urban labor force and a ballooning of numerous related social ills, such as poverty and crime.

Philosophers around the world and throughout history—including Buddha, Plato, and Confucius—have proposed systems of thought to address the social problems of their age. Three major philosophical movements arose to address the challenges of the modern era. In Europe, the Enlightenment—often dated from 1685 to 1815 and also called the Age of Reason—inspired societies to turn to reason, science, and

technology to achieve better lives for individuals and steady progress for the human race. New fields of social science arose, among them sociology, as a means of impartially studying and presenting solutions to social problems. New institutions were developed to implement these solutions, many of which still exist today—among them democratic government, national banks and lending programs, and a wide array of nonprofit organizations to serve those in need.

The economic progress of this era relied on the system of capitalism, which many thinkers in the early 19th century blamed for producing the bulk of human suffering they witnessed. These thinkers increasingly embraced a type of socialism called Marxism, which advocated for a communist revolution that placed the working class in control of the government and economy. Marxist ideology predicted that communist revolutions would inevitably take place as capitalism advanced within the industrializing world and that these revolutions would create a society devoid of major social problems. Neither of these predictions were realized. Instead, Russia, China, and many countries in Africa, Asia, and South America underwent communist and socialist revolutions but failed to achieve the economic or political equality that Marx had envisioned.

Marxist theorists began rejecting both the inevitability of revolution and the Enlightenment belief that the pursuit of knowledge would lead to progress. Instead, they viewed knowledge as reflective of systems of power. They argued that philosophers must take on a new role. Rather than be impartial observers, philosophers must change the way people engage in public discourse in order to cast light on oppression and ultimately accomplish Marx's goal of an equal society. This branch of philosophy became known as **critical theory**. Currently, politicians, school board members, teachers, and parents—among others—are active in debates about the inclusion of critical race theory in educational curriculums.

This chapter examines the philosophies of Enlightenment social theory, Marxist theory, and critical theory that inform so much of the way we live our lives today.

12.1 Enlightenment Social Theory

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Evaluate Enlightenment ideas of progress.
- Describe positivism.
- Outline the emergence of empirical sociology as a means of solving social problems.

Enlightenment thinkers proposed that human reason coupled with empirical study of the physical world would lead to progress—namely, the advancement of science and the improvement of the human condition. While time-, labor-, and life-saving scientific advances benefited many, the economic developments of the era exacerbated inequality and pushed many others into poverty. Concerns also grew about the power of governments and other institutions and the role of the individual in increasingly complex and interconnected economic and social systems. Political theorists such as John Locke (1632–1704) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) proposed social contract theory, which spoke to the protection of individual freedoms. And new fields emerged to study and attempt to address the social problems that were developing.

CONNECTIONS

The chapter on political theory examines social contract theories that addressed the protection of individual freedoms.

Rationalism and Empiricism

Enlightenment thinkers proposed that the knowledge needed to improve social conditions could be gathered through rationalism, which regards reason as the source of most knowledge, and empiricism, which relies upon the evidence provided by experiments. The French thinker René Descartes (1596–1650) argued that true

knowledge could be acquired through reason alone, without relying on experience. Descartes's famous quote "I think therefore I am" insists that we know what we know due to abstract reason. For example, knowing that one plus one equals two is a function of reason rather than personal experience.

Other Enlightenment thinkers, including the English philosophers Francis Bacon (1561–1626) and John Locke (1632–1704), believed that knowledge could be gained only through empirical methods, including direct and indirect observation and experience. According to these thinkers, we make deductions from observations that suggest patterns or connection. These deductions can then be tested by systematically observing further phenomena and recording and analyzing data surrounding these phenomena. The scientific method is an empirical method solidified during the Enlightenment period that has become the standard way of conducting any type of objective research.

While rationalism and empiricism seem to be making opposing claims about truth, each has value, and the two can work together. The technological advances of the last 200 years—such as the launching of astronauts into space; the invention of radio, television, and the internet; and the eradication of diseases such as polio—can be said to be the result of both rationalism and empiricism.

CONNECTIONS

To learn more about the ideas of Descartes and the empiricists, visit the chapter on epistemology and the chapter on logic and reason.

Kant and Ethical Progress

The German Enlightenment thinker Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) proposed that reason alone could guide individuals to identify ethical codes that would result in an improved society. These codes, which he called categorical imperatives, could be derived by determining which rules for ethical behavior we might wish to apply to everyone without exception.

CONNECTIONS

The chapter on normative moral theories digs deeper into Kant's ethical theory.

Kant believe that applying reason in this way could usher humanity toward a moral society in which each individual would enjoy the greatest possible freedom. However, Kant also believed that this work of reasoning out a moral code could not be accomplished by individuals but must be undertaken by entire societies. Nor could the work be accomplished in one generation; instead, it may take centuries of trial, reflection, and education. Yet, through this pursuit, societies would progress with each generation, ultimately reaching a more perfect moral code and a more ideal society (Dupré 1998).

Comte's Positivism

The French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798–1857) crafted a social theory with the goal of pushing humanity forward toward a more peaceful society—one that could weather the storms of the political revolutions that he experienced in his youth. Considered the first philosopher of science, Comte analyzed the development of the different branches of science that existed in his time. Based on this work, he proposed the law of three stages for the development of societies. In the first stage, individuals attributed the events of life to supernatural forces. In the second stage, individuals recognized that human efforts and natural forces were largely responsible for many events while still acknowledging the power of supernatural forces. In the third stage, individuals shift from focusing on causation to the scientific study of the natural world, human society, and history. In this third stage, Comte believed that humanity would reject religion and focus only on laws or postulates that can be proven. Comte called this third stage **positivism**.

FIGURE 12.2 Auguste Comte believed that society could be studied empirically and that this study could result in human progress. (credit: "Auguste Comte" by Maison d'Auguste Comte/Wikimedia, Public Domain)

Grounded in this positivist approach, Comte proposed the establishment of a science of society, which he called sociology. He believed that society, like an organism in nature, could be studied empirically and that this study could result in human progress. Comte's conception of sociology as a field of study remained in the theoretical realm. A few decades after he first proposed it, however, his theoretical ideas for a new discipline crossed the Atlantic Ocean and found a home in universities in the United States. Here great minds—such as W. E. B. Du Bois, discussed in the next section—established sociology as a practical discipline that could inform the policies and programs of governments and institutions.

Comte believed that humanity would struggle to transition to positivism, as religions provided comforting and meaningful structure and rituals. As a result, Comte founded his own church in 1849, which has as its theoretical legacy the secular humanism of today.

THINK LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Comte struggled with mental health and spent much of his later years in psychiatric hospitals. During this time, he established the structure and rituals for his church. Watch Dr. Bart van Heerikhuizen (https://openstax.org/r/ComtesReligionofHumanity) from the University of Amsterdam discuss Comte's journey and whether religions are necessary to stabilize society. Then consider how religion serves society—and whether it is necessary in the modern era. Describe the type of church or alternative social institution you would establish to serve the needs of society in the age of science.

Du Bois and Empirical Sociology

W. E. B. Du Bois, a prominent American intellectual and civil rights activist, pioneered the use of empirical methods in the field of sociology. When Du Bois first engaged with sociology, the young field of study was largely theoretical. Du Bois criticized early sociologists for making broad generalizations about human

societies based on vague, personal impressions rather than first seeking to gather evidence (Westbrook 2018, 200). Du Bois set out to convert sociology into a scientific discipline.

After receiving his PhD from Harvard University in 1895, Du Bois came to the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. Here he conducted a complex investigation into the obstacles that African Americans faced in becoming self-supporting. Over 15 months, Du Bois conducted 2,500 door-to-door interviews, collecting data on demographics, education, literacy, occupation, health, membership in civic organizations, criminality, rates of alcoholism, income levels, home ownership rates, voting practices, and the integration of African Americans into the larger society. He compared his findings with data compiled by the US Census Bureau and other sources to gain more insight. For example, comparing his data regarding the occupations of people living in the Seventh Ward, an African American neighborhood, to 1890 census data on the occupations of people in the whole of Philadelphia, he found that a significantly greater percentage of African Americans were engaged in low-skilled, low-paying occupations. Du Bois's study and his subsequent book, entitled *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, became the first empirical analysis of racism in the United States.

FIGURE 12.3 W.E.B. Du Bois pioneered the use of empirical methods in the field of sociology. (credit: "W.E.B. Du Bois by James E. Purdy, 1907" by James E. Purdy National Portrait Gallery/Wikimedia, Public Domain)

Today we take for granted our ability to find statistics such as the divorce rate, the crime rate, or the average salary for a job in the region where we live. However, the collection of this kind of data and its use as a tool to inform public policies aimed at addressing social problems is a product of Du Bois's determination to bring science to the study of social issues.

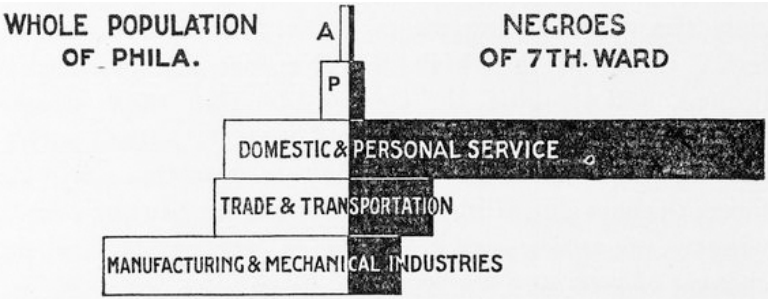

FIGURE 12.4 This bar graph from Du Bois's *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, published in 1899, illustrates his conclusion that African Americans living in the Seventh Ward were less likely to work in the skilled professions of manufacturing and mechanical industries and more likely to work in unskilled positions of domestic labor. This data-based approach to studying human experiences was revolutionary at the time. Note that at this time, the term *Negroes* was commonly used to describe Black Americans. (credit: *The Philadelphia Negro*, p. 109, by W. E. B. Du Bois, Google Books, Public Domain)

12.2 The Marxist Solution

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain the dialectic method.
- Contrast the Hegelian and Marxian concepts of dialectic.
- Outline the stages of Marx's proletariat revolution.
- Describe how Maoism reframed Marxism as an anti-imperialist revolution.

Unlike Enlightenment social theory, Marxist theories did not try to solve specific social problems that arose from industrialization and urbanization. Rather, they advocated removing the economic system that they felt caused these problems—capitalism. When German philosophers Karl Marx and Frederick Engels published *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848, they made a prediction: the workers would overthrow capitalism in the most advanced industrial nation, England. The natural forces of history, they argued, made this revolution inevitable. They derived their views of these historical forces from the work of German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) on the **dialectic method**.

Hegel's Dialectic Method

Hegel argued that history itself was the movement created by the interaction between a thesis (an original state) and a force countering that original state (antithesis), resulting in a new and higher state (synthesis). This dialectic can be likened to a grade report: based on the original grades (the thesis), a student will ideally reflect on their performance and address areas of weakness (antithesis) to ultimately arrive at a higher understanding of the topics under study (synthesis).

Hegel argued that in various eras of history, Absolute Spirit—which might be understood in many ways, including God or the collective human consciousness—confronts its own essence and transitions to a higher state. Hegel saw this most clearly in the life of Jesus and the birth of Christianity. Hegel presents Jesus as a rational philosopher who reflects on and confronts Judaism—antithesis challenging thesis. The resurrection of Jesus following his crucifixion symbolizes an awakened consciousness both in the individual of Jesus and in humanity. Within this framework, the birth of Christianity following Jesus's resurrection is viewed as the synthesis, the higher state (Dale 2006).

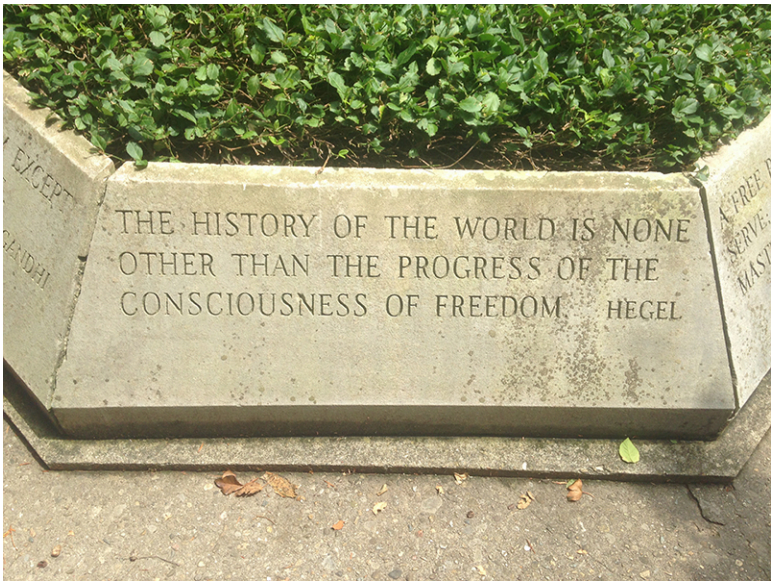

FIGURE 12.5 This quote from Hegel, carved into a public monument in Rocky Ripple, Indiana, captures his belief in the power of thoughts to change the world. (credit: "Hegel Quote" by Bart Everson/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Marx's Dialectical Materialism and the Proletariat Revolution

In contrast to Hegel's idealistic dialectic, Karl Marx (1818–1883) proposed a view of the dialectic called **dialectical materialism**. Dialectical materialism identities the contradictions within material, real-world phenomena as the driving force of change. Most important to Marx were the economic conflicts between social classes. *The Communist Manifesto*, written by Marx and his collaborator Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) states, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (Marx and Engels [1969] 2000, ch. 1). Marx and Engels note that in every epoch of history (as understood at the time) society has been divided into social orders and that tensions between these social orders determine the direction of history, rather than the realization of any abstract ideals. Specifically, they identified the colonization of the Americas and the rise of trade with India and China as the revolutionary forces that created and enriched the bourgeois class, ultimately resulting in the death of feudalism. Similarly, Marx regarded the clash of economic interests between the bourgeoisie (owners of the means of production) and the proletariat (workers) as the contradiction that would bring down capitalism and give rise to a classless society (Marx and Engels [1969] 2000).

CONNECTIONS

For a deeper dive into Marx's views, visit the chapter on political philosophy.

Marx laid out a detailed plan for how the proletariat revolution would occur. Marx proposed the concept of surplus value as a contradictory force within capitalism. Surplus value was the profit the capitalists made above and beyond the wages of the workers. This profit strengthens the capitalists' monetarily and so gives them more power over the workers and a greater ability to exploit them. Marx viewed this surplus value as a key part of the "economic law of motion of modern society" that would inevitably lead to revolution (Marx [1954] 1999).

Despite there being competition among workers for jobs, Marx believed that conflict with their employers would bind them. As capitalism advanced, the workers would form into a class of proletariats, which would then form trade unions and political parties to represent its interests. As the revolution advanced, the most resolute members of the working-class political parties, those with the clearest understanding of the movement, would establish the communist party. The proletariat, led by the communists, would then "wrest, by degree, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the

State" (Marx and Engels [1969] 2000, ch. 2). The communist party would need to rule society as "the dictatorship of the proletariat" and enact reforms that would lead to a classless society.

These developments did, in fact, materialize—but in Russia, not in England, as Marx had predicted. Marx had expected the revolution to begin in England, since it was the most industrial society, and to spread to other nations as their capitalist economies advanced to the same degree. The unfolding of actual events in a way contrary to Marx's predictions led Marxists and others to doubt the reliability of Marx's system of dialectical materialism. This doubt was compounded by the realizations that the Russian communist party was responsible for killing millions of farmers and dissidents and that some working-class parties and unions were turning to fascism as an alternative to communism. By the early to mid-20th century, opponents of the capitalist system were questioning orthodox Marxism as a method of realizing the ideal of a government by the working class.

THINK LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Watch "Karl Marx on Alienation (https://openstax.org/r/KarlMarxonAlienation)" from the series *A History of Ideas*. The video examines Marx's claim that the alienation and oppression created by capitalism would fuel revolution in the working class. He called for the workers to revolt, as "they had nothing to lose but their chains."

Questions:

- Was Marx wrong about the marginalization occurring within and through a capitalistic economy? Using at least one credible source, offer an argument (based on your source) that either supports or refutes his claim. Does your argument resonate with your lived experience?
- Where was or is the revolution? Should we dismiss Marx (or at least his claim that alienation occurs through the oppression rendered by privately owned means of production) given the absence of a global revolution?

Revolutionary Movements of the 20th Century

During the first two decades of the 20th century, revolutions swept across the globe. Contrary to Marx's prediction, these did not occur in the most industrialized countries. Rather, the Ottoman Empire (in Turkey), the Russian Empire, and the Chinese empire all fell to coalitions of different groups, including advocates for representative government who embraced Enlightenment philosophies, socialists and communists implementing their versions of Marxism, and factions within the military that sought to empower their nations through modernization.

Lenin's Imperialism

In 1917, Russian revolutionary leader and Marxist theorist Vladimir Lenin (1870–1924) published a pamphlet proposing to explain why communist revolutions were not occurring in the most advanced industrialized capitalist economies. Lenin suggested that capitalism had morphed into imperialism. Rather than continuing to squeeze their own working classes at home for profits, large national monopolies had gained access to both cheap raw material and labor and new markets in Africa, Asia, and South America. The result, Lenin argued, is that communist revolutions will take place in these subjugated nations rather than in the most industrialized countries (Lenin [1963] 2005).

Mao's Reframing

The military losses of the once-great Chinese empire to imperialist invasions over the course of the 19th and early 20th centuries and the resulting humiliations played a major role in the Chinese revolution of 1911. Imperialist Japan's conquering of northern China provoked an on-and-off military alliance between Chinese democratic reformers and the Chinese Communist Party, led by Mao Zedong (1893–1976), that eventually deteriorated into civil war. Adopting Lenin and his predecessors' views of imperialism, Mao reframed the

Marxist revolution. Imperialist nations represented capitalists and the semifeudal, colonial, and semicolonial states that they subjugated represented the proletariat. The Chinese revolution, Mao argued, was part of a global revolution against capitalism that would see subjugated nations throw off imperialist chains and establish Marx's vision (Mao [1966] 2004).

Mao's reframing of the Marxist revolution has profoundly impacted the course of history. Anti-imperialist, socialist groups in Africa, Asia, and South America helped their countries achieve independence. Often displacing other nationalist groups that supported revolution, they succeeded at one period in establishing a large network of small socialist states. Today, as workers in industrialized nations have failed to embrace communism, Marxists largely envision their battle to be against what they view as modern-day imperialist nations.

Unlike Russia and industrialized nations, China lacked an organized working class that might provide the Communist Party with the numbers and material support needed to launch a revolution. As a result, Mao addressed his rhetoric not only to the proletariat proper but to the peasantry as well. He defined a different class struggle—one between the peasants and the landlord class. "The ruthless economic exploitation and political oppression of the peasants by the landlord class forced them into numerous uprisings against its rule," Mao noted in the Little Red Book—a selection of Mao's quotes first published in 1964 that all individuals were strongly encouraged to own and study (Mao [1966] 2000, ch. 2). Mao extended the revolutionary class even further to include members of the intelligentsia and the petty bourgeoisie, a term describing those managing small-scale commercial undertakings. Mao urged all these people to join the peasants and the proletariat and become "saviors of the people" by ousting the Japanese imperialists and establishing a new democracy based on Marxist principles. Mao even extended membership in the revolutionary class to members of the bourgeoisie who held strong nationalist, anti-imperialist views: "Being a bourgeoisie in a colonial and semi-colonial country and oppressed by imperialism, the Chinese national bourgeoisie retains a certain revolutionary quality" (Mao [1966] 2004, § 5).

Mao's reframing of the proletariat afforded Marxist movements far greater flexibility in choosing supporters and defining their enemies. Like Mao's reenvisioning of the Marxist revolution, this shift enabled the spread of Marxism within the less-industrialized world.

FIGURE 12.6 Mao's reframing of Marxist ideology inspired not only the Chinese people but also those seeking to establish governments and economies founded on Marx's ideals in other parts of the world. (credit: "Mao Statue" by Philip Jägenstedt/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Cultural Revolution and Reeducation

Mao identified the transformation of China from a feudal monarchy to a representative democratic system to a Marxist democracy as a series of cultural revolutions. Despite Mao's highly inclusive definition of the revolutionary element, he strongly emphasized the primacy of the proletariat and the Communist Party. In discussing the new democracy, Mao explained, "This culture can be led only by the culture and ideology of the proletariat, by the ideology of communism, and not by the culture and ideology of any other class" (Mao [1966] 2004, § 12). Mao had galvanized the support of many groups to win control of China. Now, Mao needed a mechanism to maintain the primacy of the Communist Party and communist control of the nation once imperialist Japan had been evicted from northern China.

Mao found his mechanism with a method he called **self-criticism**. Mao warned that the party must not become complacent after achieving success. The minds of comrades, Mao explained, gather dust and must be washed from time to time. Engaging in regular self-criticism meant that the party might avoid mistakes and respond quickly and effectively to setbacks. A deeper motivation for self-criticism, however, stemmed from the Communist Party's desire to establish and maintain control over the new society.

In theory, self-criticism would consist of groups of comrades sitting together, discussing their ideas, reporting on their dealings, and helping each other improve. Mao described how self-criticism should proceed: "If we have shortcomings, we are not afraid to have them pointed out and criticized, because we serve the people. Anyone, no matter who, may point out our shortcomings. If he is right, we will correct them. If what he proposes will benefit the people, we will act upon it" (Mao [1966] 2000, ch. 27).

In practice, as early as the 1930s, self-criticism sessions turned from small groups that shamed individuals into public events in which "class enemies" were denounced, humiliated, and beaten, often by people whom they were close to—such as family members, students, or friends. Indeed, Mao recognized these practices as essential to the revolutionary movement: "A well-disciplined Party armed with the theory of Marxism-Leninism, using the method of self-criticism and linked with the masses of the people; an army under the leadership of such a Party; a united front of all revolutionary classes and all revolutionary groups under the leadership of such a Party—these are the three main weapons with which we have defeated the enemy" (Mao [1966] 2000, ch. 1). Mao's attempts to reeducate his people culminated in the Cultural Revolution (1966–1977), during which mobs and militias murdered somewhere between hundreds of thousands to millions of citizens who were deemed class enemies.

Whereas in practice, self-criticism in China resulted in brutality and repression, the idea that communication and self-examination can serve as a tool of liberation has continued to develop.

12.3 Continental Philosophy's Challenge to Enlightenment Theories

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain the meaning of *hermeneutics*.
- Contrast meaning as expressed through historicity and meaning as expressed through objective models.
- Articulate phenomenology's contributions to questions about the nature of reality.
- Describe the basis for ethical action identified by phenomenology.
- Articulate the undertanding of reality proposed by existentialism.
- Describe Ricoeur's narrative understanding of the self and society.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, scholars began to challenge both empiricism and rationalism. In particular, scholarship in the disciplines of hermeneutics and phenomenology questioned what we can know and how we should approach the acquisition of knowledge. Though these fields did not address social issues, they informed critical theory, which provided a new perspective on why Enlightenment social theory may not be enough to solve social problems. This section examines these ideas that lay the groundwork for critical theory.

Hermeneutics

The area of philosophy that deals with the nature of objective and subjective meaning in relation to written texts is called **hermeneutics**. Hermeneutics is the study of interpretation. When engaged in hermeneutics, we are asking questions such as author's intent, how the audience interprets the text in question, the assumptions that fuel the reader to make the conclusions they come to, etc. Hermeneutics is of great importance to this chapter as it deals with the possibilities of seeing a thing from not just one perspective but several. One of the key ideas of hermeneutics is the suggestion that truth is relative to perspective and is not fixed.

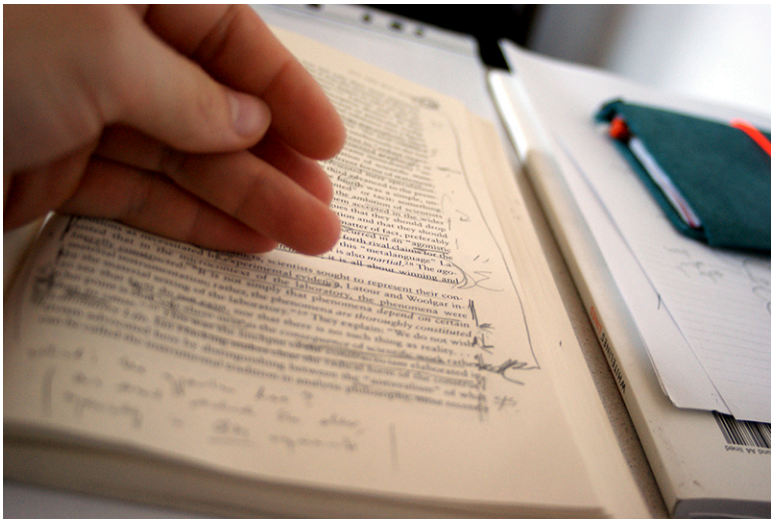

FIGURE 12.7 Hermeneutics challenges the idea that a text "means" just one thing, pointing instead to the relationship between text and reader as creating a diversity of possible meanings. (credit: "How My Professors Annotate Their Books" by Michael Pollak/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Historicity

Historicity is the philosophical view that everything that we encounter gains its meaning through the temporal events that surround its introduction to and maintenance in the world. In this view, both the author and the text produced by the author are products of history. Historicity asserts that there is no such thing as unmediated meaning; no textual claim stands apart from the events in time that give rise to it. Hermeneutics took up the concerns of historicity when it engaged the question of whether the construction of a text could possibly reveal more about the meaning than the author intended. For example, the analysis of a Charles Dickens novel usually focuses on the struggle of Victorian society to come to terms with the inhumane conditions brought about by the industrial revolution in England. Dickens himself was forced to work in a boot-blacking factory at a young age. Yet his writing communicates ideas that he was not necessarily aware of. His first edition of *Oliver Twist* presented the villain Fagin using anti-Semitic stereotypes. When an acquaintance made him aware of this, Dickens initially denied it, but the subsequent edition replaced many instances of the term *the Jew* with the name *Fagin* (Meyer 2005).

Reception and Interpretation

If hermeneutics is the art of understanding, then it follows that authentic communication is a discussion between what is transmitted by the text and what the audience receives. Reception includes not just what is heard or read but what is perceived. For example, the biblical book of Revelations has caused hundreds of years of fierce battles over its proper interpretation. Some readers hold that the events spoken of within the text will literally happen. Others approach it with a solely historical mindset, viewing it as furnishing a message of hope to an oppressed community during a specific time in the past. And some view it as expressing allegorical ideas about the processes of change and growth. Which reading is correct? According to hermeneutics-based biblical scholar Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976), one must have "a living relationship" with

the text one wants to understand. Stated differently, one must engage the historical, literary, cultural, socioeconomic, religious, and political background within which the text was written to fully grasp its significance.

Hermeneutics rejects both the absolute power of rational thought propagated by Descartes and the empiricism promoted by other Enlightenment thinkers. In fact, hermeneutics challenges the basic idea of things having one absolute meaning. Instead, meaning is understood as being derived not from an objective source but from the reader. In doing so, hermeneutics regards the knowledge gained from objective investigations (such as scientific experiments) as one of many possible viewpoints.

Ricoeur's Narrative Accounts of Self and Society

French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) held that there was nothing that a text says by itself. Perhaps more clearly, he argued that any text is only capable of saying what we say it says. What someone does when they "understand" a literary work or the words of another person in conversation is to create meaning based on the available words. Even if the author of a text were with us to interpret every word, we still could not arrive at "the" meaning of the text, since it is doubtful that we could ever experience the literary work from the same context as the writer (Gill 2019). **Discourse** is the name Ricoeur assigned to the process of making meaning out of the texts and dialogues that have been presented to us. As opposed to the identification of things in the natural sciences, a process limited in possible meanings, discourse possesses endless interpretative possibilities.

In the later part of Ricouer's career, he switched his focus from symbols to metaphor and narrative. For Ricouer, a metaphor is not simply the exchange of one word for another. Rather, a metaphor is a way of saying that which is in some sense unsayable. There is something that radiates beyond the metaphor to the point that the substituted whole is beyond the sum of its parts. By "narrative," Ricoeur meant not stories themselves but the norms structuring how stories are told and received (Ricoeur 1991, 8, 10). In this perspective, there is no pure narrative unmediated by the reader's perspective.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology, very generally, can be defined as the study of how an individual encounters the world through first-person experience. One can dive deeper to identify several areas of inquiry within phenomenology, such as the nature of experience, the use of symbols to convey experience, objective vs. subjective experience, the connection between experience and values, and the experiential importance of religious ideas. Phenomenology argues that the starting point of philosophical reflection must be the realm of experience and not the realm of abstract ideas. Instead of starting with the purely mental idea of a thing, phenomenology suggests that we reflect on how the experience of a thing affects us. For example, a phenomenological approach would encounter a chair from the perspective of the purpose it is serving at that particular moment (perhaps it's being used as a table) and not what the idea of "chair" may indicate. Phenomenology tasks us with working toward an understanding of various types of experiences involving the thing in question.

Phenomenology and Reality

Phenomenology was largely developed by French thinker Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961) and German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859–1938). Husserl argued that when one begins the phenomenological investigation, one must suspend the temptation to assert that an object is in essence what it appears to be. Rather, Husserl advocated that we focus on how the thing appears to *us*. Husserl thus provided the foundation of the phenomenological project: the relinquishing of assumptions about the objects of experience.

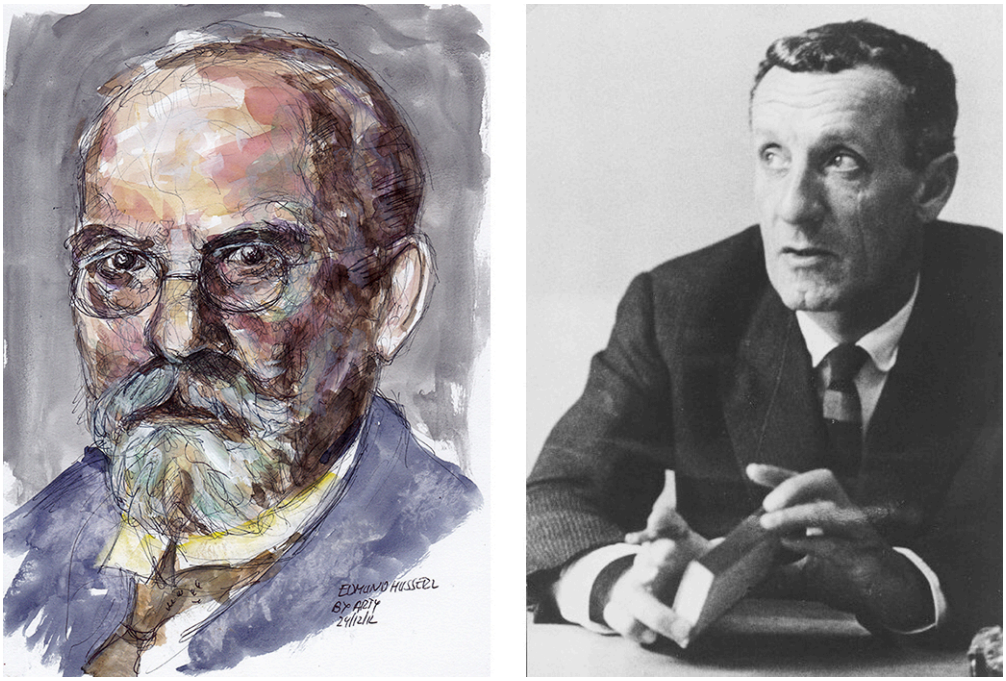

FIGURE 12.8 Edmund Husserl (left) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (right) each made important contributions to phenomenology. (left credit: "Edmund Husserl for PIFAL" by Arturo Espinoza/Flickr, CC BY 2.0; right credit: "Maurice Merleau-Ponty" by philosophical-investigations.org/Wikimedia, Public Domain)

Merleau-Ponty further rejected Descartes's distinction between the mind and the body. Merleau-Ponty argued that we cannot separate perception or consciousness from the body, as we perceive the outside world *through* our bodies. The body structures our perception. For example, Merleau-Ponty pointed to psychological studies of phenomena such as phantom-limb syndrome and hallucinations to show that the body mediates our perception of the outside world (Merleau-Ponty 2012).

Martin Heidegger's (1889-1976) brand of phenomenology, focusing on the nature of human being (what he referred to as "*Dasein*"), argued that being by necessity has to occur in the world, as being cannot manifest without a world. This view challenged attempts to discover the nature of being in the realm of theory and ideas. Heidegger proposed that abstract ideas don't reveal much about being since they are not in the world. If we want to analyze the nature of being, we must not focus on individual instances of beings and our external assumptions about them, but rather examine the world, the realm in which being itself occurs. For Heidegger, what gives rise to the experience of being is more revealing than an investigation of things (Smith 2013).

For example, this view would privilege experiences from everyday life, such as driving to the store or greeting a neighbor on the sidewalk, as more informative on the nature of being than abstract philosophical reflections on transportation or neighborly interactions. As another example, consider the difference between music that aligns with standards of music theory and that which does not. In the case of the former, a song is good because it follows abstract ideas of harmony, uniform time signatures, etc. In the case of the latter, a song may break some or all the rules of music theory but still present a phenomenological reality of experiences of joy, pain, angst, or anger. In fact, Heidegger was very interested in works of art and their function to authentically imitate life as it is and not as abstract concepts say it should be.

Phenomenology and Ethics

There is a strong connection between ethics and phenomenology. The phenomenological vantage point of reflecting on experience engenders a sense of wonder. Some philosophers would assert that ethics has this sort of awe-inspiring quality; we do the "right" action because it compels us. From a phenomenological perspective, the ethical response, like all experience, cannot be reduced to biological, chemical, or logical

reasons. That which persuades us to do something we are convinced of to be "good" or "right" makes a claim that transcends either of these. In other words, there is a difference between someone not causing unnecessary harm to another merely because the law prohibits it and a person who has truly been persuaded by the phenomenological presentation of another human that they matter greatly and should not be harmed unnecessarily.

Phenomenology deeply engages the questions of ethics by investigation of the nature of immediate human experience. Allowing oneself to be authentically confronted with the suffering of other humans can cause us to want to fight for those who are suffering, even when abstract conceptual ethics might indicate that this is not our responsibility. For example, a person is not required by any abstract legal or ethical mandate to give one of their kidneys to a stranger. But when they are confronted phenomenologically with the suffering experience of the person who needs the kidney, they may be moved to donate their kidney even though they do not have to.

Existentialism

Existentialism can be defined as the philosophical focus on the human situation, including discussions of human freedom, the making of meaning, and reflections on the relevance of the human sciences and religion. Existentialism's phenomenological roots along with an emphasis on human freedom provides its foundation. In the existentialist view, the world of experience and meaning is created from the ground up, rather than moving from the abstract realm into the world. This reversal is the basis of human freedom: if humans create the overarching structures of society, then these structures lack the transcendent foundation that would qualify them for objectivity. In other words, if humans created all of the ideas many take to be pre-existent and necessary to our world, then these ideas are obviously not pre-existent and are not necessary. If these structures aren't more or less fixed in the way that the law of gravity is, then we can change them as needed. Existentialism is grounded in the belief in human freedom. The world does not cause an individual's actions, as the world and the individual are one, hence the individual is free. From human freedom comes the responsibility to engage the world and shape it as one sees fit to.

THINK LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Would you define yourself as an existentialist? Why or why not? Give a detailed answer that includes the strengths or weaknesses of existentialism and how it is relevant to the world in which you live.

12.4 The Frankfurt School

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify the main goal of critical theory as developed by the Frankfurt School.
- Describe the Frankfurt School's revision of Enlightenment and Marxist ideas.
- Evaluate communicative action as a tool for liberation.
- Explain how critical theory is messianic.

What we know as critical theory emerged from the work of a group of early 20th-century Marxist German philosophers and social theorists at the Institute for Social Research at Goethe University in Frankfurt, Germany—a group that came to be known as the **Frankfurt School**. It arose within the turbulent political environment of the socialist revolutions of the early 20th century and the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany.

Following World War I, the socialist 1918–19 November Revolution dethroned the existing monarchy in Germany, replacing it with a parliamentary system that was later known as the Weimar Republic. Felix Weil (1898–1975), who would go on to provide the financial backing for what would become the Frankfurt School, was on the front lines of the revolution, serving in the Frankfurt Workers' and Soldiers' Council. The son of a wealthy entrepreneur, Weil aligned himself with philosophers, artists, and others who had been shifted to the

left by the experiences of WWI and by other socialists. In 1923, Weil helped establish what was known as "Marxist Study Week," a gathering of left-leaning thinkers, many of whom would later be affiliated with the Institute for Social Research. Although the Institute for Social Research was founded in 1924, it was under the leadership of Max Horkheimer, who became director in 1930, that the institute began to focus on practical responses to social oppression (Horkheimer [1972] 1992).

In 1933, in response to the rise of the Nazi regime, the institute moved from Frankfurt to Geneva, Switzerland (Löwenthal 1981). From Geneva, the institute relocated to New York City, where it was made a part of Columbia University. It was while the institute was part of Columbia that the Frankfurt School gained notice and prestige, with its research methods gaining acceptance among other academics. After the end of World War II, some of the Frankfurt School intellectuals returned to West Germany while others remained in the United States. A full return of the institute to Frankfurt occurred in the 1950s (Held 1980).

The Formation of a Critical Theory

Although the Frankfurt School did not articulate one singular view, one identifying mark of its critical theory was a push toward emancipating humanity from the multitude of forces viewed as enslaving it. Max Horkheimer (1895–1973) argued that a plausible critical theory must do several things: explain the ills of society, identify the means by which change can occur, provide a rubric for critique, and articulate reasonable goals (Horkheimer [1972] 1992). The Frankfurt School not only sought to free those oppressed through cultural, economic, and political structures but also sought to free philosophical theory from the chains of oppressive ideologies. The members of the Frankfurt School critiqued Enlightenment thought, revised key Marxist concepts, and proposed new strategies pertaining to how social change can be accomplished.

FIGURE 12.9 Max Horkheimer is recognized as the founder of the Frankfurt School. (credit: "Max Horkheimer for PIFAL" by Arturo Espinosa/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Critique of the Enlightenment Concept of Knowledge

The Frankfurt School was critical of the Enlightenment view of true knowledge as conceptual, hence separate from the world. Drawing on the work of other branches of philosophy that had arisen in continental Europe

during the 19th and 20th centuries—in particular, phenomenology and hermeneutics—the school focused on how the context within which we experience a phenomenon or observe an object can change our interpretation of its meaning. The Frankfurt School rejected the Enlightenment's faith in the ability of reason to lay bare the secrets of the universe. For these thinkers, knowledge did not consist of absolute "facts" but instead an awareness of the structures of our social world that shape what we believe to be facts (Corradetti 2021).

While many philosophical systems revolved around abstract ideas made popular by the Enlightenment, the critical theory developed at the Frankfurt School attempted to engage the world as it was and not as philosophical frameworks painted it to be. The theorists of the Frankfurt School asserted that philosophical ideas are not abstract concepts. Rather, the ideas that structure the world as we live in it are the result of social, political, cultural, and religious forces and are therefore lived issues. Moreover, to the degree that these forces are oppressive, so are the accepted beliefs or knowledge generated by these forces. The purpose of true knowledge is thus to inform us on how the social world can be liberated from marginalizing and oppressive concepts (Corradetti 2021).

Horkheimer's Rejection of the Primacy of Reason

The Enlightenment had established a hierarchical relationship between philosophy—and by extension reason—and science. Kant had positioned reason itself as the key to understanding science and to making sense of how scientific discoveries fit into the overall framework of knowledge. According to the Kantian view, proper philosophical reflection was based in reason. Horkheimer rejected this prioritization of reason. He asserted that the objects of scientific reflection were shaped and determined through context (Horkheimer [1972] 1992). Horkheimer and others criticized Kant and Enlightenment philosophy as abstract, irrelevant, or in the worst case, enabling the oppression that occurred since Kant's time. Instead, the Frankfurt School offered a focus on how philosophy could be used to make a practical difference within that world.

Benjamin's Disruption of the Status Quo

A common denominator among the multiplicity of ideas within the Frankfurt School could arguably be what German-Jewish philosopher Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) called the "messianic." By this, he meant a disruption within the status quo that eventually responds in various ways to the oppression occurring in a society (Horkheimer [1972] 1992). Jewish and Judeo-Christian theology prophesies a messianic redeemer who will eventually bring peace to an unstable world. Benjamin adapted the term to indicate a conceptual resistance to hegemonic systems (another term for the power structures of the status quo). This resistance is not part of and does not flow from linear history but rather interrupts it. Benjamin understood systems such as capitalism to be linear pathways of history that the messianic impulse interrupts, thus bringing forth a reality that does not flow from past to present but always is. Benjamin held that such a disruption of linear time disrupts systems of power by creating a classless moment (Khatib 2013).

One example of Benjamin's idea of the messianic would be the eradication of the socially constructed hierarchy of race. Disrupting this concept would presumably result in a society devoid of the stratification that is connected to notions of race. The difficulty with this idea is that messianic moments within human societies don't seem to last. With the messianic deconstruction of one status quo (such as race) arises another construction that eventually takes the place of the former as the status quo (such as class).

FIGURE 12.10 Walter Benjamin was an early member of the Frankfurt School. He started as a literary critic but contributed profoundly original ideas to the school. (credit: "Walter Benjamin for PIFAL" by Artruro Espinoza/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

The Revision of the Marxist Dialectic

The Frankfurt School amended the dialectical method to address what they saw as the shortcomings of Marx's belief that the progression of the world from capitalism to socialism was inevitable. As we can see now, a socialist future has yet to be the inevitable end point of all capitalist societies. In the hands of Frankfurt School theorists, the dialectical method became not a forecast for humanity's future, but a "down and dirty" understanding of the arbitrariness of the social situation in any given era (Horkheimer [1972] 1992). This understanding indicated that what is to come must be shaped in a real way by intentional action, as opposed to theoretical reflection. While utilizing elements of Marxist philosophies, many Frankfurt School thinkers held that social transformation was not inevitable but needed to be worked toward in conscious ways.

Jürgen Habermas's Communicative Action

The Frankfurt School sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas (b. 1929) is the most prolific figure associated with the Frankfurt School, producing work touching on a variety of topics in social life (Bronner 2011). Habermas took Max Horkheimer's place as the chair in sociology and philosophy at the Institute for Social Research in 1964.

A prized possession of many societies is a democratic right to free speech; this right was championed by Habermas. As articulated by Habermas, the emancipation of a society is fueled by more than the mere act of people saying what they feel. Rather, people must say what they feel in a public forum in which their ideas can be challenged—in a forum through which people debate freely and thus sharpen their ideas. Habermas viewed this sort of open discussion as having the potential to shape and transform how political systems are run. Habermas calls this sort of pressure by dialogue **communicative action**.

The foundation upon which communicative action rests is the ground of language. Communicative action views language not as an unchanging system that will always produce certain conclusions but as a process of

discovery that is most effective when the ideas we hold most dear are put to intense scrutiny. Language becomes the process by which humans create and agree upon the norms that are most important to them (Bronner 2011).

Habermas viewed communicative action as taking place in the public sphere. The public sphere refers both to the spaces in which people discuss the issues of the day and the collective conceptual realm of people involved in such discussions. The public sphere is a realm outside of nation and state politics where people can be persuaded to engage in some sort of political action (Asen 1999). Habermas contrasts the public sphere with the private sphere, which is the realm where the mechanisms that perpetuate society reside, such as the organizations and enterprises responsible for the production of commodities within an economy (Habermas 1989, 30).

Modern-day examples of the public sphere might be social media platforms or coffeehouses. The hip-hop element of rap is another type of public sphere, with rapper Chuck D of Public Enemy famously stating that rap is the "CNN" of Black America. Public sphere theory asserts that the best governments are the ones that take heed of the communicative action that takes place in the public sphere (Benhabib 1992).

Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy

Inspired by Frankfurt School thinkers, Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire (1921–1997) made key contributions to a school of thought known as the **critical pedagogy** movement. Freire asserted that the education provided to people living in the postcolonized world wasn't adequate for emancipation. Freire argued that the type of education needed would move toward a deconstruction of the means by which knowledge production is structured and disseminated in a colonial society. Similar to Habermas's communicative action, Freire affirmed that authentic communication must occur between teacher and student for true education to take place. True education involves asking "why" questions of the most foundational aspects of the society. This challenging of assumptions prompts the student to consider whether the foundational aspects of a society are actually beneficial or are simply accepted as normal and natural since things have "always" been this way. For Freire, you are only authentically human when you live a life that practices free critical reflection, which leads to emancipation (Freire [2000] 2012). In other words, emancipated humans not only think for themselves but also question the very ways in which society says we should think.

12.5 Postmodernism

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Outline the main tenets of postmodernism.
- Analyze structuralist theories in psychology and linguistics.
- Evaluate the post-structuralist response to structuralism.
- Explain concepts central to the thought of Derrida, Nietzsche, and Foucault.

Many modern scholars embraced the idea that the world operates according to a set of overarching universal structures. This view proposes that as we continue to progress in terms of technological, scientific, intellectual, and social advancements, we come closer to discovering universal truths about these structures. This view of progression toward truth gave rise to a school of thought known as structuralism, which is pervasive in many academic fields of study, as discussed below. **Postmodernism** departs from this way of thinking in rejecting these ideas and contending that there exists no one reality that we can be certain of and no absolute truth.

Structuralism and Post-structuralism

The philosophical battle over whether there is one nonnegotiable reality took shape in conversations around **structuralism** and post-structuralism. Structuralists historically looked to verbal language and mathematics to show that symbols cannot refer to just anything we want them to refer to. For example, most people would

say it is ridiculous to use the word *car* to refer to a dog. Rather, language and mathematics are universal systems of communication emerging from a universal structure of things. This claim sounds similar to Platonic idealism, in which the structures that ground our world are understood as intangible "forms."

CONNECTIONS

You can learn more about Plato's concept of forms in the chapter on metaphysics.

Post-structuralists argue that universal structures are abstract ideas that cannot be proven to exist. They contend that structuralists are mistaken in their understanding of the internal workings of language—or any system—as unmediated (or not influenced by the outside world). This mistake, they argue, had misled people into believing in a universal structure of things. **Post-structuralism** suggests that the meaning of things is in perpetual authorship, or is always being created and recreated. Post-structuralists dispute the claim that any universal system of relations exists. Rather, they argue that anything presented as a universal system is in fact the product of human imaginations and almost certainly reinforced by the power dynamics of a society.

One clear example of the post-structuralist critique of structuralism can be found in the debate over psychoanalysis.

Freud's Structuralism in Psychology

The theory of **psychoanalysis** is based on the idea that all humans have suppressed elements of their unconscious minds and that these elements will liberate them if they are confronted. This idea was proposed and developed by Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud (1856–1939). For Freud, psychoanalysis was not only a theory but also a method, which he used to free his patients from challenges such as depression and anxiety. In Freud's early thinking, the "unconscious" was defined as the realm in which feelings, thoughts, urges, and memories that exist outside of consciousness reside. These elements of the unconscious were understood to set the stage for conscious experience and influence the human automatically (Westen 1999). Freud later abandoned the use of the word *unconscious* (Carlson et al. 2010, 453), shifting instead to three separate terms: *id*, referring to human instincts; *superego*, indicating the enforcer of societal conventions such as cultural norms and ethics (Schacter, Gilbert, and Wegner 2011, 481); and *ego*, describing the conscious part of human thought. With these three terms, Freud proposed a universal structure of the mind.

Post-structuralist and Feminist Critiques of Psychoanalysis

Post-structuralists point out that Freud's ideas about psychoanalysis and universal structures of the mind cannot be proven. The subconscious foundations on which psychoanalysis is grounded simply cannot be observed. Some have argued that there is no substantive difference between the claims of psychoanalysts and those of shamans or other practitioners of methods of healing not grounded in empirical methods (Torrey 1986). French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995) and French psychoanalyst Felix Guattari (1930–1992) took an even harsher approach, presenting psychoanalysis as a means of reinforcing oppressive state control.

Belgian philosopher Luce Irigaray (b. 1930) and others have criticized Freud's ideas from a feminist perspective, accusing psychoanalysts of excluding women from their theories. In this view, psychoanalysis is based on a patriarchal understanding. Those taking this view point out that Freud made a number of patriarchal claims, including that sexuality and subjectivity are inseparably connected, and that he viewed women as problematic throughout his life (Zakin 2011). Yet many psychoanalytic feminists express a critical appreciation for Freud, utilizing what they find valuable in his theories and ignoring other aspects.

Ferdinand de Saussure and the Structure of Linguistics

Along with US pragmatist C. S. Pierce (1839–1914), Swiss philosopher, linguist, and semiotician Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) was responsible for creating a system of linguistic analysis known as **semiotics**. Semiotics is an analysis of how meaning is created through symbols, both linguistic and nonlinguistic. One of

the foundational tenets of Saussure's linguistic theory is the idea that language has both an abstract (*langue*) component and an experiential (*parole*) component, what we hear or see when it is used every day. A word alludes to an intangible essence represented by a sound or collection of visible symbols (Fendler 2010). This audible or visual expression has a distinct life from that which it represents. Language is a system that functions according to certain rules, which allow for some things but not others. For example, we can't say a person is walking and standing still at the same time (Nöth 1990). As an audible or visual expression, however, language is also a product of society. For example, the word *dope*, which conventionally meant narcotics, has also come to signify something that is well-done. Saussure held that there were structural laws that define how linguistic signification operated; the semiotics of Saussure and Pierce were the means of discovering these laws. Semiotics became a cornerstone of structuralism.

Wittgenstein and the Linguistic Turn

Structuralism was accompanied by what is known in philosophy as the **linguistic turn**. The term *linguistic turn* comes from Austrian philosopher Gustav Bergmann (1906–1987). It refers to philosophical movements in the Anglophone world starting in the early 20th century that privileged verifiable statements over statements that could not be verified. Since the statement "I can see clearly now" could be verified by a vision test, it would have more value than the statement "God exists," which is not verifiable (Rorty 1991, 50).

The view that language has internal continuity was championed by the early work of Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) but rejected in his later work. In later works, such as *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein concludes that language is verifiable only within its particular context. For example, the claim "God exists" may not be verifiable for an adherent of analytic philosophy (a term for the branch of philosophy concerned with statements that can be proved to be logically possible through analysis). However, the claim might be verifiable for a person who has had an experience with a particular deity or deities, as their very experience is the proof.

Key Post-structuralist Ideas about Self and Text

Associated with the thought of French philosophers Michel Foucault (1926–1984), Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995), and Roland Barthes (1915–1980) and US philosophers Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) and Judith Butler (b. 1956), among others, post-structuralism proposes new ideas about our understanding of the self and our interpretations of texts. Post-structuralism proposes that there is no such thing as a preexistent human "self" outside of its construction by society; what we call the "self" is a confluence of geographical region of birth, upbringing, social pressure, political issues, and other situational circumstances. For the post-structuralist, however, there is an experiencing entity perpetually in process, and that experiencing entity cannot be constricted to the boundaries of what we think of as the "self." Similarly emphasizing context, post-structuralists argue that the meaning intended by the author of a text is secondary to the meaning that the audience derives from their encounter with the text and that a variety of interpretations of a text are needed, even if the interpretations that are generated are conflicting.

Deconstruction

Closely related to post-structuralism is **deconstruction**. Accredited to Algerian-born French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), deconstruction aims to analyze a text to discover that which made it what it was. Derrida rejected the structuralist approach to textual analysis. In the structuralist framework, there was a focus on how a text fits into a larger framework of linguistic meaning and signifying (Barry 2002, 40). Derrida, among others, held that these structures were as arbitrary as other facets of language, such as the arbitrary decision to use "tree" to refer to a large plant with a bark, trunk, and leaves when we could have called it a "cell phone" and have procured the same symbolic use (Thiselton 2009). Derrida asserted that texts do not have a definitive meaning but rather that there are several possible and plausible interpretations. His argument was based on the assertion that interpretation could not occur in isolation. While Derrida did not assert that all meanings were acceptable, he did question why certain interpretations were held as more correct than others

(Thiselton 2009).

FIGURE 12.11 This painting of Jacques Derrida on a building in France speaks to his continued importance to contemporary thinkers. (credit: "Jacques Derrida, Painted Portrait _DDC3327" by thierry ehrmann/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

THINK LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Watch "Philosophy: Jacques Derrida (https://openstax.org/r/JacquesDerrida)" from the series *The School of Life*.

Deconstruction is defined in the video (at the 2:54 mark) as "the dismantling [of] our excessive loyalty to any idea and learning to see the aspects of the truth that might be buried in its opposite." At the 3:47 mark, the narrator notes that one of the most important ideas forwarded by Derrida was "once we begin to examine it closely, almost all of our thinking is riddled with a false, that is, unjustified and unhelpful, privileging of one thing over another." The narrator offers several examples: speech over writing, reason over passion, men over women, etc. According to Derrida, this unquestioned privileging prevents us from seeing the supposedly lesser part of the equation.

Questions:

- Can you deconstruct an idea that, to this point, you have simply accepted as correct?
- What are the merits of what Derrida called the opposing or underprivileged counterparts of this idea?
- Why do you think the underprivileged meanings have been overlooked?

Deconstruction is Auto-deconstruction

Derrida observed that social relations, which have come about through centuries of human evolution, assign meanings to things and our experience of things (Derrida 1997). Deconstruction hinged on what Derrida called "différance," the separation between the ways a thing can be conceptualized and the ways a thing can be experienced. For example, the experience that we name the "human" is not fully containable through our attempts to define the concept. However, in our reference to the many competing notions of "human," we have (perhaps unknowingly) artificially demarcated the experience, creating the appearance of the "human" as something with an essential identity.

To deconstruct a concept is to strip meaning from its supporting layers in order to make clear its complexity and instability. Derrida's idea of différance is an integral part of "auto-deconstruction," or the process by which deconstruction happens automatically (without intentional philosophical reflection). Auto-deconstruction is always present, but the human is not always attuned to see how things we see as definitive are deconstructing right before us. Auto-deconstruction could be thought of in terms of something as simple as the elements that constitute a chair. If we think about how the chair is made up, we might begin to lose sight of the idea of "chair"

and begin to see it in terms of color, material, height, length, width, contrast to other objects in the room in which it resides, etc. Whether or not we focus on the confluence of things that make up the event of the chair, this tension of différance is what provides the perception of "chair" (Derrida 1997).

Ethics in Post-structuralism

Nietzsche's Genealogy

When German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) famously declared that "God is dead," he rejected God as a basis for morality and asserted that there is no longer (and never was) any ground for morality other than the human. The removal of the notion of sure foundations for ethical behavior and human meaning can stir a sense of anxiety, a fear of living without a place of certainty (Warnock 1978). This fear and anxiety inform the existential notion of the "absurd," which is simply another way of stating that the only meaning the world has is the meaning that we give it (Crowell 2003). In this motion away from objective assertions of truth, one comes to what Nietzsche calls "the abyss," or the world without the absolute logical structures and norms that provide meaning. The abyss is the world where nothing has universal meaning; instead, everything that was once previously determined and agreed upon is subject to individual human interpretation. Without the structures of fixed ethical mandates, the world can seem a perpetual abyss of meaninglessness.

Although Nietzsche lived prior to Derrida, he engaged in a type of deconstruction that he referred to as genealogy. In *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche traces the meaning of present morals to their historical origins. For example, Nietzsche argued that the concepts we refer to as "good" and "evil" were formed in history through the linguistic transformation of the terms "nobility" and "underclass" (Nietzsche 2007, 147–148). Nietzsche held that the upper classes at one time were thought to be "noble," having characteristics that the lower classes were envious or and would want to emulate. Therefore, "noble" was considered not an ethical "good" but a practical "good." A person simply had a better life if they were part of the ruling class. Over time, the concept of "noble" took on a more ideal meaning, and the practical characteristics (e.g., reputation, access to resources, influence, etc.) became abstract virtues. Because the lower classes were envious of the upper classes, they found a theoretical framework to subvert the power of the nobility: Judeo-Christian philosophy. In Judeo-Christian philosophy, the "good" is no longer just a synonym for the nobility but a spiritual virtue and is represented by powerlessness. "Evil" is represented by strength and is a spiritual vice. Nietzsche views this reversal as one of the most tragic and dangerous tricks to happen to the human species. In his view, this system of created morality allows the weak to stifle the power of the strong and slow the progress of humanity.

FIGURE 12.12 This public statue of Friedrich Nietzsche in Naumburg, Germany expresses both his approach to life

and contemporary engagement with his ideas. (credit: "Friedrich Nietzsche Statue - Naumberg, Saxony-Anhalt, Germany" by Glen Bowman/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Foucault on Power and Knowledge

For French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926–1984), "power" at the base level is the impetus that urges one to commit any action (Lynch 2011, 19). Foucault claimed that power has been misunderstood; it has traditionally been understood as residing in a person or group, but it really is a network that exists everywhere. Because power is inescapable, everyone participates in it, with some winning and others losing.

Foucault contended that power affects the production of knowledge. He argued that Nietzsche's process of genealogy exposed the shameful origins of practices and ideas that some societies have come to hold as "natural" and "metaphysically structural," such as the inferiority of woman or the justification of slavery. For Foucault, these and other systems aren't just the way things are but are the way things have been developed to be by the powerful, for their own benefit. The disruptions promoted by critical theory are viewed as insurrections against accepted histories—disruptions that largely deal with a reimagining of how we know what we know—and understood as a weapon against oppression.

Political Movements Informed by Critical Theory

Although critical theory can seem highly abstract, it has inspired and informed concrete political movements in the 20th and 21st centuries. This section examines two of these, critical race theory and radical democracy.

Critical Race Theory

One of the most controversial applications of critical theory concerns its study of race. **Critical race theory** approaches the concept of race as a social construct and examines how race has been defined by the power structure. Within this understanding, "Whiteness" is viewed as an invented concept that institutionalizes racism and needs to be dismantled. Critical race theorists trace the idea of "Whiteness" to the late 15th century, when it began to be used to justify the dehumanization and restructuring of civilizations in the Americas by Britain, Spain, France, Germany, and Belgium. As these colonizing nations established new societies on these continents, racism was built into their institutions. Thus, for example, critical race theorists argue that racism not as an anomaly but a characteristic of the American legal system. Ian Haney López's *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* argued that racial norms in the United States are background assumptions that are legally supported and that impact the success of those socially defined by them. Critical race theory views the institutions of our society as replicating racial inequality.

The idea of institutionalized racism is not unique to critical race theory. Empirical studies, such as those carried out by W. E. B. Du Bois, have outlined the structure of institutionalized racism within communities. Critical race theories are unique in that they do not see policies that arise from these empirical studies as a solution because these policies, they argue, arise within a power structure that determines what we accept as knowledge. Instead, critical race theorists, like other branches of critical theory, turn to the philosopher, the teacher, or the student to relinquish their role as neutral observers and challenge the power structure and social institutions through dialog. Critics of this approach—and other critical theory approaches to education—worry that these programs seek to indoctrinate students in a manner that bears too close a resemblance to Maoist "self-criticism" campaigns.

Radical Democracy

"Radical democracy" can be defined as a mode of thought that allows for political difference to remain in tension and challenges both liberal and conservative ideas about government and society. According to radical democracy, the expectation of uniform belief among a society or portion of a society is opposed to the expressed and implied tenets of democracy (Kahn and Kellner 2007). If one wants freedom and equality, then disparate opinions must be allowed in the marketplace of ideas.

One strand of radical democracy is associated with Habermas's notion of deliberation as found in

communicative action. Habermas argued for deliberation, not the normalizing of ideas through peer pressure and governmental influence, as a way in which ideological conflicts can be solved. Though Habermas admitted that different contexts will quite naturally disagree over important matters, the process of deliberation was viewed as making fruitful dialogue between those with opposing viewpoints possible (Olson [2011] 2014). Another type of radical democracy drew heavily on Marxist thought, asserting that radical democracy should not be based on the rational conclusions of individuals but grounded in the needs of the community.

Summary

12.1 Enlightenment Social Theory

Enlightenment thinkers proposed that human reason, coupled with empirical study of the physical world, would lead to progress—the advancement of science and the improvement of the human condition. Kant proposed that reason alone could guide individuals to identify ethical codes. The application of reason, in this way, would usher the human race toward a moral society in which each individual could enjoy the greatest freedom. However, this work of reasoning out the moral code could not be carried out by individuals but societies over a period of generations. Comte proposed the establishment of a science of society, which he called sociology. He believed that society, like an organism in nature, could be studied empirically. In this way, social problems could be addressed, and the human race could progress.

12.2 The Marxist Solution

Unlike Enlightenment social theorists, Marxist theorists did not try to solve social problems that arose from industrialization and urbanization. Rather, they worked toward removing the economic system that they felt caused these problems, capitalism. Marx proposed an alternative to the Hegelian dialectic, called dialectical materialism. He looked to the contradictions within material, real-world phenomena as the driving force of change. Marx regarded alienation and the clash of economic interests between the bourgeoisie (capitalists) and the proletariat (workers) as the contradiction that would bring down capitalism and give rise to a classless society.

12.3 Continental Philosophy's Challenge to Enlightenment Theories

In the section dedicated to hermeneutics, or the exploration of meaning as it flows from interpreting written texts, critical theory's stressing of context was continued. The section examined the notion of historicity or the claim that meaning is not somehow prior to reading a text (perhaps in the mind of the writer) but that meaning is somehow related to and generated from both the introduction of a text and the maintenance of that same text. Meaning may indeed by plural. Ricoeur went so far as to assert that the text does not say anything in and of itself. The text articulates what we as the interpreter generate. Thus, interpretation results in endless possibilities.

12.4 The Frankfurt School

While critical theory encompasses multiple perspectives, the origin of the approach is traced to Frankfurt, Germany, in 1923. There were several commonalities among Frankfurt School thinkers. Most adopted tenets from Karl Marx's philosophy. Critical theorists sought to build upon Marx's call to free humanity from oppressive economic and cultural forces. As noted by Max Horkheimer, a plausible critical theory must explain the ills of society, identify the means by which change can occur, and give a rubric for critique and articulate reasonable goals.

Equally as important to critical theory was the liberating of philosophy itself from what was perceived as the limiting boundaries as set by the key thinkers during the Enlightenment. Critical theory dethroned the prioritization of reason and replaced it with a reciprocal acknowledgment of the importance of context and reason. Hegel's core concept of dialectical movement was also revised from an inevitable forecasting of predetermined events to a tool used to gain insight into specific historical contexts. Habermas's notion of communicative action illustrates how critical theory has stressed context over objective reasoning when searching for meaning.

12.5 Postmodernism

Within the postmodernism perspective, there is no absolute truth, and there are multiple right ways of belief. The postmodern view challenges the intellectual faith born in modernity that humanity might someday come closer to discovering universal truths.

The tension between structuralism and post-structuralism parallels the tension between modernity and postmodernity. Ferdinand de Saussure advanced a theory in which meaning was embedded within a linguistic structure but the meaning itself is expressed through multiple mechanisms. With the so-called linguistic turn in philosophy, a challenge to the existence of universal systems (structures) was launched. As noted, three post-structuralist themes were: 1) the self itself is not static but a confluence of various forces, 2) the meaning of the author was secondary to the meaning derived from the audience, and 3) interpretations, even if conflicting, were necessarily plural. Derrida's notion of deconstruction, of the need to consider the meaning accepted and the meaning obscured, followed intellectually from post-structuralism. If we deconstruct meaning, we work toward understanding the greater reasons surrounding why some interpretations were privileged and others rejected.

A "genealogy" is the historical map that traces the past origins of present meanings. Nietzsche and his radical historicism used genealogies to draw meanings in a world thought of a void of objective meanings. Michel Foucault argued that tracing genealogies can help us expose shameful origins of practices and ideologies that foster oppression. Foucault sought to expose when power was used to oppress and when it was used to harm. Knowledge, argued Foucault, once freed from oppressive conventions, ought to be used to develop the self.

Key Terms

Communicative action a term coined by Jürgen Habermas to refer to open discussion within a public forum, with the potential to change political systems and societies.

Critical pedagogy the application of the insights of critical theory to pedagogy; the belief that all education should be in service of disrupting oppressive systems of power in all their forms.

Critical race theory approaches the concept of race as a social construct and examines how race has been defined by the power structure.

Critical theory any method of assessing and challenging the power structures of societies; also refers to the various theoretical approaches to assessing and challenging power structures associated with the Institute for Social Research (Frankfurt School).

Deconstruction a method of connecting the meaning of a text to the social forces at play in its creation; a strategy for analyzing the ways in which humans create objects and essential ideas where they don't naturally exist.

Dialectic method Hegel's understanding of history as a movement created by the interaction between a thesis (an original state) and a force countering that original state (antithesis), resulting in a new and higher state (synthesis).

Dialectical materialism a revision of Hegel's dialectic method proposed by Karl Marx, which identities the contradictions within material, real-world phenomena as the driving force of historical change.

Discourse the process of making meaning out of texts and dialogues.

Frankfurt School another name for the Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt; also refers to an amalgam of thinkers affiliated with the Institute for Social Research.

Hermeneutics the study and theory of interpretation of texts, including not only a linguistic analysis but also a background investigation into how the context that gives birth to a text affects how it can and should be interpreted.

Historicity the process of verification of the events said to be historical.

Linguistic turn a term used to signify a movement beginning in the early 20th century focusing on the philosophical value of verifiable, logically consistent statements as providing objective information about the universe; associated with analytic philosophy.

Phenomenology the first-person study of how the "phenomena" of the world impact the consciousness, in contrast and response to philosophical schools of thought that start philosophical reflection with the realm of ideas.

Positivism the third stage for the development of societies proposed by August Comte, in which people reject religion and focus only on things that can be proven.

Post-structuralism views supporting the idea that the world cannot be interpreted through preexisting structures because there are no such existing structures; the idea that the universe is a confluence of forces that are given different meanings by human and nonhuman agents over time.

Postmodernism the philosophical perspective that there is no absolute truth to the universe, leaving no grand objective narratives to categorize and structure the world (as in modernism) but everything to individual interpretation; the idea that truth is perspective.

Psychoanalysis the attempt to cure mental illnesses by uncovering the unconscious elements that are said to be the foundation of human behavior.

Self-criticism term for a method of public self-analysis proposed by Mao Tse-Tung as a means to achieve personal and societal improvement.

Semiotics an analysis of how meaning is created through symbols, both linguistic and nonlinguistic.

Structuralism the belief that the universe has a certain objective structure to it and that language indicates this structure; the belief that in order to understand individual parts of the universe, one must understand their place in the overarching structure of things.

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Review Questions

12.1 Enlightenment Social Theory

1. How did Enlightenment thinkers propose that societies would accumulate knowledge?
2. What role did reason play in Kant's belief in ethical progress?

12.2 The Marxist Solution

3. How did Marx feel that the social problems of industrialization and urbanization should be addressed?

12.3 Continental Philosophy's Challenge to Enlightenment Theories

4. What is hermeneutics?
5. What is meant by historicity?
6. What did philosopher Paul Ricoeur mean by "discourse?"?

12.4 The Frankfurt School

7. According to Max Horkheimer, what are the three distinguishing marks of a plausible critical theory?
8. In what way did critical theory reject Kant?
9. How did Habermas define communicative action?

12.5 Postmodernism

10. How does postmodernity differ from modernity?
11. Was Ferdinand de Saussure a structuralist or a post-structuralist? Why did you answer as you did?

12. What did Jacques Derrida mean by “deconstruction”?

13. On what grounds has psychoanalysis been criticized?

14. What is meant by the term *genealogy* as used by Foucault?

15. What was the importance of genealogy for Foucault?

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