

Ethics vis à vis Morals

Life or Death through Suicide

21 August-18 December 2006

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Phil. 310: LEC 12323; D115 Ethics (21 August – 18 December) Robert Buckenmeyer
 Day-To-Day syllabus; Fall '06* (30 classes) **MW 5:30PM-6:45PM PM**
Office hours: 4:45.M – 5:25PM. MW, Room 335 Davies' Hall or Humanities' Off

TOPICS	No.CLASSES	DATES	READINGS:BKST/NOTES	
Ethics	2	08\21,23	To be or not to be? Class notes:prol;Pref;Intro.	
<u>Slavic/Indo Europeans:</u>				
Tolstoy	3	08/28,30; 09\6	The Death of Ivan Ilych Chap. One	
<u>Occidental humans:</u>				
Socrates: Ethics, Morals,religion	3	09/11,13,18	Apology(notes.)	Chapter Two
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<u>Chinese humans:</u>				
Confucius	3	09/20,25,27	Analects; notes	Chapter Four
Lao Tzu	3	10/4,11,16	Tao (notes)	Chapter Four

Discussion Paper #1: What relevance, if any does morals have to do with ethics?

	2	10\18 & 23		
Occidental humans:				
<u>Heraclitus</u>	2	10\25,30	<i>Fragments</i>	<u>Chapter Five</u> ; notes
Roman				
<u>Seneca</u>	2	11\1,6	<i>Letters on Suicide</i>	Chapter Six; notes
<u>Occidental/Europeans</u>				
David Hume	2	11\8,13	<i>Essay on Suicide</i>	<u>Chap. Seven</u> ; notes
<u>Albert Camus</u>	3	11\24,25,26	<i>Myth of Sisyphus</i>	<u>Chapter Eight</u> ; notes
<u>Jean P. Sartre</u>	3	11\29\12\4,6	<i>Essay on the Hole & No Exit</i> ;notes	Chapter Nine

Discussion paper # 2: What change, if any, has occurred in your view of ethics in relation to morals and/or of the standards of human conduct between B.C. and A.D.? **2 12/11 & Final exam day, whose date and time shall be provided.**

A mid-term will be a "take-home," to be given **10\16**, due back in class on **10\23**; so that the final day on which the **second discussion paper is read will occur on the date of the final exam, whose date and time shall be provided.**

READ THE DIRECTIONS FOR WRITING AND GRADING. THE texts WILL BE discussed in the class sessions on the dates indicated, so a student may prepare for the class sessions and/or read the materials in lieu of class, except in the case of the classes scheduled for discussion paper readings as specified. **THE FOUR SCHEDULED CLASS DISCUSSION DAYS- 10\18, 23;12\11, 13 are REQUIRED ATTENDANCE. Failure to attend THESE DISCUSSION DAYS without prior notice means an "F" for the course, UNLESS PRIOR APPROVAL IS GIVEN BY THE INSTRUCTOR; THIS IS the NON NEGOTIABLE ELEMENT WHICH STANDS AS PART OF THIS SYLLABUS CONTRACT BETWEEN STUDENT AND INSTRUCTOR.**

Philosophy classes

Robert G. Buckenmeyer

DIRECTIONS: writing, grading discussion papers and other “irrelevants”

DEFINITIONS: The first thing necessary is to define the terms:

1. relevant/irrelevant(s): the only relevant goal of any course of instruction is a student's learning; the only relevant method by which any student learns is that the student understands the subject matter/method.

2. grades(ing): grades are teachers' approximate measurements of the student's internal learning and understanding of subject matter/method; essentially then, every grade is subjective, whatever the standard of measure whether of the student's skills to learn (since each student is unique) or of the student's skills to imitate. That external approximation is then quantified, so the measurement is not just subjective but arbitrary because neither learning nor understanding, as spiritual activities of the human mind and will, can be quantified. Therefore, grades/grading are conveniences for the administration of the educational system, but have little or no direct relevance to the student's life of learning, unless to score the student's ability to imitate, by, for instance, a “scantron”.

3. discussion paper(s): the discussion paper has a dual purpose: first, to stimulate the student to “objectify” in writing his/her internal thinking about a specific question and then to externalize out-loud that “objectification” to peers and the instructor during classroom readings.

This instructor uses discussion papers for the same reason an artist uses some medium through which to express an idea. Take, for instance, the potter and an idea of a beautiful pot, vase, whatever. The potter must throw clay in order to “make” the idea of the pot “real”. Only when we humans **do** something do we learn the extent of our knowledge, skill and understanding. (This fact applies equally to students and teachers.) Writing our thoughts parallels the potter's throwing of clay. As the potter molds and works the clay, the clay molds and works the potter's idea; so too, as we mold and work our words, language molds and works our idea(s).

Once thoughts are written, then, we speak what we have written. This speaking of our thoughts closes the circle of our communication with ourselves. Literally, our internally expressed idea returns to us through our speaking its written expression and we hear what we thought. We reflect upon our thinking and this reflection leads us to clarify our own thoughts. What we thought silently, we wrote; what we wrote, we speak; then we rethink again silently what we thought as we listen to what we speak.

In addition, this speaking of our written words to the class benefits us in two other ways: first, we gain confidence through sharing our thoughts and through the appreciation others show of our thought(s). Secondly, we generate new thoughts because we share in others' ideas, sparked by our spoken thoughts through discussion and dialogue. Again, this completes the circle of our communication with ourselves, but this time as human beings who share and reflect upon our thinking. What we began in the silence of our private minds, we verbally share socially; through this sharing we contact our shared, human nature, providing a social perspective to our individual, private thoughts. So our private, internal thoughts are reinforced, reevaluated, reformed, but most of all enriched, deepened, broadened and heightened.

The question now becomes: how are the discussion papers and/or any tests graded? The answer is simple: they are graded subjectively and arbitrarily, as are all grades(ing) - of course, this statement is true only if the instructor and/or administrator is honest. The question should be: how does this instructor seek to achieve a balance or justice within this subjective, arbitrarily “objective” bureaucratic requirement? This instructor seeks first to “level the playing field” by providing the same set-questions for all students to answer and a common set of primary sources

from which all students approach the question. Maria Montessori would call this “freedom within limits”. Secondly, this instructor seeks to measure the student’s increase in learning and understanding within the context of the class’ learning and understanding as expressed in two discussion papers.

This means simply that each paper is graded for two elements: first, the form through which the thoughts appear, including proper use of grammar, punctuation, spelling and other formal mechanics; in short, this means that the instructor seeks to access the student’s skills in the use of language, both as to content and structure, as the material through which the student’s ideas take shape. But, just as the idea of the most artistic ceramic clay pot is dependent upon the potter’s successful work with the ceramic clay, so the most brilliant philosophic idea depends upon the student’s work with his or her language materials. Thus, if the potter has not kneaded the clay so every bubble is removed, the most beautiful, artistic ceramic clay pot will explode within the kiln. If a student has not worked his or her language materials so the mechanics’ bubbles are removed, the most beautiful, artistic philosophic idea will explode within this instructor’s critical kiln.

The second element graded is the student’s thought process and development. This element uses the standard of the question asked and the philosopher who expressed and developed a similar thought, for the purposes of the “Intro” course, people such as Confucius, Lao-tzu, Socrates, Ivan Ilych, and so forth. This instructor frequently requests students to re-write an original paper. Such an opportunity, however, merely requests re-expression and inevitably leads the student to a deeper and broader understanding of the subject-question, sometimes to a better grade. Nevertheless, students should know that some former, successful students have re-written discussion papers more than once, twice, even more, in one case ten, yes (10) times.

Finally, the student’s second discussion paper becomes more important than the first because the student is graded upon his or her own increase in understanding and learning of the course materials. Thus, a better effort in the second discussion paper can lead to a better grade, and vice versa. The grade which any student receives lies within the control of a student’s attitude and motivation. Any person’s attitude determines that person’s ability, but one’s ability may well exceed one’s attitude. The instructional purpose is single, namely, that the material be presented in a manner such that the student may learn and understand. This instructor is not interested in providing students with information or knowledge, so students who seek such limited learning should seek it elsewhere. The student’s purpose, therefore, in writing and discussing papers is to communicate that student’s learning and understanding. Grades seek to represent the progress of each student in his or her journey on the road of learning toward understanding the problems philosophers discuss. You, therefore, grade yourselves and I, as instructor, am merely an instrument who assigns that grade for administrative, that is, bureaucratic purposes. 7/97;1/98;12/99;4/00;02/05;07\06rgb

PROLOGUE

“There is but one philosophical problem truly serious and that is suicide”. (*The Myth of Sisyphus*, p.1) Albert Camus states that judging whether one’s life is or is not worth living amounts to answering this single most important question of philosophy.

Three hundred and forty years separate Camus’ statement and Shakespeare's soliloquy of Hamlet. Yet, Hamlet's soliloquy reverberates within the hearts of so many people today:

To be, or not to be,- that is the question:-
 Whether 'tis nobler in the mind, to suffer
 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
 And by opposing end them?- To die, to sleep,-
 No more; and by a sleep to say we end
 The heart-ache, and the thousand natural shocks
 That flesh is heir to?- 'tis a consummation
 Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;-
 To sleep, perchance, to dream;- ay, there's the rub;
 For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
 When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
 Must give us pause: there's the respect
 That makes calamity of so long life;
 For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
 The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
 The pangs of dispriz'd love, the law's delay,
 The insolence of office, and the spurns
 That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
 When he himself might his quietus make
 With a bare bodkin? who would fardels bare,
 To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
 But that the dread of something after death,-
 The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn
 No traveller returns,- puzzles the will,
 And makes us rather bear those ills we have,
 Than fly to others that we know not of?
 Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
 And thus the native hue of resolution
 Is sickled o'er with the pale cast of thought;
 And enterprises of great pith and moment,
 With this regard, their currents turn awry,
 And lose the name of action...(*Hamlet, Act III, Scene I*)

A thread runs through this soliloquy and Camus’ statement and the end of this thread is the meaning of the Greek word, *aletheia*. This Greek word is composed of the Greek alpha-privative, *a*, meaning *not* and the Greek verb, *lethein*, meaning four things in the following

order: *to forget, to hide, to bury and to cover up*. English translates this Greek word as *truth* so the Greeks think of our positive word, *truth* in negative terms, that is, *what is not forgotten, what is not hidden, what is not buried and what is not covered up*.

This distinction argues to a major difference between English and Greek culture, but return to the thread. The thread we grasp here is that the Greeks argue *to being open* whereas our word covers up this openness because our word provides a *name*! The name *truth* gives us the idea we know something, that it the *truth* whereas the Greek word manifests an *attitude*, that is, showing four things we can not do, if we seek *truth*. So, this thread shows us that both the “death” and “sleep” options Hamlet refer to are functions of forgetting, or hiding, of burying and of covering up. Both “dreaming” and conscience are activities which force us to remember, to face life, to live rather than to avoid life and living by dying or sleeping.

This “pale cast of thought” about suicide is especially relevant today, beginning the third millennium, given the recent statistics concerning suicide within the United States, some of which accompany these notes. The contemporary tendency is “to take the easy way out” relative to life, namely, death when, that is, the easiest way of living, namely, the comfortable way of pleasing others, whether parents, peers, “friends” fails! - whether that death be by abortion, euthanasia, murder or suicide. The fact is that nature teaches humans through the cyclic and annual seasons to serve life, prepare for it through the annual movement of winter to spring, summer and fall and nourish it through air, water and food so that living things might mature and reproduce and thereby continue this cycle of life. Although death is a means through which nature conserves living beings, nature achieves this death through a natural selection process during which these living beings struggle to conserve the life they possess. Every living being, whether plant or animal fights against death, indeed, produces seeds so it can survive death, except the human animal, supposedly the “highest” animal!

The human being alone, that celebrated *rational animal* seeks to control both life and death, whether because the boredom of loneliness or in order to avoid the emptiness of meaning signaled by pain or to prevent inconvenience occasioned by injustice or even pregnancy. Most contemporary humans measure the gift of life against the convenience of their living. Indeed, this same human being claims suicide to be a right, claiming that such a right to kill oneself and others is a reasonable right, particularly when looked at in relation to the “quality” of one’s life. Yet, if each living being is unique and, therefore, irreplaceable, is not the basic quality of each human life the fact that it is a gift? But, if such a life is a gift, how can one claim it is reasonable to judge whether or not such a life is one of lesser or greater quality? Does not common sense preclude such a claim if and when any human being receives a gift from some other person? Whether or not that gift, a pen, for instance, costs \$50.00 or \$00.50 is irrelevant if such is a gift from another person - after all, if we take Hume’s measure of life as useful, both pens do write!

Yet, the suicide statistics are telling. The October, 1995 report by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development shows that the rate of suicide among young adolescents increased 120% from 1980-1992; the firearm-homicide rate for 10-14 year olds increased by 110% between 1985 and 1992; the smoking rate among eighth-graders rose 30% from 1991-1994; two-thirds of eighth-graders report that they have tried alcohol and 28% say they have been drunk at least once; pregnancy rates for girls younger than 15 rose 4.1% between 1980 and 1988 -

notwithstanding all the millions poured into “sex education” in public schools, the availability of condoms, various other birth control devices and birth control pills. The National Institute of Health statistics as of 1997 show that suicide is the eighth leading cause of death among all Americans and the third highest cause of death among fifteen to twenty-four year olds!

The National Center for Health Statistics also produced a report in October, 1995 which documented 23,730 homicides in 1994, of which 15-24 year-old males listed 6,790 slain for 1994, a rate of 37 per 100,000. Males showed 32,410 suicides in 1994, up 12.1% from 1993, an average of 12.4 per 100,000 people but males, ages 15-24 showed a suicide rate of 26 per 100,000 people, 110% and 300% the rate increase from 1950. The combined suicide and homicide rate for young males was 63 per 100,000 for 1994. Indeed, the New York Times of 13 October 1999 documents the statistics for the 1997 year in which guns were used nationally in 17,566 suicides compared with 13,522 homicides - the first year records show more suicides than homicides with guns!

Indeed, lack of appreciating the gift of life and lack of being recognized as a valuable gift of being alive have turned untimely death into a “natural” phenomena and a popular song. The “Notorious Big” has a “hit” song entitled “You’re nobody ‘till somebody kills you”! Contemporary America is a society of “throw always”. Once a person is no longer “useful” - the practical definition Hume uses to determine whether or not someone should live or die - the person is “down-sized”, shuttled into a rest home or made available for burial - shades of Hume’s “Essay on Suicide”! As a matter of fact, the “useless” extends to anything or anyone who is found to be inconvenient or a cause of our “inconvenience” - including the human fetus within the womb. Thus, “Notorious Big” is correct. Only the County or City Department of Health requires a valid death certificate and a valid death certificate requires a name! Indeed, although everyone has a death certificate, not everyone has a birth certificate! So, in America death becomes personal recognition and it could be “big” news and make the evening or morning TV news channel! Just think, the evening news report or the obituary column is one’s last claim to fame, except, of course, the aborted child and then only a conscience provides any memory of that child’s brief gift of life!

Camus focuses on the "pain of living" whereas Shakespeare emphasizes the possible pain of life after death. Both confront the thought of suicide from pain! One seeks the value of life compared to the pain of living; the other questions the desire to die confronted with an unknown and possible eternal future. Suicide is born out of the desire to avoid the pain of living whether that pain results from the emptiness which we call the boredom of loneliness or the physical and psychological pain humans create or seek to avoid. Popular song groups, such as the *Smashing Pumpkins*, reflect this suicide wave. Their *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness* tape release even includes a song entitled *love is suicide* in its set called *Bodies*.

Now, what is the relationship between Hamlet's speech and Camus' question? The answer is quite simple When we live other than we are, we are not ourselves. Such a way of living is painful because it is an unnatural way to live. Indeed, to live not as ourselves is to kill self, that is, to commit suicide.

But, what occasions the kind of pain which fathers this thought of suicide? That answer is also simple. The kind of pain which fathers thoughts of suicide is the pain of living other than we are. To live other than we are means to experience the pain of dying while we are still living, that is: we seek to avoid the reality of living with the pleasure of acceptance or, indeed, the pain of rejection. When we live other than we are, we are not ourselves so we seek to escape through suicide. As Camus observes in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, suicide is a thought before it is an act, however, we humans first experience the habit of living and only afterward develop the habit of thinking.

Therefore, this thought to be other than we are is suicidal. First, when we think we can avoid the realities of life, such as "the oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely", we are suicidal. To seek to avoid these "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" is to seek to avoid being human because to be human means to feel pain as well as pleasure - imagine nature's spring seeking to avoid winter's pain! Secondly, when we think we can be someone else, anyone more successful, more beautiful, richer than we are, we are suicidal. To seek to avoid acceptance of who we are, different, unique and irreplaceable, and thus to avoid being alive is suicidal because to be alive is to be human in a unique way. So, we commit suicide when we seek the "cover" of doing things as others do them or as being as others think we should be - e e cummings was as succinct as he was sublime in the sixth of *i six nonlectures*

To be nobody-but-yourself in a world which is
doing its best, night and day, to make you
everybody else-means to fight the hardest battle
which any human being can fight, and never stop
fighting.

To be oneself is not to seek "cover," not to forget, not to hide, not to bury, not to cover up. To be oneself is to be honest, and thus, truthful, a unique instance of humanity, an insight which Sartre dramatized within *Huis Clos*, *No Exit*, which Camus described within *The Myth of Sisyphus*, but which originally Plato described within the *Apology*. To be truthful is to be incarnate, that is, to be oneself, this mind in this body. The Greek word we translate as truth, alethein, literally, a, not and lethein, to forget, to hide, to bury, to cover up - perhaps the Greeks were not as pagan (that is, "out of it") as some Christians thought and still think! To be truthful is painful and pleasurable, but both are the price of the cost of being alive and living humanly.

If we look at "being oneself" within the Christian/Catholic creation/providence perspective means to accept the creative action and providential decision of God, namely, both to accept the gift of being alive and to be thankful to be alive as this unique person who is I. Indeed, within the first Chapter of *Genesis*, as Hebraic *Yhwh* breathed life into earth and calls the creation, Adam, literally, from the earth, the *Old Testament* text calls this Adam, zelem, literally, image and likeness, so Orthodox Jews see each human by transposition to be the image and likeness of *Yhwh*, God, irreplaceable, inimitable, essentially a person being loved!

Indeed, *Genesis* describes Adam and Eve seeking to know both good and evil. *Yhwh* declared everything created as good. Whereas Adam and Eve sought to know both good and evil,

thereby rejecting the created world as *Yhwh* saw it, namely, as good. Even the pagan, sixth century B.C. Heraclitus contrasted humans with God when he commented: "To God all things are good, whereas humans deem some things as good and others as bad". Indeed, another pagan, Socrates accepted himself as good even though he saw himself as knowing that he did not know. Such an acceptance was as humble as it was virtuous and this acceptance appreciated being human, in his case a questioning, Athenian Greek. Such an acceptance is human wisdom, the highest virtue to which the human can attain, a combination of love and knowledge, or, rather, love of knowledge as the human good, literally, the love of being human, as we shall see, the *jen* of Chu Hsi, Confucius and Mencius.

The accepted alternative to being oneself, or ethical is to identify with a group and, thus to be moral. Yet, is it not good to be moral? Friedrich Nietzsche makes an insightful comment that "Morality is the best of all devices for leading mankind by the nose".

Today, the American press is replete with articles announcing the decline of morals within human society. Parents question themselves about the lack of morals their children show. Citizens complain about the breakdown of morals in government. State and federal workers complain about the lack of accountability in the management of public monies. This is the 90's, however, a quotation of Charles Dickens is as relevant today as it was in David Copperfield's time about 1855: "This is the best of times; this is the worst of times". If we turn back to the time before Christ, specifically, the fifth century B.C., we find Socrates lamenting the lack of ethics vis á vis morals in Athens. A pagan distinguishes between public morals and private ethics! Perhaps we "Christians" can learn something which might nurture our meaning for life.

For I spend my whole life in going about and persuading you all to give your first and greatest care to the improvement of your souls, and not until you have done that to think of your bodies or your wealth. And I tell you that wealth does not bring excellence, but that wealth, and every other good thing which men have, whether in public or in private, comes from excellence. (*Apology 29b-30b*)

The contemporary complaint, the statements of Socrates, the statement of Camus and the soliloquy of Hamlet converge. The message is the same: the goodness or badness of a human being is internal and results from each person's choices and actions. Humans can control nothing which comes from the outside of us; but humans can control only what comes out of us, our reactions to external people and actions. External achievements, whether reputation, honor or wealth have no effect, or only a temporal and, therefore, temporary effect upon the internal goodness or badness of any human being - unless, that is, that individual person, like Ivan Ilych decides that it can and does affect him or her!

This difference between external and internal influences creates the basis for the distinction between morals and ethics. Whatever practical purpose is served by the claim that "the devil made me do it", or the lament "if I had a different mother or father", or excuses such as "if my peers had not done it," "if I had a better example", "if only I had known", "if I only had another chance", or "if I only had a better education" the fact stands: we individually made the decision to go along or not to go along with these external influences and excuses. We chose to agree or disagree, to act or not to act. We find that the New Testament provides us a unique

example for the inability to exercise control over individual, human choices, even if we were to return from the dead to warn others, our most beloved of the results which individual decisions entail. So Abraham advises the rich man who begs Abraham to have Lazarus go back and warn his brothers of what happens if they also do not feed the hungry (Luke 16:19-31).

The Gospel, literally Greek for the Good News emphasizes individual responsibility, even the sacredness of choice within the parable of the "rich man and Lazarus". The temporal, rich man had rejected the daily, perhaps to him painful presence of a beggar, one Lazarus, whose sores the rich man had seen dogs lick. Both died. The rich man found torment in Hades and saw Lazarus in the "bosom" of Abraham. The rich man asked that Abraham allow Lazarus to dip his hand in water and drip the water upon his tongue, however, Abraham rejected this request, commenting that "...between us and you a great gulf has been fixed..." The rich man then begged Abraham to send Lazarus to his five brothers "to give them warning so that they do not come to this place of torment too". Abraham observes: They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them. The rich man insists: "...if someone comes to them from the dead, they will repent". Abraham retorts: "If they will not listen either to Moses or to the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead".

The "Good News" is that each of us decides but one thing. None of us decides whether we are to be born or when we are to die - the former might be the result either of an act of passion, even a criminal act or a result of love, or a mixture. The latter is the decision of a combination of factors we call "nature" - of course, contemporaneously, given the cheapness in which people, particularly many contemporary Americans hold the uniqueness of life, whether those advocating abortion or euthanasia, humans more than "nature" is the cause! The one thing each of us can decide is how to live as we are, that is, whether to choose to live or die. As a matter of fact, the "Good News" quotes Jesus Christ as saying:

Anyone who finds his life will lose it; anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it. (Matthew, 10, 37-39; Mark 8, 34- 38; Luke, 9, 23-26; 14, 26-27)

If that does not suggest suicide, how else would the advertisement read? In addition, John's "Good News" quotes Christ as saying:

...and I lay down my life for my sheep...The Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me; I lay it down of my own free will, and as it is in my own power to lay it down, so it is in my power to take it up again...(John 10, 15- 21)

Later on within John's "Good News", Jesus Christ states an apparent and ultimate New Testament vindication for suicide:

This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you. A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do what I command you. (John 15, 12-14 and I John 1:4, 3:16 and 13:34.)

The question is, therefore, not whether or not to commit suicide, but whether suicide is not the best choice a Christian/Catholic can make?

Human beings are strange. They want to be independent, yet they seek to be dependent. They want to control, yet, they submit to being controlled. They crave power, but they claim impotence. They pretend to be rational as they continue to rationalize. They want rights, but not responsibilities: they want the appearance of knowing and acting (call it "my rights"), yet they reject the reality of knowing and acting (call it "my responsibility"). Today, we hear countless arguments for "rights", seldom any for "responsibility". Perhaps we may view this human ambivalence in a traditional, philosophical way of the problem between the one and many. Heraclitus, for instance, stated:

...To be in agreement is to differ; the concordant is the discordant. From out of all the many particulars, comes oneness, and out of oneness come all the many particulars.
(Frag. 112)

To be born is to be the same and different. Each is a child of two parents, the recipient of twenty-three chromosomes from each the father and the mother and so with similar DNA, characteristics and traditions, another human being - notwithstanding cloning and various other technological innovations! Yet, each child is unique, an inimitable forty-six chromosomes. Growth confronts the child with this same one and many. The desire to belong seduces the child to be one with family and peers, yet the urge to be many, oneself, confuses the child to be assertive, independent. If we apply the soliloquy of Hamlet to this conflict, we could describe our situation as a "to be or not to be", to be myself, independent, unique, or to be as others want me, dependent, a member of the family, one of the group. The question, of course, is the same, as Camus comments: whether the pain of living as myself-human-being is worth living? This is the question for suicide.

The urge to be independent, however, is itself seductive. We ask: "what do you want of me?" "What are you doing?" We seek to control people through these "what" questions, trying to force them to explain their requests and actions in our own terms, assuming that answers will provide the brakes upon the speed of individual human actions. We ask these questions as the "blindens" for our own vision. We ask these questions, but refuse to do any self-reflection. The issue of human action is not "what" but "how". "How" we act, not what we do is the key to understand "human" action. All animals, human as well, eat, walk, "talk", hear, feel and live. The difference between and among these animals is "how" each kind of animal eats and acts. When we speak of a human being we call this different "how" "rational", yet, even though we are all so-called "rational animals", each of us is unique.

Again, the one and many, indeed, the same but different confront us humans. We, like Adam and Eve after they sought to know both good and evil by eating the fruit from the tree of both good and evil cover up differences in order to remain comfortable with being the same, not being different from the "crowd". Yet, humans are not simple beings, as it were, but we are complex; we are not like everybody else, each is different. We are neither animal, or rational; rather, we are both. But, when does it mean to be rational, to be human? Rational stands as an adjective, modifier of animal, the noun. However, we humans make more out of the rational

adjective than we do the animal noun. We focus on being rational, yet, ignore being animal. Then, we equate this rational with being someone other than we are, hiding under the cloak of being moral and with having rights. Indeed, we even use our rational ability to reduce the unique particulars we perceive within and around us to a so-called universal - humans are no longer unique individuals but become rational animals, a group to which we all belong, a comfortable category! So, many contemporary American women scream for equality with males - given the biological diversity such a cry hardly can be a reasonable expectation! But, we continue this reduction in order to avoid facing the differences, the complexities of living - we reduce some of these rational animals into criminals, law breakers, others into law-abiding, into "welfare recipients" and "people who work for a living".

The following chapters investigate this human strangeness as it has been discussed or written about by various philosophers and authors. Each chapter discusses one of these works and authors and the exhibit contains the discussed work; this way the reader may read about the meaning of the work from a second perspective and read the work itself from his or her own perspective. This approach seeks to convey understanding of the work and the human problem; the purpose of this understanding is that the reader better will understand him or herself.

The questions are many, but the problem is the same. The problem is: am I really choosing to perform or not to perform a given act; am I being responsible or irresponsible? The questions are many: am I ethical or am I am moral? Can I be moral when I am ethical? If I am religious, am I moral? Or, if I am ethical can I be religious? What, if any, is the relationship between morals and ethics; between religion and morals; between religion and ethics, between living as I am and dying as someone else? The basis of the problem is how does the I-who-am relate to the we from whom I am born and with whom I live? Of course, the age old issue is the relationship between the human being as individual and as social.

The problem concerns how a human being rightfully continues to be him or herself, a unique individual while at the same time responsibly assumes other roles on the Shakespearean stage of life. We each, after all, have our part and our time in this play we call "life". Those other roles might be any one of the following, or others, not listed: self and child; self and parent; self and spouse; self, wife and mother; self, husband and father; self, wife, airline hostess, wife and mother; self, husband, store manager and father. The issue is the ability of the human person to be centered as a unity, yet, at the same time to be diverse and a multiplicity.

Originally, of course, we are centered as a unity, yet, at the same time we are diverse and a multiplicity. This is reality, a fact of nature and the result of biology. Although the I is one, yet, I is many. The I is body and soul; mind, will, feelings and emotions; body as head, upper body, hands, torso, feet; soul as knowing and loving; body as brain, heart, large and small intestine, and so forth. The pronominal and practical I is the pronominal and real "we." The interesting thing about this biological fact is that we accept this as reality, understand it when we say I and do not lose our center as a result of the awareness. Yet, when this I considers its relationship to parents, even siblings, but especially peers, this I reacts like a ship in a stormy sea. I feels that I is losing I's balance and that I's center disappears.

The physiological acceptance and confidence gives way to a psychological confusion, even fear. Who am I? Will I lose "me"? My very life is at stake. Our thinking affects our living and our acting. Our thinking about who and how we are affects how we act. Indeed, our thinking about ourselves affects how we think about other people and how we act toward other people changes accordingly.

Of course, the dilemma each human being faces is whether or not to be as each is or as others, even loved ones, but especially peers want us to be. To be different always occasions discomfort whereas to conform induces comfort. But common sense faces a fact of nature and biology: being unique means to be different. So, the problem persists: even if I conform I can never be the same! Thus, each of us must face our image whenever we look into a mirror and ask the question: if I am who I am, then my actions are unique to me, so how can I ever be or act like other people want and act? Contemporary movies, entitled "Shirley Valentine" and "Word of Honor" dramatize this issue and present this problem. The following chapters seek to explore this issue and problem from the perspective of several philosophic and prose works, some oriental, others occidental.

PREFACE

Religion, Morals and Ethics and Human History

The *New Testament* records one suicide, that of Judas Iscariot. Neither *Testament* denounces any of these reported suicides. Indeed, Matthew's recounting of Judas' return of the thirty silver pieces and the hanging of himself clearly implies the possibility that Judas' suicide reflects an act of repentance. (Matthew, 27: 3-10) Two early fathers of the Catholic church, Tertullian and Origen imply that Christ committed suicide and compare it to the ultimate act of love, namely, the giving up of one's life for a friend. John Donne, the English poet and Catholic Christian who became an Anglican priest comments in *Biathanatos* (literally, the force of death), 1621: "Our blessed Savior...chose that way for our Redemption to sacrifice his life, and profuse his blood". (Part 1, Distinction 3, Section 2)

The early Christian Catholic church adopted the Roman view of suicide, namely, that it was a choice made by noble men: whether pagan, such as the Greek Socrates, Isocrates, Demosthenes, Codrus, Charondas, Lycurgus, Cleombrotus, Cato, Zeno, Cleanthes, Seneca and Paulina; early Romans, like Lucretius, Lucan, Labienus, Terence, Aristarchus, Hannibal, Brutus, Cassius, Mark Anthony; or Eastern notables like Cleopatra, Nerva, Statius, Otho, King Ptolemy of Cyprus, Mithridates and the King Sardanapalus of Persia; or Catholic Christians, martyrs like Stephen or Perpetua.

Early Catholic Christian converts looked upon death as an opportunity to imitate Christ. Indeed, about 202 A.D., the letters of Pliny the Younger, Governor of Corinth (now Turkey) reveal the death sentence which was given for being a Catholic Christian. Indeed, the extant prison diary of one Perpetua, a pregnant woman details the last days of one such Catholic Christian. Perpetua had refused to offer public sacrifice to the Emperor, stating that she was a Christian. She persisted in her statement, as Pliny repeated the question three times, so he condemned her to be eaten by the animals in the amphitheater. After she gave birth, she was led into the amphitheater and faced down the lions although they mauled her badly. The Governor sent a young gladiator into the arena to dispatch her with his sword, but as the gladiator looked at her, his hand was shaking so badly that he could not cut off her head. Perpetua again proclaimed herself a follower of Christ, took his hand and thrust the sword into her throat. Turtullian, the Catholic Christian Theologian subsequently wrote in his *Apology* that "the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians".

Justinian's Digest of Roman law specified that the suicide of a private citizen was not punishable if it had a "rational cause". Three such "rational" causes were possible: "...impatience of pain or sickness, or by another cause...(or) by weariness of life...lunacy, or fear of dishonor". This motivation of "dishonor" was the reason Socrates, the Greek drank hemlock and Rikiu, the Japanese noble killed himself with his sword. However, the Romans did not permit suicide "without rational cause" because "...whoever does not spare himself would much less spare another".

Ironically, the Roman argument was that if a person held him or herself in such disregard as to commit suicide, then such a person would treat other persons likewise and be inclined to

kill them, thus, causing a public disorder. But, the Romans listed three other specific cases wherein suicide became a crime: a slave committing suicide to deprive his master of a capital investment, namely, him or herself; a soldier committing suicide was the equivalent of desertion; and a criminal committing suicide to avoid a trial or to avoid his or her sentencing - in these cases, however, the crime was not religious or ethical, but rather economic since the possessions of the deceased reverted to a Roman citizen (in the first case) or to the Roman state (in the last two cases).

However, barely three centuries later, the black Berber Catholic Christian Aurelius Augustine and the Catholic church faced a phenomenon which changed the Roman Catholic church's tolerance of suicide after the Roman model; that phenomenon developed within Catholic Christianity itself. Two Catholic groups, one called the "Donatists", in the fourth century A.D., then later, another called the "Albigensians", in the early thirteenth century A.D. advocated suicide as "proof" of one's love of Christ in God. Both the "Donatists" and the "Albigensians" cited the Old Testament, Jewish example of Eleazar and the seven brothers at Masada (2 Maccabees 6:18-7:42) as the ultimate sacrifice of faith in Yhwh. This Donatist phenomenon is even the subject for inclusion within Gibbon's *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*:

The rage of Donatists was inflamed by a phrensy of a very extraordinary kind: and which, if it really prevailed among them in so extravagant a degree, cannot surely be paralleled in any country or any age. Many of these fanatics were possessed with the horror of life and the desire of martyrdom; and they deemed it of little moment by what means or by what hands they perished, if their conduct was sanctified by the intention of devoting themselves to the glory of the true faith and the hope of eternal happiness. Sometimes they rudely disturbed the festivals and profaned the temples of paganism with the design of exciting the most zealous of the idolaters to revenge the insulted honor of their Gods. They sometimes forced their way into the courts of justice and compelled the frightened judge to give orders for their execution. They frequently stopped travellers on the public highways and obliged them to inflict the stroke of martyrdom by promise of a reward, if they consented - and by the threat of instant death, if they refused to grant so very singular a favor. (Vol. III, p. 401; Henri Daniel-Rops provides a more specific description of the Donatist schism within his two volume work, *The Church of Apostles and Martyrs*, Doubleday, Image Books, 1960, Vol. II, pp. 189-196)

St. Augustine, the black Berber, fourth century A.D. Catholic Bishop of Hippo in North Africa argued against the suicide of the Donatists, calling it a "sin against God". His argument was similar to the Greek Socrates' arguing against suicide within Plato's *Phaedo* - some scholars state that Plato's *Phaedo* is the source of Augustine's argument. This "sin against God" resulted from the same Socratic (and, prior to Plato, Pythagorean) principle, namely, that one's human life is a gift from God. Thus, to take one's life is to murder oneself and from Augustine's time to today civil law has struggled with the identification of the crime, murder, with the criminal, as the victim - so after Augustine, the same person becomes both victim and criminal, the murdered and the murderer.

Augustine, therefore, compared taking one's life with taking another's life when he said that suicide is a violation of the sixth commandment - something which the Old Testament did

not do. The Council of Orleans in 533 A.D. then denied funeral rites to anyone who killed himself while accused of a crime; the Council of Braga in 562 A.D. extended this exclusion to all suicides, regardless of social position, reason or method; the Council of Toledo in 693 A.D. ordered that even the person who attempts suicide be excommunicated, that is, be excluded from reception of the Christian Catholic sacraments. These decisions were made in order to stop a fanatical religious effort within the Catholic church, in spite of the best of religious intentions, yet the effect was that Catholic, then Protestant Christianity thereafter classified any suicide as a crime against the victim. So, legally suicide makes the victim become the criminal.

Much later, in the early 11th century A.D., the Cathar immigrant eastern non-Christians, Catholic heretic Manichaeians (a hybrid of Greek and Persian pagan Gnostics) moved into Germany and Southern France. French Catholics who later became schismatic Huguenots claimed these Cathars as their ancestors. These Cathars, literally, Greek meaning pure, (the original "puritans" whose example and name became the English Protestant puritans who came to America) claimed a purity of spirit and liberation from matter and a material world which they viewed as evil.

Huguenots sought direct communication with God and advocated suicide as the means to proclaim their freedom from the material world and to achieve union with God. These Cathars, "the pure ones", called "the Perfect" attracted many European Christian Catholics within the region of Albi in southern France from whence Cathars acquired the name Albigensians. This movement was condemned as heretical by the Catholic Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 and Rome launched two crusades against the Cathars, driving them from France in 1229. (An interesting fact is that St. Dominic, founder of the Dominicans and his closest assistant went to Albi to reason with these Albigentians so they would not be killed, at the same time that other Dominicans were setting up what came to be called the Inquisition both in France and Spain.) Here a Catholic, Christian country drives a religious group from French soil because they advocate suicide as the action which "buys" union with God and eternal life.

Ethics, morals, religion, all gravitate about the issues of life and death, right and wrong, good and evil, virtue and vice. The public has views on these matters and private individuals have views which agree, or differ with these public views or both. The question is: is any consensus possible about what is right and what wrong, what is good and what evil, what is virtuous and what vicious? Is human suicide noble because human life is ignoble or does the gift of being alive preclude ending it through suicide? History reveals many views, but are these views applicable to the present needs? Do the views debated and written during the B.C.era (Or B.C.E. for those "pure" secular historians) have any relevance to the problems of our A.D. period of history (or, C.E., again for our "pure" secular historians!)?

The question people frequently ask about evil versus good, physical evil versus being "normal" is the same one which the disciples asked Jesus Christ when they saw the blind man: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, for him to have been born blind?" The answer is the same now as it was then: "Neither he nor his parents sinned", Jesus answered, "he was born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in him".(John, 9:1-8) When these same people ask this question about moral evil, the implication is the same: namely, that the sins of the father are inherited by the children. The fact of the matter is that good parents do not make good children,

nor do bad parents make bad children. Good children come from bad parents; bad children come from good parents. Good people exist in bad neighborhoods and bad times; bad people exist in good neighborhoods and good times. The fourth century B.C. Aristotle commented on the origin of a person's good or bad actions within the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

Now, we must start with the known. But this term has two connotations: 'what is known to us' and 'what is known' pure and simple. Therefore, we should start perhaps from what is known to us. For that reason, to be a competent student of what is right and just, and of politics generally, one must first have received a proper upbringing in moral conduct. The acceptance of a fact as a fact is the starting point, and if this is sufficiently clear, there will be no further need to ask why it is so. A man with this kind of background has or can easily acquire the foundation from which he must start. But if he neither has nor can acquire them, let him lend an ear to Hesiod's words:

That man is all-best who himself works out every problem... That man, too, is admirable who follows one who speaks well. He who cannot see the truth for himself, nor, hearing it from others, store it away in his mind, that man is utterly useless. (Nich. *Ethics*, Book 1, Chap. 4 1095b-15)

The decisive factor in virtue or vice is not intelligence, but the simple common sense effort to determine fact from fiction and accept fact as fact. This is a simple matter of free choice. A person chooses to do or not to do a particular action, to accept or to reject his or her life. Nevertheless, the haunting tendency is to "cover up" this simple matter by seeking some excuse for an individual's actions in the parents from whom we came, the friends with whom we associate or the circumstances in which we live. These excuses presume that whatever is "bad" in those actions comes from our DNA, the circumstances, influences, or, generally, from outside forces beyond "our" control. But, the fact of the matter is everything is beyond our control except what comes out of any one of us! A human being has control only over what comes out of him or her, whether that be words or actions.

Yet, before we read some of the works of people such as Plato, Confucius, Tolstoy and Sartre on the issues of virtue and vice, ethics, morals and religion, we must clarify the basic meaning of each of these words. People frequently use both ethics and morals interchangeably. To make matters worse, Black's Law Dictionary (1983 edition), the source for all definitions of matters litigated in American courts defines both ethics and morals in the same manner, defining "ethics (p. 286) as "of or relating to moral action..." -a definition which would seem to call into question an individual's legal standing and actions within this litigious society! Then, some people include religion and use all three words synonymously. But, linguistically and factually these words differ, one from the other. We all recognize that an ethical person may be moral, for instance, yet a moral person might not be ethical. So also, an ethical person may be religious, but a religious person may be neither ethical nor moral. Furthermore, people may speak of and debate moral theories, however, only individual people are ethical and/or religious.

The fact is that "moral" comes from the Latin, *mos*, meaning manner, custom or habit in the sense of the fashionable thing; so moral is what is conventional, the socially acceptable thing

to do. Therefore, to be moral is to be socially conscientious when we act. Tolstoy's Ivan Ilych, within *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, is the clearest literary example of the moral person.

"Ethical". on the contrary, comes from the Greek *ethos*, meaning character, literally, the way one has oneself, thus, its Latin counterpart *habitus*, or its English equivalent *habit*, as in the way one is, is the result of one's chosen actions, or the "end" because of which one lives one's daily life. So, to be ethical is to act or not to act because the act is right or wrong respectively. Plato's Socrates, within the *Apology*, is the best historical example of an ethical person.

"Religious" comes possibly from three Latin words, each with the same prefix: *re*, meaning again. Those three Latin words are: *lego*, *légere*, meaning to read; *lego*, *legére*, meaning to choose; *ligo*, *ligére*, meaning to bind. So, religion means: to re-read, re-choose and re-bind; to re-read the signs indicating that God exists, to re-choose the fact that God exists, and to re-bind oneself to the God that exists.

In addition, people sometimes misunderstand the relevance of religion to ethics and morals. To be ethical is not only not to be moral, but to be ethical is also not to be religious and to be religious is not to be moral. Ethics is more basic than religion because it is the way a human being chooses "to have him or herself", whereas religion is the human being's chosen relation to God, or an Absolute, whether named Yhwh, Tao, Allah, who or whatever. Although ethics and religion are inherently related, a person's view of him or herself is more basic because such a self-view can affect that person's view of God and therefore his or her relationship to God. Indeed, one's self-image determines one's image of God, notwithstanding the fact that Genesis states:

God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them. (Genesis 1: 27)

The most obvious reason this is true has to do with the scriptural author, language and the translator. "God" here is referred to as "he," whereas the God of the Pentateuch specifically is described as Yhwh, "I am who is", "I am who am". (Exodus 3: 13-15) The Hebrew Yhwh has no gender and is not "gender" specific.

A less obvious reason is that our love of self mirrors, images and reflects our love of others. Human beings, individually and socially tend to be solipsistic. Aristotle, the Athenian 3rd Century B.C. Philosopher, stated this within the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

The friendly relations which we have with our neighbors and which serve to define the various kinds of friendship seem to be derived from our relations to ourselves. We love as a friend (1) a person who wishes for and does what is good or what appears to him to be good for his friend's sake; or (2) a person who wishes for the existence and life of his friend for the friend's sake. This is also the feeling which mothers have for their children and which friends who have had a quarrel, (but are still friends) have for one another. We regard as a friend also (3) a person who spends his time in our company and (4) whose desires are the same as ours, or (5) a person who shares sorrow and joy with his friend. This quality, too, is most frequently found in mothers. By one or another of these sentiments people also define friendship.

A good man has all these feelings in relation to himself. All others have it to the extent that they regard themselves as good; and the measure (of excellence, areté) in particular instances seems to be virtue and a man of high moral standards, as we have said. (Nicomachean Ethics, Book 9, Chapter 4, 1166a-15)

Aristotle places “motive”, or intention in the center of any human choice. So, whether this distinction between ethics and morals is valid, the fact is: each human being has the ability to make his/her own choice or to choose even if someone else tells him to do or not to do something. We each have two choice options within our power. We can act because the act is right or wrong or because our peers think the act is right or wrong. So, even if a human acts because someone else tells the person to act in such a way, that human chooses to act for that reason!

One thing that Plato's *Apology* or Tolstoy's *Death of Ivan Ilych* teaches is that we can be moral by social standards, and still not be ethical, yet, because each chooses how to act or not to act, each is responsible for his or her actions. Thus, we can act according to society's norms, that is, do what we are told by parents, teachers or our peer group, and yet, lack any character, or we can act against society's norms and be ethical. We also see that both choices lead to death. However, in both cases we are responsible for the action or non-action in which we engage. A second thing both these works teach is that we may be religious and moral, but not be ethical, as was Ivan Ilych. We also may be ethical and religious, but not moral, as Socrates was.

One ethical Socrates meant at least 226 moral Athenians in the fifth century B.C., and, if the American public's response to a self-styled military moral Oliver North or a legally moral President William Clinton are indicators, moral Americas are legion. At the same time, these 226 moral Athenians claimed they were religious because they also found Socrates guilty of being an atheist, yet, Socrates cited his belief in the Athenian priestess and in the truth of this priestess and God as the sources of his ethical quest for wisdom. So also, Oliver North claimed both patriotism and religion as his twin motives for perjury and violation of congressional law - however, North, originally a Catholic, left Catholicism in favor of a Christian fundamentalist group after Vatican II, saying that the Catholic Church had turned "leftist and soft" on Communism - the use of such excuses to justify one's actions is typical of a moral person, but not of an ethical person. Nevertheless, ethics, morals and religion are usually "mixed up" one with the other. Of course, Clinton claimed his legally moral statements before family, staff, the public and a grand jury were motivated by his “embarrassment” and effort to protect his family! Moral people always find and make excuses!

Ethics, as a matter of fact, must be the core of morals, if morals are to be anything but what the crowd, at any given time, in any given place, during any given age and on any given subject approves or disapproves of as a social group. In the same manner, ethics must have its roots in religion, that is, a person's relation to God, or an Absolute, even though social groups use "religion" as the reason for disciplining, exiling, even killing ethical persons as anti-social, or even deviates as “sick”.

The majority of the 501 Athenians judging Socrates guilty worshiped the God(s) and Goddess(es) of Athens and Ivan Ilych practiced the Orthodox Catholic religion; but, they all did so only because of their social position not out of personal conviction resulting from free choice. These moral people accepted and worshiped a social, group-approved God. Socrates, on the other hand, believed in God personally and acted on that belief ethically. Ivan Ilych only found his personal relation to God toward the end of his life and, using that as his basis, found the strength to choose what was right from what was wrong the first time in his adult life.

Finally, morals can be taught, but ethics can not. Indeed, it is John Stuart Mill in his Utilitarianism who organizes human actions around the public mores and, therefore, emphasizes that the means necessary to develop a moral society are education and legislation. Lao-tse, on the other hand, in his Tao, or The Way, condemns the attempt to educate and legislate morality or right action (li) within sixth Century B.C. Chinese society. Lao-tse even states that such social engineering, or tse "corrupts" human nature by distracting people from natural empathetic feeling available to a person's conscience and by habituating them to social opinions. This, Lao-tse contends creates social immorality and chaos instead of morality and order and this is why he rejects formal education and resists using words.

So, if education and legislation are used, then morals will be acquired through a basic animal survival technique called "imprinting". Yet, anyone with a rudimentary knowledge of animal behavior (and human beings are a type of animal) knows that baby chicks, for instance, if hatched by a duck will imprint duck-mother actions. Yet, no chicken is a duck, and, in some cases where such an "off" kind of imprinting occurs, the differences between the imprinted and the "parent" can be so great that the imprinted dies as a result. Many a baby chick has drowned in a farm's lake, notwithstanding the frantic efforts of the "foster mother" duck. So, Ivan Ilych died because he imprinted on his "peer" society!

The problem which morals bring, therefore, might be imprinted through parental actions or societal and school instruction. Then, of course, positive law reinforces these problems, but none of these efforts can be the source of ethical actions. Thus, no country can take pride in being a country of "law and order" because any order which positive law produces is exterior only and will remain only as long as the "long arm of the law" hovers over the people, or as long as the parent or teacher watches over the child or student. This lesson has the proof of the historic "fall" of the Soviet Union with the tearing down the East Berlin's wall. The chaos we have witnessed to have occurred in the Baltic and Yugoslavia is proof that hatred and division are only controlled by fear of external penalties, but "break out"

Ethics cannot be taught, nor legislated - a fact newspaper and T.V. news headlines and stories attest to in America today and will continue to do tomorrow. Of course, neither can religion be taught. Even religion can be imprinted or inherited, yet, each person must choose and decide what his or her relation is to God, or an Absolute, only, however, after and to the extent that person has achieved self-knowledge.

Aristotle states clearly and concisely the personal nature of ethics, even though he, as a father, wrote the *Nicomachean Ethics* for his then seventeen year old son:

we are not conducting this inquiry in order to know what virtue is, but in order to become good, else there would not be an advantage to studying it. (Nic. Ethics, Bk. 2, Chap. 2: 1103b 25-30)

So, notwithstanding Aristotle's and Plato's contention that the basis of free choice is knowledge of facts, it is clear that whatever power knowledge is and has, self-knowledge is the basis of that power. So, too is self-knowledge the basis or root of ethics whereas knowledge of society's ways might be the basis of morals.

This contention of Plato and Aristotle might imply that knowledge is virtue - an implication that few scholars have understood about Plato's *Meno* or *Theaetetus*. But, if knowing that we do not know reflects the human condition, then the only knowledge which constitutes the basis for human excellence, or virtue is knowing that one does not know. So, therefore, the only kind of knowledge which is power is self-knowledge!

This is precisely why Socrates reluctantly concluded to his being the wisest, or most virtuous of men; he became aware, or knowledgeable that he did not know when his peers claimed that they did know. The self-thinking which Socrates did, affected his actions. His thinking that human wisdom consisted in knowing that we do not know, affected his actions toward himself, namely, his questioning the statement of the Delphic Oracle. But, this thinking about human wisdom also affected his actions toward other Athenian citizens, namely, he deemed it his sacred duty to question them about the meaning of wisdom. This kind of thinking resulted in a like kind of living, however, a life of questioning not appreciated by his Athenian peers. Although no thought of suicide entered the thinking of Socrates, the majority decision of his Athenian judges found him guilty of treason and ordered the ultimate penalty, death by drinking hemlock.

Socrates discovered that human virtue rests upon self-knowledge and this set the stage for Plato's discussions in the *Meno* and the *Theaetetus* and for Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Thus, Aristotle's twin contention that his inquiry seeks not "to know what virtue is, but...to become good" merely reasserts his agreement about the relevance of Socratic self-knowledge and then seeks to determine how to apply it through the virtue of prudence to achieve continuing growth in human virtue. To know oneself, therefore, is to be virtuous because knowing self means that one knows that one does not know.

Introduction

We human beings pride ourselves on two issues: first, that we are of a higher order than all other animals; secondly, that we are free, or rather, are capable of free choice. A classical definition of human being, for instance, is rational animal. But, this definition is unusual in two ways. First, the grammar of this definition specifies that rational is an adjective modifying the noun animal. So, grammatically the noun animal is more important than the adjective rational. Secondly, however, we humans customarily place more emphasis upon the adjective rational than we do on the noun animal. So, we frequently show embarrassment about being animal and boast about being rational. But, are we humans a “higher” order of animal?

Whether this is true or not depends not upon the theoretical truth of the statement but upon the practical "how" we human beings act. The sixth century B.C., pagan Heraclitus, for instance, prefers donkeys to human beings since donkeys prefer yellow colored hay to gold because hay nourishes animal life; some humans, on the other hand, choose yellow gold to nourishing food and starve to death. The person who tells others that they should do as s/he says not as s/he does is the person who has a twisted view of the human being. Indeed, the fact that the very life of any newly born animal of whatever species depends upon its ability to imprint parental actions rather than verbal directions. This is why Michael Mails, Professor, University of California Irvine has been so critical of the October, 1995 Carnegie report mentioned in the Prologue, stating that the Carnegie report on ten to fourteen year-old youth blamed them but should have blamed parents for the plight of American youth today. Thus, the title of his new book is: *The Scapegoat Generation: America's War on Adolescence*.

Words are least active. Worse: our actions frequently contradict our words. Whether we say that we love others is one thing, but our actions toward ourselves and others are something else again. This is why Lao-tse advocates feeling rather than speaking! The "adult" emphasis upon verbal statements as more important than volitional actions exaggerates the rational aspect of the human being more than the human aspect of living. Indeed, the characteristic Protestant Congregational comment of parent to child was (and is) “do as I say, not as I do” - such a statement is a logical offshoot of the Albigenian immigrants to America, mentioned in the *Preface*.

If we look into a mirror, what we see might not necessarily be the image reflected. We, for instance, might be looking for something other than what the image reflects. Many of us forget that human beings are both animal and rational. The test of being human is whether or not we can achieve a balance between these two essential components of human nature. The proof of that balance is what we call the virtue of being human. Many humans emphasize the rational but ignore the animal. Others revel in the animal and forget about the rational. Those who ignore the animal are condemned to be animals whether or not they accept animal as an essential component of being human. The sound and odor of a fart bring laughter and embarrassment during the most dignified dinner party or the most intelligent discussion. Those who forget the animality of being rational must remember it at the most importune times. Over-eating or over-drinking are doomed to the soaring scale-indicator, or the morning-after head aches. They bring

reflections of regret, questions of "why?" and statements of "never again" - they might also bring arrest, fines and jail, indeed, even death.

Take the second view that human beings are free, or rather that we humans have the capability of free choice. The two words free choice are neither synonymous nor interchangeable. For instance, free choice means just that: we can choose one of at least two alternatives. If these alternatives are to perform a virtuous or perform a vicious act, then we are able to make a free choice. In other words, freedom means that we human beings are free to be good or bad -- the choice of how we act is ours and how we are means how we live.

The issue is not nature; nor is the issue nurture. The fact is free choice. Whatever the contribution of nature and the influence of nurture, the fact is that we human beings each has free choice or s/he is not free. This fact affects how we live as well as whether or not others can live. One example is post-natal alcohol syndrome. PNA curtails the child's, and subsequently, the person's free choice, even, perhaps diminishing it severely. (We do not yet know what the long term effects that chemical using fathers and mothers will have on their children's ability to choose freely since the 1990 school year brought the first "crop" of crack babies into the elementary schools.) We, therefore, are not living "as an island" for ourselves, no, our lives impact other people, sometimes detrimentally. The message of Socrates to the Athenians is a history lesson in ethics: if the Athenians cared more for wealth, honor or reputation than they did for the improvement of their own souls; these Athenians were not free to choose because they themselves had limited their own choices. Their choices were self-limited to wealth, honor or reputation; they decided in favor of the material so any and every "choice" thereafter was determined by that first choice! This decision means they have rejected the spiritual in favor of the material -- this decision meant that they are no longer free to choose and meant that they already had ordered the death of Socrates.

A third issue affects anyone who lives within the A.D. period of history - anno Domini, literally, in the year of the Lord, that is, after the historical date of the birth of Jesus Christ. An example of this third issue is the statement: Jesus Christ was an ethical man, or "I'm ethical because I'm a Christian." Whether or not Jesus Christ was/is an ethical man is one question for which at least two answers are possible. However, only one answer is possible to the latter statement: No. No person is ethical because that person is Christian. If this were the case, then history would require rewriting. Socrates, for example, is ethical, however, he was no Christian; the same is true of Confucius and many other persons living prior to A.D.

Christianity not only does not guarantee that we are ethical, but being ethical is a requirement which qualifies A.D. humans to be Christian. If, for instance, a current self-styled Christian can read the Apology of Plato, reflect upon the words and actions of Socrates and not say that s/he would agree and have acted in the same manner, then that person cannot claim to be ethical, much less Christian. If, as Thomas Aquinas stated in the thirteenth century, "grace builds on nature", then whether or not we human beings can be Christian depends upon whether or not we are human. If that is true, then the extent to which we can be Christian is limited only by the extent to which we are human, so the more human we are, the more Christian we can be! Indeed, whether or not we can be Christian depends upon whether or not we are human, notwithstanding Martin Luther's or John Calvin's claims to the contrary!

One caution is necessary here. All of us might seek to be perfect, to be happy, to be virtuous. But, if the example of Socrates is any lesson in being human, it has a message for all of us: to be imperfect is to be perfect. Human perfection consists in being imperfect. Socrates said it best:

So I examined the man - I need not tell you his name, he was a politician - but this was the result, Athenians. When I conversed with him I came to see that, though a great many persons, and most of all he himself, thought that he was wise, yet he was not wise. And then I tried to prove to him that he was not wise, though he fancied that he was: and by so doing I made him, and many of the bystanders, my enemies. So when I went away, I thought to myself, 'I am wiser than this man: neither of us probably knows anything that is really good, but he thinks that he has knowledge, when he has not, while I, having no knowledge, do not think that I have. I seem, at any rate, to be a little wiser than he is on this point: I do not think that I know what I do not know.'

Socratically speaking, to be human is to be truthful about the way things (including we humans) are. Essentially the Greeks looked upon logos, or speech, as the ability to use words and thus as the distinctive quality of being human. Therefore, if and when humans were truthful in speech, they were perfect according to nature. But, then Socrates concluded: knowing that he did not know and when he did not know meant being wise. So, the perfection of being human was to be wise and being wise meant knowing that we do not know. Wisdom, therefore, for Socrates and the Greeks was the actualization of the human potential; the virtue, or areté of humanness. Perhaps another pagan, the Chinese gentleman Confucius said it best:

The Master said, Man's very life is honesty, in that without it he will be lucky indeed if he escapes with his life. (Analects Bk. VI, No. 17)z

So, if being honest is being who we are, then to be perfect means to be who we are, that is, perfectly imperfect. An irony exists within this statement and within the fact that each being exists as it is. That irony is simply this: is the purpose of nature and/or of the Old Testament, New Testament, indeed, the "God" of the various philosophic writers, such as Confucius, Plato, to mention only a few, that each being which exists has but one purpose: namely, to be who that being is? To phrase this question another way: is the human being's purpose on earth to be who each one is? If such is the case, then why does it take nearly a life-time for each human being to discover that his or her purpose for existing is to be who he or she is?

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