

ETHICS FUNDAMENTALS AND APPROACHES TO ETHICS

Chen Te

Chung Chi College, Chinese University of Hong Kong

Keywords: Egoism, contract theory, utilitarianism, pragmatism, essence, actualization theory, rationalism, teleology, deontology, hypothetical imperative, categorical imperative, *jen, ren*, Confucianism, existentialism

Contents

1. Introduction
 2. Ethical Egoism
 3. The Contract Theory of Hobbes
 4. Utilitarianism
 5. Pragmatism
 6. The Theory of Aristotle
 7. The Theory of Kant
 8. Confucianism
 9. Existentialism
- Glossary
Bibliography
Biographical Sketch

Summary

As traditional moral values have been challenged by contemporary thought, the moral consciousness of people today has been degraded. But morality has a function in human society, and its role is irreplaceable by any other item of human culture. One way to get out of the predicament is to use the moral theories of the past to reflect anew upon the meaning and the end of morality, and reinvestigate the principles to guide actions and moral judgments.

This article introduces some ethical theories that represent the most fundamental thinking of the solution of moral problems. The moral theories introduced and discussed in this article can be divided into two types. The first takes morals as instruments for the satisfaction of desires, while the second theory takes morals as manifestations of the real self. Both types of thinking have the support of human experience. They are, therefore, not necessarily to be regarded as contradictory or incompatible, as they appear to be, but can be seen as complementary. Both reflect the functions of morals on different levels of human experience. This is true not only in comparing these two types of theories, but also in comparing the theories of these two types. Some enlightenment can be obtained by rethinking each of these theories.

1. Introduction

This is an era in which the significance of morality is degraded. What people are

concerned about is not morality, but benefits to themselves. There are, of course, many causes that lie behind this phenomenon. One is that human society underwent a rapid and substantial change over the twentieth century. The relationships between individual people, between people and society, and between human beings and the natural environment are very different from those of a hundred years ago. The moral system that solved the problems of the past may be unable to solve the complicated problems of today. Another reason is that societies of the past were typically monistic with uniform value systems, and today's societies are typically pluralistic ones in which different value systems operate together. No particular value system is believed to be able to give an absolute standard of what is right or wrong. At the same time, anthropologists say that different cultural patterns have different value systems and moral systems. There are no objective standards to judge which system is better or higher than the others. This gives an impression that value or moral systems are merely artificial products of human beings and have no independent authority.

This does not mean that our society no longer needs morality and that one can appeal to desires in judging what one should do or should not do. Everyone has numerous desires or wishes that are very often in conflict. One has to make decisions about which desire to satisfy and which to give up or postpone. How to make a right or correct decision and by what standard that one decision is right and another wrong is always a puzzle. One of the functions of morality is to give guidance in dealing with these puzzles.

On the other hand, there are always conflicts among people. It is always a problem for a society to maintain order and to prevent or solve the conflicts among people reasonably. Another function of morality is to provide principles and rules that are acceptable to everyone and encourage people to live together peacefully and cooperatively.

Traditional moral standards and moral rules that played a very important role in the lives of people of the past have somewhat lost their power today. If the moral standards or moral rules of the past are taken as the only guidance for action and moral judgment, and these moral standards and moral rules are in fact not entirely suitable to our society, people will take this as evidence that morality is no longer significant, and the function of morality as described above will vanish. Many problems will then arise in people's lives and in society. It is therefore not appropriate to appeal blindly or dogmatically to the moral rules of the past whenever morality is mentioned as if they are the only moral standards humans have. Instead, it may be better to go back to the ethical theories to reflect upon the meaning and the end of morality and see what kind of principles can be a guide in taking action or in making moral judgments. The purpose of this article is to introduce some fundamental ethical theories that have had a great influence on the moral thinking of the past and, I believe, still give a great deal of enlightenment in dealing with the problems of morality today.

More than two thousand years ago, Aristotle pointed out that moral education consists of two parts. One is to establish good habits of conduct. The reason is that it is a preliminary and necessary condition for being a moral person to develop good dispositions, and disposition is a matter of habit. Thus one has to develop a habit of pursuing justice or a disposition to be just if one wants to be a just person. What Aristotle means by saying this is that moral practice is a very important factor in being a moral person. One cannot have

a moral character or become a moral person if one does not constantly practice to be moral, even though one might have correct moral ideas. This is just like a pianist who would not be a good pianist if she did not practice regularly even though she knows in her mind how to play the piano.

The other part of moral education, according to Aristotle, is to know why one should be moral. One often has to give up some benefits for morality and one would not do so or at least would not be willing to do so if one did not know why one should be moral or why it is good to be moral. This is like taking medicine. Nobody is willing to take medicine not knowing what is good about it. But one would if one knew that it would promote health. What Aristotle wishes to bring out is the importance of moral theory that shows the significance or the good of morality.

Developing a moral habit is a matter of educational psychology and will not be discussed in this article. Instead, the focus is on why one should be moral and what are the moral principles that one should observe. The discussion will be pursued through the introduction and analysis of some fundamental ethical theories.

2. Ethical Egoism

The first ethical theory to be introduced and discussed is egoism. What egoism advocates is that the benefit of oneself is the end or goal of all actions, including that of moral actions, and thus is the only standard of what is right and what is wrong, or what is moral and what is immoral. It looks as if egoists are advocating that people ought to be selfish and ought therefore to resist any moral rules or principles, since selfishness is, in common sense terms, incompatible with morality. This is not true. The philosophers who advocate egoism note that a selfish person will very often not secure benefit but suffer harm instead. Overtly selfish people are very often distrusted, isolated, excluded, or made to suffer.

The egoist suggests that in order to secure long-term benefits and to promote long-term self-interest one should do well to observe moral rules or principles. In the history of ethics, Aristippus and Epicurus are both known for their egoistic ethics. They advocate that the end and meaning of life is one's own pleasure, because, they said, everyone, without exception, is pursuing their own pleasure as the end of their actions. They urge, though, that one of the conditions of securing pleasure is to be unselfish, just, honest, etc. Anybody who is selfish, unjust, dishonest, and in fear of their evil behavior being found out and punished would at least have no peace of mind, and so would be unhappy. Morality, in this sense, is an instrument. It is a means to happiness. It is not good in itself, but promotes one's long-term benefits. That is to say, humans are moral not for the sake of being moral but for the sake of happiness. Morality would have no value at all if it could not help to obtain happiness.

The "ego" that egoism talks about is an individual person. Egoism may be broadened, though. For example, nationalism can have the same basic structure as egoism. Thus the leaders of most countries realize that no country can isolate itself from others, and that all countries are interdependent economically, politically, militarily, and culturally. The bankruptcy of one country can cause an economic decline in another country. So a desire

to promote the interests of one's own country will usually require the fair treatment of others.

A similar point can be made concerning the view that only humans are of any moral concern. So, human beings use the natural world as a slave or an instrument merely for the satisfaction of their ever-growing desires. Many species in the world have been exterminated; the natural environment has been polluted; and the ecological order of the earth has been disturbed. In recent years, many people have begun to be aware of the seriousness of the problems and that human beings and the natural world are interdependent. They have come to understand that if the natural world is damaged humankind will not flourish in the long term.

To conclude, the message of ethical egoism and its variants is that humans have to respect others if they want to be respected; they cannot do harm to others if they do not want to be harmed. Morality is typically required for happiness. One weakness of egoism, though, is that it is not the case that good is always rewarded and evil always punished. Egoism does not provide a sufficiently solid foundation for morality.

3. The Contract Theory of Hobbes

The second theory to be discussed is contract theory, which was developed by Thomas Hobbes in the seventeenth century. Like egoism, it holds that the end of morality is individual benefit. However, egoism appeals directly to the consequences of the action concerned as the standard of moral judgments, while contract theory appeals to the contract made between the two or more parties concerned. The reason why one should be moral, according to contract theory, is not because one can directly gain more in consequence, but because the contract, which one explicitly or implicitly agrees to observe, is the foundation of moral rules.

According to Hobbes, morality does not come direct from human nature. Rather, it is an artifact designed by humans to escape the predicament of the state of nature. In the state of nature there is no overarching authority, and so everybody can do whatever they want to satisfy their desires. There is no right or wrong, no justice or injustice. There would be no need of morality if, in the state of nature, each could get what they wanted peacefully. However, this is not the case. Since the desires of humans are ever growing and natural resources are limited, one person's satisfaction is often at the expense of another's dissatisfaction. This competition between people encourages a disposition "to kill, subdue, supplant, or repel the other." This is a state of war in which every other human being is, at least potentially, one's enemy, and no one has security against others. In such a state, there cannot be cooperation among people, who remain in a solitary, poor, nasty, brutish state. The only way to escape the state of nature is to design rules for people to observe so that they can live together peacefully and cooperatively. Hobbes calls these rules "the laws of nature."

The laws of nature are the foundation of morality. They are designed for the sake of the satisfaction of every individual's desires. They are not good in themselves, only as instruments. The first natural law says that "every man ought to endeavor peace, as far as he has hope of obtaining it." In order to seek peace, people have to give up the right to do

everything they want to do, since there will be no peace if everyone attacks others when they think it necessary for the satisfaction of their desires. Thus the second law of nature says that a person must “be willing, when others are so too, as far-forth as for peace, and defense of himself he think necessary, to lay down this right to all things; and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himself.” This mutual waiving of rights, implied in the second law, requires that both parties undertake to limit their freedom and to trust each other to do so. This waiving of rights is in vain if the contract regarding mutual restraint is not expected to be kept, and so Hobbes’s third law of nature is “that men perform their covenants made: without which, covenants are in vain, and but empty words; and the right of all men to all things remaining, we are still in the condition of war.”

According to Hobbes, the covenant is the foundation of morality. An action is immoral only when a covenant has been made and the action violates this covenant. For Hobbes, morality is founded on a kind of contract or agreement that is made for the purpose of obtaining peace, which is crucial in order for people to be able to live together cooperatively and to improve their chances of satisfaction of their desires. Morality, in other words, is not an end in itself but an instrument designed to satisfy the desires of each individual.

Contract theory is a popular ethical theory today. It is actually a kind of egoism, because the basic motivation is the satisfaction of the desires of each individual. Thus many sociologists believe morality is designed for the purpose of maintaining good relationships among people and maintaining a social order that is important for the safety, security, and happiness of each individual. Moral rules, as Hobbes said, play a crucial role in developing an implicit agreement between people that they refrain from doing one another harm. People perhaps do not observe the moral rules for their own sake but because they will benefit in the long run from so doing.

This theory, however, has a significant weakness. The purpose of designing and observing moral rules for individuals is, according to the theory, to prevent others from doing harm to people and the better to satisfy their desires. This interpretation of morality cannot, however, explain morally motivated self-sacrifice. Morality does not seem to be merely a contract.

4. Utilitarianism

The third moral theory to be introduced is utilitarianism, which holds that the end of morality and the standard of the distinction of right and wrong are not one’s own benefit or happiness, but that of the whole community. Jeremy Bentham, the founder of utilitarianism, said that it is the happiness of the party whose interest is considered that determines whether behavior is right or wrong: “if that party be the community in general, then the happiness of the community; if a particular individual, then the happiness of that individual.” What Bentham means by this is that every action has some effect on the interests of some party. Sometimes the party concerned is a particular individual, sometimes a family, and sometimes the whole community. It is the happiness of the whole party, whose interests are affected by the action, that determines whether the action is right or wrong. Thus, any action that tends to increase the happiness of the party

concerned is approved, and any action that tends to diminish the happiness of the party concerned is disapproved. Bentham called this principle “the principle of utility” and regarded it as the highest principle of morality, from which all moral rules such as “Thou shall not kill” and “Thou shall not steal” are derived.

Why is the principle of utility the highest principle of morality? Why should the happiness of the whole community be pursued as the end of individual actions? Why is the happiness of the community, rather than of individuals, the standard of judging what is right and what is wrong? The foundation of the principle of utility, according to Bentham, is that individuals all by nature pursue pleasure and avoid pain in all actions, and so they alone determine what they shall do and at the same time point out what they ought to do. This foundation is the same as that of egoism. Granting, though, that it is a fact that everyone by nature pursues their own pleasure does not yield the conclusion that the happiness of the whole community, rather than of oneself, is the end of actions and the standard of judging what is right and what is wrong. Thus, there must be some other reason for advocating that the principle of utility is the highest moral principle.

Bentham later says that the principle of utility is the highest principle of morality because it is the most reasonable principle to be the ground of moral rules. For instance, if one asks what is the reason that individuals should not steal or should not lie, the only reason given is that it is against the principle of promoting the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people. All the other reasons given by other theories are not as satisfactory as the principle of utility. Sympathy, for instance, is too subjective to be the universal and impartial principle of what is right and what is wrong. God’s will, on the other hand, is too ambiguous, needs to be interpreted, and can be reduced to the principle of utility.

John Stuart Mill, the most outstanding disciple of Bentham, when talking about the sanctions that explain the motives of people to observe the principle of utility says that everyone has social feelings that are the desires to be in unity with others. It is these social feelings that are the foundation of our conscience and that support the principle of utility. If this is true then humans are not as egoistic by nature as the egoists believe. Our nature is to pursue happiness, not only our own, but also that of our fellow humans. This explains why the happiness of the whole community, rather than just of oneself, is the standard of right and wrong.

Given that individuals all have social feelings by which they desire the good of the whole community and selfish feelings by which merely their own good is pursued, the question can be asked why the former and not the latter should be followed when these two feelings are in conflict with each other? Mill has a ready answer to this question. He says that the happiness deriving from social feelings is qualitatively higher than that deriving from selfish feelings. What he means is that of two pleasures one of them is, “by those who are completely acquainted with both, placed so far above the other that they prefer it, even though knowing it to be attended with a great amount of discontent, and would not resign it for any quantity of the other pleasure.” Individuals are then justified to conclude that the one preferred is qualitatively higher than the other even though it is quantitatively smaller. For instance, Mill believed that the pleasure of being an actively intelligent person is higher than that of being a happy fool: “It is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.”

Utilitarianism has been a popular ethical theory in Britain and the United States since the end of the eighteenth century when Bentham's *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* was published. It has had a tremendous influence upon the moral ideas and the legal systems of both countries. There are reasons why this theory is so appealing. First, it has offered an objective standard for moral judgments. The happiness of the people is observable, and so moral judgments become verifiable. Second, happiness, or pleasure plus absence of pain, has been taken as an end and good in itself since the time of Socrates, and most people would say that happiness is the end or at least one of the ends of life. Third, the theory is in line with our moral common sense that moral actions are beneficial and immoral actions are harmful to the community.

Utilitarianism, however, has weaknesses. First, it is difficult to calculate the amount of the happiness produced by an action. It is also not easy to judge whether the pleasure is greater than the pain produced by an action. Nor is it easy to compare one person's happiness with that of another. If the happiness of the people concerned is the standard of moral judgments, this difficulty weakens the power of this moral standard. Second, is it true that moral actions necessarily bring about benefit to the people concerned and immoral actions do them harm? Judges who stick to the law when handling legal cases are good judges from a legal point of view even though the consequence of their handling some cases may not benefit the people. On the other hand, judges who take the benefit of the community, instead of the law, to be the standard for handling cases are definitely not good judges. In other words, there is often a mismatch between what utilitarianism requires and what our deep-seated feelings believe is appropriate.

5. Pragmatism

The fourth moral theory to be introduced is pragmatism. Pragmatism was developed by William James, Charles Pierce, and John Dewey. One of the basic ideas of pragmatism is that truth is the truth for human beings. Truth is not, they hold, something that reflects a transcendent reality beyond the experience of human beings. Truth is, for Dewey, a hypothesis that is verified and can solve problems for human beings. Since the situations of human beings are always changing, the problems emerging in these situations are also changing, and the truths that solve the problems are also changing. In other words, there are no absolute truths. The task of philosophy is to reflect upon and reevaluate the theories, standards, and doctrines of the past and to reconstruct new hypotheses, new theories, and new standards so as to be able to face and solve the new problems emerging in new situations and environments.

This general view applies to morality as well and to all other items of human culture. Moral standards and moral rules, for instance, are all proposed to solve problems in human lives, including those involving human relationships, so that people can live better and happier lives. When the standards and rules are proved to be able to solve these problems they are called "moral truths." There are, therefore, no absolute moral truths. The moral rules that are workable in some situations may not be workable in other situations. "Thou shalt not lie" is a good moral rule in general situations in terms of which people could trust one another, but would endanger the lives of a great number of people if one insisted on being honest with the enemy during times of war.

What Dewey implies here is that in moral education or moral training one should not get into the habit of sticking to the moral rules as if they were sacred and inviolable. Moral rules are the product of the intelligence and past experience of people. They tell what are in general the better ways to live, to get along with others, and to deal with the problems encountered in life. They are useful as reference points, but are harmful if treated as dogma. Moral character is also subject to change and development. Moral actions are the manifestation of moral character. An action that does not manifest the character of the agent must be a kind of involuntary or arbitrary action and therefore has no moral significance and cannot be said to be moral or immoral.

According to Dewey, character is not something inborn but is an acquired product. Character is a series of habits that determine the way one responds to the stimulus of the environment: how one treats others, how one selects the ends of one's actions, and how one makes decisions. Habits are acquired and character, including moral character, is also acquired. Good education, therefore, plays a very important role in forming a good or moral character. A habit is formed by a series of actions and not only by a system of ideas. People who have only good ideas do not necessarily have good habits and so do not necessarily have a good character. People have a good character and are moral people if and only if they have developed a pattern of habits of correct actions. Moral education, therefore, should not only be a teaching of ideas but, what is more important, also a discipline of building up a pattern of habits of correct action.

A pattern of habits is a pattern of actions in terms of which one can adapt to the environment and satisfy one's needs. A good pattern of habits is a pattern of actions through which one can adapt to the environment very well and successfully and constantly satisfy one's needs. A moral character is a pattern of actions by which one can solve the moral problems encountered in life and achieve a successful and happy life. However, the social environment is changing, and the personal situations of people are also changing. Agricultural society has become a commercial society, the handicraft industry a mechanical industry; a child becomes an adolescent, and then becomes an old person. Different problems arise in different situations. The pattern of actions by which one could adapt to the environment and satisfy needs in the past may not be able to help one adapt to the new environment and satisfy needs. This means that past correct or good habits of actions may not be correct or good in the present. A past good and moral character may become now a stubborn and dogmatic character.

Thus there are not only no moral rules that are universally valid in all human situations, but also no patterns of actions that are practical and can solve all the problems encountered throughout our lives. One who blindly sticks to the old moral rules or old habits and cannot propose new ways or hypotheses that are relevant to new situations and solve new problems is merely stubborn or obstinate. Those who are moral must be alert and creative. Such individuals should not be impulsive or emotional and have to abide by principles or rules and guide their actions in the right direction when the principles or rules are appropriate to the situation. But they have to be able to modify the old rules or habits or to construct new rules or new habits when the old ones are no longer adequate to the new situation and cannot help solve the new problems.

Traditional Western philosophy, beginning with Plato and Aristotle, assumes that there is a fixed final end for human life, which is the ultimate end of all actions. The meaning or value of an action, whether it is right or wrong, moral or immoral, is determined by whether it helps achieve the final end or not. Dewey objects to this view and claims that there is no fixed final end for human life. In our experience, he says, an end is actually an ideal or goal that is proposed because of the dissatisfaction of human beings with the concrete situation they are facing and for solving certain problems arising from the situation. There are no ends or ideals apart from the concrete situation and problems one is facing and apart from the concrete relation between individuals and their environment. Since the situation of every person is different from everyone else's, and the problems arising from the situations are also different, the end of each person in each situation cannot be exactly the same.

Furthermore, there is no final end such that one can sit there doing nothing when that end is achieved. Humans and their environments, and the relationships between them, are continually changing. This means that humans are always in new situations in which they have new needs and new problems and so have to face them with new ends, new methods, and new actions. Thus, human life is an endless process of creative actions in which people find new meanings and new values. Dewey does not think that there is a supreme good or highest good for which all other values can be unconditionally given up or sacrificed. He does not think, therefore, that a person can adopt any means for achieving a goal or an end. He claims that there is no value that is absolute and that the value of something has to be evaluated in terms of the price to be paid for it.

The problem now is knowing which end is desirable and worth pursuing and which is not. If an end is evaluated in terms of the price paid for it, how can one estimate whether the price is too high and the end therefore not desirable? Dewey's answer can be expressed in this way: an end is desirable and worth pursuing for a person if it is desired after they have deliberated the relation between this end and its price and they are willing to pay the price for it. This answer sounds very subjective and egoistic but in fact it is not. Dewey realizes that humans are not isolated beings, but are social animals. Their actions, thinking, language, and habits and their means and ability to adapt to the environment are all products of the interaction between them and society. This means that they are inseparable from their society. There is no individual without society and vice versa: there is no society without individuals. Society is an inseparable part of what one is and one, along with others, constitutes society. For this reason one cannot be egoistic and selfish. One cannot love oneself without any concern for society and cannot pursue one's own good or happiness by sacrificing others' good. A selfish person, who takes every advantage of others, will do harm to themselves in the long run. Furthermore, Dewey's view can be extended to the relationship between humans and the natural world. Humans are not only inseparable from society, they are also inseparable from the natural world. Their actions, thoughts, habits, and abilities are all products of the interactions between themselves and the natural world. In this sense, humankind and nature are one and not independent things. Humans cannot pursue their own good without concern for the natural world.

Dewey's moral theory is very balanced and practical. It is not absolutism, since it does not admit that there are moral rules or standards that are absolutely and universally valid.

Neither is it relativism, since it provides an objective criterion for judging which moral rules are more acceptable. It is situational, claiming that each situation has its particularity and uniqueness and that moral rules have their value only when they meet the needs and can solve the problems of that situation. This theory emphasizes the importance of cultivating a good character, which is the source of moral actions. It also emphasizes the importance of the consequences of an action by virtue of which an action is judged moral. Ideas play an important role in proposing new hypotheses and new habits to solve new moral problems. Actions are also important since it is through actions that moral ideas are actualized and a moral character is established. Dewey pays attention to the importance of habit but also emphasizes the significance of creativity in morality. His theory synthesizes the characteristics and merits of various traditional theories.

One criticism of Dewey is that his theory adopts scientific method to solve moral problems. Now scientists can propose hundreds of hypotheses until they find one that is verified. So scientists have the right to entertain numerous hypotheses that are later proved to be false by experiment. Do we, in moral life, have the same entitlement? Can individuals afford to try to pursue various ends and means until those that give the greatest satisfaction are found? Are individuals allowed to try different kinds of actions that prove to be evil by experiment until a pattern of actions is found that will do good in the long run? Arguably not. Furthermore a verification process could be a long one. Scientists can wait and do not have to decide to accept a hypothesis until the process is completed and the hypothesis proved to be true. In moral situations, however, timing is very important in making a right decision.

6. The Theory of Aristotle

Aristotle's theory, like the theories introduced in the previous sections, has an empirical approach. The difference is that Aristotle is a rationalist in the sense that, in his theory, reason plays a major role in moral life. According to him, reason is the essence of a human being, and the final goal or final end of moral life is to actualize the human rational essence. Aristotle is a typical teleologist. He claims at the beginning of his book *The Nicomachean Ethics* that every activity, including moral activity, aims at some good. For instance, the end of medical science is health; that of military science, victory; that of economic science, wealth; etc. Now, all these ends are not good in themselves and they are pursued not for their own sake, but for something else. There must be some good, then, that is good in itself and is pursued for its own sake and therefore can be the end of all other ends and that is the final end of all activities. This good is named by Aristotle as the good for human beings ("man"). Since the good for humans is the final end of all activities, including moral activities, the function of ethics is to investigate what the good is and how one can achieve it.

It is generally agreed that happiness is that good, since it is the final end that is pursued by everyone in every action. But different opinions arise as to what happiness is. The majority holds that it is pleasure; some say that it is wealth; some say that it is honor. Aristotle says that pleasure is not the good for human beings because, if it were, there would be no difference between human life and the life of a cow. Wealth is merely an instrument and so is not good in itself but is good for something else and is not the final end of all other ends. Honor depends more on those who confer it than on who receive it,

and it would be a miserable life for a person if the achievement of their final end of actions depended not on them but on others. Furthermore, the reason that people seek honor is to confirm that they have moral virtue. Honor is therefore not the final end or the good for humans. Even virtue cannot be the end because it is possible to possess virtue while one is asleep and so to possess it without acting according to it.

What is happiness or the good? Aristotle seeks the answer from the function of a human. Thus to know what makes a good or perfect pianist, the function of a pianist needs to be known before an answer can be given. What Aristotle thinks is that if a person entirely fulfills the function of a pianist, this person is a good pianist or a person who achieves the good for a pianist. Similarly, a person who fulfills the function of a human achieves the good for a human. What is the function of a human? Humans can, like other living beings, absorb nutrition and grow. But this function is not peculiar to humans. Even a vegetable has this function and so it is not the function by virtue of which a human is a human. Humans also have sensation. But this function is shared by other animals, and so is not the function of a human either. Humans have the power of reasoning and can act according to the dictates of reason. This function is not shared by any other beings and so is the function of a human, or so Aristotle claims.

The question, what is the good for humans or happiness for humans, can now be answered. While the function of a pianist is to play the piano, a good pianist is a person who plays the piano well. With the same reasoning, if the function of a person is to reason and to act according to the dictates of reason, a good person is one who exercises these activities well. This is happiness or the good for humans. Aristotle says that a short period of happiness does not make a person really happy. Happiness or the good is achieved only over a complete lifetime.

Having described Aristotle's answer as to what the end of life is, we can now discuss Aristotle's concept of virtue and what moral virtue is. The Greek word for virtue is *arete*, which is sometimes more aptly translated as "excellence" or "success." It is not, as the English word is, limited to moral goodness but covers goodness of many different kinds. A knife that cuts well and a horse that runs well can be said to have virtue. For Aristotle, the virtue of humans is the disposition or ability that is displayed in their endeavor to fulfill the function of a human or to achieve the end of life or happiness.

Virtues are of two kinds, intellectual and moral. Intellectual virtues are developed through the training of reason, while moral virtues are developed through the training of our desires and passions. Wisdom, for instance, is an intellectual virtue, and self-control is a moral virtue. Here the discussion will concentrate on moral virtue. Aristotle says that moral virtue is developed by habit. This means that people are not born with moral virtue, although they are not disposed against it either. Moral virtues are acquired by performing right actions. Just as a pianist becomes a good pianist by playing the piano constantly, a person becomes moral by repeatedly acting morally. Mere knowledge about playing the piano will not make a good pianist, and mere moral knowledge will not make a moral person either.

How can a human perform moral actions unless they are already moral? Aristotle's answer is that an action is moral not because it conforms to certain moral principles, but

because it is done by a moral person who (1) acts in full consciousness of what they are doing; (2) wills their actions, and wills them for their own sake; and (3) acts from a fixed and unchangeable disposition. Therefore, a child is not moral when it performs just actions without knowing why it has to act in such a way. These actions, though, have their benefit in building up good habits and good dispositions but are not really moral until the child knows why it does this, and what is the good of it, and has the disposition to do it for its own sake. In other words, in addition to habit, moral knowledge that tells what is good with moral action, and why one has to be moral, also plays an important role in building up a moral character and moral virtue.

The above discusses how individuals can have moral virtue. But what is moral virtue? Aristotle says that moral virtues are states of the soul, and every state of the soul is a feeling, a faculty, or a disposition. Now moral virtues are not a kind of feeling, because they are not called good or moral in respect of feelings. Furthermore, feelings are not the result of choices, but moral virtues are a kind of choice. Moral virtues are also not faculties because individuals are not called good or moral for having certain faculties, and faculties are given by nature while moral virtues are not inborn but are developed by constant performance of right actions. Moral virtues are, then, dispositions. The question is what kind of dispositions are moral virtues.

As mentioned before, moral virtue is human excellence through which people can achieve the good. It must be a kind of disposition that makes people good and enables them to fulfill their function well. It is therefore a disposition to choose the best for themselves. The best for themselves can neither be too much nor too little but is a mean between excess and deficiency. For example, for the feelings inspired by danger, the mean state is “courage,” and those who are excessively confident are called “rash” or “foolhardy,” while those who show a deficiency of confidence are called “cowardly.” In handling wealth, the mean is “liberality,” the excess “prodigality,” and the deficiency “meanness.” Moral virtue is, then, a disposition of the soul that disposes humans to choose the mean between two extremes.

Aristotle says that the mean is not a rigid, arithmetical mean. It is the mean relative to us. So, for a particular athlete, 2.5 kg of food may be the mean, but for another athlete, 2.5 kg of food may be too much or too little. The mean, therefore, may be different from person to person or in different situations. There is no universal rule that can help determine the mean relative to you or to me. It is the person who has practical wisdom who can judge the mean in a particular situation. Practical wisdom is one of the intellectual virtues through which one knows the good and through which one knows how to achieve the good. There are, therefore, close relationships between the good, intellectual virtue, and moral virtue.

Aristotle’s theory is sometimes called “actualization theory” because the end of moral actions is to actualize the essence of human. It is also called “virtue ethics” because a moral action is moral because it is a manifestation of the moral virtues. Whatever label is put on this theory is not important. What is important is that there are certain characteristics of this theory that differentiate it from the theories already introduced in this article. The significance of morals is not, according to Aristotle, that individuals can get more satisfaction of desires or more pleasure through morals, but that human essence

is actualized through it. What is implied here is that the process of becoming human does not happen naturally. Individuals determine the process. Through moral virtues, individuals choose and struggle to become human.

Aristotle is a rationalist in the sense that he takes reason as the human essence and that a person is a complete human only when the function of their reason is actualized or when they follow the dictates of fully developed reason. A good person, or a moral person, must therefore be a rational or reasonable person. Everyone has a number of desires that are always in conflict with one another and cannot all be satisfied. It is reason that enables individuals to judge which desires should be satisfied and which should be given up, which should be stronger and which should be weaker. It is reason that helps to choose the mean, so that desires and feelings can be harmonized and so that individuals can have unified and harmonious personalities. While many people today doubt whether every species has an essence and whether reason is really the essence of humans, it seems undeniable that reason plays a very important role in guiding our behavior and in pursuing the good for humankind.

7. The Theory of Kant

The ethical theory to be introduced in this section is that of Immanuel Kant, a German philosopher of the eighteenth century. Kant was a rationalist in the sense that he claims that the moral principle is an imperative directly issued by our reason and is not merely an instrument for our pleasure or the satisfaction of our desires. In this sense he is somewhat like Aristotle. The difference between Aristotle and Kant is that Aristotle is a teleologist for whom every action has an end, and the final end of moral actions or moral virtues, Aristotle says, is happiness. Kant, however, is not a teleologist but a deontologist for whom morality is not merely a means to an end; it is an end in itself and is good in itself. The reason why morality is an end in itself is that it is the imperative of reason. It is the command of our reason to be moral. Reason tells that it is our duty to be moral.

It sounds heavy handed, in the contemporary context, to say that individuals have to follow the commands of reason. But Kant says that, in fact, reason is always commanding humans and individuals are always following the commands of reason in human life. Human beings, he says, do not act from instincts only or predominantly, but act under the guidance of reason. They have to figure out what they need before they act, and then project an end, then design ways to attain the end, and then act accordingly. The whole process involves reason. Commands are always being made to ourselves, such as “If I want to succeed, I should work hard” and “If I want to be healthy, I should exercise regularly.” These statements are all rational imperatives. These statements are expressed in the form of imperatives because individuals are not willing to do by instinct alone what these statements ask, such as work hard or exercise regularly. It is only under a certain rational compulsion that individuals undertake these things. This rational compulsion is expressed in the form of an imperative.

The examples given above are conditional, or hypothetical, imperatives since the imperative “I should . . .” is given under the condition “if I want . . .” The imperative is valid only when the condition is valid. If the condition “I want to succeed” is not valid, which is to say that it does not correctly represent a want of mine, then the imperative “I

should work hard” is not valid. Kant says that a hypothetical imperative is actually the advice of reason, which shows the way to attain a certain end. What reason provides in this kind of imperative is a means to an end. The imperative is therefore not an end in itself.

There are two types of hypothetical imperatives. One is the problematic hypothetical imperative, and the other is the assertoric hypothetical imperative. The former involves a condition that is not necessary or universal and so is problematic. The examples given above are all problematic hypothetical imperatives since there are people who do not care whether they succeed or not and there are also people who do not care about their health. An assertoric hypothetical imperative involves a condition that is empirically universal and necessary. For example, “If I want to be happy, I should be prudent and not impulsive” is an assertoric hypothetical imperative. “I want to be happy” is universally valid, at least empirically.

The imperatives given by reason in our ordinary lives are usually problematic hypothetical ones since the ends (the conditions of the imperatives) pursued in ordinary lives are different for different people and in different situations. The imperative given for attaining happiness, however, is an assertoric hypothetical one since happiness (the condition of the imperative) is universally pursued by every person.

All the theories introduced in the previous sections regard moral principles and judgments as assertoric hypothetical imperatives. They all take them as means to the end of happiness, however different the definitions of happiness are. Moral principles and judgments, according to their theories, should be expressed in the form “You ought to do this if you want to be happy.” Kant, however, thinks that moral principles cannot be hypothetical imperatives, because they cannot be conditional ones. The reason is that morality is not only a means to some end. If it were, then individuals could always imagine some situations in which moral imperatives could refer to other, maybe more effective, means. There would be no reason then to say that one should always act according to a particular principle, such as “Never lie” or “Never kill.”

If moral principles are not means to some end, then they are ends in themselves and are not pursued conditionally. They are not issued conditionally by reason and so are not hypothetical imperatives. Furthermore, if morals are merely means to some end, to happiness, for instance, moral people are then merely intelligent people who know what they want (the end) and know how to obtain what they want (the means); immoral people are merely stupid or unintelligent people who do not know what they really want, or do not know how to obtain what they want. In fact, immoral people are not blamed or punished for their stupidity or ignorance, nor are moral people honored or admired for their intelligence or knowledge. One cannot be fully responsible for intelligence or stupidity, which is somehow beyond what can be controlled, but individuals are fully responsible for being moral or not, which is supposed to be able to be controlled. Morality is therefore not the same thing as intelligence or knowledge, and a moral or immoral person is different from an intelligent or unintelligent person. This implies that a moral principle cannot be a hypothetical imperative but must be an unconditional one—a categorical imperative.

In contrast to a hypothetical imperative, a categorical imperative is issued by reason not merely as a means to some end, but as an end in itself. It is not merely rational advice about how to attain some end, it is an imperative directly issued by reason itself. While the function of reason in issuing a hypothetical imperative is to provide knowledge about how to obtain what one desires, the function of reason in issuing a categorical imperative is to command one to do what reason itself wants one to do. It is categorical imperatives, not hypothetical imperatives, that reveal the real commands or requirements of reason on our actions.

Since a hypothetical imperative offers advice about how to attain some ends, its content is about the causal relations between some specific means and a specific end, such as the relation between hard work and success, or that of regular exercise and health. What, then, is the content of a categorical imperative? The categorical imperative is a command of reason itself, and what reason is essentially concerned with is universality. Accordingly, the content of the categorical imperative, says Kant, is a command that our actions be universal models for the actions of all people. This means that the categorical imperative commands us to do only what individuals will other people to do. The categorical imperative is the highest moral principle, from which all moral rules are derived. The reason why one should observe the rule “Do not kill” or “Do not steal” is that those who kill or steal are not willing to be killed or to have their property stolen. The action of killing or stealing cannot be the model for the actions of other people. They cannot be willed as universal laws. Such actions are, therefore, against the categorical imperative issued by reason.

It is easy to understand why hypothetical imperatives have to be obeyed, because these imperatives are conditional upon everyone’s own purposes. However, it may not be easy to understand why the categorical imperative must be obeyed since Kant says that this imperative is the end in itself, and there is no other end or purpose for it to achieve. This means that no conditional or hypothetical reason can be given to explain why it must be obeyed. Kant says that although individuals cannot directly see that the categorical imperative is a command that has a duty to be obeyed, this can be seen by reflecting on some facts to do with morality. So, a person is not moral when they do something good merely from the motive of self-interest. A grocer who does not overcharge a customer is not moral on account of this honesty if the act is solely from the belief that honesty is the best policy and can help earn more money. However, the grocer is moral if the act is not from self-interest but from a sense of duty or from the belief that others should be treated in ways that the grocer wants to be treated. This shows that the categorical imperative is in mind when an action is judged moral, though individuals may not be consciously aware of it.

According to Kant, reason, as it guides actions, is practical reason—it is actually the will. The categorical imperative or the moral principle is therefore issued by the will itself. This means that in the realm of the moral, individuals are not merely subject to laws as they are within the realm of nature. Individuals are lawmakers or legislators. In performing moral actions, laws we ourselves make are obeyed, whereas in pursuing the satisfaction of desires the laws of nature, which are external to reason, are obeyed. This implies that individuals are autonomous only if they live moral lives, since their lives are under the guidance of the law made by our own will. Humans are, however, only slaves or

subjects to nature like other animals while under the control of desires or inclinations. The significance of morality is therefore not in gaining more, but in living as beings with dignity who are the masters of themselves.

The content of the categorical imperative is universality, which means that the principle of one's action must be able to be universalized as a law for the actions of every person. In other words, one should act in ways such that one can will the same kind of actions be done by others. Now the universality that Kant talks about is limited to the level of rational beings. Kant's categorical imperative is concerned only about rational beings like human beings. This is in tension with the current tendency to extend concern to other animals and even to the whole of nature. Whether the concept of universality can be extended to the level of animals or even to all living beings is worth reflecting on. Some oriental philosophies, like Confucianism, Taoism (Daoism), and Buddhism, certainly extend their concern to all kinds of natural beings.

8. Confucianism

The fundamental ideas of Confucianism originated with Confucius, but did not become a systematic theory until Mencius. The initial question that Confucius is concerned with is the foundation of rites and laws. This is a question of political and social philosophy, but Confucius would not be satisfied with the answers given by the political philosophers of today. He sees all answers based on self-interest as misleading, since the rites and laws of a society based on self-interest would not be respected and observed by the people. Furthermore, one could observe the rites or laws for the purpose of one's own interests, and could also go against the rites or laws for the purpose of one's own interests.

Confucius regards *jen* (the *pinyin* transcription of this word is *ren*) as the foundation or the root of the rites. *Jen* is a Chinese word that generally means "impartial or unselfish concern or sympathy" and has been translated as "human heartedness." For Confucius, it is *jen* that gives the rites meaning and it is for the manifestation of *jen* that rites are instituted. The rites would become dead forms for those who observed the rites without *jen* in their heart. A person who attends a funeral service without grievous feeling or concern for the dead, for instance, is no different from the one who does not attend the service.

When asked about the meaning of *jen*, Confucius says: "*Jen* consists in loving others." When asked about the way of practicing *jen*, he says: "Do not do to others what you do not wish yourself." Another reply to the same question is: "The man of *jen* is one who, desiring to sustain himself, sustains others, and desiring to develop himself, develops others. To be able from one's own self to draw a parallel for the treatment of others; that may be called the way to practice *jen*." Thus, the meaning and the practice of *jen* consists in consideration or concern for others. The foundation of rites and even laws is the concern for others. There would be no rites or laws without *jen*, and there would be no objective way of manifestation of *jen* without rites or laws.

The question is why one should practice *jen* when it is in conflict with one's interests. Why should one observe the laws, which, according to Confucius, are the manifestation of *jen* when one might have to sacrifice one's properties or even one's life by doing so?

For egoists, it is for one's good or benefit that one observes the laws or moral principles. This implies that one should not observe the laws or moral principles if it brings one disadvantages. Moral principles and laws would collapse and would no longer be respected if they were in conflict with one's own good or interests. This is one of the reasons why Confucians are not satisfied with egoism. Moral principles, and even laws, must have their own foundation apart from self-interest.

What is the foundation or origin of moral principle? Why do individuals have to be moral or, in the terminology of Confucius, to insist on *jen* even when *jen* is in conflict with one's own interests? Confucius did not give a clear and systematic answer to this question and it was not until Mencius that a systematic answer was given that has influenced the thinking of the Chinese for 2000 years. For Mencius, *jen*, the highest moral principle and the highest virtue from which the other moral principles and moral virtues are derived, is grounded in human nature. His most famous saying is that human nature is originally good. What this means is that there are in human nature not only instincts and desires that humans share in common with other living creatures, but also some elements that are good in themselves and are the foundations or origins of morality. Morality, therefore, is not an instrument for the satisfaction of desires or instincts, and it has a different origin in human nature from desires and instincts.

Mencius does not mean that human nature is totally good and that every human is born a sage when he says that human nature is originally good. What he means is that there are good elements in human nature and that morality is therefore not something alien to human nature but is grounded in the good parts of human nature. There are, as everyone knows, other elements, such as desires, emotions, and instincts, that are neither good nor bad. Since, however, these elements are shared by humans with other living creatures, they represent the "animal" aspect of human nature, and should not be regarded as defining human nature. This is why, when Mencius talks about human nature, he restricts the meaning of it to the parts that only humans have.

To support his theory that there are good elements in human nature, Mencius presents a famous argument. He says: "If now men suddenly see a child about to fall into a well they will, without exception, experience a feeling of alarm and distress . . . From this case we may perceive that he who lacks the feeling of commiseration is not a man . . . The feeling of commiseration is the beginning of *jen*." The feeling of commiseration that Mencius talks about is not a kind of blind feeling or instinct, but a feeling combined with a sense of right and wrong. In other words, this feeling is at the same time a consciousness of right and wrong. When people experience a feeling of commiseration toward someone who is in danger they at the same time have the consciousness that an action that conforms to this feeling is right, and what is against this feeling is wrong. This consciousness is the foundation of the judgments of right and wrong. It is with this consciousness that one can consciously make efforts to develop the feeling of commiseration and to act rightly, even at the expense of one's own interests.

Now, all people in their original nature have the feeling of commiseration, which, if fully developed, would become the virtue of *jen*. *Jen* or morality, therefore, is not something artificially added from without but is rooted in our nature. There is, however, a question: Why should one abide by *jen* instead of one's desires when *jen* and desires are in conflict?

Mencius' answer is that it is the feeling of commiseration that differentiates humans from beasts. It, rather than instincts or desires, should be developed because humans are truly human through its development.

This answer is similar to that of the essential theory of Aristotle. Mencius, however, has another answer. Whether the desires and instincts can be satisfied, he says, does not depend upon the power of humans, but upon fate. Whether one has the virtue of *jen* depends upon humans, not upon fate. Thus, humans have two kinds of natures. One is governed by human will; the other by fate or natural law. According to Mencius, only that which is or can be governed by humans is human nature and manifests a person's real self. Since the development of the feeling of commiseration is under one's own control, this feeling manifests one's real nature. It is through the development of this feeling that one's real self is manifested. Now, since moral virtue is cultivated through the development of the feeling of commiseration, the significance of morality is that it is through morality that one's real self is manifested.

The feeling of commiseration is that through which one shares the feelings of others, not only of other people, but also of other living beings. One can be happy when others are happy, and unhappy when others are unhappy. When one can completely share the feelings of others, one is in this sense at one with others. If the feeling of commiseration is a part of human nature, then humans are not necessarily isolated beings, but can be one with other beings when this part of human nature is fully developed and when one becomes a person of *jen*. Humans are not by nature egoists.

What one should do as a moral person is therefore very simple. One does not have to calculate for each occasion what the consequences would be for their decisions, as Bentham, Dewey, and even Aristotle, would ask. What one should do is simply develop one's feeling of commiseration and share the feelings of as many other beings as possible. Every human, Mencius suggests, has the feeling of commiseration towards certain kinds of people, such as parents and children. A person of *jen* or a sage is one who extends this feeling to the parents or children of others, for instance. Mencius says: "Treat the aged in your family as they should be treated, and extend this treatment to the aged of other people's families. Treat the young in your family as they should be treated, and extend this treatment to the young of other people's families." The principle of morality is to extend the feeling of commiseration from those who are close to you to those who are not close to you. The reason why a person is immoral and there is a gap between that person and others is not that the immoral person has no feeling of commiseration, but that they are too much attached to what they desire. A moral person is one who maintains consciousness of right and wrong and who consciously aims at the principle of *jen* and makes every effort to develop or extend their feeling of commiseration.

According to Mencius, the feeling of commiseration is in principle infinite and so there is no limit to the extension of this feeling. A sage is one who can extend this feeling to the infinite and so become one with the whole universe. It is not, though, one's body but one's mind that is one with the universe. When individuals are concerned not only for themselves but also for the whole universe, they have a universal mind at one with the whole universe. In the Western tradition, only God is infinite and has a universal mind that is one with the whole universe. For Confucians, however, all humans, by developing

and extending their feelings of commiseration to the infinite, can have a universal mind. The difference is that God in the Western tradition is actually a god and actually has a universal mind, whereas for Confucianism humans are merely potentially gods and have to make an effort to have a universal mind. The process of making efforts to extend one's feeling of commiseration may be infinitely long and so no one can in any stage of life claim "I am a god."

9. Existentialism

The central concept of existentialism is, of course, existence. This has several meanings. First, humans are conscious of themselves as unique and irreplaceable. Second, humans are not born with a fixed essence, as Aristotle thinks. Every class of being has some characteristic that differentiates it from other classes of beings and that is the essence of that class of beings. Each class is described and defined in terms of these characteristics. Human essence, according to Aristotle, is rationality. According to existentialism, this may be true for other classes of beings but it is not true for humans. The reason is that humans are transcendent of all kinds of characteristics. They can be conscious of any characteristic they have and go beyond that characteristic. One could become good, for instance, when one found that one was evil. One could also become proud and evil when one found that one was good. It is in this sense that humans have no fixed characteristics and are indeterminable, and so indescribable and indefinable. This is why Sartre says that individuals are not what they are, and are what they are not.

Humans are not only outside themselves, they are also outside the world and outside their past. Humans are never determined by the world or the past. They can always take the world and the past as objects of consciousness and reflect upon them, judge them, and reform them. All this is to say that humans are free. It is because humans are free that they can question and judge themselves, their past, and the world. This does not mean that there is no relationship between individuals and their past and the world. Every person is tied up with their class, nation, family, educational background, etc. It is impossible to change or modify the events that have become part of a person's history and part of their life. One has to assume this past in every action. One is always under its shadow in one's actions. In this sense one is one's own past, which is determined and is unchangeable. However, one can take one's past as an object of consciousness and reflect upon it, judge it, and give it meaning. One can be ashamed or proud of one's family background, for instance, depending on how one judges it. In other words, one's past is never a brute fact; instead one can give it meaning. It is not so much that the past determines one's actions, but that each person determines the meaning of their past. It is the meaning of the past, furthermore, not the past in itself, that is related to one's present projects and actions.

The same is true with situations in the world. Humans always act within a situation and cannot escape from it. All our projects and actions are related to our situation, which is already there. One is not free from it. However, the meaning of the situation is not determined. A hill in front of one's house is a fact. But what it means is not determined by the hill itself but by oneself. Its meaning may be that it is an obstacle to quick passage, or that is useful for taking exercise. All such meanings are given by the individual. And it is the meaning of the hill, not the hill itself, which is related to the person's projects, feelings, and actions.

The upshot of these views is that, however unpleasant the past is and however difficult the situation is, one is still free. What Sartre, and existentialists generally, mean by freedom is not power. Freedom does not mean that one can in fact obtain what one wants. It means, rather, the autonomy of choice or decision. A prisoner is not free to leave prison, for instance, but is always free to choose to attempt to escape. The reason why existentialists emphasize choice or decision in interpreting freedom is that it is not the facts of our past or the facts about our situations, but our decision about how to face and respond to the facts that makes us what we are. We are not free to change the facts, but we are always free to choose how to face the facts. This means that we are free to be the kind of person we are. It is each person who makes the decision about the meaning and the direction of their life through their choices. We create our own selves.

Since we are free to create our self, we are also free from any fixed moral rules. There are no moral rules that people are destined to observe. It is the individual person who decides what kind of life they should lead and what rules they should observe. In fact, moral rules often contradict one another in a given situation and there is no guidance as to which moral rule should be observed and which should be given up. Sartre's story about a young man in World War II demonstrates this point. The young man's mother was living alone with him and was deeply in need of his care. On the other hand, he felt his responsibility to his country and was thinking of going to England to join the Free French Forces. He was hesitating between two kinds of morality. "On the one side the morality of sympathy, of personal devotion and, on the other side, a morality of wide scope, but of more debatable validity." No one else and no moral principle could help him to choose. He alone had to make the decision. This does not mean that one can make decisions arbitrarily. To make a choice or a decision is to give up something for something else. A decision is a real decision only when one commits to it and is willing to pay the price for it and to accept all of its consequences. It is only with such a decision that one shows what one really wants, thereby manifesting one's real self.

Freedom is therefore not only something attractive, as is generally thought; it is also something dreadful. According to Kierkegaard, the first existentialist, freedom implies the feeling of dread or, in the view of Sartre, the feeling of anguish. Whenever we find that we are free to choose or to make a decision, we have the feeling of dread or anguish. The difference between dread and fear is that fear has an object, whereas dread does not. Fear is fear of something outside oneself, whereas dread or anguish is internal. What we dread is not things outside but our own freedom. We dread, whenever we find that we are free, that we are not determined and therefore have nothing to rely upon when we make a choice or decision. Sartre has shown how anguish appears by telling a story about a gambler. The gambler, who had resolved not to gamble, again finds himself, by chance, in front of a gaming table. He tells himself that he has promised not to gamble again, but his self-confidence suddenly disappears. He no longer knows what is going to happen. The decisions of the past cannot determine what he will do. He perceives with anguish that nothing prevents him from gambling. He is alone and helpless in making a new decision.

Since humans are condemned to be free, says Sartre, anguish is their constant company. In fact, anguish is inscribed in their souls and can never be eliminated. It is because humans are free that they have anguish, and it is through anguish that they are conscious of their freedom. But anguish is an unbearable feeling. In order to escape from anguish,

there is bad faith or self-deception. Some people believe in God, in absolute values or principles, in natural rights and natural duties, and through these beliefs their direction and way of life is determined. All one has to do is follow the commands of God or observe the absolute principles. One has no freedom to choose and therefore no anguish. For Sartre, all this is self-deception or bad faith, the only purpose of which is to escape anguish. It does not mean, of course, that self-deception or bad faith is a deliberate action or decision. Bad faith is an escape from freedom. It is an escape from what one is and therefore is an escape from that from which one cannot really escape. For existentialists, one who escapes from freedom has no real or authentic self. Kierkegaard says that those who hide in the crowd and dare not to make their own decisions have no self. One could hide oneself in the crowd or in God or in other authorities, including absolute moral principles, and pretend to be determined and have no freedom. This is bad faith. One who lives in bad faith has no real self.

The most important thing for existential ethics is not whether one conforms to certain moral principles, but whether one can stand out and make one's own decisions and commit to them and be responsible for what one has done. In other words, whether one can be oneself. When talking about responsibility, Sartre says that one is not only responsible for one's own individuality, but also responsible for all humans. In choosing for oneself, he says, one chooses for all. These statements imply that one should not make any decisions that one would not want others to make. This is reminiscent of Kant's categorical imperative, and seems in tension with Sartre's main thesis that there are no fixed principles for humans to follow and that humans are entirely free to make their own decisions with nothing to rely upon (see *Personal Ethics*).

Glossary

Actualization theory:	A theory that maintains that the end of a species is to actualize its essence.
Categorical imperative:	An ought statement that expresses a command for an action not for any purpose other than itself.
Confucianism:	A school initiated by Confucius and developed by Mencius that maintains that rites and laws of a society should be grounded on the virtue of <i>jen</i> , which is developed from the essential nature of human nature.
Contract theory:	An ethical theory that maintains that moral rules or laws are founded on the contracts among people for the purpose of preventing them from doing harm to one another.
Deontology:	An ethical theory according to which an action is moral not because of the value of its consequences but because it fulfills an individual's or a rational being's duty. Moral actions are therefore good not for something else, but good in themselves.
Egoism:	An ethical theory that maintains that one's own benefits are the purpose or goal of one's life and the standard of judging what is right or wrong.
Existentialism:	A philosophical movement the main concern of which is how to exist as real individuals who are the masters of themselves and not merely a slave of the mass or of authority.

- Hypothetical Imperative:** An ought statement that expresses a command for an action in order to achieve a certain end.
- Jen:** A central concept of Confucianism, which means a virtue by which one shares the feelings of others and treat others as oneself.
- Pragmatism:** A theory that maintains that a hypothesis is true if it is proved in experiments to be successful and can solve the problems as expected.
- Rationalism:** A theory that regards reason as the faculty that can discover the truth and give guidance in our actions in achieving the end of human life.
- Teleology:** A theory that maintains that every action has a purpose and that moral actions are not ends in themselves but are performed for achieving some ends.
- Utilitarianism:** An ethical theory according to which an action is right if, and only if, it tends to increase the happiness of the people concerned; and an action is wrong if, and only if, it tends to decrease the happiness of the people concerned.

Bibliography

- Berthrong J.H. (1998). *Transformation of the Confucian Way*, 250 pp. Boulder: Westview Press. [A historical approach to understanding Confucian thinking.]
- Cooper D. (1990). *Existentialism: A Reconstruction*, 201 pp. Oxford: Blackwell. [An introduction to, and discussion of, the main topics of existentialism.]
- MacIntyre A. (1998). *A Short History of Ethics: A History of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age to the Twentieth Century*, 280 pp. London: Routledge. [The first chapter of this book discusses the philosophical perspective on the history of ethics.]
- Oakeshott M.J. (1975). *Hobbes on Civil Association*, 154 pp. Oxford: Blackwell. [This book offers an interpretation and discussion of *Leviathan*, the major work of Hobbes.]
- Paton H.J. (1948). *The Categorical Imperative*, 283 pp. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [This book is a lucid and readable commentary on Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*.]
- Plamentaz J. (1966). *The English Utilitarians*, 192 pp. Oxford: Blackwell. [An introductory book on the thinking of utilitarians from Hume, Bentham, and James Mill to John Stuart Mill.]
- Sartre J. (1993). *Essays in Existentialism* (ed. W. Baskin), 437 pp. Secaucus, N.J.: Carol. [A collection of the essays of Sartre about existentialism.]
- Sullivan R.J. (1989). *Immanuel Kant's Moral Theory*, 413 pp. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press. [A comprehensive exposition of Kant's moral theory in clear ordinary language.]
- Tuck R. (1990). *Hobbes*, 127 pp. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [This book describes Hobbes' life and discusses the arguments in his philosophical works and the post-Hobbesian interpretations of the arguments.]
- Urmson J.O. (1988). *Aristotle's Ethics*, 130 pp. Oxford: Blackwell. [A book written for readers who are not familiar with Aristotle's writings. It attempts to make clear the general lines of Aristotle's thought in ethics.]
- Welchman J. (1995). *Dewey's Ethical Thought*, 229 pp. Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press. [This book traces the history of Dewey's moral philosophy from its roots in idealism through the pragmatist approach.]

Biographical Sketch

Te Chen is a retired professor in philosophy from the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Professor Chen had been the chairman of the Department of Philosophy of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the Dean of Students at Chung Chi College, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, before retiring in 1999. He

is now a senior college tutor of Chung Chi College. His area of expertise is ethics, including both Chinese and Western ethical theories. He also has interests in existentialism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. His teaching expertise includes ethics, existentialism, the ethical theories of Kant, Confucianism, philosophy, and the history of Chinese philosophy. As well as teaching at undergraduate and graduate levels, he has supervised master's and Ph.D. students.

After graduating from Chu Hai College, Hong Kong, in 1954, Professor Te Chen's M.Phil. was conferred by the New Asia Research Institute, Hong Kong, in 1968 and his Ph.D. by the Southern Illinois University, USA, in 1969.

Professor Te Chen has written several articles on ethics, comparative philosophy, and neo-Confucianism, and a book on ethical theories that was published in 1994 and has been popular reading in this field.

UNESCO-EOLSS
SAMPLE CHAPTER