

TRANSCRIPT

Short Lectures on Ethics

Lecture 1

Definitions of Morality, Ethics, Goodness, Types of Judgments, Religion and Ethics

My name is David Keller. I love doing philosophy, especially thinking about ethics. As such, I have written and taped a series of short lectures on ethics aimed at college students, or anyone interested in studying ethical theory in the Western intellectual tradition. I especially hope to show how the study of philosophical ethics is directly pertinent to everyday life, in your personal relationships, in your job, and as a citizen in a democracy. Most importantly, though, I hope to show how studying ethics is a whole lot of fun.

First, let's define ethics. In philosophy, we define ethics as the philosophical study of morality. Now there are several important things to notice in this definition. One is that in philosophy, "ethics" and "morality" are not directly equivalent. In everyday conversation, we often use the terms interchangeably, but in philosophy we make a distinction between the two. Let's define "morality" in greater precision. Morality, as I define it, is the behavior of making moral judgments or value judgments regarding how best to live one's life. This presupposes that each one of us, as moral agents, has free will. In other words, morality denies determinism, the determinism that is common to the psychology of Sigmund Freud, for example. Morality presupposes that we are free agents, capable of making value judgments about how best to live our lives, and that we are not causal machines. Value judgments differ from ordinary judgments of preference, such as the spiciness of your food or the color of your clothing. The value judgments of morality differ from the judgments of mere preference because they include perceptions of goodness and conceptions of rightness. And they presuppose a class of beings worthy of moral considerability. And morality also presupposes a concept of virtue.

Consider goodness for a moment. All moral judgments presuppose some conception of a highest moral good. This could be obedience to God. It could be acting in accordance to duty. It could be realizing one's individual potential. It could be affirming relationships with one another based on care and empathy. It could also be maximizing a collective happiness. We all live our lives in accordance to one or more of these conceptions of goodness. Moral judgments also presuppose a class of beings worthy of moral considerability. This is what I mean. In the Western intellectual tradition, ethics has typically focused on human beings, and human beings only, as those beings worthy of moral considerability. But beings worthy of moral considerability could also be beings capable of suffering—higher mammals, the primates, and dogs, and cats, and goats, and beings that have a high degree of sentience, for example. Some philosophers have argued that all living beings are worthy of moral considerability, not just human beings and not just animals capable of suffering. Some philosophers have gone so far as to argue that entire ecosystems are worthy of moral considerability. In all of these examples, we have different notions of a class of beings worthy of moral considerability, ranging from a very small class of beings, human beings, expanding outward to entire ecosystems. The point being, in ethics, in moral philosophy, there are different conceptions of what types of being count in moral calculations.

Moral judgments also presuppose virtue, that we as moral agents are capable of affirming moral goodness by having virtuous character. Now let's turn for a moment and consider the relationship of morality to human nature. The proclivity or the propensity to make moral judgments, I argue, is built into human nature, into the very constitution of our being. One wondrous characteristic that distinguishes us from other animals is this capacity to make moral judgments. The German philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote, "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" (Critique of Practical Reason). Here Immanuel Kant is affirming the fact that there is something about making moral judgments, making value

judgments about how best to live our lives, that is intrinsic to us as human beings, and it is part of what makes us human.

We, in fact, cannot refrain, as hard as we might try, from making moral judgments. Imagine that tomorrow morning you wake up and laying in bed, you decide, "I am not going to make any value judgments today. I am not going to make any moral judgments. I am not going to judge the character of my friends and my family. I am not going to judge the actions of strangers. I am going to be completely amoral today in the way I live my life." I guarantee that you will fail by noon. By lunchtime, you will have judged the character of your friends, your family, your peers, your colleagues, and even strangers. In fact, as human beings, it is impossible for us not to make moral judgments. The French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre wrote on this topic, "In one sense choice is possible, but what is not possible is not to choose. I can always choose, but I ought to know that if I do not choose, I am still choosing" ("Existentialism Is a Humanism"). What Sartre is saying here is if you choose not to make any moral judgments, if you choose not to make any value judgments, you are still choosing, and hence you have still made a moral judgment. The lesson here is that as much as we may not like it, we are saddled with the responsibility as human beings to make moral judgments about the character and actions of our fellow beings. It is part of what it means to be human.

This saddles us with a huge responsibility. With the capacity to make moral judgments comes the responsibility to those beings worthy of moral consideration. So here the fact that we cannot escape making moral judgments brings us back to the topic of what beings are worthy of moral consideration, have moral consideration, and the fact that we have duties. We have some kind of moral responsibility to those beings that demand our respect. This means that we have to come up with some criterion by which we distinguish beings worthy of moral consideration from beings not.

Imagine that you are building a sidewalk from your front door to the street, and you need to decide whether to use sandstone or limestone. The stone is going to be cut, dramatically altered, in its physical constitution. But choosing the kind of stone to use, whether it is sandstone or limestone, is not a moral judgment. Why? Because the sandstone and the limestone are not beings worthy of moral consideration, of moral consideration. If a being is worthy of moral consideration, we have the responsibility as moral agents to not incur harm, or to even help.

Suppose you are going to visit your elderly grandmother. Your elderly grandmother has a lot of time to think about her grandchildren, and as such, she worries a great deal about them, and their lives, and whether they are happy, and whether they are achieving their goals. And you realize that if you instill any seed of worry in your grandmother's mind, she is going to spend hours, and days, and weeks worrying about you and your life. The best possible thing for your grandmother would be to hear from you that your life is going great, that it couldn't be better. And it would be best if you did not reveal your doubts about graduate school, or your doubts about medical school, or your rocky, turbulent relationship with your boyfriend or your girlfriend, or your mounting credit card debt. Your grandmother is the kind of being that is capable of being harmed or helped by your actions. Your grandmother is worthy of moral consideration in fundamental, significant ways that the sandstone or the limestone is not. You, with regard to your grandmother, and unlike the situation about making the stone walkway from the front door to the street, are in a moral situation. You need to decide whether to tell your grandmother with full disclosure the problems in your life, or whether to maybe not lie, but not be completely forthright with the truth, because your actions can affect her wellbeing. You are in a moral situation. You have to decide how best to live your life as a moral agent, what decision is best for your grandmother and you as a moral agent. Most situations that we as moral agents confront in our daily lives are of this nature. They are tough moral problems.

There is another class of moral problems that philosophers call dilemmas. These are much more pointed in the conflict and the decisions that you have to make. A dilemma is

a situation in which you have two mutually exclusive moral duties or moral responsibilities that are not both actualizable. You cannot accomplish one as well as the other. If you do one thing, you automatically fail at doing the other. That is an ethical dilemma. To illustrate an ethical dilemma, imagine a nation at war. An enemy has captured both a high-ranking military officer and a civilian. The high ranking military officer knows the location of a nuclear-armed submarine which, when used, could turn the tide of the war, resulting in defeat of the enemy and victory for the captured officer's country. The enemy also has captured a civilian of the same nationality of the officer, and the enemy threatens to torture the civilian in the most gruesome way imaginable unless the officer discloses the location of the nuclear submarine. The officer is in a dilemma. The officer presumably has a responsibility not just to the civilian of his or her own country, but to the citizens back home that might be attacked by the enemy unless the nuclear submarine is used. The officer cannot actualize both his or her duty to the civilian and the citizens back home. The officer is in a dilemma. This is a much more pointed situation about tough moral situations where it is clear what to do, but difficult, like a politician admitting in public that he or she has done something embarrassing. The military officer faces a dilemma because both duties are not fulfillable.

By way of review, we have decided that ethics is the philosophical study of morality. Morality is some sort of behavior that is embedded in the human constitution, that morality involves making value judgments about how best to live one's life, and that these kinds of value judgments differ from judgments of ordinary preference, which are not moral judgments. As a moral agent stumbling through your everyday life, as I have argued, you are going to have to make moral judgments one way or another. There are different ways of making moral judgments. One way is to simply flip a coin. Heads, tell Grandma the truth; tails, do not engage in full disclosure about your life. Or you could try for a mystical experience. You could go out into the wilderness, into the desert, dance around a fire, fast, and hope for some kind of a vision. You could also use your gut instincts, which is what many of us do much of the time, just react without thinking in a situation, using intuition and gut instinct. More commonly, you could employ some kind of religious faith. You could try to determine what religious authority, be that scripture, or religious leaders, would have to say about the situation that you are in. Or, you could employ reason, the tools of rationality. As I will argue in the next lecture, this is the method of ethics.

The last two options, the use of faith and the use of reason, are distinctive human traits, and the two primary sources of moral insight. As such, let's look closer at the relationship between faith and reason. Twenty-five centuries ago, Plato posed the question in the person of Socrates about the relationship of religion and ethics. Plato wrote, through the person of Socrates, a dialogue called the Euthypro. Socrates asks the question, "Is something good because the gods will it? Or do the gods will it because it is good?" There is a huge difference. Either actions are wrong only because of a divine intentionality, or actions are wrong, independently of any divine will, in and of themselves. In other words, either ethics is grounded only in a supernatural being or beings, or there are separate grounds for determining whether things are right or wrong. For example, is torturing babies wrong only because of a divine mandate against torturing babies, or is torturing babies wrong in and of itself, independently of divine will? And it just might happen that divine will is consistent with the mandate against torturing babies, but is not the reason why torturing babies is wrong morally.

One of the most prominent theories in the Western intellectual theory, Divine Command Theory, represents the former alternative. That is, all morality is grounded in religion. The Ten Commandments is one example of Divine Command Theory. That is that certain prohibitions and certain mandates on human action derive their authority from divine will. In Divine Command Theory, there would be no morality without God. Interestingly, though, the Bible itself contradicts Divine Command Theory. In Genesis Chapter 3 Verses 5 and 22, we learn that moral awareness was brought about by eating the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge, and that this knowledge is passed down

from generation to generation. If this is the case, that means that moral awareness, our moral consciousness, is a natural phenomenon, not supernatural. In other words, something about moral awareness, moral consciousness, that thing that is imbedded into human nature, derives itself from our natural constitution, from the natural world, not a supernatural source. In that sense, Divine Command Theory is not an adequate representation or an adequate explanation of our moral capacities.

A much more promising connection between religion and reason in the Western intellectual tradition is known as Natural Law Theory. This is the theory described by prominent Catholic theologians, such as St. Thomas Aquinas. The assumption of Natural Law Theory is that God gave us reason for a reason, and that reason is to make moral judgments correctly. In this interpretation of the connection between ethics and religion, the purpose of reason is to interpret divine will within the context of the human condition and act appropriately. If, using reason, a human action (like the use of violence) is consistent with divine will, it is ethical. If it is not, it is unethical. In this way, using the model of Natural Law Theory, moral judgments inspired by faith employ the tools of reason, but can never run contrary to reason.

So we have seen how in the Western intellectual tradition there are many points of contact between religion and ethics, between faith and reason, but they are not coextensive. There is some difference between the approach to making moral judgments based on faith and the approach to making moral judgments based on reason. And we will flesh out these nuances in much greater detail in the next lecture. Before we move on to the next lecture, we should pay a little attention to the connection between ethics and law. A common misconception is that ethics and the law are coextensive, that if something is illegal, it is unethical, and if something is unethical, it must be illegal. This, of course, can be proven to be false through many counter instances, such as slavery, the inability of women to vote in the Western tradition, and other examples. If ethics and law were coextensive, then the law would never be unethical. But that has proven to be false through the course of human history. Sometimes we as citizens must push for legal changes because the law is unethical. And this, of course, is the foundation of the civil disobedience of Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, and Henry David Thoreau—the idea that because law and ethics do not perfectly integrate, sometimes we have to push the limits of the law to improve the ethics of the law.

So, in the short lecture today, we have decided that ethics is the philosophical study of morality, and that morality is based in the human condition, in our human constitution, and as much as we may not like, or enjoy, or want the responsibility of being moral agents, we cannot avoid it. And therefore we have to make moral judgments in one way or another. We can guess, we can flip a coin, we can go for mystical experience, we can defer to religious authority, or we can use the tools of reason. Using the tools of reason to make moral judgments is the method of ethics, and that will be the starting point of the next lecture. Thank you.

Lecture 2

Ethics in Action: Socrates Imprisoned

My name is David Keller. In the last lecture we defined ethics as the philosophical study of morality, and morality is the propensity in human nature of making moral judgments about how best to live one's life. The making of moral judgments includes judging the character of yourself and others, as well as actions of yourself and others. Now last time we decided there are many different ways of making moral judgments. You can flip a coin, you can go for mystical experience, you can defer to precepts of religion, or you can use the tools of reason. Using the tools of reason is the method of ethics. Now the focus of this series of short lectures on ethics is the Western intellectual tradition. Before we move on and define ethics in greater detail, let's get clear in our minds what we mean by the Western tradition. The Western tradition is that cultural tradition stemming back to the Hebrews and the Greeks, each representing faith on one hand and reason on the other. These two great traditions came together in the Roman Empire and Roman culture which laid the groundwork for the rise

of Christianity and European civilization and its offshoots. So the focus of our attention here today is the Western intellectual tradition, and how the Western tradition has employed the use of the tools of reason to make moral judgments. And that is ethics.

If we say that making moral judgments using the tools of reason and rationality is ethics, we need to understand in greater detail what it means to be rational. What does it mean to be reasonable? I offer to you four criteria. The first criterion for rationality is comprehensiveness. For a theory to meet the criterion of rationality, it should include all of the relevant information, or at least not exclude anything obvious. For example, a theory that claimed that all sentient life is morally valuable, but failed to make any mention of non-human animals, those animals such as primates and mammals that appear to be sentient, could not be considered a comprehensive theory, because it makes claims about sentience but excludes critical considerations about sentient life. Such a theory would not be considered comprehensive, and hence not rational.

Secondly, theories which are considered to be rational should be coherent. The theory must link all related concepts into a unified whole in a systematic and integrated way. For example, if you were to give me an argument about gun rights using an intermixture of constitutional law and astrology, I would not consider your theory to be coherent, because astrology and constitutional law cannot be integrated into a unified whole, a unified theory. Your theory would fall short of the criterion of coherence.

Thirdly, theories that are rational should be consistent. That is, they should not be logically contradictory. For example, an argument that claimed that all human life, including potential human life, is intrinsically valuable, and that therefore women who have abortions should receive the death penalty, could not be considered consistent. That theory would be logically contradictory. That argument was made in a class of mine, incidentally. It is not one that I made up. It is logically contradictory, because it holds human life to be valuable, but then denigrates human life by upholding the death penalty in an inconsistent way.

Fourthly, rational theories should be adequate. That is, they should be supported by empirical evidence. They should connect to the world somehow. They should not just be abstract conceptual systems, but have connection with the world we live in and the world we see in our everyday lives. For example, the claim that preemptive war is prudent foreign policy ought to provide some concrete examples of how this policy is more adequate than détente, and how détente has failed in ways in which preemptive war succeeds. In other words, to be convinced by a hypothesis, all of us want some concrete evidence to back it up. And that is captured by the criterion of adequacy.

Now, I have argued that we all make moral judgments, and that ethics is that method which employs the tools of reason as I have captured here with the four criteria. I would like to provide you now with an example of ethics in action in the person of Socrates. Socrates, at least depicted by Plato, is an exemplar in reasoning logically about moral problems and arriving at conclusions which guide his actions. Socrates accomplished this in two ways. First, he made himself the object of rational inquiry. The philosophers before Socrates typically were concerned with the natural world. They wondered about the constitution of nature, what natural processes consisted of. Their attention was generally focused outward at the world—all of them, all of the pre-Socratic philosophers. We call them nature philosophers, in a way. They were metaphysicians. Socrates changed the emphasis of rational inquiry of philosophy by turning the object of inquiry back from the world onto himself. And in this way, he refocused philosophy from the outer world onto himself. That is why we call him the first moral philosopher, the first ethicist of the Western intellectual tradition.

After recounting the trial of Socrates and Socrates' prosaic defense of himself in a dialogue called the "Apology"—Socrates was brought to trial for allegedly corrupting the youth of Athens and inventing divinities of gods on his own. After he was found

guilty on those charges and sent to prison to await his death sentence, Plato pictures Socrates wondering whether he should escape, whether he should take the advice of his good friend, Crito, and flee Athens. In this dialogue, the "Crito," Plato gives us an excellent example of ethics in action, of how one can make moral judgments using the tools of reason which meet the four criteria that I have just outlined. In the "Crito," Socrates is in prison. It is before dawn. Crito comes to Socrates, pleading with him to escape, because on that very day, he will be put to death. He will be forced to drink the hemlock. Crito gives, in an emotional outpouring, many different reasons why Socrates should escape. Socrates will be harming himself by playing into the hands of his enemies, making his enemies victorious. Socrates will be deserting his own sons, and hence be a poor father. It would be more courageous and manly to escape. Crito and others will lose a friend if Socrates is put to death. And most prominently, there will be adverse public opinion. The people of Athens will assume that Crito and others were too cheap to bribe the guards and facilitate Socrates' escape, and they will be labeled lousy friends.

In his response to Crito, Socrates says, you are my good friend, Crito. I appreciate your concern, but in questions of ethics. In questions of moral judgment, one ought to reason through the situation carefully and not act on gut emotion or gut instinct. And so Socrates, first and foremost, decides whether it is ok in situations of ethics, in moral situations, to react to public opinion, to what others think. Socrates gives an argument which briefly is this. He says to Crito that an athlete in training, an athlete preparing for the Olympics, could either take the advice of the masses, of all one's friends and all one's family, or the advice of a very small number of people, or perhaps only one person, the expert, the coach. Socrates asks Crito if you are an athlete in training, do you take the advice of the many, or the advice of the few, the experts. The conclusion is that it is better to take the advice of the expert, the coach, because taking the advice of the many, the friends and the family, and everyone else that is very supportive of you getting to the Olympics, might result in damaging your body. Your friends and family might give you the advice to train eight hours a day, and run, and swim, and do pushups, and gymnastics, and all kinds of stuff, which might result in damaging your body—pulling a ligament, straining a muscle, damaging cartilage or something. Where as a coach is an expert in the field of athletic training and knows that you need to train in a systematic and methodical way to achieve your full potential. The conclusion of this argument is that an athlete in training should listen to the advice of the expert, not the non-expert or the masses. I forgot one critical thing. Socrates draws an analogy between the body and the soul. And Socrates says that questions of ethics are just like an athlete in training, except for what is in question is the health of the soul, not the health of the body. And just as we as athletes in training want to listen the experts and not the masses, in questions of ethics, which affect the health of our soul, we also need to listen to the experts, not the masses. And the question of escape from prison, repudiating the verdict of the jury, is a moral question. It is a moral issue. The outcome of making the right or wrong decision could be damaging the soul or helping the soul.

So since Socrates should not listen to the advice of the masses, and he therefore rejects Crito's notion that adverse public opinion in this situation has any relevance at all, the question becomes who is the expert in ethics? Who should Socrates go to to decide whether he should escape from prison or stay in prison, face his death sentence, and die? Socrates initially got himself into trouble by engaging in conversation in the public marketplace with some of the most powerful and prominent people of Athens on questions of ethics, piety, courage, beauty, truth, and so on. And he concluded that many of the people who claimed to have knowledge of these things really didn't, and that in questions of ethics, there was no one in Athens that really was more wise than he was, because he at least was wise in his own ignorance. Therefore Socrates is the expert in ethics, if there is one. So there is no one that he can go to and ask what the right thing to do in this situation is. He has to figure it out for himself. So he says to Crito, "Crito, I appreciate your concern, but here we cannot defer to the opinion of the masses. We, you and I, have to reason through this ourselves. We need to figure out what the right thing for me to do is. I cannot just react unthinkingly to the opinion of the masses. I have to figure out what to do myself." The then turns to

Crito and says, "Crito, you and I have been engaged in conversations for many years, and in all these conversations we have arrived at two conclusions. They are that one ought to never do harm, and one ought to abide by one's agreements, provided they are just." And Socrates looks to Crito and says, "Given the fact that these have been our two paramount conclusions over innumerable conversations over many years, it is obvious what I should do." And Crito says, "I am upset, Socrates. It is not clear in my mind. I am not sure what you are getting at."

So Socrates, to make it more clear to Crito, gives us what is known by philosophers as the Speech of the Laws of Athens, where he fleshes out the nuances of these two premises. Building on the fundamental assumptions that one ought to never do harm, and one ought to abide by one's agreements, provided they are just, Socrates points out through the Speech of the Laws of Athens that Socrates has tacitly agreed to live by the laws of Athens by not leaving. He had the free will to march outside of the city walls and move down to Sparta or any other town city-state in Athens, but he never chose to do that. Socrates, in fact, loved living Athens and chose to stay. So through his actions, he tacitly consented to live by the laws of Athens. Socrates says that in fact he owes his very existence to the laws, because it was under the laws, under the social framework that that laws provided that his parents married, he was educated, and he became a philosopher. And so he owes a lot of his being, his existence, to the laws of Athens by providing the social structure within which he grew up.

Given this, Socrates is within the scope of the law's authority. And by repudiating the verdict, by ignoring the law, he has the capacity to injure or damage the law by undermining its very authority. What is important to notice here is that Plato is not implying that is it the particular verdict that is in question here, the verdict being corrupting the youth and inventing divinities of one's own. Rather it is the authority of the laws themselves that is in question. If Socrates by example ignores the verdict, flees Athens, he undermines the authority of the law and possibly damages the social structure within which the laws give order and stability to the civil society of Athens. The laws for Plato provide the very social structure through which the citizens live as moral agents, and so on. So Socrates concludes that if he escapes, he incurs a form of harm which repudiates the first fundamental premise. And he has agreed to live by the laws of Athens by his actions, and by leaving he would repudiate or deny the validity of the second premise that one ought to abide by one's agreements, provided they are just.

Socrates concludes that he ought not to escape because if he does so, he will go back on his agreement to live by the laws and Athens, and he will harm the social structure of Athens, which concretely might harm his family and his friends. And therefore it is unethical for him to leave Athens, flee his death sentence, as ludicrous as it may be, because he will be incurring harm and going against his agreements. So at the end of the "Crito," Socrates concludes if I escape, my body will benefit, but my soul will be harmed. I will have done something unethical. I will have repudiated fundamental moral principles based on reason, and my soul, my moral integrity, my very being, my humanness, will suffer. If I stay and face my death sentence, my body will be harmed, I will die, but my soul will remain intact with full integrity, and I will have done the right thing. I will have done the ethical thing. And so Socrates, because the soul is more important to the body in terms of what it means to be human, it is much more important to benefit the soul than to benefit the body. The conclusion is obvious in Socrates' mind. As absurd as the verdict was, and as absurd as the court trial was, as recounted in the "Apology", nonetheless, Socrates ought not to escape.

Now I claimed that Socrates as depicted by Plato in the "Crito" represents ethics in action. That is, using the tools of reason and rationality as applied to moral problems. Let's go through quickly each one of my four criteria and see how this is so. Socrates demonstrates ethics in action because his reasoning is comprehensive. He carefully and methodically catalogues and itemizes the various kinds of harms that can be done by his alternative actions, to his soul, to his body, to his friends, to his family, to the laws, to the social structure. His reasoning is impressively

comprehensive and sweeping. He doesn't seem to leave any relevant information out, given the situation at hand.

Secondly, his reasoning is coherent. The parts of his argument are all connected by the theme of harm and upholding one's promises. So the parts of the argument hang together. They cohere into a unified and integrated whole.

Thirdly, his reasoning is consistent. In fact, consistency is the backbone of the argument in the "Crito," and it is the thing that makes it so impressive. He has promised to live according to the laws of Athens. He will harm the body if he stays and faces his death sentence, but he will not harm his soul. And he addresses the necessity of accepting the verdict, dubious as it is, because it is the authority of the laws that are in question, not the verdict itself. So his reasoning is consistent throughout, leading to a conclusion that we may not suspect, but nonetheless, he lives by his actions. He is consistent.

Lastly, his reasoning is adequate. It addresses the concrete outcomes of alternative actions and varying degrees of harm to the city-state, the social structure, to his friends, his family, and himself. And so he addresses every empirical concrete factor that seems to be relevant to the situation at hand.

If you are like me, at first reading of the Crito, you react that Socrates was wrong, that he should escape, given the ludicrous nature of the charges. But upon careful analysis, and a careful reading of the "Crito," and a careful consideration of the line of argumentation, we see the brilliance of his reasoning. In this way, Socrates epitomizes the philosophical approach to the study of morality that is ethics. Next time, in lecture three, we will turn to different kinds of ethical theories in the Western intellectual tradition and distinguish between what philosophers call normative ethics, that is the actual ethical theories themselves, and metaethics, which are questions about those ethical theories. Thank you.

Lecture 3

Types of Ethical Theories

My name is David Keller. Over the last two lectures we defined ethics as a philosophical study of morality using the tools of rationality. In this episode I would like to take a closer look at ethical theory itself in the Western intellectual tradition before we move on and look at some of the theories by actual philosophers. Now to understand ethics in the Western intellectual tradition, we need to distinguish between normative ethics and metaethics. Normative ethics are what philosophers refer to as the actual ethical theories themselves, where metaethics is the study of theories about the ethical theories. Now this sounds rather nebulous and convoluted, but it is really not. Again, normative ethics are the actual ethical theories themselves, and metaethics are questions about those theories.

We can understand this distinction easily if we draw analogy with religion. We all know that around the world there are specific religions practiced by specific groups of people. We have a wide variety of animistic religions throughout the world. We have Zoroastrianism from Persia. We have Jainism and Hinduism from India. We have Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Christianity, and a wide variety of other religions. All of these religions are specific religions with doctrine and structures of authoritarian leadership, and so on and so forth. We can ask questions about these specific religions, how people practice them in their daily lives, what scriptures they live by, what religious authorities they defer to, so on and so forth. These actual religions would be equivalent in philosophy to normative ethics, the actual ethical theories themselves, the actual religions themselves.

Now in religion, aside from asking questions about specific religions and the doctrines of those religions, and the power structures of those religions, we can ask general

questions about religion itself, such as: Can there only be one true religion, or is it possible that there can be more than one true religion? Here we have a meta-religious question. We are not asking a question about how Zoroastrians, or Jains, or Buddhists, or Jews practice their religion in their everyday lives. We are asking general, sweeping, universal question about religion itself, so this would be a meta-religious question. Again, this is similar to ethics and metaethics. We can ask questions about specific ethical theories, but we can also ask questions about those theories in general. The paramount metaethical question is, "Are there universal, objective standards by which people should live their lives which transcend culture, which transcend the peculiarities of place and time? Or are normative standards, are moral standards rooted in culture, and different for different persons in different places at different times?"

The distinction between specific religions and meta-religious questions parallels the distinction in philosophy between normative ethics and metaethics. We can ask questions about the particular ethical theories themselves, but we can ask general questions about all ethical theories. The paramount metaethical question is philosophy is, "Are there objective moral standards which transcend culture, which transcend all people, in all places, at all times? Or, on the other hand, are moral standards imbedded in culture, and are they different for different peoples in different places at different times?" This is the metaethical question of objectivism versus realism. Metaethical objectivism holds that there is one and only one correct answer about how people should act, and that answer is never contingent upon the specifics of place, or time, or culture. In other words, for the metaethical objectivist, moral standards are never relative to culture, but transcend culture and are the same for all people at all places at all times. The metaethical relativist, on the other hand, holds that moral standards change from culture to culture, from place to place, from time to time, and they vary. And there are no objective standards, morally speaking. You have heard the phrase. "When in Rome, do what the Romans do." This reflects metaethical relativism.

Now, in American culture, the metaethical question between objectivism on one hand and relativism on the other is a tough question for us. We are a pluralistic culture, proud of our multiculturalism. We are proud to be a melting pot of many different cultural influences from around the world. And so on that level, we attempt to be tolerant of different cultures and different moral practices. On the other hand, Americans are very judgmental when it comes to political regimes which we deem to be totalitarian and despotic. So on one hand we take pride in tolerance, but on the other hand we also take pride in being judgmental and upholding what we consider to be objective moral standards.

We experience the tension between relativism and objectivism in our everyday lives, especially when we meet people from different cultures as we march through our daily lives. Consider the following example. Let's say that you live in Queens, and down the hall in your apartment building is a family from Sudan. The parents have immigrated from Sudan and are very eager to raise their children and assimilate their children into American culture, but on the other hand, like all immigrant parents, are eager to retain some of the cultural heritage that they have brought with them from Sudan. And you have taken up the practice of having afternoon tea with the mother of the family. And one day over tea, you begin talking about something that you learned about in college. And that is the practice of clitorrectomy. Clitorrectomy is a partial female circumcision. At minimum, it requires the surgical removal of part of the female external genitalia. So you are not surprised to hear that this family comes from a tradition that practices clitorrectomy, but what you are shocked to hear is that this family intends to carry out this ritual, this African ritual, on their twelve-year-old daughter. You protest that doing so will permanently inhibit this girl from enjoying the full pleasures of sex. The mother retorts, "You just don't understand our culture. You don't understand that this ritual is very important to us, and it ensures the purity of our daughter for marriage by dissuading her from engaging in premarital sex." She voluntarily admits that while the practice is not explicitly mentioned in the Koran, it has been a common practice in indigenous African tribes for centuries,

perhaps millennia. After a very heated and uncomfortable discussion, you walk down the hall, telling yourself that you are adamantly opposed to this from your own cultural tradition as an American, but that you are sensitive to the fact that this is their tradition, and that if you lived in Khartoum rather than Queens, perhaps it wouldn't even seem to be that serious of an issue. But then it also occurs to you that clitorrectomy is illegal in the United States under the law, and that if you report the intentions of the family to a social worker, you are likely to be able to save this girl from this procedure which you consider tantamount to mutilation. Well, here we have a rather pointed example between relativism and objectivism. On one hand, you want to be judgmental of the practice. You believe that the fundamental bodily integrity of this young girl might be compromised permanently. On the other hand, part of yourself wants to be tolerant and understanding of this Muslim African tradition, even though it is not your own tradition. We have this tension between relativism and objectivism that runs throughout American culture.

Is there a solution to this tension? For me, I have found a way to resolve it by appealing to a universal doctrine of human rights. This holds that every human individual has the right to a bodily integrity, and not to have the integrity of their personhood violated, both in terms of body and psychologically. Things that mar people for life, either mentally or physically, would be unethical. On this model that I have adopted as a way to adjudicate the conflict between relativism and objectivism, it is ok for us to be tolerant of practices, such as birthing rituals, and marriage rituals, and funeral rituals which do not violate fundamental human rights. And in terms of these sorts of practices that are rooted in culture, it is ok to be tolerant and accepting of them. However, when there are practice which cross the line and violate fundamental human rights, violate the bodily integrity of people or cause psychological and emotional harm, then we have the right to be judgmental and we have the right to practice ethical objectivism, and to level our judgment against those practices and say that those practices are unethical and are not to be tolerated. So here, by appealing to universal human rights, I think we have a nice way of drawing a line between relativism on one hand and objectivism on the other hand, and providing a criterion by which we can decide to be tolerant of cultural practices or intolerant and judgmental. That ethical relativism and objectivism is the premier metaethical question in philosophy.

Let's move on and briefly consider normative ethics. Normative ethics, if we continue our analogy with religion, are the actual ethical theories themselves. In philosophy, we divide normative ethics into two broad categories: rule ethics and virtue ethics. Virtue ethics, also known as character ethics, focuses on the personality, the disposition, the character of the morally good, that is virtuous, person. Virtue ethics tends to be rather flexible in its theoretical construction. It allows for role models—the Buddha, or Christ, or Mohammed, or Martin Luther King, or my personal favorite, Socrates. Typically on the virtue ethics approach, one asks the question, "What would 'X' do in this situation? What would in my role model do in this situation?" And then you try to pattern your actions, your life, after the role model, the role model that is held up to be an exemplar of virtue. Virtue ethics is the approach to normative ethics which is typical of ancient Greek, and Roman, and Christian, and other religions traditions, and also the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who we will look at in a few lectures from now.

On the other hand, philosophers have taken a different approach to normative ethics. This is the rule ethic approach. Instead of asking the question, "What would 'X' do in this particular situation?" normative ethics is imperative in its character. It says, "Do 'X'." It is much more rigid in this way than virtue ethics. And it is typical of modern philosophers such as John Stuart Mill and Immanuel Kant who we will also consider in subsequent lectures. So within normative ethics, we have virtue ethics and rule ethics, and within the context of these lectures, Plato, and Augustine, and Nietzsche, and feminist moral psychologist Carol Gilligan will be examples of virtue ethics, which we will look at in future lectures. And then on the other hand, we have rule ethics. And we will be looking at the utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill and the

deontology of Immanuel Kant as examples of rule ethics.

As good philosophers, we want to know which approach to normative ethics is primary. Is virtue ethics or rule ethics more foundational, more fundamental? It is rules? Are rules really the essential way to approach the study of moral philosophy? The problem with saying that rules are the primary way of studying moral philosophy is that there is no reason to adhere to rules unless you have the character, the disposition, the personality to do so. In other words, there is no reason to stick to rules unless you are virtuous. Is virtue ethics, on the other hand, the primary, the essential, the foundational, the fundamental approach to ethics? The problem with asserting that virtue ethics is primary is that it is hard to know which virtues to cultivate in people and children, for example, without having some guidelines, some principles or rules to go by. My answer is that rule and virtue ethics seem to be complimentary aspects of the philosophical study of morality. The human condition is so diverse and has so many shades of gray that both rule ethics and virtue ethics tell us something about how we ought to best live our lives, and are useful mechanisms by which to study moral philosophy. Their distinction is useful for academic purposes, in other words. But when it comes to daily concrete human lives, both approaches seem to be important and relevant.

Let's consider virtue ethics in a little greater detail. As I alluded to in the first lecture, all ethical theories presuppose some notion of moral goodness. In these lectures, we will look at three virtue ethics which presuppose rather radically different notions or concepts of ultimate moral goodness. In the next lecture we will look at the moral philosophy of the great Christian philosopher St. Augustine. And for Augustine, the highest moral good is obedience to God, and virtuous character is the manifestation of such obedience. We will then turn to another virtue ethicist, but essentially opposite from Augustine, Friedrich Nietzsche. And for Nietzsche, the manifestation of virtuous or good character is not obedience to God or any supernatural being, or even the constrictions of society, but rather to exercise one's individualism, one's will to power, to become the person one has the potential of becoming. At the very end of these lectures we will return to the moral philosophy of the psychologist Carol Gilligan, who argues that the exercising of care and empathy in affirming interpersonal relationships is a manifestation of virtuous character.

In terms of rule ethics, we will look at two main varieties, consequentialism and non-consequentialism. Consequentialism is the rule ethics, the normative rule ethics, that asserts that you should judge alternative actions by the results they produce. Different notions of moral good when interpreted in terms of consequentialism produce different theories. The most important consequentialistic theory in the Western intellectual tradition is that of the English philosophers Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. For them, for Bentham and Mill, the highest moral good is pleasure or happiness. But that is not individual happiness or pleasure, per se, but collective societal happiness. We call this theory the normative ethics which takes a rule ethics approach that is consequentialistic and focuses on collective societal good as utilitarianism. On the other hand, the other kind of rule ethics that we will focus on is the non-consequentialism of German philosopher Immanuel Kant. For the non-consequentialist, it is not consequences that are the sole determining factor, although they are important to consider. It is just that they are not the sole determining factor of right and wrong action. There are other considerations. For Kant, this other consideration is acting in accordance to duty.

I would like to end this lecture by providing an example of consequentialism versus non-consequentialism in rule ethics. We are in a TV studio, and let's say that we hear a loud rapping on the door, with an irate, agitated voice shouting, "Is Dr. Keller in there? I am a student of his from last semester, and he gave me a D, and I deserved a C. I am going to kill him!" Jack, the camera man, is in some what of moral quandary, we might even say an ethical dilemma. If Jack is a consequentialist in the spirit of John Stuart Mill, he will analyze the situation here in the TV studio in terms of the consequences of alternative actions: telling the truth and opening the door, and

saying, "Oh yeah, Keller is right over there, cowering in the corner, or lying, and not opening the door, and saying, "We are in the middle of taping Utah Business Board Room. And Keller is not around here," and lying, essentially. So the consequentialist would evaluate alternative actions based on the consequences those actions were liable to produce. And if Jack hypothetically were to conclude that there would be more societal damage done by telling the truth, opening the door, allowing the irate student from last semester to storm in here and murder me, thus ending my life, presumably upsetting my family, friends, wife, and so on, and causing him to be thrown in jail, perhaps for the rest of this life, versus simply lying and having him storm off, cool down, and no harm done. That is how a consequentialist would confront or analyze that situation.

On the other hand, let's say that Jack is a Kantian non-consequentialist. And Jack decides that it is his duty to tell the truth, independently of the situation at hand, independently of the consequences produced. And by way of a complex sequence of reasoning, Jack the camera man decides that it is his duty to tell the truth, and to tell the irate student, "Yea, Keller is in here. He is taping a series of lectures on ethics," and laying the groundwork for the student to break the door down and come in here and harm me. In that situation, the non-consequentialist would say, "I did the right thing. I told the truth. I lived up to my duty. The moral burden falls on the perpetrator of the violence, not me." And so we can see in everyday life there are many examples of how we can analyze moral situations that we are in, in terms of consequentialism or non-consequentialism.

In the next lecture we will be turning to investigation of the normative ethics of St. Augustine, the virtue ethicist. Thanks.

Lecture 4 Christian Virtue Ethics: Augustine

My name is David Keller. Today we are going to look at the virtue ethics of the great Christian philosopher St. Augustine. To understand Augustine it is helpful to understand something about Plato. It is accurate to say that Augustine Christianized Platonism. Augustine lived in the fourth century of the Common Era, mostly in present day Algeria on the northern coast of Africa. Augustine's mother was a Christian, and apparently Augustine was pretty rowdy, partying and living a hedonistic lifestyle until he was about thirty-two years of age, when he converted to Christianity upon reading Romans chapter 13, particularly verses 13 and 14. Augustine was very intelligent, of course, and once he converted to Christianity and became involved in the Catholic Church, he rose quickly through the ranks of the church hierarchy. Earlier in his life, Augustine was a Manichean. The philosophy of Manichaeism is that reality consists of two material forces, one good, one evil, in continuous struggle and conflict with each other, with no definitive triumph of one over the other. Augustine wondered why these two forces would be in continual struggle and continual conflict, and found answers in Plato which freed him from the shackles of materialism and pointed him to a higher good, a higher meaning, above and beyond these two material forces. So Plato, Platonism was incredibly important in Augustine's development as a Christian philosopher. In his great work the Confessions, Augustine says, "the Platonists in many ways led to the belief in God and His Word." So here we see that as a Christian philosopher, Augustine was motivated by faith, but he used the tools of rationality, which I outlined in the second lecture, to think about virtue, and ethics, and truth. In this way, Augustine was not simply a Christian saint, but also a philosopher.

The subject matter of Augustine's philosophy focused on his soul and justice. Augustine was not worried or concerned with the makeup of the natural world. He was not a natural philosopher. Like Socrates, he tended to refocus philosophy on himself, on his soul, on the justice of his soul. And in this way he is very much in the tradition of moral philosophy in the Western tradition, in the spirit of Socrates. Now following Plato, Augustine believed that the soul consisted of different elements or aspects, which can either be in harmony, which represents justice, or disharmony, which results in injustice. Harkening back to Plato and what Plato says in the Republic, the soul

consists of three elements, three parts, three aspects: a rational part, which desires wisdom; a spirited part, which desires fame, and reputation, and recognition from our peers, our colleagues, our loved ones; and thirdly an appetitive part, which primarily desires physical pleasure—it is the hedonistic part of us. Injustice, as Plato argues, results when the soul is dominated by one of the two lower parts of the soul, that is the spirited part or that appetitive part. This puts our soul, our being, our suke into disharmony. Justice or harmony results when the rational part, the part that desires wisdom, controls and subordinates the two lower parts of our soul, the spirited part and the appetitive part. And the soul functions in harmony according to reason. This results in justice or virtue.

Augustine is very similar to this Platonic ideal of harmony of the soul with one critical distinction, and that is this. In Platonic philosophy, ethics, justice of the soul, is primarily self-referential. You want a harmonious soul because you want to be happy. And the end of ethics is yourself. It is the harmony of your own soul, your own being, your own suke. Augustine as a Christian pointed his ethics to God. So whereas in Plato the end of ethics is self-referential, that is, one's self, for Augustine the end of ethics is manifestation of the glory of God. It points to a higher end and higher purpose than one's self, something higher, something transcendent. And that is God. So in this way we see Augustine's Platonic emphasis on different aspects of the soul, and the soul functioning in harmony. In his work *The City of God*, Augustine writes, "If we were irrational animals, we should desire nothing beyond the proper arrangement of the body's parts and the satisfaction of our appetites[.] But because there is in man a rational soul, he subordinates all that he has in common with the beasts to the peace of that rational soul" (*The City of God*). So because we are rational animals, we must subordinate our animalistic desires to reason, but unlike Plato, reason is not the end of itself. It is the love of God which ethics points to.

As a Christian philosopher, it was imperative that Augustine deal with the problem of free will in the context of God's omniscience. That is, if God is omniscient, God should know everything about how each one of us is going to live our lives. God in his omniscience would know that at some point in your life, a point of temptation, you are going to choose to turn to God or away from God, to be a saint or a sinner. And God presumably will know the outcome of that point in your life. But then the question arises, if God already knows the outcome of how we are going to live our lives, what is the point of living an earthly test? What is the point of going through the motions and acting as if we genuinely have the free will to turn to God or away from God when the outcome is already predetermined? Augustine's solution is a very creative one. He argued that God does in fact know the outcome of the choices we will make, the choices I will make, and the choices you will make, but we genuinely have the free will to turn to God, or away from God, in a moment of temptation to be a saint or a sinner. At that point of temptation, we genuinely have free will to choose to turn to God or away from God. It is that God knows beforehand what our choice will be. God knows whether we will be a saint or a sinner. Nonetheless, we are not predetermined mechanistic beings, plodding through our lives from point A, to point B, to point C. We genuinely have the free will to turn to God or away from God. Therefore God has omniscience. God knows the outcome of all events. God knows what our choices will be, but we genuinely have the choice. We have the free will. The notion of free will is important for Augustine to retain as a Christian philosopher. He feels in this way he has solved the problem between the conundrum of God's omniscience and free will.

There is a second problem relating to free will and God's knowledge. If God knows that some of us will choose to do evil, and God is all good, that is, omnibenevolent, why would God set up the possibility for evil by giving us free will? That is, if God is truly good, omnibenevolent, does not wish evil, why would God give us the free will, knowing full well that some of us will choose to do wrong and cause evil? Augustine answers that God gives us free will, even knowing this will result in evil, because if we did not have free will, there would be no morality. There would be no choice. There would be no basis for us as moral agents to be praised or blamed. Therefore, free will, what I have defined as the behavior of morality, imbedded in each one of us as human

beings, puts us under an ethical obligation to turn to God. Augustine says, "No man is ever blamed for what he has not been given, but he is justly blamed if he has not done what he should have done; and if he has received free will and sufficient power, he stands under obligation." Therefore, without free will, there would be no morality, and without morality, there would be no ethics.

This turns us to the keystone of Augustine's moral philosophy, that is, the virtuous person, the person of virtuous character. For Augustine there are two types of people, generally speaking. These two types of people, people with two types of character, are cast by Augustine as citizens of two metaphorical cities: the city of God, which he calls the Christian city; and what he calls the city of man, the city of human beings, the pagan city. According to Augustine, the history of human civilization is the history of the interaction of these two types of people, these two types of culture. In his great work *The City of God*, Augustine writes, "Though there are a great many nations throughout the world, living according to different rites and customs, and distinguished by many different forms of language, arms, and dress, there nonetheless exist only two orders, as we rightly may call them, of human society[;] we may rightly speak of these as two cities. The one is made up of men who live according to the flesh, and the other of those who live according to the spirit. Each desires its own kind of peace, and, when they have found what they sought, each lives in its own kind of peace" (*The City of God*). This is the city of God and the city of man. On earth, all real cultures are intermixtures of the two, though certain cultures may have a predominance of one type of person, of one citizen, over the other type—Jerusalem or Babylon. But your citizenship is determined by your orientation to God, not where you live in particular. Therefore, you could be a citizen of the city of God living predominantly in a city of man. This hearkens to Christ's remarks about the kingdom of God in the Gospel of Matthew. Your citizenship, your orientation to God is not a question of a place in time and politics, but of your soul, of your character. Therefore there are two types of cultures, and the citizens that comprise them won't be distinct until the Last Judgment.

Let's look a little bit more closely at the character of these two types of citizens, and this will disclose the underpinning, the fundamentals, of Augustine's virtue ethics. Citizens of the city of God live by a principle of conduct which is the love of God. Using free will, citizens of the city of God turn to God in obedience of divine law. The objects of love for citizens of the city of God are God, one's neighbor, and one's self. He writes, "This divine Master [God] inculcates two precepts,—the love of God and the love of our neighbor,—and as in these precepts a man finds three things he has to love, God, himself, and his neighbor, and that he who loves God loves himself, thereby, it follows that he must endeavor to get his neighbor to love God since he is ordered to love his neighbor as himself" (*The City of God*). So citizens of the city of God love firstly God, and then secondly all of God's children, in other words you neighbor, and yourself. And as God has instructed each one of us to love our neighbor, through that love we as children of God are mandated to try to get our neighbor also to love God. Here we have the proselytizing element of Christianity exemplified in Augustine's moral philosophy, a precept that is not evident in Eastern tradition, such as Buddhism.

Citizens of the city of man live by a much different principle of conduct, that is, love of self. Citizens of the city of man are egoistic and selfish. Using free will, citizens of the city of man turn their backs to God in defiance of divine law, and repudiate God's will and God's love. The objects of love for citizens of the city of man are one thing and one thing only—that is, one's self. Therefore, we can see the importance of free will in Augustine's moral philosophy. It is free will that determines whether we are citizens of the city of God or citizens of the city of man. Virtue, virtuous character, predisposition to moral judgment and moral behavior, is determined by choice. Augustine's own conversion experience is, as he portrays it, a pure force of will. That is, it has nothing to do with the physicality of everyday life, physical impediments, things that keep you from choosing. It is purely a force of will, and a force of will only. Augustine says of his own conversion experience when he

was in his early thirties, "I was frantic in mind, in a frenzy of indignation at myself for not going over to your law and your covenant, oh my God. Where all my bones cried out that I should be extolling it to the skies. The way was not by ship, or chariot, or on foot. It was not as far as I had gone when I went from the house to the place where we sat." In other words, turning to God has nothing to do with physical everyday life. "For I had but to will to go in order not merely to go, but to arrive. I had only to will to go, but to will powerfully and wholly, not to turn and twist with a will half wounded this way and that, with the part that would rise struggling against the part that would keep it to the earth" (Confessions). So what Augustine is saying is turning to God or away from God is a matter of will, free will, and will only, and has nothing to do with the body. It is a matter of actually breaking away from the things that shackle us to everyday life, and turning to God and manifesting God in his full glory. We see, therefore, for Augustine a virtuous character is a matter of the choices we make, based on the free will we have been given by God. And our outward actions, the way that we lead our lives—the things that are obvious to our peers, and our colleagues, our family, our friends, our loved ones—our manifestation, outward manifestations of the choices that we make in our souls, in our souls determine our character. The choices that we make determine our character, whether we are virtuous or not, and these are manifested in our outward actions, whether we are citizens of the city of God or citizens of the city of man. Thank you.

Lecture 5

Existentialist Virtue Ethics: Nietzsche

My name is David Keller. Today we are going to look at the virtue ethics of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche lived in the second half of the nineteenth century, and like Augustine, he focused on the personality, the disposition, the character of the morally good person. But there the similarity ends. In direct opposition to Augustine, Nietzsche argued that virtuous character is a radical individualism, not submission to a supernatural being, to supernatural moral precepts. This makes Nietzsche an ethical relativist in terms of the metaethics that we talked about in the third lecture. For Nietzsche, there is no objective knowledge. There is no objective truth. There are no objective moral standards. Rather, for Nietzsche, the human intellect is a product of the natural world, a product of evolutionary processes. And hence, the human intellect is completely transitory, no more permanent than shifting sands.

In 1873, Nietzsche wrote in a memorable passage, "In some remote corner of the universe, poured out and glittering in innumerable solar systems, there once was a star on which clever animals invented knowledge. That was the highest and most mendacious minute of "world history"—yet only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths the star grew cold, and the clever animals had to die" ("On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense"). The clever animals, of course, are us. And in our thrill of inventing the tools of rationality that I talked about in the third lecture, Nietzsche is saying that they are no more than constructions, epistemological constructions that will be fleeing in the grand cosmic flux of time. With the transitory nature of our intellectual constructions are also the transitory nature of our moral constructions, our ethics. So in terms of morality, for Nietzsche morals are man-made. They are a product of this world, not any supernatural realm, but of this world and this world only. The implication, then, is that there is no transcendent supernatural standard for morality, as Augustine would have us believe. Instead, Nietzsche asks the psychological question, perhaps the first moral philosopher in the Western intellectual tradition to do so. Nietzsche asks, "What is the value of morality?" Does our predilection for moral behavior make us better as human beings or worse? He says, "Under what conditions did man devise these value judgments good and evil? And what value do they themselves possess? Have they hitherto hindered or furthered human prosperity? Are they a sign of distress, or impoverishment, or the degeneration of life? Or is there revealed in them, on the contrary, the plenitude, force, and will of life, its courage, certainty, future?" (On the Genealogy of Morals). Again, he demands, "Let us articulate this new demand: we need a critique of moral values, the value of these values themselves must

first be called in question" (On the Genealogy of Morals). What Nietzsche is asking us as students of ethics is whether the moral judgments, the moral behavior that we exhibit, does that further human creativity and human prosperity, or does it inhibit it? Nietzsche's answer is that Judeo-Christian morality which has dominated the Western intellectual tradition, and which Augustine is a clear example of, has in fact made humans worse. How? By suppressing our individual creativity and turning us into meek herd animals. Again, Nietzsche says, "the meaning of all culture is the reduction of... 'man' to a tame and civilized animal, a domestic animal" (On the Genealogy of Morals).

So what is fascinating about Nietzsche is that in the Western intellectual tradition, the mainstream opinion is that from the time of antiquity, from the time of the ancient Greeks and Romans, there has been a steady moral progress upward, that we are getting better and better, morally speaking, all the time with revealed truths and advancements in human knowledge and human technology. That is the mainstream view. Nietzsche's view is that from the time of ancient Greek and Roman antiquity, human beings have in fact degenerated. We have gone downhill. We have gotten worse. Our humanity has been denigrated and defiled due to Judeo-Christian morality, the morality of St. Augustine. Well, this is a radical claim, an outrageous claim. How does Nietzsche determine this? He determines it through what he calls a "genealogy of morals" What he does as a philologist, as a historian, is he traces the roots of Judeo-Christian morality back to its origins, back to the Roman Empire. He says in his historical investigation of the genealogy of morals that in the time of the Romans, those great pagans, noble meant good, and common meant bad. Now within this simple aristocratic social hierarchy of noble and good, and common and bad, there are all kinds of normative implications. Namely, the noble, the good, are powerful strong, dominant, beautiful, egoistic, self-absorbed, and indifferent to the weak. The bad, the common, on the other hand, are weak, humble, ugly, un-egoistic, and most importantly, absorbed and obsessed with their enemies, their oppressors, the people who are above them in the social hierarchy and dominating them. Nietzsche argues in his genealogy that the Judeo-Christian priests of the Roman Empire, knowing that a straightforward physical confrontation with the aristocracy would result only in slaughter and defeat, tried something different. What they did was they took the Roman value system, and in a cunning and stunning revaluation of values, they turned the aristocratic Roman value system on its head. What they did was they turned bad into good. They said what is bad is actually good, contrary to what the Roman nobles tell you. And what is good, according to the Roman nobles, is not just bad, it is evil. So in other words, the Judeo-Christian priests, in a transvaluation of values, flopped the Roman value system upside down, and turned bad into evil. So this means that on the new Judeo-Christian value system, it is the common people, the masses, who are good. And those are the weak, the humble, the ugly, the un-egoistic. And the evil classes are the powerful, the strong, the dominant, the beautiful, the egoistic. Now suddenly the people who are good on the old value system are evil on the new value system. This, Nietzsche says, is the origin of guilt, of psychological guilt. The strong, the Roman nobles, the Roman aristocracy, now feel guilty for being strong.

This is a paradigm example of what Nietzsche calls the transvaluation of values, and it is a stunning example of how one group can triumph over another group, not through straightforward physical confrontation, but through a psychological manipulation. In the Western Judeo-Christian tradition, Nietzsche calls this transvaluation of values the slave revolt in morality. Slave morality, Nietzsche says, is a herd morality. It is a morality of uniformity, of conformity. It is against difference, and according to Nietzsche, it has damaged and repressed the potential for human creativity. This leads us to position where we can see the three main themes, what I call the three main pillars of Nietzschean thought, and they are understandable within the framework of ethics. These themes are threaded throughout Nietzsche's thought, and understandable within the context of these lecture on ethics. They are the transvaluation of values, which we have just talked about, the notion of the eternal return, and lastly, that of the Übermensch, the person of virtuous character.

Firstly, let's look at the transvaluation of values. As I alluded to twenty minutes

ago, for Nietzsche values are not permanent. They have no supernatural origin. Instead, values grow out of context, out of earthly existence, like flowers out of soil. These values can change. They can be created, and they can be destroyed. The transvaluation of values connects with a concept of time, and it is a cyclical concept of time. It is concept of time that is more represented in the Asian and Eastern cultures and indigenous cultures than in the Western intellectual tradition where we typically think of time in a linear fashion. Nietzsche calls this concept of time the "eternal return." According to this idea of the eternal return, the same types of things, that is war and peace, suffering and ecstasy, joy and pain, happen over, and over, and over, and over again without end. Everything in human existence is intertwined, and there is no hope for a final judgment where good will be separated from evil, citizens of the city of God will be separated from the citizens of the city of man. Nietzsche says that is foolhardy. Everything about earthly existence and human existence is intimately intertwined, and can never be separated. Nietzsche is often misunderstood on this point. The idea of the eternal return is not a cosmology, not an actual model of time, but rather a metaphor for our earthly predicament, a metaphor for the human condition.

This leads us to the last and final pillar of Nietzsche's thought, the Übermensch. The Übermensch is German for "overman," that is, a self-overcoming person, a person who has the will, the will to power, to overcome obstacles that life throws in one's path, and does not give up, and is persistent, and persists and overcomes those problems, and in doing so becomes a better person. You may have heard the famous Nietzsche quote "What doesn't kill me makes me stronger." That is a maxim of the Übermensch, the self-overcoming individual, somebody who takes problems and becomes stronger by facing them. The model of the Übermensch is really that of an artist, a creative person, a person who creates one's own values, and one's own values flow out of them like a composer writing a symphony, or a painter painting a landscape. The creative person, the artistic person, the individualist, does not look at others for guidance, but rather creates one's own values. They are not a conformist. They do not look to society. They don't look to religion. They don't look to a supernatural being for guidance. They only look to themselves. They are a radical individualist. We can see that the word Übermensch is often translated from German into English as "superman," but this is a bad translation because an Übermensch might be a very un-superman-like person. It might be a person with a disability who achieves things that nobody else thought possible, somebody who has some kind of limitation and supersedes, surmounts that limitation, and achieves something that would have been thought by others to be impossible. And you know people like this, and I know people like this, people who do not give up. In Nietzsche's ethics, they would be possibly Übermenschen.

In conclusion, we can see that these three themes, the transvaluation of values, the eternal return, and the Übermensch are all woven together in one whole. In Nietzsche's thought, that is the Übermensch creates one's own values, in other words transvaluates values in affirmation of the eternal return. This is the person of virtuous character. The person of virtuous character for Nietzsche is a radical individualist, an unconformist, somebody who is very oriented towards earthly life, not towards supernatural existence above the natural world. The Irish poet William Butler Yeats, in a famous poem called "The Second Coming," weaves the ideas of Nietzschean thought nicely together, exemplifying particularly the transvaluation of values and the idea of the eternal return. I am not going to read the whole poem now, but I would like to close today by sharing with you a few passages from the poem. Again, it is by William Butler Yeats, "The Second Coming." He writes,

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed[,]
Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
[W]hat rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

This beast, the second coming, is not of Christ, but it is of an Übermensch, somebody who is going to take the Judeo-Christian value system that has persisted for two thousand years and reevaluate those values, just as the Judeo-Christian priests did in the Roman era. The Second Coming will be an example of the eternal return, and example of an Übermensch, the Anti-Christ, reevaluating, transvaluating the values that we have been living with for two millennia. Thank you.

Lecture 6

Consequentialist Rule Ethics: Mill

My name is David Keller. Today we are going to look at the rule ethics of the English philosopher John Stuart Mill. Scholars in the humanities tend to divide the Western intellectual tradition into four periods or epochs: the ancient period, the medieval period, the modern period, and what is known as the post-modern, or contemporary period. At the beginning of the modern period, philosophers began to emphasize a new approach to ethics, what we call rule ethics. These philosophers found the ancient and medieval focus on the virtue, the character, the disposition, the personality of the morally good person to be rather abstruse. They argued that it would be much better to focus on formulating concrete rules of conduct that could guide us through our everyday lives. This is the tradition in ethics that we are calling within these lectures rule ethic, as opposed to virtue ethics. Rule ethics can come in different varieties. Today we are going to look at a consequentialistic rule ethic, and next lecture we will look at a duty-based or deontological rule ethic.

The topic of today is consequentialism, and consequentialism is the idea that you can judge alternative actions by the consequences or the results that they produce, and pick your actions accordingly. Now of course all actions would have to be judged in terms of some notion of the highest good. You wouldn't know which actions to pick without having an idea of what good you are aiming at. If you are aiming at obedience to God's will, your consequentialistic rule ethics might be divine command theory. If your highest good is self-determinism, you might adopt an ethic of existentialism. If your highest good is to escape from the state of nature and live in the security of civil society, you might adopt a social contract theory, or social contractarism. If your highest good is individual pleasure, you would adopt a consequentialistic rule ethic of egoism. Or, if your highest good is collective societal happiness or pleasure, you would adopt the ethic that we will be calling today utilitarianism.

So utilitarianism is a consequentialistic rule ethic that maintains that the highest good in ethics is collective societal happiness. Utilitarianism was originally formulated primarily by the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham in the late eighteenth century and then again by the philosopher John Stuart Mill of the early nineteenth century. For Bentham, the highest good of ethics is pleasure, and the avoidance of pain. He wrote, "Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure" (The Principles of Morals and Legislation). Upon this framework, Bentham erects a consequentialistic framework of ethics. He wrote, "It is for [pain and pleasure] alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne" (The Principles of Morals and Legislation), the throne being the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. It is important to notice that for Bentham he is not talking about individual pleasure, which would be egoism, but rather collective societal pleasure, pleasure for the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Therefore, an individual moral agent ought to gauge his or her actions according to the results that those actions will produce, not just for the individual moral agent herself or himself, but collectively for society as a whole.

John Stuart Mill took Jeremy Bentham's ideas and developed them in greater detail. Mill argued that it is a psychological fact that all people seek happiness. This is reminiscent of Aristotle's claim in the Nicomachean ethics that all people seek happiness and avoid unhappiness. So ethics for Aristotle, Bentham and Mill is laid on a

foundation of psychology, psychological hedonism, the pursuit of happiness. Now according to Mill, all things that humans do, all things that you do, all things that I do, all things that are friends and family do, are valued either in and of themselves as ends to happiness, or as means to happiness. What Mill is saying is that the choices that you make in your daily life you believe generally will either result in immediate happiness, or at least happiness down the road. Studying for an exam, listening to these lectures on ethics, reading John Stuart Mill, or practicing your trombone, or the piano, or learning your scriptures may not be pleasurable at the moment, but John Stuart Mill would say that you do them with the expectation of those activities bringing happiness in the long run. He says in his great work Utilitarianism, written in 1861, "Pleasure, and freedom from pain, are the only things desirable as ends; and that all desirable things (which are as numerous in the utilitarian as in any other scheme) are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves, or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain" (Utilitarianism). So for Mill, all things that we do are calculated psychologically in terms of happiness.

Now it is important and critical to note that for Mill, happiness is not just physical pleasure, but mental pleasure. So happiness for Mill equals the physical and the mental. Whereas Bentham tended to focus on physical pleasure, Mill argued that pleasure for humans, part of our humanity, what it means to be a human being, includes the mental, the psychological. He wrote, "It is quite compatible with the principle of utility to recognize the fact that some kinds of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others. It would be absurd that, while in estimating all other things quality is considered as well as quantity, the estimation of pleasure should be supposed to depend on quantity alone" (Utilitarianism). So what Mill is saying is that where Bentham tended to interpret happiness as being physical pleasure which can be quantified, Mill is saying the issue is not so simple. Happiness includes the physical pleasures, which are amenable to quantification, but in addition to that, in the human life, in the human condition, in the human being, we must consider mental pleasures, which are pleasures of quality, not quantity.

Mill weaves the threads of all of these elements of his particular type of consequentialism, including happiness and qualitative hedonism, into what he calls the Principle of Utility. This Principle of Utility is the keystone, the rule for utilitarianism, and is one of the greatest maxims in the history of Western philosophy. Mill wrote, "The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals 'utility' or the 'greatest happiness principle' holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain and the privation of pleasure" (Utilitarianism). So in this one rule, we have a maxim to help us to guide our actions as moral agents through our everyday lives. We are supposed to measure alternative actions that are opened up to us and choose the one that produces a certain kind of result, a certain kind of consequence. That consequence is the production of happiness, not just for our selves, but for society as a whole. In addition, it is a certain kind of happiness, not simply physical happiness or pleasure, but mental happiness.

Now Mill, in his great work Utilitarianism, anticipated objections to this theory, and he offered replies. In doing so, Mill offers an excellent example of doing philosophy, and that is as you are offering your theory, you anticipate that criticisms that will be made of it, and respond before you even go to press, which is what he did. He offers three main objections, and he responds with three replies. The first objection is people should learn to do without happiness, that happiness should not be the focus of our daily lives. This echoes Nietzsche's criticism of Utilitarianism and what Nietzsche saw as the slavish pursuit of pleasure that Bentham and Mill tended to emphasize, a criticism that Nietzsche made in *On the Genealogy of Morals* that we looked at in the last lecture. Mill's reply to this objection that people should learn to do without happiness is that yes, people should learn how to do without their own individual, egoistic, selfish pursuit of happiness, but they should not learn how to do without the pursuit of collective societal happiness. So Mill believes that his focus on collective happiness rather than individualistic happiness mitigates that objection.

Secondly, Mill anticipates the objection that happiness is humanly unobtainable. His reply that happiness is not for the human being, for human conditions, for you or me, is that happiness is in fact unobtainable as the objection says, if by happiness we mean a continuous state of high-level ecstasy. If that is what we mean by happiness, yes, the objection is correct; happiness is not humanly attainable. Mill's response to this objection is that this is not really human happiness. Human happiness, happiness for humans, is periods of tranquility punctuated by excitement. And it is not a perpetual state of high-level ecstasy, but rather an intermixture of tranquility and excitement, tranquility and excitement, tranquility and excitement. This model of happiness that is a more realistic description of the human condition is in fact humanly obtainable. So Mill thinks that he has answered the second objection.

The third objection, which I find the most interesting, is this. The objection goes, the Principle of Utility reduces humans to non-human animals, more specifically as Mill says in *Utilitarianism*, pigs or swine. His reply is that this is not so. The Principle of Utility, even though it focuses on pleasure, on happiness, does not reduce human beings to pigs. He says, firstly, mental pleasures, which humans are capable of, and which differentiate us from other non-human animals, are qualitatively better than physical pleasures. Mental pleasures, compared to physical pleasures, are safer, more durable, and less likely to lead to unpleasant side effects. For example, buying a used copy of Milton's *Paradise Lost* for five dollars might bring many more hours of pleasure reading and thinking about Milton's great work and his depiction of the great war in heaven, Satan falling into hell, so on and so forth, than spending twenty dollars on a high-grade bottle of single malt whiskey. The whiskey is more expensive, the pleasure is less durable, and it is likely to lead to an unpleasant throbbing headache the next morning, whereas reading Milton's *Paradise Lost* won't. So for Mill, there are gradations of pleasure, and some pleasures are better than others, and the kinds of pleasures that human beings are capable of are qualitatively better, of a higher order, than the lower pleasures that are more bodily. In another example, you might be wondering whether spending a couple of hours watching the Daytona 500 in a sports bar or listening to a live performance of Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring" at the London Philharmonic is a time better spent, and Mill would say that those who have experienced both pleasures, both drinking the bottle of whisky or reading Milton's *Paradise Lost* on one hand, or watching the Daytona 500 in a sports bar or listening to Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring" on the other hand, if people who have experienced all those kind of pleasures tend to prefer one type of pleasure over another type, then Mill says we have good reason to believe that the type of pleasure chosen by those who have experience of both must be the higher quality pleasure.

This leads directly into what philosophers call the competent judges criterion. The competent judges criterion states that a person, you, or me, or one of our friends is a competent judge of which kinds of pleasures are qualitatively better than others, and hence the ones that should be pursued by us as human beings, if we have experienced all of those kinds of pleasures and given decided preference to one over others. He says, on the topic of the competent judges criterion, "Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a decided preference, irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure" (*Utilitarianism*). So the competent judges criterion is the mechanism by which we as moral agents are able, supposedly, to sort out which types of pleasure are qualitatively better for human beings than others, and to emphasize those pleasures in our consequentialistic analysis as moral agents.

The outcome of all this forgoing analysis leads to the interesting point that for Mill, humans as competent judges would never choose to forgo mental pleasures for physical pleasure. In other words, no human being according to Mill, would choose to be a one hundred percent satisfied physical being than partially satisfied mental being. No one would choose to be a completely satisfied pig over a partially satisfied human being. Again, in his great work *Utilitarianism*, Mill writes, "Few human creatures would consent to be changed into any of the lower animals for a promise of the fullest allowance of a beast's pleasures; no intelligent human being would consent to be a

fool, no instructed person would be an ignoramus, no person of feeling and conscience would be selfish and base, even though they should be persuaded that the fool, the dunce or the rascal is better satisfied with his lot than they are with theirs" (Utilitarianism). So in other words, even though as human beings we might be less capable being fully satisfied given our capacity of physical pleasures, none of us would choose to be a non-human animal, even if that meant being fully satisfied in terms of physical pleasure only. Mill drives this point home in one of the greatest passages of Western ethics when he writes, "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" (Utilitarianism). In other words, it is only because they are not a competent judge and have not experienced the plenitude and richness of mental pleasures over simple physical pleasures.

So that is the basis of John Stuart Mill's utilitarianism. We might say by way of summary that it is rule ethics of qualitative consequentialistic collective hedonism. Again, Mill's ethics is a rule ethics of a qualitative consequentialistic collective hedonism. The question remains how might we apply the principle of utility to everyday situations. There are two ways that Mill alludes to in Utilitarianism, but he doesn't provide a detailed analysis of the ramifications and the implications of each approach, because they are incommensurate, in a way. These two ways are rule utilitarianism and act utilitarianism. In one point of Utilitarianism, Mill makes the comment that as moral agents as we march through our lives, we should adopt rules which forbid actions that are generally injurious in order to promote collective happiness in the long run. So in other words, we just adopt rules, general maxims, that guide us through our lives that in the long run will promote the greatest good for the greatest number of people. But later in Utilitarianism, he makes the comment that there will always be exceptions to these rules, and that moral agents must consider each situation individually. Moral philosophers have dubbed this approach, more of a situational, individualistic approach, as act utilitarianism.

Now we can see the incommensurability of the two approaches. It is logical to think that you and I and others would agree that generally speaking, the rule of telling the truth would promote the greatest good for the greatest number of people in the long run. It allows us to live together more peaceably. We tend to trust one another. It allows us to enter into contractual obligations with each other because I assume that you are going to uphold your end of the bargain, so on and so forth. Generally speaking, the rule would be that it is good to tell the truth. But we can always come up with exceptions to that. For example, the enraged, despondent murderer who is rapping on the door, wondering if Dr. Keller is in the TV studio, in that situation, honestly, according to the principle of utility, it might be better to lie to the potential murderer so that he or she would go away. So we see within Mill's own treatment of utilitarianism that there is an internal tension between rule ethics and act utilitarianism. Mill himself never explicitly ferreted out the implications of both of these different approaches, and the debate between act utilitarians and rule utilitarians has turned out to be one of the most interesting and enduring debates on ethics.

Lastly, let's consider what virtue would be for John Stuart Mill. Mill says that virtue is the multiplication of happiness. It is the tendency of moral agents to act in such a way that they produce the greatest possible collective happiness around them in their daily actions. This is interestingly not the virtue of Plato, who emphasized harmony of the soul, or Augustine, who emphasized obedience to God, nor Nietzsche, who emphasized virtue as a manifestation of individual creativity. Rather, for Mill virtue is not an internal, intrinsic property of one's character, one's disposition, but rather is to be determined by the actions that the moral agent produces in his or her own everyday life.

In closing, I would like to make one final comment, and that is insofar as utilitarianism is consequentialistic, it is very effective in terms of economic public policy analysis, because in decisions of public policy, it is efficient to do a cost

benefit analysis and measure the pluses and minuses of all various possible actions, and then determine public policy as such. In this way, our society is fundamentally utilitarian. Thank you.

Lecture 7

Duty-Based Rule Ethics: Kant

My name is David Keller. Today we are going to look at the duty-based rule ethics of German philosopher Immanuel Kant. Kant lived in the late eighteenth century, and like Mill, Kant believed that ethics must be objective. Like Mill, Kant took a rule-ethics approach, but unlike Mill, Kant believed that consequences are not the sole determining factor of ethics. Consequences matter, but they are not the sole determining factor. The sole determining factor of ethics for Kant is adherence to moral law. This moral law Kant argued, as we will see today, is discernable by reason. And this reasoning process is the foundation of ethics. In this way, with this focus on adherence to law, Kant adopted the Christian emphasis of the importance to conformity to law, but made reason, not God, the foundation of law. For Kant, the dictates of reason are universally binding on all rational beings in all places, at all times. In making this assertion, Kant repudiates the ethical relativism that we discussed in the third lecture. Kant also, in departing from Mill, is the first philosopher in the Western intellectual tradition to deny that happiness has anything to do with morality. In Western ethics, there is a robust tradition going all the way back to the ancient Greeks, Plato and Aristotle, up to Mill and beyond Mill, that focuses on the importance of happiness in ethics. And what is noteworthy about Kant is that Kant departs from this tradition in ethics of claiming that happiness is a central concern of ethical reasoning.

Why did Kant think this? Well for Kant, there is no necessary connection between happiness and ethics. They are completely disconnected. Think for example of Alexander DeLarge in Anthony Burgess's novel *A Clockwork Orange*, which was also made into a movie by Kubric. Alexander is egregiously immoral, but he seems to be quite happy. So there doesn't seem to be any connection between happiness and morality, at least in the case of Alexander DeLarge. Or think of Viktor Frankl in the Nazi concentration camps. The way that Frankl is represented to us through his writings and through history is somebody who is quite moral, but quite unhappy. So it is these kinds of examples that caused Kant to question the connection between happiness and morality. Furthermore, for Kant there is a problem with grounding ethics on happiness because happiness changes from person, to person, to person, depending on psychological makeup. Therefore, ethics of Kant must rest upon a solid, static, unchanging foundation. This foundation cannot be happiness. Rather, it is reason the exercise of rationality, what we call in philosophy a priori reasoning, or abstract, logical reasoning. In making his argument that ethics must be grounded on the exercise of reason, Kant argues that what he calls good will is the highest good, the summum bonum of ethics, not happiness, as Bentham and Mill had argued. In other words, the greatest good for the greatest number of people, good consequences, might be produced accidentally or for the wrong reasons. Instead, for Kant, good will, which he defines as acting on good intentions, is the only unqualified moral good. He writes in his famous treatise *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, "[Nothing] can be regarded as good without qualification, except a good will. Intelligence, wit, judgment, and whatever talents of the mind one might want to name are doubtless in many respects good and desirable, as are such qualities of temperament as courage, resolution, perseverance. But they can also become extremely bad and harmful if the will, which is to make use of these gifts of nature and which in its special constitution is called character, is not good. A good will is good not because of what it effects or accomplishes, nor because of its fitness to attain some proposed end; it is good only through its willing, i.e., it is good in itself[.]" (*Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*). Here Kant clearly departs from the consequentialistic tradition of Bentham and Mill, and utilitarianism in arguing that consequences are the focus of ethics. Kant says that is not the case. Rather, it is the exercise of something which he calls good will. What he is saying in this passage is that all personality traits, charisma, wit, intelligence are morally good or bad depending on a person's will. In other words, if you are intelligent, charismatic,

whether those personality traits turn out to be morally good or bad depends on your will, or how you put them to use, because intelligence, wit, charisma can turn out to be morally bad if your character, your will is nefarious, and you put them to use in unethical ways.

So for Kant, a person's good will should be valued in and of itself, independently of what that person does. He writes, again in the *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, "Even if, by some especially unfortunate fate or by the niggardly provision of stepmotherly nature, this will should be wholly lacking in the power to accomplish its purpose; if with the greatest effort it should yet achieve nothing, and only the good will should remain...yet it would, like a jewel, still shine by its own light as something which has its full value in itself" (*Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*). So in contrast to Mill and Bentham, a person might be deserving of praise even if they are incapacitated or in a vegetative state and they can't actually do anything in the world, we might say that the person can still be judged by us to be virtuous, to be morally good, if their will, their intentions, independently of what they might be able to achieve or not achieve in the world.

Kant gives a very simple argument for the existence of this thing which he calls good will. Kant says everything in nature, everything created by God, everything in creation, has a purpose. Therefore reason must have a purpose. This purpose is not the pursuit of happiness, because the pursuit of happiness would be better fulfilled by brute animal instinct. Therefore, Kant argues, the purpose of reason is instead the cultivation of something good in and of itself, that is, a good will. So in the *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, which is the most clear and concise statement of Kantian ethics we have, after making this argument for the existence of good will and its intrinsic value, Kant goes on to address the topic of duty. And this is the keystone of Kant's ethics, and it is why we call Kant a duty-based rule ethicist. Kant says having a good will means acting in accordance with duty. Acting in accordance to duty differs fundamentally from acting on inclination, which involves acting according to the contingencies or the specificities of a particular situation. Kant gives the example of a shopkeeper. Let's say that you are a shopkeeper and a young child comes in and is making a purchase. And the young child is not accustomed to commercial transactions, and is not sure how much the item that he or she is buying, say a pack of gum, is really worth. And you could take advantage of the situation, and you could shortchange the child. Now Kant says that if you as a shopkeeper choose to not shortchange the young child because you are worried that you will be caught by his or her parent, you will be found out, your reputation will be besmirched in the town, in other words there will be negative consequences to your action, that decision not to shortchange the child is much different than a situation in which you choose not to shortchange the child simply because it is the wrong thing to do. So here we have an example where on a consequentialist perspective, such as John Stuart Mill, the outward action—not shortchanging the child—is exactly the same. But for Kant there is a crucial difference, and that is the intentions which motivated the action not to shortchange the child. On one hand you acted on inclination, which is simply fear of getting caught and having your reputation as a shopkeeper damaged in the community. On the other hand, you made an honest transaction for the sake of making an honest transaction. So for Kant, as we see in his example of a shopkeeper, there is a crucial difference depending on the intentions of the action.

Kant gives us a summary of his argument to this point. In brief, he reduces his argument to three propositions. His first summary proposition is moral action emanates from duty, not inclination, which we just reviewed. He secondly says actions have moral worth due not to the results they produce but to the goodness of the will, a repudiation of consequentialism. And thirdly, he says duty is the necessity of acting out of respect for moral law. Let's take this third summary proposition and flesh out the nuances of this claim a bit further, that is, duty is the necessity of acting out of respect for moral law. We need some kind of test to determine whether or not our actions are in accordance with duty. Actions are personal, yet morality must not be personal in the sense that it must be universal, that is categorical, across for all moral agents. Morality must be categorically binding or universal. It is this

universalization of subjective statements of intentions that is the lynchpin, the keystone of Kant's ethics. Kant argues that ethics must take the form of a command: Do Y, what Kant calls the categorical imperative. This imperative form of morality, Do Y, differs fundamentally from hypothetical imperatives which take into consideration the contingencies of specific situations, what he calls hypothetical imperatives. For example, hypothetical imperative takes the form: If X, do Y; rather than the categorical imperative: Do Y. Let's say, for example, that you want to go to law school. So I say if you want to go to law school, then study for the LSAT. If X, do Y. If you want to go to law school, study for the LSAT. Kant says that morality does not have anything to do with these kinds of hypothetical imperatives, because they are not universally binding or universally relevant to all moral agents. Namely, not all of us was to go to law school, so the hypothetical imperative if you want to go to law school, then study for the LSAT is only relevant to those of us who want to go to law school. In other words, it is not universal. Hypothetical imperatives have nothing to do with morality. Morality is captured in categorical imperatives which are universally binding on all moral agents: Do Y independently of situations.

The categorical imperative is Kant's rule for ethics. The categorical imperative is the keystone of Kantian ethics, and the reason we define Kant as primarily a rule ethicist. The categorical imperative is equivalent to John Stuart Mill's principle of utility, and the categorical imperative is this, translated from German into English. Kant writes, "Act only on that subjective statement of intention through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal moral law" (Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals). Again, "Act only on that subjective statement of intention through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal moral law" (Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals). In the categorical imperative we see the importance for Kant of universalization, categorical universalization. For Kant this is based on the intrinsic value of all rational beings, and why morality is categorically binding, because all moral beings are worth of moral consideration, and we are worth of moral consideration because of our intrinsic being. So the universality of ethics for Kant is rooted in the intrinsic worth of you, and me, and your family, your friends, and all other moral agents.

Think of yourself for a moment. You probably think that you have some kind of intrinsic or inherent value above and beyond your use value for other people. You believe that you are valuable in and of yourself, independently of how you might be used for other person's ends. You therefore, Kant argues, you therefore cannot will that humanity in general does not have intrinsic value spread across the totality of humanity, because you yourself therefore would be an exception to what you just decided. You are compelled by the standards of rationality that we outlined in Lecture Two to conclude that because you yourself have intrinsic value, no rational agent should be used merely as a means for some other end.

This leads to the second formulation of the categorical imperative, which basically says: Don't use people. And the foundation of this is that all rational beings have intrinsic value, as you yourself have already decided, and are therefore worth of moral consideration, independently of consequences, of use value. Kant writes, "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means" (Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals). So this is the second formulation of the categorical imperative. This second formulation points towards what Kant calls the "Kingdom of Ends." The Kingdom of Ends is the community of all of us that deserve the recognition and respect required of ethics. Now what is the methodology of universalizing the categorical imperative such that you as a moral agent can go through your day and feel confident that your subjective statements of intention are in accordance with moral law, and that therefore you are acting in accordance with duty, therefore have good intentions, and therefore are manifesting good will? It works like this. If you can universalize your subjective statement of intention to act, then it is ethically justifiable to act. If the subjective statement of intention that you are pondering cannot be universalized and ends up in some kind of contradiction or inconsistency, it should not be acted upon.

Kant gives two types of problems that can arise in universalizing your subjective statements of intention, as per the requirements of the categorical imperative. The first one is a straightforward logical contradiction, and the second one is an inconsistency in the Kingdom of Ends. In the Grounding, Kant gives us four examples. The first two are examples of the straightforward logical contradiction, and the last two examples are instances of inconsistencies in the Kingdom of Ends. Let's look at two of these examples, one from each category. In the second example from the Grounding, Kant gives an instance of a straightforward logical contradiction. It is wondering if you should lie in order to get some money. So your subjective statement of intention would be, "I will lie in order to get some money." You try to universalize this statement to see whether you can act upon it. So you say in universalized form, "When anyone is in need of money, anyone should lie in order to get it." This results in a straightforward logical contradiction. Why? Because the world that you are presuming in your subjective statement of intention, "I will lie in order to get some money," presupposes a World T in which people generally tell the truth. Otherwise lying in order to get money wouldn't work, because people wouldn't trust you. People assume that you are telling the truth, because generally everyone tells the truth. It is a world of truth telling. It is the world that must exist in order for lying to work. But then when you universalize your maxim, "Anyone would lie in order to get some money," you are presupposing a World not T, a world in which truth telling is generally not the case. So your subjective statement of intention presupposes World T, and your universalized formulation of your statement of intention presupposed World not T. You have created a straightforward logical contradiction. So therefore, as per the methodology of rational thought, the categorical imperative prohibits you from acting on your subjective statement of intention.

The other two examples, example three and example four in The Grounding, are examples of the inconsistency in the Kingdom of Ends. The third example is you are wondering whether you should squander your natural talents because you are lazy. And so your universalized formulation of this would be that anyone should squander his or her natural talents if they are lazy. You realize that this is inconsistent within the framework of the Kingdom of Ends, because each individual has an intrinsic worth such that our natural talents should be fully developed and fully actualized to the highest degree possible. So when you yourself say, "I am going to squander my natural talents because I am too lazy to practice the piano, or play lacrosse, or read the scriptures so I can become a good religious leader, you are in essence, according to the categorical imperative, saying it is ok for anyone to squander his or her natural talents if they are lazy. This is a direct violation of the notion of the Kingdom of Ends, which our intrinsic worth should be manifested to the highest degree possible.

We see in this brief exegesis of Kant's ethics that Kant's monumental contribution to ethics is the idea that we are bound in a moral community built on a mutual respect, and we ought not to be treated as mere ends for some other good, like the collective social good of utilitarianism. In this way, our culture has a fundamental Kantian value, and that these values provide a counter balance to the powerful utilitarian tendencies of American culture that we addressed at the end of the last lecture on John Stuart Mill's utilitarianism. That is, people and groups of people ought not be sacrificed or be forsaken for some overarching good, that we have intrinsic value, and that value must be respected, independently of the consequences at stake. Thank you.

Lecture 8

Feminist Virtue Ethics: Gilligan

My name is David Keller. We are going to conclude our series of short lectures on ethics by looking at the virtue ethics of moral psychologist Carol Gilligan. Gilligan's ethical theory is an example of feminist virtue ethics. Carol Gilligan is a moral psychologist currently teaching at Harvard, and of all the thinkers that we have looked at in this short series of lectures, she is the one person that I have actually met. And it was an honor meeting her. Before we look in detail at her contribution to ethics, we need to define feminism, because I have claimed that her theory is an

example of feminist virtue ethics, or ethics which focuses on the character, the disposition, the personality of the morally good person, rather than outlining rules as exemplified by Mill and Kant. Feminist, according to me, is the assertion that there have been and still are socio-cultural structures which have impeded or restricted the development of women, and that these structures ought to be dismantled. It is this "ought" in the phrase "these structures ought to be dismantled" that makes feminism an ethical theory.

To understand Gilligan's theory, we must first understand the difference between the terms "sex" and "gender," terms that you will notice in everyday discourse, and in the media are generally equivocated, but for our purposes here as scholars, as academics, we must be very careful to distinguish. The term "sex" is a biological term. In human beings it means that the nucleus of each cell contains twenty-two paired chromosomes and two sex chromosomes. So in human beings, males have a paired set of chromosomes, XY, and females have XX. The point here is that sex is, technically speaking, a biological term. Gender, on the other hand, is a social term, and it is the words masculine and feminine, which are gender terms, and which are not biological terms. Why do I say this? Because gender arises through a socialization process. If things go as planned in our culture, biological males should become masculine, and biological females should become feminine. But as we all know, there is nothing necessary about this connection. There are some biological males that exhibit feminine attributes, and there are some biological females which exhibit masculine attributes. In other words, there is nothing imbedded in our actual DNA that determines whether we should become masculine or feminine. It is a socialization process.

Take me, for example. I appear, to the best of my ability, masculine in the clothes I wear, and the kind of haircut I have, and so on and so forth. I did not wear a dress to stand in front of the camera. I don't have ribbons in my hair, and I actually went to the effort to get a haircut before taping these lectures so my hair wouldn't be too long. In other words, I have made some kind of effort, primarily because of a social pressure to look a certain way, look conventional, look masculine. And this socialization process of gender is central to Carol Gilligan's ethical theory. Gilligan's central contribution to ethics is that this engendering process which is a social process, has ethical implications. Specifically, Gilligan argues that there are in fact two moral psychologies in our culture, two systems, one masculine and one feminine, and that women have traditionally been judged according to the standards of the masculine system, and have been underrated as a consequence, and that this is unethical.

Gilligan argues in her famous book *In a Different Voice* published in the early 1980s that traditional moral psychology based on the work of her mentor at Harvard, Laurence Kohlberg, is very Kantian in orientation, and that Kohlberg's scale has been used to judge the moral sophistication of women. Women have come out underrated on this system and that is not the problem with the moral sophistication of women that is revealed in this. It is that the wrong system has been used to judge women, and that is a masculine system. Kohlberg argued that there is a scale of moral sophistication hierarchy, and Kohlberg argued that the lowest form of moral sophistication is pure deference to authority. Secondly, a slightly higher level of moral sophistication is when one learns to satisfy one's own needs, and then begin to consider the needs of others. So you begin to become aware of a social context. The third level for Kohlberg is when a person seeks approval by conforming to stereotyped rules. Fourthly for Kohlberg, conformity is augmented by a sense of goodness in maintaining social order. Fifthly, a higher level of sophistication is reached when one begins to associate morality with rights and standards which are endorsed by society as a whole. This makes me think of the rule ethic approach to John Stuart Mill's utilitarianism. But then Kohlberg argues that highest level of moral sophistication is when a person begins to generate self-chosen universal principles of justice and look beyond the social framework. This is clearly very Kantian, reminiscent of the Categorical Imperative and the process of universalization that we looked at in the last lecture. So the gist of Kohlberg's scale here is that the lowest levels of moral sophistication are based on making moral judgments according to social context—deference to authority, social acceptance, and so

forth—while the highest forms of moral sophistication is the ability to make judgments based on totally abstract principles, such as the Categorical Imperative, independently of social context. Kohlberg as an empirical social scientist concluded upon doing his research, which included, incidentally, boys, that men based on this very Kantian inspired scale are much more morally superior than girls and women.

Gilligan's work is largely a reaction to the moral psychology of Laurence Kohlberg. Gilligan argues that Kohlberg's moral psychology is seriously flawed, because women and girls are being judged on a criteria that in our culture are masculine. Gilligan argues in her famous book *In a Different Voice* that therefore a problem in psychology and psychological theory has been misinterpreted as a problem in human moral development, specifically female human development. The problem for Gilligan is that there has only been one theoretical apparatus to evaluate two distinct psychologies of gender. Her central thesis is that we need a second moral psychology to do justice to the feminine perspective. In order to accomplish this, Gilligan looks at the different ways that men and women, boys and girls, are engendered in the socialization process.

What are the differences in our culture between masculinity and femininity? As an empirical social scientist, Gilligan looks to childhood games. She notices that boys' games are typically games of competition, ball games, running, jumping, scoring, etc., in which victory is always gained at the expense or the loss of somebody else. Victory entails defeat. Boys' games are inherently competitive. Look at girls' games. Girls' games, Gilligan says, are not this way at all. They generally are games of cooperation which are not overtly competitive. Doll house, dress-up and role-playing games do not have clear winners and losers. No one is victorious in an afternoon playing doll house, for example. For Gilligan as an empirical social scientist, these games provide a window into the socially-constructed psychologies of masculinity and femininity. For Gilligan, in the masculine psychology men are like inert atoms, bumping and colliding with each other in the game of life. Some individuals get knocked out of the game, and some individuals persist and are victorious. On this model of inert, discrete selves, selves come into relationships and go put out of relationships. Or, to put in another way, selves have relationships. This psychology, this masculine psychology, is clearly a good psychology for free market economics, in which you go out into the marketplace, you compete, and there are winners and there are losers. The feminine psychology, on the other hand, is very different. On the feminine psychology, Gilligan argues, individuals are considered to be embedded in webworks of relationships of mutual interdependence. So while on the masculine model we have just said the self has relationships, on the feminine model the self is relationships. On the feminine model selves are nodes in webworks of relationships, and the definition of the self is the position in the webwork of relationships that one happens to inhabit. As a scholar of the science of ecology it is interesting to note in passing that the feminine notion of selfhood is a very ecological one insofar as it emphasizes interdependence and connectedness.

The feminine psychology is good for families, and it is good for local communities, developing and nurturing relationships in the neighborhood, in the church, in the social community. So we have two distinct psychologies, masculine and feminine, which have distinct social functions. The feminine perspective is what Gilligan calls the care perspective, and this care perspective in psychology has interesting ethical ramifications. In her research and her scholarly work, Gilligan thus provides a second alternative to Kohlberg's scale of moral development which he intended to be universally applicable to all human beings. So by way of review, Gilligan is saying that we need a second scale to Kohlberg's masculine one to do justice to the feminine perspective, the care perspective.

Gilligan's scale goes something like this. The lowest level of moral sophistication is that of a survival orientation, say that of a baby, in which the focus is on caring for one's self—crying, getting attention when one is hungry or wants to go to sleep, and so forth. A second level of moral sophistication is attained when the individual is still selfish, becomes vaguely aware of an orientation in a social context. The third level of moral sophistication for Gilligan is focus on care and conformity, similar to

Kohlberg, with a different emphasis on desiring to please others, and to do what is good, and care for others. As the individual in the care perspective begins to see one's webwork in relationships, one realizes that you cannot sacrifice one's self entirely to nurture relationships. And there is a greater relationship of the connection between the self and others, something of the nature of "I am not different than you; we are connected, we are connected in the same social webwork, the same social framework." Then for Gilligan, the highest level of moral sophistication is when care becomes a self-chosen principle. It is a complete recognition and affirmation of the interdependence of all individuals within a webwork of relationships.

So to recap this scale, for Gilligan the lowest levels of moral sophistication are based on an egoistic, self-centered gratification, and the highest levels are based on the recognition of an inter-dependence of individuals and the affirmation of those relationships. In the care model, empathy and concern for other persons becomes a self-chosen principle of conduct. This principle of conduct is the manifestation of a virtuous character in terms of femininity. This is the ethics of care. Now in conclusion we can see that for Gilligan there is a gender complementarity. There is a masculine psychology and a feminine psychology in our culture, and each psychology has distinct social functions, one for the market place, and one for the home. And so in this sense, Gilligan's ethics is conservative in affirming the roles that we each play in a harmonious and just social framework. Her contribution to ethics is the idea that the manifestation of virtuous character is one of care, and it is feminine perspective, but it should not necessary be restricted to women. Men like myself can exhibit virtuous character insofar as we recognize the interdependence of all selves in a social framework, and show empathy, concern, and care for other people who are worthy of respect and recognition as moral agents themselves. Thank you.

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