CROSSROADS OF TRADITIONAL PHILOSOPHY

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With Historical Essays by George Sochan
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For Evelyn Gonzalez-Mills, who holds the beacon on the path.
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PREFACE FOR STUDENTS

This online version of Crossroads is made available to students free of charge. It is based on a previous edition that was formerly published by Kendall Hunt. It does not include the primary sources.

Why study philosophy? Why is philosophy sometimes a required course at the university? The answer to these questions is that philosophy is the foundational discipline. It provides the groundwork for both the natural and social sciences.

The natural and social sciences all employ a method or standards of evidence. This is why every major has its research methods course or introductory course where the methods employed in order to develop theories and make progress in the specific fields are discussed. Philosophy examines very closely the methodology of the sciences, their underlying assumptions, and their scope and limits. Logic evaluates the arguments used in developing theory, and epistemology tries to determine what can be known and the level of accuracy and certainty sought in any science. For this reason logic and epistemology provide a compass for finding our way through a variety of disciplines.

Philosophy also helps us to see the universality in the university. By going beyond any particular discipline, philosophy explores the links and relationships among disciplines. Such an approach to learning can help us to see how neuroanatomy, artificial intelligence, and psychology all impact on the understanding of human consciousness. The interdisciplinary approach to learning can also help us understand the issues involved in determining the nature of human beings (if there is such a nature!) and the fundamental features of the universe.
Philosophy will help us to formulate our ideas clearly, conduct research, analyze problems, and assess the ideas of others critically. Such analytical and problem solving abilities can transfer over into practical life and almost any occupation. Indeed, many employers today are looking for such analytical and problem-solving skills.

Philosophy can help students to communicate more clearly and persuasively. The practice of careful argumentation, exposing informal fallacies and formulating sound arguments is important for the effective communication of ideas. Not everyone listens to the voice of reason, but it is an asset to have logic on your side.

Finally, philosophy, for more than two thousand years, has been concerned with questions about values (axiology). In ethics, we study the origin and nature of moral values and raise questions about moral standards. Ethics has an immediate practical application in both personal morality and public policy. The closely related field of political philosophy raises issues about the nature of civil society, the state, international relations, justice, and human rights.

In the second edition the applied ethics section is deleted and several theoretical selections are added, including Jean-Paul Sartre, Saint Augustine, Plato (the entire *Euthyphro*) and Charlotte Bunch. John Rawls is covered in largely narrative form. The introduction is expanded to include the entire Apology (Plato), and selections from Simone de Beauvoir, W.E.B. DuBois, and Soren Kierkegaard. There are revisions to the text to address areas where students have called for more explanation. The most extensive revision has been to the Hume section on moral sentiment. Dr. George Sochan makes a most valuable contribution by providing insights into the historical and biographical context of the philosophers covered in the text. As always
Note on Historical Essays

The short historical passage given to each philosopher in Crossorads, while designed to be more than a brief biographical excerpt, is not intended to be a complete history. The passage for each philosopher provides a biographical sketch and also attempts to set that philosopher’s life and career within a historical context. That historical context is primarily the period during which the philosopher lived and, secondarily, when appropriate, it may include subsequent periods of history where the philosopher had significant influence. For instance, Plato and Aristotle are discussed in the context of the Classical Age of Greece, which is when they lived, but their ideas and writings are often referenced in later periods, like the Middle Ages, which they influenced.

The historical sections are intended to supplement the philosophy presented in Crossroads, both in regards to the primary resources that are used and the commentary made on these selections. The historical writing has not been presented as heavily documented research. Therefore, no citations are used in the text. Much of the content is of a general knowledge and can easily be found in encyclopedic references. Almost all of the information in the historical writings has been taken from secondary, not primary, sources. A few of the sources used have been listed.

Each historical passage concludes with a select bibliography. The listing of a select bibliography has two purposes. First, it provides some of the sources used that enabled the
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An extensive listing was considered unnecessary because each passage is brief and serves only as background to the philosophy. Secondly, the select bibliography provides the interested student with references for further reading. One of the criteria for listing references was that the book should be easy to read and readily understood by an undergraduate college student. As often as possible, each historical passage has one or two books listed to cover the historical period, one or two secondary sources that refer to the philosopher’s thought, and, when possible, a book of writings by the philosophy, especially an autobiography.

A final point about the historical writings is their placement in the textbook. Often the historical essay appears prior to the given philosopher, but occasionally a few essays were grouped together as parts of a larger whole. For example, it was convenient to group all of the philosophers under the epistemological section as being part of the early modern period. Finally, a historical essay appears for any given philosopher only once. If a philosopher appears more than once in Crossroads, as is the case with David Hume, the historical background is set at the philosopher’s first appear in the textbook.

George Sochan

April 2002
Part One: Basic Concepts

1. The subfields of philosophy

Before we attempt to define philosophy, let us get the big picture of the major subfields of philosophy. The traditional subfields of philosophy are: Logic, Ethics, Metaphysics, Epistemology, and the History of Philosophy. This text focuses on Ethics, Metaphysics, and Epistemology.¹

Logic is the science concerned with the evaluation of arguments. By studying formal logic we develop the ability to systematically distinguish between valid and invalid argument forms. Informal logic helps us to recognize the psychological tricks of some arguments that don't really prove what they claim to prove. Logic covers both deductive and inductive argumentation. The sort of reasoning generally found in mathematics and geometry is deductive. The sort of reasoning generally found in predictions based on observation is inductive. A study of both sorts of logic helps us evaluate arguments in a variety of sciences.

Ethics is the study of the foundations of morality. It examines the origin and nature of moral values and standards. Ethics is concerned with the meaning of human rights, justice, good and evil, moral obligation, care, and virtuous character.

Metaphysics, sometimes called ontology, is the study of the fundamental features of the universe. What is the basic stuff that constitutes the world; is it one or many? Is the mind ultimately identical to a physical object (the brain) or is the mind a distinct sort of stuff? Or, are


² The “tool” metaphor for rationality and knowledge has been
there other alternatives? These are some of the questions of metaphysics.

Epistemology is the study of the scope and limits of human knowledge. How do I know anything? What is truth? What can I know? Is the world as it appears the only reality or is there some reality beyond appearance? Epistemology aims to give us a compass for exploring what is knowable by human beings.

The history of philosophy includes a tradition that began more than two thousand years ago with the first writings of those who studied nature (the physikoi). This tradition has a philosophical debt and was in dialogue with early Egyptian science. Nevertheless each tradition has its own set of problems and approaches to perennial questions. Today the history of philosophy divides philosophy according to epochs: ancient, medieval, early modern, nineteenth century, and twentieth century. It focuses on problems and themes that run through each epoch and studies the great thinkers who changed the course of intellectual history.

In addition to these traditional fields there are many branches of philosophy. The philosophy of mind explores the nature of human consciousness--is conscious experience reducible to neural events in the brain or is it a distinct sort of being? As part of cognitive science, it also explores whether machines can think. The philosophy of religion explores the nature of faith and its relation to reason, the attributes of God, and the arguments for the existence of god. The philosophy of science explores the nature of scientific revolutions, the assumptions of the scientific method, and the relationships between the scientific disciplines. Under ethics there are numerous subfields such as political philosophy, social philosophy, and the philosophy of law. The philosophy of language studies how we learn language, the nature of meaning, and the impact of language on our understanding of the world.
To whatever discipline we turn, the examination of its foundations and its relationship to other disciplines is its philosophy. You can see then, that philosophy is indispensable to a liberal educational experience!

2. The crossroad

The philosophical journey begins at a crossroad. Perhaps you remember pausing for a moment to question seriously what it means to be in the world. The crossroad is the place where the hard work of self-examination begins and closed-mindedness ends. The path from the crossroad is not easy. Nor is there a clear sign as to which direction one ought to go. The important thing is to travel a number of paths and employ critical thinking to remove obstacles along the way.

This introduction to philosophy opens a dialogue with the reader about a variety of crossroads, about the alternative paths, and about the traditional questions which confront one along the way. It does not pretend to be a survey of all the philosophers. That is too much for an introduction. And it does not claim to cover all of the areas of philosophy: the philosophy of science, of politics, of anthropology and of many other disciplines are not covered here. The focus is on three core "philosophical sciences": metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. These are enduring and foundational areas of philosophy, areas that have not been swallowed up by specific disciplines but continue to interrogate and critique the natural and social sciences.

It is the main goal of this book that students will enter into philosophy rather than stay outside it, and that philosophy be a real and concrete part of the student’s life and not an alien subject. Instead of trying to cover everything it makes a beginning. And instead of promoting memorization of key words it encourages the grasping of key concepts.
Listening to the Primary Sources

Socrates: This sense of wonder is the mark of the philosopher. Philosophy indeed has no other origin... (Theatetus 155d)

This book introduces the reader to philosophy by taking a philosophical journey. We seek to reignite that native sense of wonder that belongs to all of us as persons. We do not intend to lose any companions on this journey; so we avoid unnecessary technical language or obtuse reasoning. This does not mean we abandon technical language and complex argumentation altogether.

Each section introduces the student to basic terms and concepts. We consult the primary sources in order to hear from great thinkers first hand. We enter into a dialogue with these voices from the past. They are not voices long gone. Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter From a Birmingham Jail” speaks to us today as loud and clear as the day the ink dried on the original paper...if we are good listeners. And Socrates' description of the rise from ignorance to knowledge or his self-defense before an Athenian court rings as true as today's news...if we are attentive enough to what is being said. By reading the primary text we enter into a living dialogue. It is our intention not to be stranded outside the door of knowledge!

A Working Definition of Philosophy

The etymology of the word 'philosophy' gives us a hint concerning what this study is about. If we examine the word 'philosophy' we find its origins in the ancient Greek 'philosophia'. 'Philo' is love or friendship. 'Sophia' means wisdom. Philosophy then, is the love of wisdom. We find this love of wisdom all over the inhabited ancient world. The origin is present at this moment in you. It has to do with thinking about what it means to be in a world.
The origin of philosophy is native to us all. We have to be human and capable of thinking about what it means to be in the world. There is no better teacher than yourself. Your greatest teacher is the voice within: insight. All we need is the right attitude, an openness toward our own predicament in so far as it is common to all, and an openness to different perspectives. We must be open to sincere self-reflection and inquiry. This open-mindedness, combined with the art of careful thinking, is the key to entering into philosophy and thinking critically.

3. The philosophic life

In the sections that follow, we may observe the connection between philosophical thought and practice. Our examples are Socrates (as described by Plato), Gandhi, and Martin Luther King Jr. We begin our journey with Socrates.

Historical Essay

Socrates (470-399 BC) is perhaps the most famous philosopher in history and “the Cave Analogy,” which features Socrates as the spirited teacher in search of truth, is perhaps the most famous piece of writing in philosophy. The writing is part of the Republic, a work written by Plato (427-347 BC) during the fourth century BC. The central figure in almost all of Plato’s writings is Socrates who was Plato’s teacher. History does not record any writings by Socrates, himself, and what we know of this philosopher is primarily through the writings of Xenophon, Aristophanes, Plato, and Aristotle. Through the Plato’s works, called the dialogues, Socrates became such a dominant figure in philosophy that all the Greek philosophers prior to Socrates are called the pre-Socratics. Hence, his life has become a marker in Western philosophy.
Socrates lived during most of the fifth century BC in the city-state of Athens. He was born shortly after Athens had led the Greeks to victory against the Persians. The Persian Wars erupted from the clash of the expanding Persian Empire as it moved westward into Europe and the proliferation of Greek colonies throughout western Asia. Following these wars, Athens emerged as the dominant Greek city-state; the middle decades of the century constitute Athens’ years of glory. It is this period in Athenian history that represents the Classical Age of Greece to most persons today. During this century as well as the following one, the arts, such as sculpture, architecture, poetry, drama, comedy, history, and philosophy, blossomed.

Athens’ glory, however, was short-lived. Whereas the Greeks had generally accepted Athenian leadership of the other city-states against the Persian enemy as necessary and good, afterwards other city-states revolted against the overbearing dominance of Athens in the Greek world. Sparta led many of the city-states against Athens and her allies in the Peloponnesian War. This war lasted 27 years and resulted in the defeat of Athens in 404 BC. The war years were tumultuous for Athens as the people of the city-state endured defeats, treason by the leaders, and finally enforced surrender by siege and starvation. It was during the turbulent years of incessant war that Socrates came to prominence as a philosopher.

During the fifth century BC Greek philosophic interest, especially in Athens, became centered on ethics. Contemporaneous with Socrates was a group of Greek philosophers, called Sophists, who had traveled to Athens to teach young men how to conduct themselves successfully in everyday living. They taught many subjects, including philosophy, for pay. The Sophists took a utilitarian approach regarding ethics, meaning that a person should adopt those values as right and good that benefit himself in his particular community. The Sophists, then,
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adopted a relativistic approach to the study of ethics, which is in contrast to Socrates, as presented in Plato’s dialogues, who arguably believed that values, like justice and beauty, existed objectively regardless of human preference. Through rational investigation, moreover, Socrates believed that important ethical ideals could be determined.

In the Platonic dialogues Socrates used a particular style of investigation that has become famous in pedagogy as the Socratic Method. He began his investigation of an ethical ideal with an interrogation of another person—almost anyone in Athens—in order to establish a basic definition. Quickly in this interactive examination, the other person’s often ill-considered notions about basic issues became unraveled. Philosophically the Socratic Method eventually makes distinctions that enabled the investigators to see more clearly the object of their investigation. The prisoner released from his chains in the Cave Analogy represents the results of an inquirer gaining some intellectual release from ill-considered thinking through rational inquiry.

Socially, while Socrates became renowned as a philosopher in Athens, he also became a controversial figure. The Oracle at Delphi, to which the Greeks looked for answers to questions, offered Socrates’ name to the question about who was the wisest of men. Upon hearing of the oracle’s reply, Socrates said that he was the wisest of men because he realized that he knew that he did not know. Socrates’ comment clearly implied that he knew his fellow Athenians were not only ignorant but blindly ignorant. Socrates, as well as the Sophists, had exposed the Athenians as incapable of rationally defending their beliefs. In his cross-examinations, Socrates would not accept beliefs and views that were based merely on custom, tradition or myth. While his career helped to establish philosophy as a legitimate rational investigation into basic human questions,
Socrates also contributed to undermining the established order in fifth century Athens. For this he was put on trial, and judged guilty of corrupting the youth and introducing new gods. Circumstantial evidence, including the fact that some of his students and associates had acted duplicitously and brutally during the Peloponnesian War and the war’s aftermath, made it appear that Socrates was a danger to Athens. The court exacted a capital sentence, and Socrates, surrounded by some of his loyal students, died a martyr’s death when he drank a cup of hemlock. As shown in Plato’s *Apology*, Socrates died contented and still engaged in dialogue with those near him; centuries later the scene was immortalized by the French painter David. Certainly for the western heritage, and perhaps the entire world, Socrates’ life epitomizes the courageous philosopher who desires to know the truth in order to live well.

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3.1 Plato: *The Apology* (philosophy as a way of life)

Socrates emphasized that philosophy was not wisdom itself but the ability to inquire and search for truth. For Socrates the **wise person is the one who knows he does not know, as opposed to the ignorant person who thinks he knows something but does not really know anything.**
Part of being able to learn is recognizing the half-baked attitudes and prejudices we have internalized and calling them into question. Socrates never took things at their face value; he called contemporary values and customs into question when he thought they departed from the truth. Indeed, one of the charges against Socrates by the Athenian authorities, documented in Plato's Apology, was "corruption" of the youth, that is, inspiring youth to ask questions about accepted concepts of justice, goodness, religion and public policy. This sort of dialogue placed a thorn in the sides of the authorities. For this Socrates was accused, tried, and sentenced to death.

The following Platonic dialogue, the Apology, provides a sympathetic account of Socrates as he faces the Athenian court and ultimate sentence to death.

Selected Reading: Apology, by Plato. Translated by Benjamin Jowett.

Review questions:

1. What were the charges brought against Socrates?
2. What do you think were the real motivations behind the explicit charges made against Socrates?
3. What was the defense strategy used by Socrates?

3.2 Plato: The Cave Analogy (philosophy as education)

The Socratic character described in the Apology calls into question certain public policies
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported and prejudices of his time. This character type is found again in the theory and practice of Mohandas K. Gandhi, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., and other great leaders. Each had a love of wisdom. Can you think of other people who have similar qualities? How do they make others feel uneasy? Why is it that some people feel uneasy when their beliefs and misconceptions are called into question? What happens when a person or groups are called from ignorance to face the truth?

The movement from ignorance to knowledge is the intended path of philosophy. Before one can free others from the chains of ignorance, one must be free oneself. Each individual is capable of discovering whether knowledge is an unattainable ideal or essential to a complete human existence. The ascent is not easy. There are rewards along the way.

The cave analogy found in Plato's (c. 427 - 347 BC, Athens) Republic gives us a good image of the process involved in moving from ignorance to knowledge. Imagine being chained to a seat in a cave and constrained to look at a wall. This wall only displays the shadow images of real objects that are outside the cave. The light passes around the objects and leaves only an imitation, a shadow of the real thing on the cave wall. Unaccustomed to light, you are one day led out of the cave and into the bright sun. What would your reaction be? How would you respond to the person who brings you into the light after so much time in the cave? Think about these issues as you read the following selection.

Selected Reading: From Republic, by Plato. The selection is often referred to as “the cave analogy.”

Review Questions:
1. How does the cave analogy illustrate the ascent from human ignorance to knowledge?

2. What is one's first response to being called into the light of truth?

3. Why might someone resent the spiritual guide who calls one out of the dark and into the light?

3.3 Mohandis K. Gandhi: Ahimsa and satyagraha (philosophy and truth force)

Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869-1948), during the first half of the twentieth century, was the prominent philosopher of non-violence, whose ideas have been adopted by many other prominent persons in their pursuit of justice. Gandhi’s career, both in South Africa and India, show the influence of ideas in shaping major historical events as well as the influence of Hinduism on the development of ideas in the Western Heritage. Immortalized in 1982 in the film, Gandhi, today he is remembered as the little man in a loincloth who toppled the British Raj in India by using non-violence.

Gandhi was born in the present-day state of Gujarat, India during the height of the British Empire. His Hindu parents arranged Gandhi’s marriage for him at the age of thirteen. A few years later he attended law school at the University College in London, and in 1891 he was called to the bar as an attorney. He returned to India in the same year but was unsuccessful at establishing a private practice. In 1893 an Indian firm with an office in Durban, South Africa sent him to that country, which during the nineteenth century was part of the British Empire. Remaining in South Africa for over twenty years, Gandhi led a movement against the racism endemic in this part of the British Empire. Gandhi’s method to overturn injustice was based on a
very tough campaign of non-violent non-cooperation against the institutions that sustained unjustly discriminatory policies. Gandhi admitted to the influence of Jesus Christ, Henry David Thoreau and Leo Tolstoy in the development of his ideas. One of these he called Satyagraha, or “truth and firmness,” which entailed a disciplined, non-violent response by the practitioner of this force against evil. Such exemplary conduct, Gandhi believed, would lead the evildoers to see the truth of their wickedness. Once exposed, Gandhi concluded, the evildoer had the occasion to reform. For the campaign to be successful, Gandhi insisted that the practitioner of Satyagraha must always avoid the use of violence.

In was in India, just after the end of the First World War, that Gandhi put his ideas into practice before the entire world. Gandhi had returned to India in 1915 when the British Empire was stalemated against Germany in a world war. Aside from the difficulties of the war, the British in India were confronted by an emerging Indian nationalist movement that demanded political autonomy for India within the empire. The effort for Home Rule was led by a privileged caste of Indians educated in British schools and inculcated with western ideals of individual freedom and social equality. Members of this westernized Indian elite found numerous shortcomings in the British practice of liberty and equality in India and had formed the National Congress Party as a challenge to the British Raj. Shortly after his return to India, Gandhi joined the Congress Party leadership and his participation turned the campaign into a mass movement. As the First World War ended, popular uprisings and revolutions broke out around the world. In India there was unrest, in part, because of the Rowlatt Acts that had imposed emergency police measures against treason and revolution. The Congress Party viewed the legislation as a violation of civil liberties during peacetime and Gandhi led the first of his
civil disobedience campaigns against the British in India. Violence was endemic in India during March and April 1919, and a bloody climax occurred at Amritsar where Anglo-Indian troops methodically shot and killed unarmed civilians who had violated a curfew. In response to the turbulence, including the violent acts committed by Indians in his name, Gandhi called off the civil disobedience.

Failure in one campaign did not deter Gandhi from resuming another; in fact, the events of 1919 were the beginning of more than a twenty-year crusade against the British Raj. In 1920, for instance, Gandhi and the other Congress leaders organized a campaign of non-cooperation against the British rulers wherein Indian clerks refused to work and Indians boycotted British-run institutions. Later that decade Gandhi led Indians in an economic boycott of British-manufactured clothing. Gandhi was trying to lead the Indians to a state of complete independence of the British. In 1930 Gandhi undertook his famous Salt March wherein he walked 240 miles from Ahmendabad to the Arabian Sea to make salt. Thousands of Indians followed him in his protest of the British monopoly on salt. By the early 1930s Indians began referring to Gandhi as mahatma, or great soul. It is by this title that the world has come to remember him. Also, Home Rule no longer satisfied Gandhi and the other Congress leaders. The ultimate goal of this Hindu-led national movement was to drive the British out of India with non-violent non-cooperation, civil disobedience, and moral suasion. Relinquishment of governance by the British seemed to be at hand in the 1930s when Gandhi met personally with the British Viceroy in India and the British Prime Minister in England to discuss the possible independence of India.
In 1942, while Britain was again beleaguered in another world war, Gandhi and Congress launched their Quit India campaign. For this Gandhi and most Congress leaders were jailed throughout the war years. During the Second World War the leaders of Muslim Indians, like Al Jinnah, cooperated with the British, especially in the war against Japan. For their wartime cooperation the Muslim League gained British support for their agenda. Eventually, the Muslim League successfully demanded and received the reluctant acquiescence of the British, Gandhi and the Hindu-led Congress to divide British India into two parts: India and Pakistan. As the British pulled out of India, the northwest region, known as the Punjab, erupted into a horrific, violent bloodbath of killing among Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims. To some extent, Gandhi quelled acts of violence, especially in Calcutta, with a fast unto the death. Shortly after his fast to stop the violence which he abhorred, Gandhi was assassinated in January 1948 by a Hindu nationalist who believed that he had betrayed India by accepting the demands of the Muslim League.

Even before his death Gandhi came to symbolize the modern world’s secular saint who could achieve good in the world through the use of moral force. In the second half of the twentieth century, many utilized his methods to confront injustice, most famously Martin Luther King in the United States. It may be, however, that such methods only work well in liberal societies, like the United States or British India, which tolerate civil disobedience and, under the pangs of guilt, ultimately yield to the demands of the disobedient. During the 1930s, when Gandhi visited England in a gracious reception, Ho Chi Minh pointed out that in French-ruled Vietnam there were hundreds like Gandhi but all of them had been executed. Despite prodding
be shot, the British grudgingly yielded to the movement he did so much to inspire.

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The Socratic devotion to truth and commitment to certain moral principles is found again and again in world history. Gandhi organized a form of non-violent civil disobedience, *satyagraha,* in both South Africa and India during the first half of this century, in order to resist unjust laws and policies and change social reality. For Gandhi, *satyagraha* means holding on to Truth. The one who holds on to the truth is engaged in a disciplined way of life and practices the principle of *ahimsa,* which means nonviolence towards all living things. These concepts became the foundation of the social practice of non-violent civil disobedience. The following passages give us a brief look at the philosophy behind Gandhi's practice.


Review questions:

1. Define ‘satyagraha’.
2. Define ‘ahimsa’.

3. What are the requirements for attaining satyagraha?

3.4 Martin Luther King Jr.: “A Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (philosophy and social justice)

Historical Essay

Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) was one of the most historically significant persons during the twentieth century. His works include *Stride toward Freedom*, *The Measure of a Man*, *Strength to Love* (an anthology), and *I Have A Dream: Writings and Speeches that Changed the World* (an anthology). Born into a racially segregated South during the Jim Crow Era, King during the 1960s led a noteworthy campaign to overturn much of that system. In honor of the Civil Rights leaders’ memory, President Ronald Reagan on November 2, 1983 signed the congressional legislation to make his birthday a national holiday.

King was born into a family of southern Baptist preachers. His father, Martin Luther King, Sr., was minister at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. As a boy, the son witnessed his father as an activist against racial discrimination and saw him direct a successful boycott against a city newspaper that had belittled African-Americans. The younger King was a successful student at school, who had skipped two grades and entered Morehouse College at the young age of 15. Under the influence of the president of the college, Dr. Benjamin Mays, King decided to pursue a clergyman’s career. He, first, completed studies at Crozier Theological Seminary and, then, earned a Ph. D. from Boston University. While working on his doctorate, he married Coretta Scott in 1953.
He returned to the South to become pastor at a Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama in 1954. King’s return to the segregated South occurred just one year prior to Rosa Park’s refusal to give up her seat to a white patron on a city bus in Montgomery. King was elected president of the Montgomery Improvement Association, and he led a boycott of city buses during a period of 382 days. Eventually, after a Supreme Court ruling that upheld a lower federal court’s decision against Montgomery’s segregated bus system, the city ended its policy of discrimination against African-Americans on the buses. King’s leadership made him nationally famous, and soon he began building a career as a Civil Rights leader.

In 1957 he became president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Under King’s leadership, this organization had as its aim the attainment of political rights for African-Americans that should have been attained during Reconstruction under the fourteenth and the fifteenth amendments to the Constitution. To attain these political rights as well as others for African-Americans, King would employ during the 1960s the tactics that Mohandas K. Gandhi had used against the British in India during the first part of the twentieth century. In 1959 King toured India in order to increase his understanding of Gandhian tactics of non-violent resistance to unjust authority. Another influence on King’s methods was Henry David Thoreau’s *Essay on Civil Disobedience*.

During the early 1960s a variety of activities, including the “Freedom Rides” on buses through the South and sit-ins at cafeterias that discriminated against African-Americans, had made the denial of civil rights to certain Americans a major issue. White as well as black Americans participated in campaigns that confronted injustice. Martin Luther King, Jr. was not always the leader in these episodes, but he soared to national prominence again during 1963,
first, in Birmingham, Alabama and, then, in Washington, DC. In the latter city King gave his famous “I Have a Dream” speech on August 28 to a crowd of 250,000 that have gathered in support of a Civil Rights act, which Congress passed in 1964. Previously, during the spring in Birmingham, King had been jailed while the police used dogs and water cannons on the protestors.

From that jail cell King wrote his famous “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” to justify his campaign that asked Americans to disobey certain southern local ordinances. In this essay, King establishes his position under the principle of natural law that is a major component of the western ethical heritage. In the case he builds in the letter, King refers to numerous world historical figures, including Socrates, Thomas Aquinas, and Thomas Jefferson. Many of the ideals, which King referenced in his letter, provide the theoretical basis of a liberal democratic society. What King clearly points out in the letter is that mid-twentieth century America fell far short of those ideals. For his work during 1963, King received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. *Time* magazine named him “Man of the Year” for 1964.

By the mid-1960s turbulence and social disorder had become pervasive and sometimes violent throughout much of the USA. Even before 1965 there had been much violence, some of which had been directed against King in attempts upon his life. Divisions appeared among African-Americans regarding the tactics and goals of the Civil Rights movement. King found much less success in his campaigns against defacto segregation in northern cities, such as Chicago, where he and his supporters were pelted by bottles, rocks and garbage as they marched through the streets in a demonstration. President Johnson became disenchanted with the Civil Rights leader when King turned against the United States’ role in the Vietnam War. Suspecting
that King might be a fellow traveler in support of the Soviet Union, the FBI had been spying on his alleged communist activities, but nothing political was found. Finally, during the tumultuous year of 1968, King was shot and killed while standing on a motel balcony in Memphis, Tennessee. His assassination occurred one day after he had delivered his “To the Mountaintop” speech during a Sunday morning church service. Through his non-violent, yet militant, resistance of injustice, King had also led many Americans to the mountaintop to view a different America that should be based on racial harmony and liberal freedoms for all of its citizens.

Select Bibliography


Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., as a student of philosophy, theology, and ethics, studied Gandhi's teaching, visited India, and incorporated some of Gandhi's concepts into his own philosophy.

...I turned to a serious study of the social and ethical theories of the great philosophers. During this period I had almost despaired of the power of love in solving social problems. ...Then I came upon the life and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. As I read his works I became deeply fascinated by his campaigns of nonviolent resistance. The whole Gandhian concept of satyagraha (satya is truth which equals love, and graha is force; satyagraha thus means truth-force or...
love-force) was profoundly significant to me. As I delved deeper into the philosophy of Gandhi my skepticism concerning the power of love gradually diminished, and I came to see for the first time that the Christian doctrine of love operating through the Gandhian method of nonviolence was one of the most potent weapons available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom. [from King, "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence," 1960, in *I Have A Dream*]

Notice how the study of philosophy can change a person's life. Also notice how concepts from different continents and cultures may be in profound dialogue. Studying philosophy is part of a "pilgrimage" to arriving at one’s own view of the good life. As part of such a pilgrimage, Reverend King also studied the early Greek thinkers.

The "Letter from Birmingham Jail" was written when King was in jail because of his protest activity in Birmingham. A group of clergy had written King a letter expressing concern about King's protest activities. As you may observe from the following selection, these clergy could not understand Dr. King's purpose and commitment to direct action as a means of achieving justice. Note Dr. King's use of the cave analogy and the four steps involved in direct action while reading this selection.

Selected reading: Martin Luther King Jr., “A Letter from a Birmingham Jail.”

Review questions:

1. What use does Reverend King make of the cave analogy?

2. What are some of the reasons King’s critics used to attempt to dissuade King from leading or participating in civil rights activities in Birmingham?
3. How does King address the arguments of his opponents?

4. What are some of the ideas that Socrates, Gandhi, and King have in common?

As King's letter illustrates, knowledge and practice are intimately related. There is a tradition in philosophy that not only seeks to uncover the truth, but to act on reality to transform the environment. After coming out of the cave and into the light we may recognize what Paulo Freire has called limit conditions. These are conditions that limit the realization of human potential. Sometimes unjust laws, discrimination, or poverty can limit the realization of human potential. Philosophy, on this view, is not a mere spectator sport, but includes the activity of uncovering such limit conditions in order to change them.

4. Reflection and choice

Part of King’s message to North Americans was that it is immoral to judge a person by non-essential or accidental features of personhood, like the color of one’s skin or one’s gender. Since racism and sexism impose limit conditions, liberation from such conditions means greater possibilities for realizing human potential. The philosophical reflections of W.E.B. DuBois on double consciousness and Simone de Beauvoir on gender based discrimination help to expose limit conditions and provide just one more tool in the struggle to overcome those conditions.


Historical Essay
William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868-1963), more familiarly known as W. E. B. Du Bois, was a prominent American intellectual whose long life and career helped to shape major historical events of the twentieth century. Born just after the Civil War in the United States, he lived long enough to witness the beginnings of the Civil Rights Movement in that country and the emergence of independent states on the continent of Africa where he died.

W. E. B. Du Bois was born during Reconstruction, not quite three years after the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment that legally ended slavery in the United States. He grew up in a black family in a small village in Massachusetts where most of the families were white and many forms of racism were not overt. His college education, however, was at Fisk University in Tennessee long after Reconstruction had ended. In Tennessee he severely experienced the meaning of racism in overt acts, such as the incident where a white woman arrogantly refused his apology for having bumped her accidentally and derogatorily called him a racial slur. Du Bois graduated from college with both a degree and a newly emerging sense of pride in his African heritage. Next, he attended Harvard University and was the first African-American to graduate with a Ph. D. from that institution. His dissertation, considered a classic, was published as The Suppression of the African Slave – Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870.

In 1897 he accepted a position at Atlanta University. Once again, Du Bois resided in a southern state, and this time it was during the Jim Crow Era. Despite the Reconstruction amendments to the Constitution, African-Americans were denied political rights. Lynchings, which peaked in 1895, terrorized African-Americans into submission. In public places throughout the South separate and unequal facilities were set up for white Americans and for black Americans. The Supreme Court in Plessy v. Ferguson upheld the southern states’
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported discriminatory laws. In his Atlanta Speech, Booker T. Washington provided one response to this oppression. He argued that African-Americans should forego political activism in order to acquire the economic skills that would earn respect from the white Americans that African-Americans deserved. Du Bois strongly disagreed with Washington’s speech; so, with other anti-Bookerites, he formed the Niagara Movement to encourage active resistance to racial discrimination.

In 1909 Du Bois attended the National Negro Conference. Out of this meeting the National Association of Colored People was created. A year later Du Bois left Atlanta University to become director of publicity and research for this organization. Until 1934 he edited the NAACP’s journal, Crisis. At the end of World War I the NAACP sent Du Bois to France to investigate the conditions under which African-Americans served along the Western Front. While in France, Du Bois worked to create the Pan-African Congress in 1919. It was at this time at the Paris Peace Conference that President Woodrow Wilson promoted national self-determination as the principle to reorder the world after the First World War. Du Bois’ vision in 1919 was that the peoples of African would soon liberate themselves from European rule and govern themselves. In 1934 he left the NAACP because of disagreements over policy, and he resumed his scholarly writings.

In 1935 he published Black Reconstruction, a seminal work that changed the historiography on this subject. For the past half-century a sympathetic view of the former Confederacy had prevailed that portrayed the southern planters as preyed upon by aggressive Carpetbaggers, vicious scalawags, and ignorant ex-slaves. This is the view shown in the movies, Birth of a Nation and Gone with the Wind. In contrast, Du Bois’ study portrays the ex-slaves as
active agents of change who promoted democracy in America. *Black Reconstruction* influenced subsequent historians in the field, including John Hope Franklin, Kenneth Stampp, and Eric Foner.

Du Bois’ professional contributions were not limited only to history. In 1899 he published *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, which examined an African-American ghetto in that city. In contrast to prevailing explanations that assigned poverty to individual failure or to an inherent inferiority based on race, Du Bois argued that Philadelphia’s ghetto was fashioned by economic and political forces outside of the ghetto, itself, what today is called institutional racism. In support of his case, Du Bois marshaled an impressive array of statistics centered on an urban study. Du Bois also made a major contribution to the field of philosophy with *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1903. In this work he expressed the dualism of existence for black Americans in the United States. Du Bois eloquently conveys the sense of two-ness within the body of one person wherein, because of skin color, any black American is both what he is and also what he is perceived to be by the dominant, white majority. Du Bois simply wanted to be a man respected for his humanity, but he increasingly found that impossible in the USA.

In part, because of his frustrating disappointments with life based on a white-dominated, capitalistic society, Du Bois looked elsewhere in the world for an answer to what he called the greatest issue of the twentieth century: the race question. Based upon his readings and upon his visits to the Soviet Union, he began openly to favor Communism. This public posture brought him into trouble with the United States government. In 1951, during the era of the McCarthy Hearings in Congress, Du Bois was indicted by a federal grand jury under the Foreign Agents Registration Act as an unregistered agent for a foreign power. He was acquitted and in 1958,
when his passport was restored to him, DuBois, at the age of 90, again began world travels that would make him a permanent ex-patriot. In 1961 he joined the Communist Party and moved to Ghana. A year later her renounced his U. S. citizenship. W. E. B. Du Bois died on August 27, 1963, one day before Martin Luther King delivered his “I Have a Dream” speech in Washington, DC to a huge Civil Rights rally.

Select Bibliography


In 1903, W.E.B. DuBois, in *The Souls of Black Folks*, wrote a prophetic forethought: “…the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line.” In the opening chapter of this classic work DuBois describes a double-consciousness that he argues is part of the experience of African-Americans in the United States. We all arguably have two modes of being: *being for ourselves* and *being for the other*. The way that the other views us can have an impact on the way we feel about ourselves and interact with others. It may also impact the kind and extent of economic opportunities we might have.

If the other prejudices my character based on the color of my skin or the way I speak and this judgement is negative, I cannot help but notice it. Now imagine, if you have not experienced
it yourself, that large numbers of persons prejudge you, pull over your car, insult you, avoid you, search you, reject your loan application, steer you away from housing, or deny you opportunities, based on your race.

Racism is a moral issue because it involves moral value judgements about persons based on non-moral features of their existence. It also has far-reaching social consequences. In the following selection from *The Souls of Black Folk*, try to imagine that you are in DuBois’ shoes when the children in his class are trading cards.


Review questions:

1. What does DuBois mean by double consciousness?
2. Does DuBois analysis of double consciousness have relevance to contemporary North America? Explain.
Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) was an author, philosopher, and feminist writer. Aside from her interest in women rights, she concerned herself with the rights of the elderly, women’s abortion rights, factory conditions for workers, and the revolt in Algeria.

She was born into a middle class family in Paris. Her father was a frustrated lawyer who really wanted to be an actor and her mother was a devote Roman Catholic. De Beauvoir, who began her life very religious, gradually relinquished all religious sentiments and became an atheist. After attending private schools, de Beauvoir studied at the Ecole Normale Superieure in Paris during the same time that Jean-Paul Sartre was there. Sartre and de Beauvoir matriculated from the university with a first and second ranking, respectively. Thereafter, they became lover, intellectual comrades, and lifelong companions. She was with Sartre as he died in the hospital, commenting that they would not be reunited in death, but that it was wonderful to have been together so long in life.

Upon graduation de Beauvoir began teaching in philosophy in various schools until 1943. During the German occupation of France after 1940 she began her writing. Her first book, written during the middle of the war, is a fictionalized version of her relationship with Sartre. In this story, L’Invitee, the Sartre character has an affair with another woman, which ruins the perfect communion for the de Beauvoir character. In the end she concludes that certain things cannot be shared and that she is ultimately alone, which is one of the main themes of her novels. Her semi autobiographical, Les Mandarins, explicitly recounts the triangular relationship among herself, Sartre, and Nelson Algren, who wished to marry de Beauvoir. The Mandarins has a message calling the intellectuals to participate in real world struggles. The book was published
in 1954 when she was becoming political conscious, due, in part, to the Algerian revolt against French colonialism that had erupted the same year.

De Beauvoir’s feminist classic is *The Second Sex*, which appeared in print in 1949. In this work she asserts that women are not born, but rather they are made. They are made, de Beauvoir argues, because it is men and the patriarchal structure that men have constructed which have defined women as being something that is not male. Objectified in this way by men, women are fashioned as something less than human. Her notions of misogyny in myth and literature have become very influential. *The Second Sex* as well as *The Mandarins* was banned by the Roman Catholic Church. Initially only an intellectual feminist, de Beauvoir became an activist in women’s causes, especially the issue of abortion rights, during the 1960s.

Her other significant writings include *A Very Easy Death* and *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre*. In the former work de Beauvoir chronicles her mother’s death with clinical precision, showing the abandonment and loneliness of old age in an uncaring society. In the latter work she treats Sartre’s death which occurred in 1980. After his death de Beauvoir did not do well; she fought often with his adopted daughter, drank too much, and became dependent on amphetamines. De Beauvoir died in April 1986 and was buried in the same grave as her life’s companion.

Select Bibliography


One of the most important feminist philosophers of this century, Simone de Beauvoir, critiques the idea that gender ought to determine the basic character and position of women in society. It is laws, institutions, and customs that have subordinated and oppressed women as a group. These factors are developed and reproduced by humans and are subject to change. Simone de Beauvoir acknowledges both the power of the environment in defining the parameters of one’s freedom and the potential for liberation, should the oppressed be given or seize the opportunity. In her classic work, *The Second Sex*, she writes:

But is it enough to change laws, institutions, customs, public opinion, and the whole social context, for men and women to become truly equal? “Women will always be women,” say the skeptics. Other seers prophesy that in casting off their femininity they will not succeed in changing themselves into men and they will become monsters. This would be to admit that the woman of today is a creation of nature; it must be repeated once more that in human society nothing is natural and that woman, like much else, is a product elaborated by civilization. The intervention of others in her destiny is fundamental: if this action took a different direction, it would produce a quite different result. Woman is determined not by her hormones or by mysterious instincts, but by the manner in which her body and
her relation to the world are modified through the action of others than herself.

The abyss that separates the adolescent boy and girl has been deliberately opened out between them since earliest childhood; later on, woman could not be other than what she was made, and that past was bound to shadow her for life. If we appreciate its influence, we see clearly that her destiny is not predetermined for all eternity (1989, p. 725).

Review questions:
1. How do the actions of others with regard to gender roles impact the destiny of girls?
2. Do biological differences determine female character?

4.3 Soren Kierkegaard: The seriousness of making choices

Historical Essay

Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), often called the Father of Existentialism, was born in Denmark just as Napoleon’s European empire was crumbling under the offensive of the Allied armies. Two years after Kierkegaard’s birth, Napoleon was exiled to St. Helena, an island in the South Atlantic Ocean, and peace was restored to Europe. Denmark had been one of the countries overrun by French armies and, in the war’s aftermath, the country had gone bankrupt. Life for the young Soren, however, was not so difficult because he had been born into a prosperous merchant family. Following the Napoleonic Wars the nineteenth century was generally a comfortable time for the middle classes. They asserted themselves economically and politically.
Well-to-do fathers put their sons into prestigious universities in order to secure a conventional career in the government or the church or the university, itself. Michael Kierkegaard, the successful merchant and respected rentier, provided a university education for both of his surviving sons. Soren Kiekegaard began this prescribed route, as he father wished, but through a series of fateful choices he abandoned bourgeois conventionality.

In 1830, at the age of seventeen, Soren Kierkegaard entered the University of Copenhagen. Initially he pursued his studies diligently, but soon he sunk into a life of debilitating debauchery. Living the life of the nineteenth century profligate, Kierkegaard ran up huge debts that isolated him from his father. During his years of prodigal drift, he learned his father’s secret, which was that Michael Kierkegaard, as a youth, had cursed God because of his unrelenting poverty. Both father and son came to believe that all of the children would be cursed with an early death. Shortly after the son learned the awesome secret, the father died. Within two years of that event, Soren completed his studies and earned his doctorate in theology in 1840. That same year he became engaged to Regina Olson, the daughter of a civil servant. As he entered his mature years, it seemed that Kierkegaard had finally chosen the respectable life that his father had wished and that bourgeois conventions prescribed for someone of his social standing.

Based on diary excerpts, the twelve-month period of Kierkegaard’s engagement was the most difficult time of his life. Despite entreating overtures from his betrothed, and his own professions of love for Regina, Kiekegaard broke off the engagement in November 1841. Apparently, Kiekegaard was deliberately choosing to live a particular type of life that avoided the encumbrances of married living with its social responsibilities. Thereafter, he pursued a
monastic type of life wherein he lived beyond the socially acceptable mores of bourgeois Copenhagen. Immediately upon the breakup, and throughout the 1840s, he began to write and publish prolifically because he believed that he would die at an early age. The first of his major works to be published was Either/Or. This two-volume work, like many of his other books, was published under a pseudonym.

In Either/Or Kierkegaard lays out the three styles of life, which are the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. By a dialectical process, an idea that he borrowed from the German philosopher George Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), a person could proceed from the aesthetic and the ethical life styles to the religious way of life. By the early 1840s, as he began his torrid pace of publications, Kierkegaard had already experienced the aesthetic life as a dissolute university student and the ethical life as the graduate with a doctorate in theology who had been engaged to a respectable young woman. By the middle of the 1840s Kierkegaard emerged as prolific author who wrote criticized the smug conventionality of contemporary Christianity.

Even though Kierkegaard had borrowed from Hegel, it was the German philosopher’s complex and abstract system of thinking that the Dane attacked. During Kierkegaard’s lifetime Hegelian philosophy prevailed throughout Europe and it was even penetrating the schools of theology and the churches. Kierkegaard vehemently opposed this tendency because, whereas Hegelianism postulated that God could rationally be perceived as the unfolding World Spirit of human history, Kierkegaard believed that though God was rationally unknowable, the path to a relationship with God was through highly personal experiences. Kierkegaard decried the trend in churches of prescribing dogma as the basis of the Christian life. Increasingly during the course of the nineteenth century much church teaching had become merely the inculcation of bourgeois
Kierkegaard protested that the Christian life was centered in every decisive act that a person made. In choosing either this act or that act, he argued, a person stood before God in all eternity because it was these individual and serious choices of particular actions that, in his words, made the person a “knight” of God or not a “knight” of God. Often, he insisted, a person met God through a leap of faith in the darkness as the biblical Abraham had encountered God by setting aside ethical norms and being willing to sacrifice his only son.

Kierkegaard’s brief life ended in 1855 just as he had become embattled with the Danish church. The occasion for his attack was the consecration of a new bishop in Copenhagen in the autumn of 1854. Kierkegaard even went to the extent of buying his own journal to trumpet his written accusations against the church. In these articles he railed against the light-hearted, celebratory and joyous aspects of Christianity, which might be likened to a Dickensian Christmas story of warm friendship and good food during a comfortable dinner in a middle class home. In contrast to this smug self-contentedness, Kierkegaard emphasized seriousness, sin, guilt, and individual alienation from a holy and transcendent God. In the midst of his campaign to reform the church Kierkegaard collapsed in the streets. He was taken to a hospital where he died a few weeks later. In the next century Kierkegaard’s life and writings won considerable acclaim as an influence on both Christian and atheistic existentialists.

Select Bibliography


Soren Kierkegaard addresses the issue of reflection and choice not from the point of view of race or gender, but as that solitary individual who faces an either/or decision. All of us face such decisions in our lives, when our choices depend to a great extent on how we view our role in the world and what incentives are most important to us. Kierkegaard was deeply concerned about the seriousness of making choices. In the following selection, Kierkegaard speaks of a mask one wears that not only obscures one’s personality from others, but perhaps from oneself as well. He also speaks of something inside us that makes it difficult for us to become transparent to ourselves. How can we make serious decisions if we are distant from our innermost selves?


Review questions:

1. What are the two types of incentives Kierkegaard lines up on opposite sides of moral decision making?
2. Do you agree with Kierkegaard that we generally wear a mask? Explain.
3. What, for Kierkegaard, is the innermost and holiest thing of all in a person? Do you agree? Explain.
5. Getting Started: The path to the cogito

The design of this text begins the interpretation of the traditional fields of philosophy with epistemology, followed by metaphysics and ethics. The reason for this division and order of themes is that in the order of discovery, we start out asking “what does it mean to know or how do we know things about the world?” In the process of thinking about knowledge, we raise questions about the being of the knower and the things known. And once we focus on the basic features of things known, we have entered the area of metaphysics. With both some introductory epistemology and metaphysics, we are prepared to discuss theories of morality or ethics. Ethics generally presupposes some exposure to theories about the nature of human beings and their relation to others and to the environment. So though the lines between epistemology, metaphysics and ethics are not always clearly drawn, this rough outline will serve as a useful guide as we find our way.

The first question, "What is knowledge?" brings us into the realm of epistemology. Let's use the same strategy, etymology, for defining this term as we used to define 'philosophy'. 'Episteme' is the Greek word for knowledge and 'logos' is the account or complete explanation of a subject. Epistemology is the account or study or explanation of knowledge. It asks: what is the origin and scope of finite, that is, human knowledge?

How do we start out on the path to knowledge if we do not yet know what we are looking for? If we have a road map and there are already signs along the way, then we already know where we are going. We do not begin with a road map. We begin by being a bit lost. Acknowledging that we are lost at the entrance to the theory of knowledge is not a bad thing; it is
a good thing. It is a good thing, especially if we are willing to suspend our prejudices and half-cooked opinions in order to search for the truth.

If there are no maps to the hidden treasure, are there any signs to guide us? Yes, there are signs in the form of questions. There are questions that guide us in opening a path, in making a clearing in the wilderness.

Let us begin to clear a path using ordinary language. We often talk about having things "in mind" or "on our minds." What does it mean to have an object in mind? When we know or perceive an object, we have it in mind. What does it mean to have an object in mind? Should we take this somewhat literally? When I perceive the Empire State Building, in what way do I have it in mind? Do I have direct perceptual contact with the building itself? Does the object we have in mind also subsist outside of our minds? Or does human knowledge give us a mere representation, like a picture-copy of an object? If I only have a representation of the Empire State Building in mind, how do I know that this representation is a good copy of the real thing? In order to answer these questions we must first search for a method. During the early seventeenth century, the search for knowledge began with an attempt to correct the understanding, that is, to restrain reason from theoretically unsubstantiated opinions and focus reason on propositions that are indubitable.

Historical Essay

Rene Descartes, John Locke, George Berkeley, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant

The intellectual development of early modern philosophy spans the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries of European history. This development follows the periods called the Renaissance and the Reformation. Beginning with the Renaissance a break with the medieval
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Heritage began. That break, which included a repudiation of the worldview that rested heavily upon the thought of Aristotle and, to some extent, Plato, was completed during the early modern period of European history. Aside from philosophy, much of the original work that comprises the modern worldview was done in the sciences, especially astronomy, and mathematics. The latter part of this two hundred year span is called the Enlightenment while the seventeenth century is sometimes referred to as the Age of Genius. A few of the intellectual giants from the early modern period, including Rene Descartes, John Locke, George Berkeley, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant, are incorporated in the textbook’s section of epistemology.

Today Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) is remembered as the individual who resisted the established authority of the church when he provided his evidence as proof that the Aristotelian conception of the universe (the geo-centric view) is wrong. At the beginning of the early modern period Galileo in 1623 published the polemical essay, *The Assayer*, which not only reasserted that, contrary to long-standing theories, the sun rather than the earth is in the center of the universe but that knowledge of the natural world is obtained by empirical science and mathematics and not by reference to ancient authorities. Ten years later, in 1633, Galileo was brought before the Inquisition for the views he trumpeted in *Dialogue Concerning Two Chief World Systems, Ptolemaic and Copernican*. Ill and under duress, Galileo recanted the Copernican view that the sun is in the center of the solar system after the third interrogation. Prior to his death in 1642 Galileo resumed his health and courage, and made significant contributions to the science of mechanics.

Despite his recantation, Galileo became a heroic figure in the western heritage because he did promote the correct view of the solar system; he used the new scientific techniques to support
his case rather than rely on empirically unverified opinions from a distant past; and, for a while, he stood as an individual against a dogmatic and, at times, overbearing institution to maintain his freedom to think. In England Galileo’s contemporary Francis Bacon (1561-1626) provided the scientific method for the empirical studies that Galileo had made with his telescope. Bacon called this method the New Science. Fifty-four years after Galileo was forced to recant what he had observed of the night through his telescope, Isaac Newton (1642-1727) calculated the mathematics that substantiated the astronomer’s observations. In 1687 Newton published the *Principia*, the book that puts forth the principal of universal gravitation as the basis for explaining the Copernican solar system. For this Newton was not condemned but praised by his contemporaries. Newton’s work, which had been built on that of many others, provided a new worldview in ways other than just explaining the configuration of the universe. The intellectual work of those, like Newton, in the Age of Genius overthrew the authority of the ancients and of the church and replaced it with the notions of freethinking philosophers and the discoveries of scientists.

Rene Descartes (1596-1642), another contemporary of Galileo, made significant contributions to mathematics as well as to philosophy. Born into a well-to-do family near Poitiers, France, Descartes received a Jesuit education that included college study of philosophy and mathematics. Despite his friendship with many of the Jesuit fathers, Descartes became dissatisfied with what he had been taught, concluding that there is so much disagreement about the basic features of the universe that everything seemed to be uncertain. At the outbreak of the Thirty Years War, the seventeenth century war that contributed to the end of medieval Catholic Europe and facilitated the rise of modern national states, Descartes joined the army of Prince
Maurice of Nassau and, the following year, of Maximilian, the Duke of Bavaria, who campaigned in central Europe. He did little fighting and had much time for contemplation. It was during a lull in campaigning that Descartes applied algebra to geometry, thus, giving the world analytical geometry. The coordinates on a graph are named after him: Cartesian. When his tour of duty in the army had been completed, Descartes settled in Holland in 1629. For the next twenty years he began a philosophical inquiry in order to determine whether one could have the same certainty about the natural world that he had found in mathematics. It was during this period that Descartes published *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations*. In 1649 Descartes traveled to Sweden to become the tutor of Queen Christina, but died of pneumonia in the following year.

Descartes’ method of reasoning was based upon establishing an absolutely indubitable point, which is the certitude of his own existence derived from the knowledge that he is thinking, and, then, by a step-by-step process, deducing evidently certain ideas and facts. This manner of argumentation and proof is used in logic and mathematics; Descartes made it generally applicable to almost any subject. It is what we now call analysis, whereby a subject is divided into its many parts so that each can be more easily examined for logical reconstruction. What Descartes did for the world of ideas was being done in the seventeenth century in the world of mechanical things, like the construction of clocks and watches.

While Descartes and other continental philosophers, such as Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677) and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716), emphasized the importance of innate, or a priori, concepts, the British empiricists contended that the original source of knowledge of the external world is chiefly acquired through the senses. The primary proponent of Empiricism at
the end of the seventeenth century was John Locke (1632-1704). Unlike many other philosophers, Locke had a prominent career in national politics. During the late seventeenth century he served as personal physician and adviser to the Earl of Shaftesbury, leader of the Whig party in England. The Whigs opposed the absolutist tendencies of the Stuart kings of England and, therefore, were often in exile. Locke and Shaftesbury were in exile in France for part of the 1670s and 1680s. It was there that Shaftesbury and other Whigs arranged a coup that forced James II off the throne of England in 1688. In what is called the Glorious Revolution, the Whigs replaced Stuart absolutism with a limited monarchy that ensured the rights of Englishmen. In the early 1690s Locke wrote two essays of political philosophy justifying the revolution. The one called *The Second Treatise of Civil Government* has had worldwide influence. The ideas that Locke penned in this document have been used to justify liberal revolutions, which promote the rights of individuals under limited government, around the world. Thomas Jefferson borrowed copiously from Locke to draft the *Declaration of Independence*. The declaration’s most famous line, “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” is a paraphrase from Locke’s writing wherein the latter argued that the purpose of government is to preserve the life, the liberty, and the property of the citizens. That governments are rational constructions, which ought to be designed in accordance with the laws of nature, was an ideal devised during the early modern period and radically different from the medieval notion of a divinely sanctioned monarchy.

While in exile in France, Locke wrote *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, which was published in 1689. In this work he gives a classic treatment of Empiricism. According to Locke, the mind is a blank slate when a person is born and it is chiefly through
sensory experiences during life that he gains knowledge of the external world. Locke’s notion of
the mind as “a blank slate” that primarily receives its information through life’s experiences was
radically novel for the seventeenth century. In the centuries since the Enlightenment Locke’s
assumptions about human nature and its development provided that theory for those idealistic
reformers who wished to change institutions in order to uplift degraded humanity. One of those
idealists was Jean Jacques Rousseau in France who wished to free humans with education from
the shackles that society had wrongly imposed upon them. In Emile Rousseau (1712-1778)
propounded that the child should be educated through direct experiences of persons and things.
A second important influence derived from An Essay Concerning Human Understanding was the
principle of tolerance. In analyzing the primary and the secondary qualities, Locke showed that
one often could not obtain certain knowledge. In fact, absolute certitude about the external world
seemed to evade humankind; therefore, one should not be overly assertive about one’s assertions
of knowledge. During the subsequent century, called the Enlightenment, dogmatic institutions,
like the Roman Catholic and the absolutist state, were subjected to intense criticism for their
infallible claims. In contrast, the tolerant individual, opened to diverse views, became the ideal
in liberal societies that increasingly championed free speech and a free press. Following Locke’s
influence the mark of the liberal individual became that of an educated person who refused to
adhere to institutional creeds but who freely chose for himself after a judicious investigation of
the facts.

George Berkeley (1685-1752), an Irish Protestant, studied at Trinity College in Dublin,
Ireland. One of the textbooks used there at the beginning of the eighteenth century was Locke’s
Essay Concerning Human Understanding. A scrapbook of thoughts he wrote during his
undergraduate years indicates that Locke’s book influenced him profoundly. Upon graduation, during his twenties, Berkeley wrote two books to refute Lockean empiricism: *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* and the popular *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*. Aside from philosophy, Berkeley had a career as a clergyman. In 1713 he took Holy Orders in the church and later traveled abroad to London, England, to the European continent, and, eventually, to the Thirteen Colonies. Berkeley left a personal legacy to America, which was his Rhode Island farm and his library that he gave to Yale University in Connecticut. Finally, it 1734, Berkeley became a bishop in the Church of England, and it is as Bishop Berkeley that he is remembered in history. Berkeley’s basic insight was to point out Locke’s arbitrary distinction between primary qualities, which Locke said are observer independent, and secondary qualities, which he said are observer dependent. Berkeley argued that all sense perceptions are ideas in the mind. Berkeley insisted that all reality is mental, being either in the mind of God or in the mind of the individual subject or of both. As a Christian, he posited God as the mind who perceives the entire universe as and sustains it within His own mind. Berkeley’s philosophy is called Phenomenalism, and it constituted a critique of the increasingly materialistic worldview of the eighteenth century philosophes.

David Hume (1711-1776) was the eighteenth century Scottish philosopher who developed important criticisms of Locke’s Empiricism and Berkeley’s Phenomenalism. Hume was not only a prominent philosopher during the Enlightenment; he also was an accomplished historian. His six-volume *History of England* was the standard work on the subject until the publication of Thomas Macaulay’s *History of England* in the middle of the nineteenth century. During his lifetime and even for a while after his death, Hume was a controversial figure because
of his views on revealed, supernatural religion. Certain of his works remained unpublished until after his death and, of those that were published during his lifetime, often deletions or revisions were made under pressure of the chapters on religion. For instance, in subsequent editions after the first printing of his *History of England*, Hume deleted passages that labeled Protestants during the Reformation as fanatics and the Roman Catholic faith as mere superstition. After Hume’s death, his friends published his brief autobiography, *My Own Life*, and his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. The latter book has become a classic because it critiques the traditional proofs for the existence of God. Also, much praise has been given to *My Own Life* as the best short autobiography in the English language, but devout Christians were offended that Hume portrayed himself during his death as unconcerned about an afterlife. Despite the prevailing agnosticism of intellectuals during the eighteenth century, many persons in Britain were still religious and about the time of his death Britain was undergoing a religious revival through the Methodist Movement. The prevailing religious sentiments cost Hume a professorship at the University of Edinburgh, which post was given to the candidate that did not arouse the animosity of the Scottish clerics. Despite these problems, Hume was able to secure adequate employment, once as a librarian in Edinburgh where he did his research for the *History of England*. During the early 1760s he served as secretary to the British ambassador in Paris where he was very favorable received by the coterie who frequented the salons. It was during this period in France that Hume made important connections with the French philosophes.

Hume’s insightful criticisms were also aimed at Locke’s Empiricism and Berkeley’s Phenomenalism. In *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, he showed that experiential observation only allows one to conclude that sensual impressions exist not that there is an entire
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported external world to one’s self. Furthermore, through sensory experiences, Hume argued, one does not encounter a self, a god, or even causation. These, he said, are human conceptualizations that cannot be substantiated by Empiricism. If Hume’s critique had concluded here, it would seem that he was a radical skeptic, but he was much more moderate than that. While Hume’s criticism exposed the limits of Empiricism, he also acknowledged that human beings do live a life on earth but it is one based on probabilities not absolute certainties. Contrary to what the philosophes claimed, Hume said that, except for mathematics, humans could not gain certitude by empirical reasoning.

One of Hume’s later contemporaries, Edmund Burke (1729-1797), was another opponent of systems building. Burke shared sentiments similar to Hume’s, and developed them into a conservative political philosophy at the end of the eighteenth century. In Reflections on the French Revolution Burke attacked the revolutionaries who attempted to reconstruct France on a set of principles derived from the Enlightenment. He considered their attempt to remake France in a single generation to be impossible because no person, or group of persons, could know with certainty all that was necessary to rebuild a socio-political order that had taken many generations to develop. Like Hume, he believed that humans live by custom, and Burke put an emphasis on the heritage of the past in shaping the way persons in the present live. The work of both of these thinkers, especially Burke’s, stands as a reaction against the most radical version of the Enlightenment’s agenda, which sought to reduce all of social reality to a few basic, universal principles.

At the end of the Enlightenment, during the 1780s, a number of significant philosophical works were published that resolved some of the problems in which Empiricism had become
This was the work of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). Born in Koeningsberg, Prussia (presently Kaliningrad), Kant never traveled more than 70 miles from the city, but by the end of his life he had achieved renown as a philosopher in Europe. Unlike many of his peers in philosophy, Kant held an academic post as a philosophy professor at the University of Koeningsberg. Since Kant’s time, especially during the twentieth century, it has become typical that a philosopher is also a university professor. As a professor, Kant voiced the not too unfamiliar complaint that students are habitually inattentive and incapable scholars. In a letter to a friend he complained that the best note-takers in class are often unable to distinguish the significant from the trivial.

Still, Kant was a popular teacher and his lectures were well attended. For fifteen years he labored as an unsalaried lecture; his only compensation being what students paid him. Prior to that he served as a private tutor of children within well-to-do households. Finally, in 1770 at the age of 46, Kant attained a salaried position as professor of logic and metaphysics. Now he had a stable career that allowed him to devote much of his time to writing philosophy. Publicly, in many ways, Kant appeared to his neighbors as the dignified and delightful but slightly eccentric professor. Throughout his day Kant followed a strict routine that included an hour-long walk in the afternoon after the midday meal. His walks, eight times back in forth on the avenue in front of his house, became know as the philosopher’s walk and, reputedly, housewives in the vicinity set their clocks to the time of his regular daily appearance.

It was at this time of the regular routines, during his later life, that Kant was preparing his major philosophical works. Finally, at the age of fifty-seven, he began a publishing spate that lasted almost until his death in 1804. Among his major works are *The Critique of Pure Reason,*...
The total corpus of his writings comprises an entire system of philosophy that is comparable to the work produced by Plato or Aristotle. He set out to resolve the primary problem bedeviling empiricists during the eighteenth century regarding just what could be known by the senses. He did this by dividing all that existed into two realms: the world of phenomena and the world of noumena. It is only things within the world of phenomena that one can know through sensual experience and the mind’s mental categories that a person can know. Whatever exists beyond the world of the phenomena, which Kant called the noumena, cannot be known by humans. Hence, Kant showed the limitations of human knowledge. There are certain things humans just cannot know by empirical reasoning, such as whether God exists or whether the human soul is immortal.

Like Hume had done before him, Kant also demolished the rationalistic proofs of God’s existence, which had been so convincing for medieval philosophers. Since, as Kant had demonstrated, God did not exist within the world of phenomena but transcended it, His existence is not something that a human could prove or disprove. In effect, when Kant had determined the limits of empirically based, rational knowledge, he had also established a broad zone for human faith. This division became very significant in the following centuries for westerners. The other major matter with which Kant wrestled was the problem of free will. Like other intellectuals of the Enlightenment, Kant accepted the Newtonian universe that was governed by natural laws. Increasingly, this meant, especially for educated westerners who were abandoning a biblical worldview, a very deterministic universe. Since humans lived in this universe, which Kant had called the world of phenomena, they, too, were governed by the laws of nature. In the wider
context of western intellectual development during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is debatable just how successful Kant was in preserving free will, especially in matters of ethical choices, for human beings. In the centuries after Kant, determinism, in one form or another, as an explanation of human behavior and even of human thought became prevalent in many of the new academic disciplines that were developed. The zone of freedom that Kant preserved for humans is in the realm of the *noumena* where individuals are undetermined and, thereby, capable of making autonomous, rational choices. In the following centuries many persons still clung to the eighteenth century notion of the rational, autonomous individual that Kant had so eloquently created as the decision-maker in moral choices. It is the human being constituted as rational, good, and self-reliant and living heroically in a universe devoid of superstition and stupidity that was the embodiment of much of the thought of philosophers during the early modern period. That image is still apparent in western societies.

**Select Bibliography**


5.1 From Cartesian doubt to the *cogito*

In order to get started in the theory of knowledge, we are in need of a method. Just as a carpenter uses tools to construct an edifice, we stand in need of tools to construct our theory of knowledge.\(^2\) But how do I know which tools to use? How can I be sure I am not using a sledgehammer to manage a tack or a tack to hold a thousand pound beam? I want to use only those tools that are the surest and best. Remember, we are building the edifice of human knowledge. We want to know, generally, what are the sorts of things we can know and how we might know them.

The seventeenth century French philosopher who changed the course of Western thinking, Rene Descartes, offered a method for building the foundation of our edifice based on an inventory of what we know and what we don't know. In his *Meditations on First Philosophy* (*Meditations*), Descartes calls all of his opinions about the mind, the physical world, and perceptions into question. This calling into question of our opinions is methodical doubt. Let us hold ourselves in the crossroad of epistemology and lend Descartes our ears. He is calling upon us to start from scratch! For Descartes, exercising such doubt requires the careful use of freedom. As Descartes gets started, he lets his readers know that he is not about to question conventional morality. For practical purposes, he will accept the norms of common decency

\(^2\) The “tool” metaphor for rationality and knowledge has been used by Nietzsche and Hegel.
while he questions things that have to do with our knowledge of the natural world. If he is not sure about something, he will withhold his assent. The freedom being exercised here then, is a freedom of judgement. Descartes realizes that he is absolutely free to withhold his assent from any opinion of which he is not absolutely certain and to only assent to that which he cannot doubt. The source of error is the misuse of our freedom, and in particular the misuse of judgement. Error occurs when we freely judge a proposition to be true which is not true. Take the proposition: 'Dogs are cold blooded animals.' Here we combine the subject 'dog' with the predicate 'cold-blooded animals'. The error consists in attributing a property to dogs that does not properly belong to dogs. We only fall into error by assenting to this combination. When I say or think that the above statement (or proposition) is true, I assent to what is false. Error has its root then, in the illegitimate use of freedom, not in the ability to perceive and conceptualize.

A detailed inventory of all of our opinions would take all year or maybe even a lifetime. So Descartes suggests a short cut. Since most of our opinions about the natural world are based on sense-experience, and we have at times been deceived by our senses, let us call all of our sense experience into question. Sense-experience includes the information we get from the five senses: touching, hearing, seeing, smelling, and tasting.

When we call our sense-experience into question, we do not deny that there is sense-experience. We only question the meaning of this experience and the inferences we make based on this experience about the nature of ultimate reality. Most of us assume that our sense-experience informs us about the world around us, more or less accurately. However, most of us could not say just how our sense experience informs us about the 'real' world or how we could verify that it does so.
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The following selections from Descartes' *Meditations* will take us on a journey that illustrates both Descartes’ method and the main results of that method. Pay special attention to the use of the **dream analogy** and the **evil demon** as devices that illustrate the sort of doubts Descartes raises about sense experience. Also, beware that the meaning Descartes gives to the word **ideas** is much broader than that which we give the term today. The term 'idea' refers to perceptions, emotions, feelings, thoughts, opinions, judgements, and memories. The term is so broad, it covers any type of mental event.

Selected reading: From *Meditations* I. and II., by Rene Descartes.

**Where are we after Cartesian doubt?**

Descartes has called into question the meaning of sense experience. In our natural attitude toward the world, we take our perceptions of trees, cars, roads, buildings and other objects as presenting items that belong to a world around us. Within Cartesian doubt we now suspend our judgement about what these perceptions really mean. For all we know at this point, they could be mere figments of the imagination or the productions of an evil genius. Regardless of whether they are parts of a natural world outside or just dreamlike images, they do indeed appear, that is, there is some perceptual content that is present to thinking.

After engaging in Descartes' systematic doubting, what am I (for now we follow Descartes and use the first person) left with to construct a new foundation for all of human knowledge? The very fact that I doubt reveals the starting point for a theory of knowledge. I cannot doubt I actually doubt while I doubt. Does this make sense to you? Doubting is a form
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of thinking. So I cannot doubt that there is thinking going on. Descartes also assumes that since
there is thinking there must be a subject (what we call 'I' when we say, "I think") which is doing
the thinking. This ego is the thinking thing. Most of us go through life assuming the very same
thing; there is some ‘I’ that I call 'myself'. This ‘I’ does the thinking and feeling and perceiving.
It is supposed to remain somewhat stable through time. That is why I think of myself at the
moment as the same person who drove to work this morning.

Descartes has tried to demonstrate that the existence of this thinking thing is self-evident.
All the rest of my experience is called into question. This may seem trivial and obvious to the
reader but it was important to distinguish these claims about thinking and the self from claims
about the appearance of the world. In any case, there are many philosophers who question the
existence of this Cartesian subject, this ‘I’, that is supposed to be doing all the thinking.

The world and the appearance of the world: a fateful distinction

It is important to remember that the calling into question of sense experience is not a
matter of doubting that a world appears to us. The word idea encompasses all of our sense
experiences, concepts, feelings, opinions, judgements, and dreams. The dream analogy and
evil demon make it quite evident that while we cannot doubt that a natural world (which
Descartes calls the corporeal or physical world) appears to us, we can doubt whether the
content of this appearance has any extra-mental reality. Extra-mental reality is reality
outside or independent of our minds. Perhaps this natural world which appears to me in what
I take to be my waking life is just an idea in the mind, much like a dream is merely in my mind.
You might say that this waking dream is more vivid and lively. But maybe what we call being
awake is to have just a more vivid and lively dream than the dreams we have while doing what we call sleeping.

Have you ever taken a dream to be so real that, while dreaming, you wished you were "dreaming"? Or have you ever awakened from a terrible dream that seemed so ‘real’ that it actually made you feel afraid or upset. If dreams can be so convincing, why can't what we call waking reality be equally convincing, yet just as much a dream, a bunch of ideas that reside solely in our minds? What is at stake here is the inference from the appearance of a world to the claim that this appearance gives us information about the extra-mental world. For Descartes, the inference most of us like to make, without justification, is as follows:

1. A world appears to me while awake.
2. The appearance is the content of an idea in my mind.
3. Therefore there must be a world outside of and separate from the appearance that corresponds to this appearance.

Notice that (3) does not follow from (1) and (2). So if we start from the Cartesian crossroad of systematic doubt, it is not immediately clear how we are to obtain access to an extra-mental world. If there is no justification for moving from statements (1) and (2) to statement (3), why are we so apt to make such an inference? (Incidentally, some philosophers would dispute premise [2]). Descartes tries to clarify this issue by distinguishing between two sorts of ideas: adventitious and innate. **Adventitious ideas** appear to come from outside the mind without our causing them to come before consciousness. I am not aware of myself creating this keyboard and monitor, the walls of this office, and the sounds of people talking in the
The other sort of ideas may have their origin in me, even apart from all experience and before I had any sense-experience: innate ideas. The principles of logic and mathematics seem to come from me without the need for observation. If observation plays a role, it is arguably to remind me of what I already somehow know. I may use pennies to teach a child how to add $3 + 4$, but I do not really need the pennies to demonstrate the truth of the proposition: $3 + 4 = 7$. The pennies are merely a pedagogical device to direct our attention to that which we already somehow know. The bringing of three pennies next to four pennies does not verify the truth of $3 + 4 = 7$; it merely illustrates this truth. We do not use the experimental method to prove that $3 + 4 = 7$. The second and third time we bring 3 objects next to 4 objects and count them does not offer more proof that the statement $3 + 4 = 7$ is true. Such a statement is true a priori, that is, independent of my experience of counting objects. This is what makes mathematical truths innate.\(^3\)

Descartes' reliance on innate ideas in much of the later *Meditations* has earned him the label of rationalist. The rationalist is characterized by the use of innate truths in attaining knowledge of our world. Descartes applied the truths of mathematics and coordinate geometry to the physical world to describe the laws of mechanics.

Other concepts, such as cause and effect, substance and property (or mode), were also used to give accounts of the regularities and properties of natural phenomena. 'Every event or entity has a cause' is a long held assumption about the world. We make sense of much of our experience utilizing this concept. The concept of substance and mode is used quite often in

\[^3\] Note that some philosophers (e.g. J.S. Mill and S. Kripke) offer an opposing perspective on mathematical truth as being empirically grounded.
ordinary English. The subject of a sentence usually refers to a substance, an underlying thing. And the predicate usually refers to that substance's qualities or properties. For example, "the sky is blue," refers the quality blue to the underlying thing -- the sky. The sky stays relatively the same while undergoing modifications: it turns gray, cloudy, clear, or hazy.

The empiricist, on the other hand, relies more on perceptions or data received from the senses. General principles are usually derived not from innate ideas but from the results of observations during controlled experiments. This is not to say empiricists avoid the use of innate or a priori principles altogether. The distinction here is one of emphasis. Empiricists use the inductive method, that is, they prefer to base much of their claims about the world on observation. Generally, observations of the repetition of certain events under similar conditions lead to probable knowledge about the phenomenon under study. If I drop two objects of different weight, but otherwise similar, from the same height fifty times, or better, one thousand times, and each time they hit the ground at the same moment, I might formulate a law of falling objects based on such observations. The more times I observe this regularity the more confidence I have that such outcomes will occur should the same conditions be repeated again. The so-called 'laws of nature' are conceptualizations of these probabilities.

Notice I have been very careful about the use of the terms 'empiricist' and 'rationalist'. It is all too easy to get caught up in putting philosophers into neat boxes! However, these neat labels--rationalist and empiricist--indicate only general tendencies. None of the early modern philosophers we are considering is completely rationalist (relying on innate ideas alone) or empiricist (relying on sense experience alone).
The main problem of the meditations

The main problem facing us at the crossroad of the *Meditations* is:

**what is the status of adventitious ideas?**

These are ideas that we are not aware of producing in ourselves. These are all those experiences that seem to come from "outside" us. Let us be clear about this point. I do not create the idea of the keyboard and monitor before me. I may turn toward the keyboard and thereby make the idea available, but my mere turning does not generate the visual perception of the keyboard. I am sure you do not think that you are creating the paper and ink of the words you are reading. We are not aware of ourselves as causes of such ideas. Adventitious ideas include most of our immediate experience of the physical world. By physical world I mean the streets, buildings, trees, people, and things that surround us everyday. Do our ideas of a physical world represent or give us knowledge of an extra-mental (separate from mind) world or do they merely constitute a sophisticated dream? Are our ideas of physical objects identical to the physical objects?

Descartes thought that our ideas of physical objects are ultimately representations of physical objects; they are not physical objects themselves. Perhaps photographs provide a good analogy for the concept of representation. Imagine that my idea of Professor Sochan represents Professor Sochan much like a photo represents him. Is there more to Professor Sochan than his photograph? By analogy, is the idea of Professor Sochan the same thing as Professor Sochan.

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*I want to distinguish between the everyday physical world and the physical world of theoretical physics, which is more abstract and mathematical.*
Or are my ideas all there are to the world? If my ideas (as representations) are the whole world, then they don't really represent or point to anything. There would be no extra-mental reality serving as the cause or basis of my ideas. In the case of Professor Sochan, we might want to argue that the photograph is not identical to Professor Sochan, but presents a likeness of a real, that is, non-photographic, living Professor Sochan.

**Descartes’ constructive task**

Descartes' task after so much doubting is to re-establish knowledge of the existence of the corporeal (physical) world based on the certainty that he is a thinking being. In practical life, we assume that our ideas of the natural world represent to us an extra-mental world that is like our idea of it, much like a photograph represents the real thing. Extra-mental means outside the mind. If I am an indirect realist, when I see the Empire State building I do not think the building itself is in my mind but that my senses somehow produce an idea (a perception) of the building, which represents the building that exists outside of my mind. Descartes thought that the idea in our mind must be some sort of representation that points beyond itself to the object outside us.

**But what is the justification for this belief?**

The justification, for Descartes, must be based on what I can know for certain. Meanwhile, the consequence of not answering this question is to be stuck in one's own mind with an idea that may be a mere dream. This position is called solipsism. The solipsist could not assert that any other minds exist except her own. She is quite isolated! Descartes solves the problem of solipsism and restores knowledge of extra-mental reality by resorting to innate ideas; but one might wonder if such ideas are beyond methodical doubt. Such scholastic principles as
"everything has a cause" and "the concept of the finite presupposes the concept of the infinite" are brought in through the back door of the Meditations in order to solve the problem of solipsism and the existence of a corporeal world. For it is by using these innate ideas that Descartes proves the existence of God.

**The argument from divine benevolence and power**

Descartes asserts that based on our knowledge that we are limited beings we have the idea of limitation. Fair enough. Then, using the assumption that the idea of limitation that we have presupposes the idea of the unlimited, Descartes establishes the existence of an infinite and good God. We will not go into the details of Descartes' proof for God's existence here. When you study them on your own, you may or may not find these proofs convincing. The important point to make here is that having established that there is an all-powerful good God, Descartes reclaims extra-mental reality. A good God would not deceive us humans about what we so habitually assume is true. We assume that a corporeal (physical) world exists in addition to our idea of that world. We know about this extra-mental world because our idea of it provides a reasonably good representation of this corporeal world.

With the help of a benevolent God Descartes is then ready to clearly distinguish thinking substance from corporeal substance. You have seen the term substance before. Descartes takes the concept of substance from scholastic (medieval) thinking, but it has its origin in Aristotle’s *hupokeimenon*, which may be translated substance or underlying thing. For Descartes, distinct finite substances have independent existence from each other and depend on the creator for their existence. Different kinds of substances (or underlying things) have very little in common. For
example, two distinct substances may both have duration and be created entities. What is more important is how distinct substances are different. The thinking substance (that’s us!) opines, judges, imagines, feels, and conceives. The corporeal substance (the physical world) is extended in space; it has motion, shape, solidity, and number.

Now we can focus on exactly what features of our representation of the physical world correspond to the actual extra-mental physical objects. According to the indirect realists (Galileo, Descartes, Locke), the basic features of corporeal substance are indeed reported to us by the senses. But not all aspects of our experience of corporeal objects report to us what is extra-mental. Some aspects of our experience represents to us qualities that exist only on the side of the subject, that is, the thinking thing. We will call these observer-dependent qualities for now. Other aspects of our experience represent to us qualities that exist not only on the side of the subject, but also in an object that is independent of the subject. We will call these observer-independent qualities for now. Let’s take a simple, tasty example to make these ideas clear.

**At this point: have an ice cream!**

You deserve an ice cream break (or tofu for the vegetarians). Taste the ice cream please. Imagine it’s your favorite flavor. Now the indirect realist would argue that the sweetness of this ice cream exists only for the subject; the sweetness I experience is not in the ice cream. The qualitative experience of the sweetness is observer-dependent. The chemical composition of the sugar in the ice cream exists in the ice cream itself. This chemical composition does not depend on my particular sense organs and the way my sense organs are disposed towards ice cream. The molecular structure of sucrose is observer-independent. John Locke provides a vocabulary that
can help us further develop the distinction between qualities that are merely observer dependent and qualities that represent to us observer independent physical structures. At this time then, we move to Locke’s representative theory of knowledge.

Review questions:

What is the function of the dream analogy?

2. What is the function of the evil demon concept?

3. What distinguishes dreams from waking reality?

4. What is it that Descartes cannot doubt?

5. What is the function of the wax analogy?

6. Can we doubt the extra-mental (separate from mind) reality of physical objects? Explain.

7. For Descartes, what is the nature of corporeal substance? What is the nature of mental substance?

5.2 John Locke: Primary and secondary qualities

\textit{Empiricism and the tabula rasa}

For John Locke (1632 - 1704), a British empiricist, all of our knowledge begins with sense experience. The mind is like a blank slate (or \textit{tabula rasa}) until sense experience starts to fill it with data. This emphasis puts Locke in the empiricist camp. As we saw, this general approach to the theory of knowledge is often referred to as empiricism. The empiricist maintains that knowledge is primarily based on sense-experience. Locke introduced two terms to
Locke distinguished between primary qualities, which belong to material things in themselves (or corporeal things), and secondary qualities, which are the properties of material things in so far as they cause subjective qualities in the mind. For our purposes, I will refer to these subjective qualities as the secondary qualities. Thus to simplify this distinction, the primary qualities of any physical object impact human senses and brain processes in such a way as to cause sense experience. Primary qualities were thought to be objective and measurable, such as number, shape, motion, and solidity (mass or resistance). Secondary qualities were viewed as subjective and transitory, such as color, smell, taste, sound, and feeling.

Contemporary natural science continues to refine this distinction by distinguishing objective from subjective features of things. Today it is still the quantifiable properties such as mass and charge that, for the most part, pass for objective and universal aspects of nature. (It should be noted that contemporary physics also considers the role of the observer during scientific experimentation.)

Locke made easy

How can we bring these concepts home and make them easy for us to remember? Let's take an example that relates these concepts to everyday life. Imagine that Charles is looking at an oak tree during the fall season. It is evening and the leaves appear to be yellow--gold in color. This color that Charles sees is not a quality that inheres in the thing itself (the extra-mental leaves on the tree). The yellow-gold colors are just the way in which the leaves appear to
Charles' visual apparatus at a certain time of day. The light waves which reach his eye produce a stimulus which is processed by the optic nerve and certain diverse areas of the brain; somehow, at nearly the same moment, there is a mental image of color, what is today often referred to as a *qualia* or mental content.

The mental color *qualia* itself arguably has no existence outside of Charles' mind. The light waves that impinged upon the eye and set off a series of physiological events somehow produced the mental image (the *qualia*) of color. Locke, if brought up to date by modern optics, would probably maintain that waves and photons have a real existen
tce outside of Charles' mind. The shape and number of the leaves also have a real existence outside of his mind, but he may not see all of the leaves' sides at once. He has to walk around the leaves to accumulate knowledge about their complete shape.

Imagine now that Charles steps back 100 feet from the tree. The leaves look smaller, but do the leaves really get smaller as we move away from them? The appearance of size that is influenced by distance is merely a subjective (secondary) quality that depends on the observer. The actual size of the leaf that can be measured by inches or meters or some other convention is an objective (primary) quality; it can be confirmed by a standard of measurement. (Just to take another example, I can visually bracket the moon between my hands from my position on earth, though I know its "real" size is much larger than the distance between my hands! But I certainly do not know this from the mere appearance, that is, mental content, of the moon-perception.)

Let us not forget the sense of smell. When Charles goes home, he smells spaghetti sauce cooking on the stove. He smells the pungency of garlic and the sweetness of tomatoes, the aromatic oregano and lightly sweet basil leaves. (You can tell I like to cook.) He gets hungry.
He thinks, uncritically, that the sweet and pungent smell is really in the sauce or in the air and that he is taking it in. But according to Locke's theory, the smell is only a representation in his mind. No part of this representation is a primary quality. The sweetness *qualia* is not in the observer-independent features of the sauce, only the molecules that cause sweetness *qualia* are in the sauce and in the air.

There are primary qualities that cause us to smell a sweet, pungent, sauce. These qualities are indirectly observable through a perceptual representation, some with the naked eye and some under a microscope. The primary quality description of the above example would go something like this: The molecules of garlic, tomato, oregano, and basil are vaporized and floating in the air; these molecules stimulate nerves in the nose and a message gets to the brain. At the same time the mind perceives the odor (a secondary quality). Again, smell is a secondary quality; it is the way in which the human being reacts to the primary qualities of the molecules of various spices and foods.

And finally let us consider tactile qualities. Charles runs up to the stove, dips in a spoon, and burns his mouth on the hot tomato sauce. It happens to the best of us. After letting out a scream he reflects on the hotness of the sauce. The sensations of burning hot and pain (the qualia) is not in the sauce itself. The 200-degree tomato sauce does not have the pain floating around in it! When we say "the sauce is hot," what really (from the point of view of the primary qualities) is happening? The molecules of the sauce, which have a certain atomic configuration, are moving at a high speed in different directions with the distance between molecules expanding and the temperature rising. Remember that the primary qualities include number, motion, and shape. We might update these to include charges in order to account for the relationship between...
These primary qualities of the sauce, when applied to the human tongue and mouth, produce a sensation of hot and pain which are secondary qualities that seem to depend on the human senses and neurophysiological system.

**Locke and the representative theory of knowledge**

Locke's view is often referred to as the representational theory of knowledge. It is also called indirect scientific realism. On this view, ideas represent to us the extra-mental world in terms of the primary qualities of objects. Ideas, in a sense, enable humans to describe these extra-mental qualities correctly. This theory has the assent of common sense. Perhaps most students subscribe to this view. It seems to make sense of both the differences in our subjective experience of the world and the sameness of what we take to be the facts or objective descriptions of things. We all have different opinions about the way certain foods taste but we can agree on the chemical composition of those same foods. In almost every class I find some students who love the taste of eggplant and others who find it utterly repugnant; but all of us agree on the physical-chemical properties of eggplant.

Each of us responds to the temperature of a room. All of us may differ on whether the room temperature feels comfortable, too warm, or too cold, but we can agree on the temperature in centigrade or Fahrenheit.

Sound provides us with another example. We may differ on the way a certain guitar performance by Vicente Amigo sounds, but we can agree on the sound frequency of the guitar strings’ vibrations as measured in the studio or by an oscilloscope, and the great speed at which Amigo can pick the strings.
Still yet another example is provided to us by our sense of smell. Some of us like the smell of musk perfume and some of us hate it; but we can all agree on the chemical composition of musk. Yes, each to his or her own, but not in terms of the primary qualities!

Has Locke resolved important aspects of the problem of knowledge? Let us not rest complacent in the representational theory of knowledge, though it be attractive to common sense, for it has problems of its own! It was Bishop George Berkeley who tried to throw a wrench in the theory of indirect realism.

5.3 Bishop George Berkeley: Critique of indirect scientific realism

Bishop George Berkeley (1685-1753), a British phenomenalist, argued against the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. Berkeley agreed with Descartes and Locke that all sense perceptions are ideas (in the broad sense) in the mind. More precisely, Berkeley argues that whatever is immediately perceived is an idea in the mind, but he did not admit that there were also primary qualities that exist independent of the observer. This is not to say that Berkeley denies that some things have motion, number, shape and solidity. Berkeley argued that what Locke called the primary qualities, are, like the secondary qualities, merely ideas in the mind.

Remember, Locke's position is that the primary qualities of our ideas (shape, number, solidity, motion, extension) are indeed represented in the idea that is in the mind, but these qualities point beyond the ideas to an extra-mental reality (physical objects) where they exist independent of our minds. For Locke, our ideas of the primary qualities correctly represent what
the extra-mental objects are like; they resemble extra-mental reality. On the other hand, for Locke, the secondary qualities are merely subjective.

By what right, argues Berkeley, do you set up the primary qualities as radically distinct from the secondary qualities. The qualities called primary by Locke, are for Berkeley, to be counted among the observer-dependent ones. The being of the secondary qualities depends completely on being in a mind. The indirect realists (Galileo, Descartes, Locke) would most likely agree. Berkeley goes even further and argues that the primary qualities, just like the secondary ones, exist only in minds also. Examined more closely, there is arguably no theoretical justification to treat one set of qualities differently from the other.

Shape, number, solidity, and motion, the so-called primary qualities, are, like the secondary qualities, all perceived and are unintelligible apart from perception, imagination, or conceptualization. To illustrate this point, imagine that a white billiard ball is moving along a table. The color of the ball, which is supposed to be a secondary quality, is perceived in the same nexus of sensations as the shape and motion of the ball. Imagine if the shape of the ball is reduced until it disappears. What happens to the color? It too disappears. Or imagine that the ball is emptied of all color content. What happens to the shape? It also disappears! Again, all of these qualities, the secondary as well as the primary, are represented in the same complex perception; by what right do we separate off shape and motion from whiteness and give them a special status?

To be sure, shape and motion are not the same as color, but they are perceived together with color. There is nothing in the ideas of a white moving billiard ball that indicates there is anything extra-mental about any of the qualities of the ball. This does not mean, for Berkeley,
the ball does not exist. It does. But it exists in a mind and is as white, and solid, and round as one PERCEIVES it to be.

The inference from adventitious ideas to some extra-mental, that is, observer independent cause of these ideas is completely ungrounded. Maybe Descartes was correct when he was not comfortable with our habit of assuming that our ideas represent extra-mental reality. For this reason Descartes brought God into the picture. Remember, it was God who guaranteed that there was an extra-mental world corresponding to certain aspects of our mental world. If we do not use God for this special purpose, why not question this habit of mind?

The following selection provides some of Berkeley's arguments that we do not have knowledge of an observer-independent physical world. (Berkeley also makes the additional claim that there is not an observer or mind independent world.)


**An unfair poke at Berkeley: kicking the stone**

Some of the objectives raised against the arguments in the above dialogue are not really decisive against Berkeley. One criticism I often hear from students may be called the "pain in the foot argument." Let one of our friends who agree with Berkeley that "to be is to be perceived" kick a large boulder with all her might. (Don’t try this at home.) Obviously there will follow some screams of pain. There then, is the proof that the boulder really exists, a foot really
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Victory to common sense! Now we can go home and rest! All philosophical problems have been solved. Let's party! Not so fast. This happens to be a very weak argument against Berkeley.

Berkeley does not deny the existence of the boulder. How do we come to know this boulder if not by perceiving it? And how do we know someone's foot, even our own, except by perceiving or feeling it? And the pain is certainly real. Yet it too is known to exist only by being perceived. The inference that any of these objects exists unperceived, independent of any mind, is completely unwarranted. Berkeley's challenge is clear: can you imagine a thing unimagined or perceive something that is unperceived or think something that is unthought?

There are other, more radical challenges to Berkeley that place in question Berkeley's fundamental hypothesis, that what we immediately perceive is always merely an idea in the mind (except for God). Twentieth century French philosopher John Paul Sartre, for example, argued that what we immediately perceive is precisely not mental. Consciousness, for Sartre, is always aware of what is not consciousness. The reason why Berkeley poses such great problems for indirect realists is that they accept this fundamental hypothesis. So it is important to keep in mind that Berkeley’s theory of knowledge is only a problem for realists who accept Berkeley’s fundamental hypothesis.

Berkeley’s notions: unperceived things, the self, and God

According to Berkeley there is no "external" world outside of the world of ideas and perceptions. What about that internal (mental) world and the ego (I) of the Cogito (I think)? Remember, Descartes took the existence of the Cogito, or the 'I' that thinks, as self-evident. The
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ego is an important concept because it figures as an element of most theories of selfhood. Yet, as we shall see, according to David Hume, search our souls as we may, the self does not appear as an idea; we just assume it exists because we know there is thinking and feeling going on in what seems to be the same consciousness. The self seems to tie my bundle of experiences together into one person’s experience.

Berkeley, like Descartes, believed that there must be a thinker or self behind the thinking that is going on in my mind even though this ego that thinks is not directly perceived. Since the thinker or self that thinks is not directly perceived, and one of Berkeley’s general principles is that to be is to be perceived, how does Berkeley justify his acceptance of an active ego or self? In the Second Dialogue we find Philonous insisting on an active thinking power that is the subject of ideas, and it appears that Philonous is representing Berkeley's view:

"...I know or am conscious of my own being, and ...I myself am not my ideas, but something else, a thinking, active principle that perceives, knows, wills, and operates about ideas. I know that I, one and the same self, perceive both colors and sounds, that a color cannot perceive a sound, nor a sound a color, that I am therefore one individual principle distinct from color and sound, and, for the same reason, from all other sensible things and inert ideas."

While Berkeley does not want to infer the existence of physical objects as distinct entities

\[5\] Berkeley, pp. 80, 81.
apart from our ideas, he is willing to infer the existence of the self as the entity that thinks the ideas. The self is not the only entity that Berkeley accepts based on an inference from experience. Since we do not create many of our ideas of the world, but they seem to appear to us without our willing, Berkeley brings in God as the origin and source of what Descartes called 'adventitious' ideas. Yet God, too, is an unperceived entity.

Since the self and God are not directly perceived, Berkeley stipulated a new meaning for the term 'notion' to account for such entities. It is not very clear how Berkeley theoretically justifies these notions, but they are useful for him in solving certain questions raised by his theory of knowledge.

Most of us suppose the ongoing existence of this book as well as other physical objects when we leave the room. If none of us perceives the book, how can we account for its continued existence, for to be is to be perceived! We may be happy to hear from Berkeley that God's omniscience guarantees the ongoing existence of the natural world while humans or other perceptive animals do not perceive it.

Berkeley, in agreement with Locke and Descartes, accepts the notion that everything needs a cause for its existence and for every activity there must be a subject of that activity. These assumptions lead to the notions of self (the subject of experience) and God (the cause of everything). Yet there is a crucial difference between Berkeley's view and Descartes' view. For Berkeley, God does not guarantee an extra-mental world; God sustains the existence of an ideal (mental) world by thinking the world! God, an infinite intellect, also causes adventitious ideas to appear to finite minds (that's us!). God creates and sustains this great sensorium that we call the world. To be is to be perceived, if not by finite thinking creatures, then by the uncreated being.
Review questions:

1. Briefly outline Berkeley's argument against the claim that an idea resembles extra-mental reality.

2. Can you imagine an object existing unperceived? Explain.

3. What entity does Berkeley introduce to explain the continuing existence of things apart from human perceptions? Is such a move acceptable?


5. If “to be is to be perceived,” in what sense does the brain exist?

6. David Hume: Starting over

   The work of taking the next step in dismantling the unquestioned assumptions of Descartes fell to David Hume (1711 - 1776), the most influential of the British empiricists. Hume agreed with Berkeley and Descartes that all that we immediately perceive are our ideas (again, in the broad sense of ‘idea’). Hume accepted neither Locke's representationalism nor Berkeley's notions, nor yet Descartes’ good God. Hume's Treatise on Human Nature and Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding in effect take us back to the first Meditation but with more rigor and strictness: no unquestioned assumptions, as far as Hume can help it, are allowed in the door.

   In the following selected reading, Hume lays out the basic features of his theory of knowledge and a critique of the concept of causality.

Selected reading: From An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding, by David Hume.
6.1 Matters of fact and relations of ideas

For Hume all of our knowledge is reducible to matters of fact and relations of ideas. Matters of fact are propositions (statements that are true or untrue) based on sense experience or reflection. "Anna is 4 foot 6 inches tall" is verified by inspecting the height of Anna. "The table is red" is verified by inspecting the color of the table. More specifically, our sense-experience consists of impressions and ideas. All matters of fact are verified by consulting impressions and ideas. Impressions are the immediate and vivid experience of the senses. Ideas are the copies, less vivid and more vague, of our impressions. When I first see the red table, the impressions of color and shape are vivid. When I later remember this table, the idea I have is a less vivid copy of the impression.

Relations between ideas are determined by judgements about the combination of one idea with another. Some relations between ideas are the basis of statements that are necessarily true, that is, their denial would constitute a conceptual contradiction. Examples of disciplines that study such propositions are logic and mathematics. I know that P and not-P cannot both be true at the same time. Arguably, I do not need facts or experiments to convince me of this. I know that, given Euclidean or non-curved space and certain definitions and axioms, parallel lines never intersect. I do not need to continue a drawing of parallel lines on a plane surface for hours on end to convince me of this.
Now we have some of the basics of Hume’s epistemology. We have a grasp of what sort of things we know (impressions and ideas) and what sort of knowledge we can have (matters of fact and relations between ideas). Hume puts these premises to work in a critique of the concept of causality. This critique applies both to Hume's predecessors and today's theory of knowledge. An example will make the critique clear.

Let us observe billiard ball 'cue' hit billiard ball '7'. Billiard ball '7' then moves toward the side pocket and falls into the pocket. What we have just observed, according to Hume, is:

\[ \begin{align*}
  t_1 & \quad \text{the cue ball is hit} \\
  t_2 & \quad \text{the cue ball moves.} \\
  t_3 & \quad \text{the cue ball is adjacent to the 7 ball.} \\
  t_4 & \quad \text{the 7 ball moves.} \\
  t_5 & \quad \text{the 7 ball falls into the side pocket.}
\end{align*} \]

Each \( t_n \) represents an occasion for a distinct impression. To illustrate this point, let us imagine repeating \( t_1 \) through \( t_5 \), this time using a video recorder to record these events. Now with our advanced video technology we can divide each of these times into hundreds or thousands of separate frames.

For Hume, all we can ever hope to observe is that one frame or impression follows another. Impressions are atomic and unconnected. This thing we call a ‘cause’ will not show up in any one of the frames. Look all you want. Divide your frames into still more frames till the end of time; you will find no impression of this thing called ‘cause’. The use of causality to
explain events is a habit or custom we have of explaining one event that regularly follows another event in a pattern of constant conjunction. We say the antecedent event causes the subsequent event. But what more can this mean than one event follows another? Further, we can imagine any of the events from $t_1$ to $t_5$ as coming to be without a cause. If we watch a video tape of a pool game in slow motion, one frame at a time, we see only one event follows another. There is no separate and additional thing, no impression of a cause that shows up in any of the frames. Again, what we see is one frame following another.

The event $t_1$ just is not one moment and is the next, with no discernible extra thing called a ‘cause’. This may startle some of us, but being surprised does not constitute an argument. There is simply no contradiction in asserting that any given entity exists without a cause. The prejudice that everything needs a cause is arguably primarily derived from non-theoretical practices of common life. Hume calls the uncritical use of the concept of causality into question.\(^6\)

Since there is no impression corresponding to our concept of causality and the existence of things may be considered without entertaining the concept of cause, there need not be a cause of our impressions and ideas. For all we know, adventitious ideas just happen! What is certain is that we have often observed one event follows another with regularity. It is not certain, however, that such a pattern must be repeated in the future. This is not to argue that things that exist are caused by nothing. Hume is careful to point out that nothing is not considered a cause at all. It could very well be that there is no cause for things to exist. Again, there can be nothing at time

\(^6\) I owe this insight into Hume’s critique of causality to some suggestions of Ralph Acampora.
and at some moment \( t_2 \) an impression can appear without a cause; this implies no contradiction although it may please neither common sense nor scientific sensibility.

**The human self and God make no impressions**

Another consequence of Hume's critique of the theory of knowledge is that there is no self behind the theater of our mind thinking and opining and imagining and observing ideas. The Berkeleyan notions are not allowed here. Yes, Descartes, there is thinking but you cannot infer from this that there is a thinker! Since there is no impression of the self, that is, it never appears to us, there is no theoretical justification for asserting its existence! Nor is there some extra-mental reality that causes my 'adventitious' ideas. Impressions and ideas may present themselves from one moment to the next without need for a cause or substance or corporeal entity. There is no appeal to a good God. Since there is no impression corresponding to our concept of God, the concept has no basis in matters of fact.

**Some consequences of Hume’s critique of the concept of causality**

The assumption that the future course of events will conform to the patterns of the past may be referred to as the hypothesis of the **uniformity of nature**. If there is nothing in \( t_1 \) that makes \( t_2 \) necessary, if \( t_1 \) just happens to be followed by \( t_2 \), there is no guarantee that nature will continue to be uniform. So repeating an experiment ten times, 100 times, or 1000 times makes no difference. There is no impression of anything in nature that will guarantee the same pattern will continue; the very next experiment may produce a counter-example and falsify our hypothesis.

The entire science of probability and inductive reasoning (generalizing from observations) depends on this assumption of the uniformity of nature, for if the future does not
have to conform in any way to the past, predictions are mere guesses based on hope or faith, not science. Indeed, all of the so-called natural laws are now called into question because there is no evidence that nature must obey these laws. After all, we have no impressions of the future. Regularity in the past proves nothing about the future because, so far as we can tell, the connections between events in the past were not necessary. From the repetition of the same events following similar events a habit of the human mind assumed there was some cause that brought these connections together and will continue to bring such events together in the future.

By way of example, let us examine the following claim about the law of gravity. The law of gravity has applied for all of human history, and for all we know, a great deal of pre-history, and it will apply to nature in the foreseeable future. Such a claim has no basis in fact because we have no impression or idea of the future. The uniformity of nature assumption has no basis in fact because maybe the rules that nature has followed in the past will cease now and new rules will take over, or perhaps there will be no rules at all! The so-called laws of nature are merely assumptions that come from a habit of mind. The uniformity of nature assumption has absolutely no rational justification.

Another example is the generalization that any person who is HIV positive will develop the AIDS syndrome. After years of general assent to this view, it now appears that some persons who test HIV positive have not become ill with the AIDS syndrome. Still another example is the long held belief that stomach ulcers were caused by acid; yet it has recently been discovered that a bacteria (helicobacter pylori) is associated with the onset of stomach ulcers. Connections between events in nature that are taken as necessary today may turn out to be contingent (accidental) tomorrow.
The problem of induction

The scientific method, which depends on inductive reasoning, that is, reasoning from the repetition of particulars to general laws, is thus without rational justification. This problem is sometimes referred to as the problem of induction. The practical solution is to go on our merry way and assume the uniformity of nature, laws of nature, and the "science" of probability. In epistemology, we are still interested in what human beings can know theoretically.

After Hume's critique of induction, we are left with the knowledge of relations between ideas that gives us truths in the areas of mathematics and logic. With regard to the other source of knowledge, sense-experience, we obtain the matters of fact. These matters of fact are bundles of impressions and ideas (perceptions) that make up what we call the psychological and natural worlds. There is neither a substantial self that holds these ideas together nor a corporeal world apart from the impressions.

For Hume, as for Berkeley, the primary and secondary qualities exist only as perceived, but unlike Berkeley, there is no perceiver, no self, no God, no notions of things that cause or contain our impressions and ideas. In this sense Hume is much more radical in his faithfulness to experience.

The consequences of Hume's critique of representationalism and causality for the theory of knowledge are devastating to indirect realism. There is not much to know besides our impressions and ideas and the truths of mathematics; only a non-rational habit of mind lies behind the projects of natural science. Science fails to guarantee certainty. Natural law and the uniformity of nature are customs created by human fictions, not rational scientific discovery.
The concept of probability is glorified custom; we cannot rationally predict a future that we have never observed.

**Crisis of early modern science**

One of the goals of seventeenth century science was to apply mathematics to the corporeal world. It was argued that since mathematics is the source of propositions that are necessarily true, their successful application to the natural world would yield **objective and universal knowledge** in the sciences. With Hume's critique of induction, however, the project of applying geometric concepts and laws of motion (mechanics) to nature stood at a crisis. On what ground can science claim objectivity? Do claims of **objectivity** require some guarantee that the adventitious ideas really do represent the things outside us?

For Hume, there is not only no evidence of a self; there is no evidence that any of my impressions corresponds to your impressions. I cannot even be sure anyone else exists! Nor can natural science make universal claims about the world. **Universality** requires that all impressions of the natural world must always conform to certain rules everywhere and for all time. But the problem of induction would seem to render such claims of universality groundless. By what right can science maintain that some aspect of our ideas have objective validity apart from human consciousness? What access, if any, do human beings have to reality? Is there any reality beyond the bundle of perceptions that pass, one after the other? If there is a corporeal world, by what right do we apply to it the rules of mathematics and physics? How can we take the **necessary truths** of logic and mathematics and apply them to the apparently unpredictable natural world? Are we back in the first *Meditation*, this time to stay?
Review questions:

1. What does Hume mean by matters of fact and relations between ideas? Which one of these objects of human inquiry does not require experience?

2. What does Hume take to be the origin of our belief in causal relations?

3. Are there any good arguments to justify the assumption that the future will conform to the past? What is Hume's view?

4. What is the relationship between the constant conjunction of events and our habit or custom of attributing causal relations to things?

5. Why do you think Hume rejects the notions (in Berkeley's technical sense) of Berkeley?

7. Immanuel Kant: Copernican revolution in epistemology

Immanuel Kant (1724 - 1804), who initiated the Copernican revolution in philosophy, met the challenge of providing an epistemology that restores objectivity and universality to the sciences, the unity of the self to the mind, causality to all relations between events, and the conformity of the future with the past. Hume, like Locke, had assumed that human beings were somewhat passive with regard to knowledge, receiving impressions from whatever their source, with no guarantee that such impressions form a pattern that will repeat itself in the future. What if, like the Copernican revolution in astronomy (which made the earth revolve instead of standing passively still), the theory of knowledge were to place the human mind in motion as an active participant in the formation of objects? What if reason itself plays an important role in how objects appear to us? Perhaps we do not passively receive impressions of things. Maybe we are not like a blank slate waiting to receive chalk marks. What if, like the lenses on a camera, we
7.1 Human reason as constructive

Sometimes a philosophical theory is made easier by using an analogy. In order to better understand Immanuel Kant's theory of knowledge, let's return to the analogy of the filter. For us to perceive any object, it must first pass through this filter that stands between knowledge and reality. This filter has a pattern to which reality must conform to become an object of knowledge for us humans. Every single experience must pass through this filter and obey its rules; only then can it enter our consciousness. This filtering of reality before it can become an object for us humans is precisely the strategy used by Kant to restore objective and universal knowledge to the scientific enterprise. Kant called this strategy Transcendental Idealism.

Transcendental idealism

In order to understand what Kant meant by transcendental idealism we must distinguish Kant's idealism from Berkeley's idealism and Locke's representational theory of truth. Kant does not deny that what we immediately perceive is the appearance (or ideas). Descartes' ideas, Locke's representations, Berkeley's ideas, and Hume's impressions and ideas are all what immediately appears to a mind (though Hume denies there is a substantial mind). For Kant, the appearance does not represent a physical object in the sense of resembling it, as Locke claimed for primary qualities. Nor does the appearance fully exhaust all there is to say about reality as Berkeley argued. There is, for Kant, a reality beyond the appearance; reality is that which confronts our
filtering mechanisms, that which appears, the in-itself. The in-itself (the real hidden ground of all that appears), however, is not directly accessible to human experience. We cannot pass beyond our experience to the in-itself. Our approach to the in-itself is always guarded by the filter with its rules and forms, always ready to form and shape the in-itself into an object for human understanding.

Again, imagine a filter that stands between our awareness of reality and reality itself. We do not have direct access to reality as it stands apart from our filter, but we do have immediate access to what has passed through our filter, our tinted window on the world. Or better yet, imagine that you were born with red contact lenses, innately and permanently installed. Pretend that you were unaware of these lenses until your optometrist, Dr. I. Kant, told you about them. Your world would be red. And since you cannot take out these lenses, you can never know the unfiltered colors (if there are any) of the world.

This grand filter is more than a contact lens. It determines a great deal more about our experience. This filter determines the universal features of our experience. By universal, we mean those features that must be part of any human experience. Imagine that the filter sets certain rules and parameters for whatever might pass through. These rules and parameters are the forms of intuition (sense experience) and the concepts of understanding.

**Forms of intuition (sensing the world)**

The forms of intuition are space and time. In order for us finite rational beings to have a perceptual experience, it must conform to these important filtering forms, that is, it must be located in space and occur in an orderly series of nows, one after the other. The space that Kant
was writing about was Euclidean space. You may have studied Euclidean geometry. (Descartes
invented coordinate geometry to help analyze Euclidean space.) Any physical object must
conform to the definitions, axioms and theorems of Euclidean space in order to be an object for
us. Objects must also conform to the filter’s demand that each event be ordered in time, that is,
in relationships of before and after. For example, when our guest enters our home at 7:00 PM,
this event is understood in a temporal context; our guest entered our home before we had dinner
and after we got home from work. We constantly retain what has happened, attend to the
present, and anticipate the future. We are temporal beings.

Any living thing that does not have these forms of intuition does not have a before and
after. It also does not relate objects to each other in terms of their location in space. The
rational way of knowing the real is in spatial and temporal terms. We cannot avoid this. We
cannot know the real in any other terms. We cannot know the real directly, apart from our filter,
our tinted window on the world. Our senses and concepts are our perceptual and cognitive lenses
on the world.

**Categories or concepts of the understanding**

If space and time were the only elements of our window on the real, we would be at the
mercy of a collage of colors, shapes and forms, merging one into the other without any order
whatsoever. Imagine throwing all different color paint at a wall. The design would be in space
and time but few of us could make out what it means. Life would be chaos of merging colors,
tastes, tactile qualities, sounds, and smells, with no order whatsoever. The reason we can
distinguish one thing from another is because we have concepts by which we recognize **what**
To illustrate how important our concepts are for actually recognizing an object, imagine you had never seen a fork before. It rests on a table. As you approach the table, you would not know that the length of silver is distinct from the table. The table would not be the background of the fork because you would not know that the fork could be lifted or separated from the table and taken into your hand. You would not know what the fork is for. In fact, it would blend in with the table and become a color without meaning. Through the concept of fork, however, we know the fork is distinct from the table, hard, and something that can be taken into hand and used to pick up food. Without concepts, all things would merge into a chaotic mix of color. We would be very confused indeed!

For Kant, there are very general rules to which all objects located in space and time must conform. Although these general rules do not help us distinguish a particular object, they help us organize all objects in general. They establish how all objects stand in relation to each other and themselves. The general rules are found in the understanding. The understanding is an important part of our window on the world. Just as any possible experience must conform to the sensible conditions of space and time, it must also be organized according to concepts of the understanding. Every experience must show its warrant to be an experience by having the mark of these concepts.

The most important concepts or categories of understanding (for our purposes) that apply to all possible objects of our experience are causality and the subject-mode relations. In order for us to have any experience of the natural world, it must be set up in space and time and in some causal nexus. Each event will have its cause and effect because those are the rules of our
filter, our window on the world. When I see water boiling, I can be sure there was some cause or condition that caused the water to be in its present state. The concept of causality determines that all of my experiences will have some prior cause or condition in relation to which they are effects.

Natural objects are generally experienced as properties or qualities of some subject. This relation helps us make sense of the world. We speak of things as having properties or qualities all the time. The computer screen is blue. Blue is the predicate of the subject-computer. This predicate refers to a quality that belongs to the subject. John is intelligent. Intelligence in this statement refers to a property and this property does not stand on its own, outside of John; it is contained in the subject ‘John’. Water boils at 212 degrees Fahrenheit. Boiling at 212 degrees Fahrenheit belongs to water as blue belongs to the screen and intelligent belongs to John--as predicates, properties, or qualities of a subject. This subject/quality relation, then is a part of the manner in which humans organize experience.

Without concepts our sense-experience is chaos. And without sense-data our concepts are empty shells. Without the general concept of qualities, how could we describe anything? There are logics that can handle this challenge, but not without setting up an artificial language. Concepts are also indispensable for making sense of particular objects in the world. Without the concept of pencil, I could not possibly know that this pencil on the table could be removed from the table rather than being a part of the table, that it could be taken into my hand and used to write something. Concepts help us distinguish things from their background and from other things.
During the early modern period, the rules of Euclidean geometry and physics were the rules of space and time; they provided the detailed structure of our window, our filter on the world. According to this view, the truths of geometry and physical dynamics are universally and objectively valid not only for theoretical science, but for all of our possible experiences. In order for us to have an experience, reality must pass through the filter of space and time, the rules of geometry and physics (which control space and time) and the organizing concepts of the understanding (causality, subject/predicate).

Hume was indeed correct in arguing that causality is not found among our impressions taken as separate atoms, but that is not because fantasy or habit adds causality. The understanding gathers all sense data together into relations of causality, and relations of substance and modifications. (The other concepts of understanding are action and reaction, intensity, existence, possibility and necessity.) These concepts have objective validity because every rational being must inevitably employ them in every experience; it constitutes the form of our window on reality.

One might argue that the problem of induction raised by Hume is thus to some extent resolved by Kant. The impressions are related to each other in causal relations not by psychic habit but by conformity to the logical rules by which they become part of any human experience.

**The in-itself**

If the world we get is prefabricated, that is, formed and shaped and ordered by the forms of intuition and the concepts of understanding, what about the In-itself before it gets to our filter.
What is the In-itself like unfiltered? We certainly are thinking about such an entity, but what can we know about it?

For Kant, the real has two aspects: the real as it is in itself and the real as it appears. The real as it is in itself, stands on its own apart from human intuition and categories. This is the in-itself or the *noumenon*. The in-itself or noumenon is ultimately unknowable! And the real as it is for finite rational beings is the *phenomenon* or appearance of the in-itself. There is, in the end, one Reality, but it is not known as it is in itself.\(^7\) To know the Real is to bring it through the human filter, to determine and form and shape it into the known. Knowledge of the real is our very separation from the real. But let’s look on the bright side.

Objectivity is arguably restored. Unlike Hume's impressions, which are the things themselves without law or predictability, Kant's perceptions are only possible by conforming to the rules of our window on the real. All experiences must conform to the rules in order to be experienced. This means the rules are universal: they apply to all persons in all places for all times. What more do we expect from science but such universality of rules? And what more do we expect of objectivity than that the rules do not depend on any particular perspective or individual but are the same for everyone. The price for such universality and objectivity is also high. For we have lost direct access to the real as it is in-itself: the noumenon. The in-itself is unknowable because to know it is to transform it into the phenomenon. Knowledge and ultimate reality are not amenable to each other. The ultimate reality is unknowable as it is in-itself.

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\(^7\) As Ralph Acampora points out, not all Kant scholars agree with this interpretation; some hold that Kant is ultimately a dualist.
The theory of knowledge after Kant has to answer the question: what is the relationship between human knowledge and the in-itself? Some philosophers focused on the phenomenon itself and the mental acts involved in knowing the phenomenon as the ultimate objects of knowledge. This tendency, led by the early twentieth century German philosopher Edmund Husserl, is known as phenomenology. Others gave the in-itself priority, gave it some sort of life and movement, and made the phenomenon the mere expression of the in-itself (Shopenhauer, Hegel, and others). Still others argued that this whole notion of an unknown in-itself is just a matter of confused ideas and the misuse of language (contemporary analytic philosophy).

Since Kant's Copernican revolution it has been generally accepted that the human mind plays some important role in the construction of the world that appears to us. Yet the problem of just how human understanding contributes to experience in general remains a central problem of modern epistemology. We will meet with some of these post-Kantian views in the next section.

Review questions:

1. In your own words, what is the meaning of Kant's Copernican Revolution?

2. How does Kant propose to solve the problem of induction?

3. Distinguish each type of idealism discussed by Kant in the *Prolegomena*. How does Kant's idealism differ from Berkeley’s idealism?

Part Three: Metaphysics

8. Classical metaphysics
Metaphysics is the study of the fundamental features of the universe. For more than 2,400 years, it has asked the question of origins: what is the arche (cause and ultimate stuff) of the visible universe? How many sorts of beings are there, one or many? What is the principle of order, if there is any at all? And finally, how can we account for the variety of things in the world and the constant change that we observe going on around us?

Historical Essay

Pre-Socratics, Plato, and Aristotle

Philosophy, as a human activity, began more than 2500 years ago when certain persons began to answer questions and to examine issues using reason. One area in the Ancient World where a few persons carried on such examinations was on the Balkan Peninsula in Europe; this place is Greece. Previously the Greeks, like all persons in the Ancient World, had relied on religion or custom or traditional authority to provide the answers to basic questions, such as “What is the world made of?” and “How ought a person to live?” In order to pursue a philosophical inquiry of fundamental matters, the Greeks presumed two important assumptions. The first assumption was that the cosmos was a rationally configured, orderly whole. As they abandoned their belief in mythic stories, the Greeks generally acquired the assumption that there are principles or laws that govern the operation of the cosmos, such as the movements of the planets or the celestial sphere. Secondly, because the cosmos is a rationally ordered whole, the human mind can conduct a rational investigation to discover the nature of the universe. Beginning in the sixth century before Christ (BC), Greek philosophers began such an
Pythagoras (570–497 BC) is probably the most famous of the pre-Socratic philosophers because his theorem for the relationship of the sides of a right triangle is basic to geometry. Like many Greeks, Pythagoras borrowed mathematical ideas from the Egyptians and developed them. But, this theorem represents only one speck of his fascination with numbers. He developed a symbiotic relationship between mathematics and philosophy, and Bryan Magee, the late twentieth century British philosopher, claims that Pythagoras is the first philosopher to use the word ‘cosmos’ to mean the universe. Many others, including Rene Descartes, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, and Albert Einstein, followed his lead in linking philosophy and mathematics. Perhaps, his greatest influence was upon Plato who took many of Pythagoras’ ideas and used them to develop his theory of the forms.

Before Pythagoras, there was Thales of Miletus, located on the coast of present-day Turkey. As with of the other pre-Socratic philosophers, his birth date and death date are unknown, but it is known that he was active as a philosopher during the 580s BC because he predicted an eclipse that occurred in 585 BC. He and his followers are referred to as the Milesian school. The question that fascinated him was “What is the world made of?” He believed that all things were derived from one basic element, and that is water in one form or another. Empedocles, who lived during the first half of the fifth century BC, postulated that for everything which exists there are four basic elements: earth, air, fire, and water. The doctrine of the four elements influenced western science, including medicine, until the Renaissance.

Two pre-Socratic philosophers who are discussed in the text are Heraclitus (ca. 535-ca.475 BC) and Parmenides (ca. 515-ca. 445 BC). They espoused contrasting views about the
basic makeup of the cosmos; whereas Heraclitus emphasized change, Parmenides underscored constancy as a basic feature of reality. Heraclitus was born in Ephesus, which was a Greek city-state in on the west coast of Ionia, or present day Turkey. Greeks from the Balkans had sailed across the Aegean Sea and colonized the western coast of Asia Minor just prior to the advance of the Persian Empire in this region. Heraclitus held a very negative opinion of his fellow Ephesians because they had put one of his teachers on trial for corrupting the youth and raising questions in people’s minds about the gods. Ironically, these were the same charges that the Athenians would bring against Socrates about 100 years later. Parmenides was born in Elea, a Greek city-state, at the opposite end of the Mediterranean World from Ionia, located in southern Italy. Very little is left of his writing, and that consists of 160 lines of a poem, called *Nature*. The poem had been written for one of his pupils, Zeno.

Parmenides’ most famous pupil was Zeno of Elea, who came from the same Greek colony in southern Italy as his teacher. As a young man, Zeno accompanied his teacher on a trip to Athens where they met the young Socrates about the year 449 BC. Both Zeno and Parmenides are referred to in the Platonic dialogue, *Parmenides*. Upon his return to Elea, Zeno became involved in politics and was eventually arrested for participating in a plot against the tyrant of the Greek city-state of Elea. For his part in the conspiracy, Zeno was tortured to death. One account of that story is that when, under torture, he was asked to reveal the names of his co-conspirators; he named the tyrants’ friends. Today Zeno is remembered for his paradoxes. One of the most famous is that of Achilles and the tortoise. In a race, according to Zeno, the swift Achilles can never catch the slow tortoise if the tortoise begins the race before Achilles because by the time Achilles reaches the position that tortoise once occupied, the slow-moving tortoise has already
moved some distance forward. Zeno developed these paradoxes as part of an argument process that was designed to reduce an opponent’s view to an absurd position. Zeno’s paradoxes still baffle philosophers and mathematicians today.

Anaxagoras (ca. 500-ca. 428 BC) was the philosopher who brought the study of philosophy to Athens. He was born in Clazomenae among the Greek colonies in Asia Minor, which is now present-day Turkey. He came to Athens in 480 BC, the year the Greeks, as led by Athens, defeated the Persian navy at Salamis. With the Greek land victory at Plataea the following year, the Greek city-states on the Balkan peninsula were safe from Persian aggression. Most of the Greek city-states on the peninsula, especially Athens, thrived during the fifth century. It was in this environment of economic prosperity and cultural blossoming that Anaxagoras founded the first school of philosophy in Athens. Among his students were Pericles, the city’s most prominent politician, and, perhaps, also Socrates. Anaxagoras taught philosophy at Athens until charges of impiety were brought against him. At his trial he was found guilty and sentenced to death, but with the intervention of his former pupil, Pericles, he was allowed to escape. Interestingly, a generation after Anaxagoras’ ordeal, Socrates’ suffered a similar fate, whose history has already been presented in the book’s opening section. Anaxagoras returned to the Greek colonies in Asia Minor and opened another school of philosophy. He taught there until his death. After his death an altar was erected in his memory in the market place of Lampsacus.

Socrates’ most famous student was Plato who lived much of his life during the fourth century BC. Born in 429 BC, he likely witnessed, at the age of 30, the trial and the execution of Socrates in 399 BC. Thereafter, he pursued a long career as a prolific writer of philosophical
dialogues. Before he died in 347 BC, he had founded the Academy, a philosophical school that endured until the end of Antiquity. Plato is a giant in the realm of philosophy. According to Alfred North Whitehead, the twentieth century British philosopher, all philosophy since Plato constitutes a footnote to his work.

In the years following Socrates’ death, Plato began his writing. In his early dialogues, such as the *Crito* and the *Apology*, Plato arguably presented the teachings of his mentor. Generally, in his earlier dialogues the focus of the dialogues is strictly centered on ethical conduct. These dialogues show Socrates engaged in his dialectical arguments with a given individual in an effort to determine the answer to some basic question. By attaining the answer, Socrates believed that one would know how to live justly. In his later dialogues, such as the *Republic*, Plato arguably used the character of Socrates to state his own ideas. One of these ideas is the Platonic Forms. This theory has had a profound impact upon the development of Western Civilization.

Plato’s theory of the stable and the unchanging Forms provided the metaphysical basis for the objective moral reality that Socrates sought in his dialectical examinations. Physical reality, as represented by the dancing shadows on the cave wall, is characterized by change and inconstancy. The cave’s dancing shadows, however, merely provide a dim view of the ultimate reality expressed in the ideal Forms. There is another realm, Plato asserted, that transcends physical reality where the ideal Forms have always existed. The Forms give rational configuration and meaning to everything that exists and all that transpires in physical reality.

Centuries later, the Christian movement adopted elements of Plato’s philosophy. St. Augustine, bishop of Hippo in North Africa, did much of the work, synthesizing Platonic notions
with Christian beliefs during the early fifth century AD. Other Church fathers, besides Augustine, found an affinity with Plato and his theories; a few even imagined that Plato and Socrates to be Christians before Christ. Their strong, rational defense of an absolute morality coincided well with commandments in the Old Testament and Jesus’ ethical teachings in the New Testament. Vitally important in Augustine’s development of a Christian theology were the Platonic Forms. Plato’s doctrine of the two realms provided the rational construction for the Christian perspective that life on earth was only temporary and always fading but the eternal truths that have always existed are spiritual. While for Plato these eternal truths become known through the effort of human reason, for the medieval Christians it was divine revelation that discloses them. Finally, from the Timaeus Christians found succor for the belief that there is an intelligent design to the universe. Christians since the Middle Ages have adopted Plato’s notion of the Master Craftsman as a type of proof for the existence of a creator god. In this proof, called the Teleological Argument, the purposeful and harmonious ordering of nature provided the evidence for the Genesis story of creation.

Aristotle (384-322 BC) was the pupil of Plato, who had been the pupil of Socrates. Towards the end of his life, Aristotle became the personal tutor of Alexander the Great. These are four of the most famous names from the Ancient World, and in the succession of their life spans most of the Classical Age of Greece is covered. Socrates and Plato lived their entire lives during the Classical Age while Aristotle, at the close of his life, saw the transition from that age to the Hellenistic Era that was ushered in with the worldwide conquests of his pupil, Alexander, between 333 and 323 BC.
Aristotle was born in Stagira in Macedonia while his father served at court as the king’s physician. At the age of seventeen, in 367 BC, Aristotle traveled to Athens and became a student at Plato’s Academy. He stayed there for twenty years as both pupil and teacher until the older man’s death in 347BC. During his years at the Academy Aristotle distinguished himself by his brilliance and through his philosophical differences with Plato. When Aristotle was not chosen to succeed Plato as director of the school upon the latter’s death, he left both the Academy and Athens. In 343 BC he accepted King Philip’s invitation to become the tutor of his son, Alexander. For the next three years Aristotle lived at the Macedonian court as the private teacher of the future world conqueror. Historians disagree over how much influence Aristotle had on his teenage pupil. When a slightly older Alexander prepared for conquest, following the death of his father in 336 BC, Aristotle returned to Athens where he opened his own school of philosophy, called the Lyceum. For thirteen years Aristotle taught there, giving the technical lectures in the morning to a select group of students and the more popular lectures in the evenings to the general public. During this period Aristotle also wrote many of his philosophical works, but unfortunately, copies of the originals no longer exist.

One year before his death, Aristotle fled Athens. The occasion of his departure was the death of Alexander after the latter had conquered the eastern Mediterranean World, Egypt, the Persian Empire, and central Asia up to India. The Greek city-states had been absorbed into Alexander’s military, political and cultural transformation of the world. Many Athenians resented the incorporation of their city-state within a vast Greco-Macedonian Empire. In 323 BC Athens attempted to organize the other city-states on the Balkan Peninsula in a revolt against the empire. In the brewing turmoil, animosity was aimed at Aristotle because of his Macedonian
Charges of impiety were leveled against him just as they were made against Socrates seventy-five years earlier. Unlike Socrates, Aristotle went into exile and avoided the fate of the former philosopher. A year later, in 322 BC, Aristotle died of a digestive ailment at Chalcis, in Euboea.

Aristotle made significant contributions to the intellectual heritage of the Western World. He wrote a history of Pre-Socratic philosophy in his *Physics*. He was a researcher and prolific writer in the following fields: natural history, ethics, political science, biology, and metaphysics. Aristotle differed from Plato with regard to the forms, arguing that the form is immanent, that is, within the thing to which it gives structure. After 1000 AD in Europe during the High Middle Ages, Aristotelian metaphysics provides an alternative view of reality from Plato’s. Finally, Aristotle’s metaphysics also accounts for change by using the categories of potentiality and actuality, as well as employing the four causes: efficient, formal, material, and final, which are discussed in the textbook.

Aristotle has had a profound impact on the Western Heritage, especially during the High Middle Ages (twelfth and thirteenth centuries). The rediscovery of Aristotle within Europe was made possible by the medieval Europeans’ contacts with the Arabs, who were familiar with, had studied, and had produced commentaries upon his philosophy. During the High Middle Ages Aristotle was referred to as The Philosopher. Many medieval professors considered him to be the ultimate authority on matters that were not addressed by Church doctrine. St. Thomas Aquinas, the preeminent theologian of the Middle Ages, in his *Summa Theologica*, synthesized Aristotelian philosophy and traditional Church dogma. Much of Aquinas’ writing is in the form of a series of logical arguments, which, in itself, was borrowed from Aristotle who had
developed categorical syllogisms. Until the nineteenth century the study of logic was exclusively based on Aristotle’s categorical logic.

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8.1 The Pre-Socratics: Being and becoming; the one and the many

**Being as arche (origin and source)**

Early Greek thinking is characterized by three questions about Being. Is being one or many? Is being eternal or changing? What is the origin and source (*arche*) of all beings in their variety and plenitude? The Pre-Socratics, who wrote about nature, were asking these sorts of questions between the sixth and fifth centuries BC. What distinguished the Pre-Socratic discussion of the *arche* from mythological accounts is that they tried to answer these questions in a systematic manner. Here we focus on only two of the earliest philosophers: Parmenides and Heraclitus. They present two radically different answers to the above questions.
Parmenides of Elea, c. 515-510 BC. Being is one and eternal. Change is an illusion.

In the following selected reading, we study some of the surviving fragments of what several different authors record about what Parmenides said. Try to reconstruct his basic views based on these few fragments.

Selected reading: Parmenides, from fragments translated by Kirk and Raven.

For Parmenides the logic of the way of truth leaves us no choice but to deny the reality of the world of change and affirm that the *One* is unchanging and eternal. Here we simplify his argument somewhat, by interpreting the fragments in a manner that gets at some of his central claims (these are not all valid deductive arguments):

Whatever is, could not have come from not-being, because nothing cannot produce something.

Being is.

Therefore Being could not have come from what is not.

The past refers to what no longer is, in other words, to what is not.

The past is nothing.

The present could not have come from the past because that would mean admitting that the present came from nothing.

The present Being cannot pass out of existence because something cannot become nothing.

Being cannot change because that would mean the part that no longer is becomes nothing

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Being can have no parts, because if it had parts there would be a border between the parts. Between the parts would be an empty space with nothing in it. But nothingness cannot be in any manner. There cannot be empty space.

In summary, for Parmenides, it is not possible to think about *nothing*. *Nothing* is a nonsense word. Yet nothing enters into our everyday notion of change. When we think about change, we think about something coming to be and something passing away. If we admit that anything changes, we also admit that something that was, no longer is, and that something that is, passes out of existence. We also might argue that something that is not yet is about to come to be. In all of these cases, argues Parmenides, we end up trying to think about *nothing*.

What can we say about the world of change? The world of change is an illusion. Change cannot be. The world of change would require that *something that is not* comes to be or that *something that is* becomes nothing, both of which are inconceivable.

Again, Parmenides maintained that one could not explain how change takes place without employing the concept of *nothing*. This concept, however, is the result of confusion and cannot be thought. For example, if Madonna was, at one time, unmusical, and then studied music and singing and became musical, Parmenides could not explain how the unmusical Madonna becomes a musical Madonna. What happened to the unmusical Madonna? For Parmenides, she became *nothing*, and of *nothing* we cannot have any clear idea. And from where did the musical Madonna come? Not from the unmusical Madonna, who is past and no longer is (difficult enough to think about), but then from where? Madonna could not have become at all because becoming is irrational. It violates the strict logic of THE ONE THAT IS.
Obviously there is something unsatisfactory about the metaphysics of Parmenides because it does not explain the natural world, the world of change. A successful metaphysics should try to make sense of our everyday experience. It should then, admit that change is possible and offer an account of change.

**Heraclitus (of Ephesus, c. 535 - c. 475 BC) and the world of flux.**

For Heraclitus, the natural world is always changing. The world is in a constant flux. Change is so much a part of reality that "nothing steadfastly is." As soon as you would try to grasp a moment, it is gone! For every second, there is a half of a second and for every half of a second, there is a half of a half or a quarter. Change happens so fast that there is change going on that is imperceptible. In one of the most famous of Heraclitus' fragments this notion becomes crystal clear: "Upon those that step into the same rivers different and different waters flow….It scatters and…gathers…it comes together and flows away…approaches and departs" (fragment 217, Kirk and Raven). Not only does Heraclitus admit change into his world; change is at the center of his metaphysics! (Note that fragments are surviving statements by the Pre-Socratics, more or less intact, and usually reported by later writers second hand.)

Selected reading: Selections from Heraclitus (in Kirk and Raven)

The arche (origin) of all particular things is fire. All of the elements come out of and return to fire according to the cosmic ordering principle, the logos. When Heraclitus refers to
what steers all things as the thunderbolt, he reminds his audience of the Olympian Zeus who was first in charge of all the gods.

The thunderbolt that steers all things is arguably the **logos** or the gathering power of the universe; it orders the world of change so that the form or structure of identifiable particulars may endure. The river always has different waters, but its form remains relatively stable. But how exactly does anything retain its identity while undergoing change? How, for example, is the mature oak tree in front of the building a development of one and the same acorn as distinct from other acorns.

While Heraclitus offers an account of change, it is not complete, at least in the fragments that have survived the ravages of time. It is not clear how something can maintain its form or be a particular while constantly changing. The acorn develops and matures into a tall oak tree. But how is the mature oak tree in front of this building a development of one particular acorn? What is it that preserves the identity of this oak tree throughout its development from acorn to mature oak tree? The relation between **logos** and particular things, the eternal ordering principle and the changing world, needed further clarification and development.

In Parmenides we are stuck in the unchanging one; in Heraclitus we are thrown about in the storm of change. Yes, there is a principle of order in Heraclitus, but we do not have enough fragments to present a complete metaphysics. We need to somehow account for both stability (order) and change.

8.2 Plato: Theory of Forms

We have encountered Plato before when we discussed the cave analogy. Plato wrote about every major issue covered in this book. Plato studied both Parmenides and Heraclitus. Indeed, one of
Plato's greatest dialogues is entitled *The Parmenides*. Rather than deny change outright like Parmenides, Plato constructed a view of the universe that tried to explain change in terms of a relationship between the natural (changing) world and an eternal (unchanging) world. The eternal world held the most real sort of beings, the *forms* (the Greek word is *eidos*). The world of change, while still real, was somewhat lower on the scale of being, an imitation of the forms in the eternal world. (Remember, in the cave analogy, prisoners of the cave saw only the passing images on the wall, the imitations. They could not see the forms, the really real things). In order to enter into the theory of forms (*eidos*), an example from architecture will serve us well.

**Plato made easy: Maria the architect**

Imagine that Maria, an architect, designs a cape cod house. Cape cod is an architectural design of many homes found in Prince George's County, Maryland. Cape cods have a pointed roof, two stories, and an attic space that is easily converted into a living space. Most cape cods have basements. The overall appearance of a cape cod is that of a box.

Maria makes a blue print of a cape cod using her personal computer. This blue print is given to the general contractor, Wanda, so that she can build ten cape cod homes in Bowie, Maryland. The construction workers, by following the general contractor's directions, take wood, cement, and other building materials in hand to construct ten cape cods. On some glorious day the ten cape cods are finished and customers begin to inspect them.

For Plato, the design or blue print for the cape cods is the form of the cape cod house built by the construction workers. The form tells us what something is. These homes in Bowie are not colonials. And they are not ramblers. **What** are they? They are capes. How do we know? We can compare the form (blue print) for capes with the capes that have been built. And
we can contrast the blueprint of cape with the blueprint of other home designs. The constructed capes all have their capeness (or form) in common. Let us call the capes that have been built, the actual standing homes, the imitations of the form (or blueprint) for capes. The imitations correctly imitate that form because the general contractor gave good instructions. She looked to the form when giving instructions to the construction workers. The workers put the building materials together into the form by following a set of instructions. Of course the form of the cape cod is perfect while the particular houses can only approximate the exact specifications of the blueprint—form.

For Plato, the form cape is **one thing**, although ten homes may imitate this form. The form is what all ten homes have in common, namely, their capeness. We can even say generally that what several things have in common is their form. Each of the ten is a complete imitation of one and the same form (or blueprint). The form also predates and outlives each of the ten homes. The form was there before the homes were built, and should fire strike all of them, the form will still be there for some other general contractor to imitate.

Speaking of fire, let us suppose some great fire rages through the neighborhood of the 10 capes. They all burn down (let's assume no one is hurt). The imitations of capeness are gone. Let us further assume that there are no other imitations of capeness in the world. These were the last ten. Is there any such thing as Cape Cod (or capeness) left in the world?

The form is still there, is it not? The architect has the blueprint. Let us assume the blueprint is destroyed, the disk file is destroyed, and any copy of such electronic or paper blue prints are destroyed. Does capeness still exist? In the architect's mind, you will say. The form is represented as an idea in the architect’s mind. Assume the architect dies along with everyone
else who had an idea of capeness. Now what will you say? Is there such a thing as capeness without the paper, computer, or mental representation? For Plato, the answer is: YES.

When the architect knows capeness, it is an eternal form that is known. Capeness was there before any humans inhabited the planet and will be around well after humans and this planet are gone. The fact that capeness could be known, imitated by building activity, imitated by a graphics program...all of this is possible because there is some form of capeness that is always there to be known. But what does "there" mean? Where are these forms if they exist even without a human mind to know them?

For Plato, the world of forms is the eternal network of possible things. Everything in the world is what it is or was what it was or will be what it will be by imitating the form that it embodies. The form accounts for:

a. what something is.

b. what two or more of the same things have in common.

c. the complete or perfect expression of a thing.

If I want to know what a wood saw is, I look to the form. In order to be a wood saw an entity must be made of metal or similar material, have sharp teeth, a handle, be of a certain length, and have a certain thickness. Two or more saws have their form in common. The two saws are the same in so far as they imitate the same form or design. The complete or perfect saw cuts wood well. The more completely the metal is worked into what is called a saw, the better it will cut wood.
Another example of forms may be drawn from mathematics. Two is what it is eternally, regardless of the examples of pairs of objects in the world or the human mental representations. Two apples, two stones, two personal computers, all have the form *two-ness* in common. Numbers are forms just waiting to be thought and utilized! They exist eternally in their own realm, the realm of forms.

**Problems with Plato’s theory**

Two problems are left unresolved by the above interpretation of Plato's theory of forms. First, **what precisely is imitation or participation?** When an oak tree imitates a form or participates in a form, what exactly is going on? If the form is separate from the thing, how can the form play such an important role in constituting what a thing is? If the form of an oak tree is separate from the developing oak tree, how does the form account for the identity (or *whatness*) of this oak tree and impact on its structure?

A second problem is that if forms are defined as what similar things have in common, there must be forms of forms. This last problem is known as the third man argument. Let's take our wood saws. Two wood saws have the form 'saw' in common. Now let's compare the form 'saw' with the two wood saws. What do all three--the form 'saw', the saw number one, and the saw number two--have in common? Their sawness? If this is the case, then we have two forms for saw. What do these two forms and the two saws have in common? Why, it is their sawness, of course. As you can see, the regress goes on forever.

Plato might have recognized some of these problems, but no one knows for sure if Plato thought these issues were serious enough to refute the theory of forms. Try to identify one or
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more of the above problems in the following selection from Plato's dialogue, *The Parmenides*.

Selected reading: From the *Parmenides*, “The Third Man Argument,” by Plato.

Review questions:

1. Describe the third man argument in your own words.

2. How does the theory of forms account for change?

3. Are there any examples from modern genetics of what Plato called the form of a thing?
8.3 Aristotle: The four causes

Aristotle (384 - 322 BC), Plato’s most well known student, offered a critique of the master's theory of Forms. Aristotle asked why a Form should be external to the things of which it is the Form? Forms, as external to individual things, cannot account for their movements and structure. Also, if Forms are separate from things, Forms cannot account for human knowledge of the essence of things. Aristotle addresses this issue clearly in the Metaphysics:

Above all one might discuss the question what on earth the Forms contribute to sensible things…. For they cause neither movement nor any change in them. But again, they help in no wise either towards the knowledge of the other things…or towards their being, if they are not in the particulars which share in them. (Metaphysics, Bk. I: CH.9, 991a).

Aristotle suggests an interesting alternative to the transcendent Platonic Form. Why not consider the Forms as inside things? By “inside” we do not mean the way in which candy may be inside a box. The Form accounts for the structure or design of the thing. Maybe by viewing the Form as being within the things in this sense we can offer a more complete account of change in the world.

Aristotle and the account of change: the four causes

Now let us see if Aristotle's immanent forms can give us a consistent and complete account of change in the natural world. Remember that Parmenides denied that change was possible because he thought change presupposed that something comes from nothing. The unmusical Madonna could become musical only if the unmusical Madonna became nothing and a musical Madonna came into existence who did not exist before. The past (unmusical Madonna) no longer is, and yet, the present (musical Madonna) comes to be from the past (which
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported license. This is impossible! Or so Parmenides thought.

Heraclitus at least takes change seriously, but offers only brief hints as to how change is possible. The *logos* somehow guides and steers things, which are always in flux, as they undergo constant transformation from fire into other elements and back to fire again.

Plato admitted that the world of change was real, but thought it was not as real or full of being as the Forms. The Forms are the really real! The world of change is like a passing image of the world of Forms. The eternal, unchanging Forms are separate from the things that imitate them. Plato buys the pristine nature of these Forms at a high price, for once Plato separates them from the particulars, it is hard to account for exactly how the particulars imitate or participate in the Forms.

Aristotle agrees with Plato that *what* things have in common is their Form. For Aristotle, however, this Form is not separate, nor is it one, that is, numerically the same for each thing. Two oak trees both have one and the same Form oak in common. They are both oaks. But one oak, along with its form, is in my neighbor’s yard, and the other, along with its form, is in my yard. The Form is eternal, as it is in Plato’s theory. A crucial difference is that for Aristotle, the natural biological Forms are transmitted to offspring through reproduction, that is, by way of the information left in the seed. The Form survives in the offspring. (This view, incidentally, is somewhat consistent with the modern genetic account of how the ultimate structure of a living thing is contained in its chromosomes. Of course we now know that some species have become extinct and are therefore not eternal, that the “Forms” themselves undergo mutation and selection, and that it is the gene, not the species, that is generally considered the unit of replication. Also, evolutionary biologists today generally dispense with the concept of final
Given these modifications to the theory of Forms, what other concepts did Aristotle introduce to account for change and overcome the objections of Parmenides? How can the unmusical Madonna become musical? Or, to use our other example, how can this acorn develop into a mature oak tree?

**Aristotle made easy: How Madonna became a great singer**

Contrary to the Parmenidean view, the unmusical Madonna does not entirely pass out of existence. A *substratum* (in Greek, the *hupokeimenon* [underlying thing]) perseveres in existence in the process of change. Madonna, the underlying thing, is unmusical during a given time in the past. After much practice and hard work, Madonna loses the quality of being unmusical and takes on the quality of being musical. Madonna does not pass out of existence; only the *accident* (or quality) that attached to her passes out of existence. The musical does not come from nothing; it comes from the unmusical.

Madonna perseveres all along, even while she was unmusical, that is, potentially musical. What Madonna needed was study and practice; the ability (potentiality) was there. This potential became actualized through practice, and Madonna became a popular performer actress.

In the case of the acorn of an oak tree, it contains all the information or design (today's chromosomes!) of the mature oak in potentiality; it only needs the right conditions to unfold and develop. These conditions are the four causes.

The *efficient cause* of the growth of the acorn is water and sunlight; it gets the process of growth moving. Aristotle describes the efficient cause as “the primary source of change or coming to rest” (Physics, Bk. II: Ch. 3, 194b). The *formal cause* is the Form contained in the
acorn: the instructions for the unfolding of the acorn in one specific manner rather than another. In this way the acorn will become an oak and not a willow. The final cause is that towards which the tree is aiming or striving—to become a mature and complete oak. Finally, the material cause is the stuff out of which the form is made: the soil, minerals, cellulose, chlorophyll and other essential chemicals. Given these causes, the oak’s potentiality can unfold into actuality. The oak can grow and flourish. The mature oak does not come from nothing. The underlying thing or substance was present in the acorn all along. It only underwent modification, not creation out of nothing.

Aristotle’s metaphysics accounts for change in the natural world within the Platonic and Pre-Socratic tradition; but he also goes beyond that tradition by introducing all four causes and the concepts of potentiality and actuality. This is still the basic conceptual framework of the biological sciences today (minus the final cause). Aristotle did not, however, consistently maintain that all the Forms were immanent and instantiated only in the sublunary world of change. For Aristotle, the realm above the moon was very special. Above the moon we encounter perfect forms that direct planets in regular motions. And finally, there is a form that is not embodied at all; it is thought thinking itself. This is, if we stretch the meaning of divinity, Aristotle’s God. But this God thinks nothing of humans or the sublunar world; it is wrapped up in itself alone. Despite this non-personal view of divinity, Aristotle's philosophy was to have a major impact on theology in the Arab world and in Europe from the high Middle Ages to early modern times.

Review questions:

1. How is Aristotle’s account of the forms different from Plato’s account?
2. Which account of the forms (Plato’s or Aristotle’s) do you think offers a better theoretical tool for describing “what” a thing is?

3. Give examples from genetics that illustrate Aristotle's view.

4. What is a substratum?

5. In the case of the unmusical Madonna becoming musical, how do the concepts of substratum, potentiality, and actuality help to account for change?

6. Describe how an acorn becomes a mature oak in terms of the four causes, the substratum, potentiality, and actuality.

7. When an artist makes a bronze statue of Thurgood Marshall, what are the elements of the art work in terms of the four causes?

9. Early modern metaphysics

The most radical changes in metaphysics since antiquity were developed during the early modern period (from the sixteenth to eighteenth century). Rene Descartes’ Meditations is among those early modern works that mark an epistemological turn for the theory of knowledge. It also has become famous as a paradigmatic version of the mind/body problem (which we shall visit in the section on philosophy of mind). The epistemological turn was the establishment of subjectivity as the starting point for the theory of knowledge. Descartes viewed mental processes as modes of a substance, a thinking thing. The thinking thing becomes the first existent that does not succumb to the systematic doubt of Descartes’ Meditations. It is only later, after several twists and turns in the arguments of the Meditations, that the existence of the
The separate natures of mind and body. The view that mind and body are different sorts of stuff is **metaphysical dualism**.

9.1 Rene Descartes: Substance dualism

Descartes’ **metaphysical dualism** recognizes two sorts of beings: **thinking substance** and **extended or corporeal substance**. Although these are distinct and separate substances, our everyday experience tells us that they are inextricably linked. Why else would certain drugs be useful to treat mental disorders while certain mental events, such as worrying, may result in physical ailments or even death. During Descartes’ own lifetime several prominent thinkers took issue with this dualism. (For a review of Descartes’ position, reread the selection from the *Meditations* in the section on Epistemology, above.)

9.2 Thomas Hobbes: Physicalism

**Historical Essay**

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) was an English philosopher of the early modern period who espoused materialism, but he is much more famous as the author of the political treatise, *Leviathan*. Hobbes was born in the year the Spanish Armada set sail for England, which event, he claims, caused his premature birth. During his very long life Hobbes lived through many other exciting events, such as the revolution against monarchical rule in England, which overthrew the dynasty. He even lived long enough to witness the Restoration of the monarchy in England near the end of his life.
Very little is known about Hobbes’ parents who disappeared from his life’s story at an early age. A childless and prosperous uncle provided for his education. After attending a private school for six years, Hobbes entered Oxford University. At the university he developed a severe distaste for the Aristotelian academics that he studied. In 1608, at the age of nineteen, he received a bachelor’s degree and, soon thereafter, became the tutor of William Cavendish, the future Earl of Devonshire. His association with the Cavendish family would endure his entire life. Hobbes and Cavendish departed for a tour of the continent in 1610. For Hobbes this was only the first of three trips through Europe, each of which proved rewarding for him. On this trip he discovered that Aristotelian studies had fallen into disfavor on the continent, and, when Hobbes returned to England, he met Francis Bacon who advocated inductive scientific methods in place of Aristotelian physics. In subsequent trips to the European continent, Hobbes met Galileo and Marin Mersenne, who was a patron of Rene Descartes. It was through Mersenne’s connections that Hobbes met Descartes and became familiar with his philosophy. Hobbes even provided a formally drafted criticism, written from a materialistic perspective, of Descartes’ *Meditations*, which Descartes published along with the objections.

Hobbes returned to England after his third tour of the continent in 1637. He was once again in the employment of the Cavendish family as tutor to the son of the William, who had died in 1629. Hobbes had returned to England in the midst of a decade’s long constitutional crisis between Parliament and the king, Charles I. The smoldering crisis finally exploded into an open political confrontation in 1640 and, then, a four-year civil war, beginning in 1642. Hobbes left England for France in 1640 before the political quarreling erupted into a military struggle between the king and Parliament. He remained in France eleven years before returning to
England again. While Hobbes was in France, he was soon joined by the remnants of the king’s court, once Parliament’s armies had defeated the king in the civil war. Just prior to the king’s surrender to Parliament, the heir to the throne, the future Charles II, had been sent to France where he became the private pupil of Hobbes. During these years the young heir and the aging philosopher developed a relationship that would be resumed again when Charles became king of England.

While exiled in France, Hobbes began producing his major writings. These included *On the Citizen*, which formed one part of a trilogy. The other two parts, being on the body and on man, himself, were published after he returned to England. Hobbes’ dream was to develop a universal, materialistic system of philosophy that would be expressed in three parts. The first part, *On the Citizen*, was published in 1646, but the other two parts had to be delayed because of his responsibilities as a tutor. Also, in 1649, the year of Charles I’s trial and execution, Hobbes became deathly ill. After being bed-ridden for six months, Hobbes resumed his writing.

In 1651 Hobbes published his masterpiece, *Leviathan*, which is also the year that he returned to England. Hobbes finally returned to England because he had alienated himself from the French clergy with his attacks on the papacy and had even isolated himself from the England court-in-exile with the ideas expressed in *Leviathan*. While his reasoning in the political treatise supports an absolute state, including guarantees of certain inalienable rights, his secular arguments are more suited for the defense of a twentieth century dictatorship than a seventeenth century monarchy, traditionally based on divine right and the hereditary principle. In *Leviathan* Hobbes argued for an indivisible sovereignty with no system of checks and balances, which is placed within the hands of one person or of a select group of persons, like Parliament, as a means
to uphold law and order. Hobbes believed that chaos is much worse than tyranny because the lack of personal security is so pervasive that it ultimately denies the individual his freedom by the ever-present threat to his life and property. Therefore, Hobbes concluded it is rational prudent for individuals to surrender much of their personal freedom to an absolute power that can effectively guarantee all persons in the state enough security in order to exercise responsibly what individual freedoms still remain. While *Leviathan* made a strong case for absolute sovereignty, many of Hobbes’ contemporaries, especially the Anglican clergy, considered it offensive because too many of the arguments for governance were secular.

So, Hobbes returned to England which was being governed by a military dictatorship, headed by Oliver Cromwell, who was the successful general in the recent civil wars. Once Hobbes took the loyalty oath to the state, he was allowed to resettle into his native country. Ironically, many persons believed that Hobbes had rewritten *Leviathan* as a justification of Cromwell’s regime. The military dictator, who proclaimed himself Lord Protector in 1653, had restored order to England and had even made the country prosperous by eliminating Parliament and assuming absolute power within himself. Hobbes, however, was not a Cromwellian, and when the Lord Protector died, he, like many other Englishmen welcomed the return of the monarchy in 1660, which in English history is called the Restoration.

Hobbes lived another nineteen years, now as a subject of his former pupil Charles, who became king of England and of Scotland. Hobbes’ enemies at court and his adversaries among the clergy attacked him for, among other things, being an atheist and having written *Leviathan* as a justification of Cromwell’s dictatorship. The English were still very sensitive to the recent tumult of the 1640s and 1650s so that during the Restoration many histories of the period,
including Hobbes’ Behemoth, were denied publication. Some persons, like the Puritan John Bunyan, were imprisoned, and Hobbes lived to see the House of Commons order that all his writings should be examined for profanity and atheism. Still, Hobbes was a favorite of Charles II, who protected his former teacher from any serious persecution. Hobbes continued to write during the 1670s when he had reaches his 80’s. In 1672 he wrote a brief autobiography and a few years later wrote a verse translation of Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey. In 1679 Hobbes died at the age of ninety-one, after having suffered paralysis.

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One of those prominent thinkers who took issue with Cartesian dualism was Thomas Hobbes (1588 - 1679). There is no such thing, according to Hobbes, as a distinct substance called mind. Mind is just a complex machine. Descartes was not unaware of Hobbes’ view. Hobbes made his objections to dualism known directly to Descartes as one among several critics who published their critiques in a set of *Objections and Replies*. We are fortunate to have access to these published *Objections and Replies*.

The following set of objections and replies shows us the contrast between the position of Hobbes (and others) and that of Descartes.

Selected reading: Objection II (by Hobbes and others) from *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, Volume II.

**Thomas Hobbes and the human as machine**

Thomas Hobbes is serious about doing away with the whole notion of mind as separate from the body. For Hobbes, the human being is entirely a physical object, a very complex machine. Humans are determined to do what they do just as machines are programmed to perform in certain manners:

For seeing life is but a motion of limbs, the beginning whereof is in some principal part within; why may we not say, that all automatá (engines that move themselves by springs and wheels as doth a watch) have an artificial life? For what is the heart, but a spring; and the nerves, but so many strings; and the joints, but so many wheels, giving motion to the whole body, such as was intended by the artificer? *(Leviathan, Chapter 1)*
Any talk about the mind can be reduced to talk about the body. Three centuries later, philosophical behaviorists would adopt the Hobbesian position that there is no such thing as a mind; there are only dispositions to behave in certain ways. (Some “methodological” behaviorists did not deny there was mind; it was not, however, considered the proper object of scientific study.)

In order to make this idea clear, let’s imagine that there is a person named Anne who has just missed the bus. If you want to describe the anger of Anne after she missed the bus, you might offer the following description:

A body emits loud noises about a bus being missed, heart rate increases, blood pressure increases, pupils dilate, arms are waving in the air, and a foot impacts against the bus stop sign; certain neural events occur in several parts of the brain.

This is quite different from saying she has a conscious experience that includes feelings of anger. She is especially anxious because she is thinking into the future about being late for work. Such talk about what is going on inside Anne can be reduced to something like the physical description above. Such a behavioral approach has several advantages. First, we do not have to rely on unverifiable private events that no one but the subject can access. The physical behavior is publicly observable, quantifiable and measurable. Philosophical behaviorism prefers what is quantifiable and publicly observable to what is private and qualitative. This explaining away or translation of the mental using a functional or physical description is called the physicalist
Review questions:

1. Which one of Descartes' assumptions does Hobbes call into question in objection number 2?
2. What is Hobbe's argument—that the subject of thinking might be corporeal—based on? What is Descartes’ response?

9.3 Bishop George Berkeley: Phenomenalism

The physicalist reduction of mental events to physical events has not been very satisfying for those who claim to have knowledge of their own inner states, that is, of what is going on in their minds. Bishop George Berkeley gave an alternative reduction in the opposite direction—reducing all physical events to mental events. This view is known as **phenomenalism**. We revisit Berkeley, but this time with a focus on metaphysics. In the following selections, pay special attention to arguments that reduce corporeal substance to ideas.

Selected reading: From the Second and Third Dialogues of *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, by George Berkeley.

**From Berkeley to Hume**

Berkeley remains somewhat faithful to the Cartesian project of admitting as real only that which one cannot doubt. Berkeley agrees with Descartes that we immediately perceive our
ideas. By ‘ideas’, Descartes meant sensations, perceptions, memories, images, dreams, and just about everything that is the immediate object of thinking. Remember, also, that the dream analogy was used to illustrate just this point: that all of our sense experience has the same immanent status as dreams, only we are accustomed to infer from the appearance of the world that there is an extra-mental world. For Berkeley, however, the ideas of sense experience do not represent some distinct substance or matter that resides outside and separate from our minds. The appearance is the real. The idea does not point beyond itself to a corporeal substance as its cause. This does not mean what Descartes feared: that the good God deceives us humans as to the origin and source of our knowledge of the world. All of the evidence of the senses is accepted. It is what is unperceived that Berkeley calls into question.

For Berkeley to be is to be perceived (with two notable exceptions, God and the self). All of our perceptual knowledge of the natural world is obtained through sense experience. Since sensible qualities are ideas, and ideas are what minds immediately perceive, sensible qualities exist only in minds. As Berkeley points out, by "in the mind" we do not refer to a spatial relation, as books are on shelves or cookies in a jar. Being in the mind refers to being thought or perceived.

Berkeley's arguments are so strong because, far from defying common sense, he appeals to common sense. We cannot perceive anything unperceived or conceive of anything unconceived or imagine anything unimagined. Doesn't that make sense? Berkeley urges common sense to get hold of itself and reject long-held prejudices about "matter" or primary qualities or other unknown "material" extra-mental causes of our ideas. Why posit something that is unperceived when there are so many vivid qualities that are perceived?
Berkeley's rejection of representationalism is not, however, complete. Recall our treatment of notions in the previous section on epistemology. The notions introduced in the Second and Third Dialogues (above) are (1) God and (2) the human self. The notion of God accounts for the activity that produces the adventitious ideas, that is, the ideas that I am not aware of creating and appear to come from outside of my mind. And the notion of the human self accounts for the activity of the human imagination. The notion of God also helps to explain what happens to the world when there is no person there to perceive it. If to be is to be perceived, one might argue that the world disappears when no one is looking! But no, not quite. Since God knows everything, we can account for the continued existence of things while humans do not perceive them because God perceives all things. For Berkeley, God perceives the originals or archetype of things. Furthermore, since God has the archetype of things in mind, we can be assured of the continued existence of the world while no one is looking.

Hylas, one of the interlocutors in the Dialogues (above) raises some strong objections to these notions in the Third Dialogue. We reprint them here because they serve as a good introduction to Hume's critique of all metaphysics:

Notwithstanding all you have said, to me it seems, that according to your own way of thinking, and in consequence of your own principles, it should follow that you are only a system of floating ideas, without any substance to support them. Words are not to be used without a meaning. And as there is no more meaning in spiritual substance than in material substance, the one is to be exploded as well as the other.
It is interesting that Berkeley raises serious objections to his own theory by putting them into the mouth of Hylas. If one is faithful to Berkeley’s own principles, one can arguably reject the notions of self and God because these entities are unperceived. To be, however, is to be perceived!

Review questions:

1. How, according to the "modern way of explaining things" are we affected with ideas?
2. Which interlocutor asks: "Pray tell me, whether by the brain you mean any sensible thing?"
3. Summarize the argument which leads to the conclusion: The brain exists only in the mind.
4. How does Philonous show that the brain is not a special idea?
5. What is Philonous' argument for the existence of an infinite omnipresent spirit?
6. Summarize Hylas' argument for "matter".
7. How does Philonous account for laws of nature?
8. What is Hylas' argument against Philonous' notions of soul and God? Is this argument valid? Explain.
9. To be is to be perceived.
   To be is to be perceivable.
   What is the difference in meaning between these two statements?
10. Explain Philonous' distinction between real and imaginary things.
11. How is misjudgement about our ideas possible?
12. Philonous says he is changing ideas into things. What does he mean?

13. How does Philonous account for the identity of things that appear to different persons?

9.4 David Hume: Critique of metaphysics

Recall that, for Hume, all of our knowledge is derived from matters of fact or relations between ideas. Inspect our impressions all we may, we will not find an impression of self, God, spirit, matter, substance, cause, or mode among them. While Descartes pretended to call such scholastic notions into question, they were employed as soon as Descartes established that there was thinking. For example, Descartes inferred that there is a substance that thinks from the proposition “there is thinking.” The assumption that makes this argument valid is that all activities are the activities of a substance. For example, if there is walking, there must be a walker, and by analogy, if there is thinking, there must be a thinker. Descartes deduced that, since there is thinking, there must be a substance that is the subject of that activity. Even though this subject is not directly perceived, it is known through deductive reasoning. Descartes also argues for the existence of God in the Meditations, again using dubious assumptions. One of those assumptions is that everything requires a cause that is as perfect or more perfect than its effect. Using this assumption, Descartes argued that God was the cause of the idea of God in us and the cause of all created beings. (We will not discuss the details of the proofs here.)

What is important for our purposes is that dubious assumptions that arguably should have been subject to the Cartesian doubt of the first meditation were used to prove the existence of a benevolent God. The concept of a benevolent God was then used to guarantee that perceptual
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experience represents certain features (the primary qualities) of extra-mental physical objects.

After all, a benevolent God would not deceive us about what the indirect realists believe!

Once having established the representative nature of our adventitious ideas, Descartes sought to identify those features of sense experience that have an extra-mental correlate. Descartes decided on motion, figure, number and solidity because he thought that these qualities are not only in our ideas but are in the things themselves, that is, are observer-independent features of physical objects. Such observer-independent qualities do not come into existence on account of the constitution of our sense organs as do color, smell, taste, and tactile sensations.

Berkeley rejected such an extra-mental substance, substituting spiritual substance instead. It was David Hume who followed the empiricist approach of Berkeley to its ultimate conclusion. For Hume there are just bundles of perceptions, one after the other, with no evident string to hold them together. Metaphysics can go no further, so long as it accepts impressions as the original data of sense experience. Indeed, not even the concept of being is acceptable, for it does not appear among our impressions as a distinct impression. There are only impressions and their copies, the ideas.

9.5 Immanuel Kant: Rehabilitation of metaphysics

In the chapter on epistemology we saw that being, for Immanuel Kant, has two aspects: Being in-itself and being-as-it appears, or the noumenon and the phenomenon. Kant's transcendental idealism proposes that the fundamental features of the universe, as known to human beings, are constructed by Reason. The very process of knowing being transforms being into the forms of human sensibility (space and time) and organizes sense-experience in
According with the categories of the understanding (e.g., substance and modes, cause and effect). Beginning with Kant, metaphysics explores more carefully the constructive nature of human thinking.

The *phenomenon*, that which appears, is the object of science. But the *noumenon* remains hidden from us, an unknown entity that is somehow the occasion of the phenomenon.

**Hegel and the world spirit**

The unknown noumenon was troubling to those who sought absolute knowledge of Being. If knowledge itself was a process of transforming Being (Kant’s *noumenon* or in-itself), human knowledge must forever be cut off from absolute knowledge, that is, direct knowledge of Being in-itself.

While Kant arguably rescued science from the skepticism of David Hume, he theoretically undermines the traditional metaphysics that claimed at least some access to ultimate reality. All that was left of metaphysics, according to Hume’s criticism, was a thorough-going empiricism. For Hume, what we call the natural world is just a bundle of impressions, one following the other, in no necessary order. On this view there is no theoretical justification for asserting that there is any entity that causes the impressions to appear.

For the German philosopher, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 - 1831), human knowledge is amenable to being, that is, human knowledge can behold being as it is in-itself because being in-itself is the product of rational thought. Being is rational means that being, in itself, is produced by and conforms to rational categories. Absolute knowledge does not transform or construct, but reveals what really is. The phenomena of the sciences, including
world history, represent the unfolding of the Absolute Spirit (Hegel’s term for being in-itself).

Let us take a closer look at this unfolding.

**Hegel made easier: the analogy of the creator God**

Imagine that there is a creator God who needs to create. In order to come to know Itself, this God must create a world and develop that world until the God can see Itself, like looking in a mirror, in Its work. World history is the Absolute Spirit working toward self-awareness. It goes outside Itself by creating the world, but then must develop that world, through the trials and changes of world history. All of world history is the history of the Absolute Spirit overcoming this separation or alienation from Itself. Human culture, including art, religion, and philosophy, are but expressions of the Absolute Spirit at different points in Its development. Spirit finally sees Itself, becomes aware of Itself, in the philosophy of Absolute Spirit. We humans are but expressions or moments of the Absolute Spirit's development.

Hegel’s idealism brings alive the In-itself of Kant, gives it a history, and makes it accessible to reason. Being is rational. This means that Being in itself is knowable as it is, not merely as it appears. The appearance of the Absolute Spirit is the Absolute Spirit's temporalization (entrance into space and time). Absolute Spirit enters time in order to develop and unfold. We ourselves, as a part and parcel of this Spirit, know Spirit by self-reflection, for we are moments of Its development.
Karl Marx (1818-1883) is, perhaps, the most famous of modern philosophers. He lived during the age of revolutions in nineteenth century Europe, and during the twentieth century his ideas inspired revolutions throughout the world. Many of these revolutions were successful and led to regimes that claimed to have adopted his economic theories as the basis for a new and just society. Marx has also had tremendous impact in academia, including European and North American universities during the twentieth century. It was in these states that many intellectuals adopted his ideas to develop interpretations of history, economics, politics and literature.

Marx was born into a moderately prosperous, Jewish family in Prussia just after the end of the wars that had been launched by the French Revolution. Marx’s father, who was a lawyer, converted to Christianity and had his children baptized as Protestants in order to circumvent the laws that discriminated against Jews in the legal and medical professions. Marx pursued a solid education in the classics and earned a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Jena, but he never secured a professorship at any university. For a few years, first in Germany, then in France, and finally in Belgium, he worked as a journalist. During the years of revolutionary activities in the 1830s and 1840s, governments repressed radicals, often shutting down the newspapers for which they wrote.

While in Brussels, Belgium, Marx with his lifetime associate, Frederick Engels (1820-1895), participated in the formation of the Communist Party. This was the party that was supposed to lead the industrial laborers into a workers’ paradise after they had violently overturned the middle class capitalists who owned and managed the factories, which Marx and
Engels condemned as the places of alienation for all who worked there. They had their opportunity to lead the workers in a revolt during the European-wide Revolutions of 1848. To rally these persons, whom they called the proletariat, Marx and Engels wrote the *Communist Manifesto*, which famously states that the workers have only their chains to lose. Everywhere throughout Europe the revolutions were unsuccessful and a period of great repression followed as soon as the governments could assert themselves. Marx and Engels fled Belgium and sought asylum in liberal England, which was one of the two countries that had not undergone a revolution—autocratic Russia being the other.

Beginning in 1849, Marx lived the rest of his life in England. From 1849 until his death in 1883, Marx was mostly unemployed, and his unemployment brought severe hardship upon his family. Three of Marx’s children died during the 1850s, primarily because of the wretched conditions in which they lived. Finally, his friend, Engels, the son of a very prosperous businessman, provided an annual subsidy for Marx and his family so that they were able to adopt a middle class lifestyle. When Marx was not preoccupied with revolutionary meetings with comrades or family matters at home, he spent much of his time in the British Museum doing research for his book on the capitalist system, which is called *Capital*. Most of Marx’s research for this work was not organized into a book and published during his lifetime; only volume one was. After Marx’s death, Engels rewrote some of his colleague’s notes into two more volumes and had them published in the 1890s, but the classic is the one-volume work published by Marx in 1867.

Marx repeatedly argued in his writings that the material conditions of the workers were getting worse, not better as industrialization expanded, and these conditions, plus industrial
capitalism’s inherent instability, would undermine bourgeois society through a revolutionary upheaval. Even during Marx’s lifetime, however, the living standards of the working classes of Western Europe were gradually improving as industrialization expanded. When Marx wrote *Capital*, he was living in England, the most capitalized, industrialized, and urbanized country in the world, but he refused to acknowledge the many reforms carried out by both liberal and conservative British governments. Ironically, in the year that Marx published his book, which emphatically stated that the proletariat would have to revolt in order to improve their lot, the urban worker received the right to vote and run for office in England. Even among the Socialists, there were those who rejected Marx’s dogma as wrong. At the end of the nineteenth century the Socialist movement split between those who remained Marxian revolutionists and those who became Social Democrats. The latter pursued a practical policy of cooperation with liberal members of the middle classes to achieve socio-economic gains for the working classes and the former became doctrinaire revolutionaries, known as Communists, in the early twentieth century in Europe.

Marx died in 1883 at a time when some workingmen’s groups in Western Europe were rejecting revolution for reformism. He did have some slight satisfaction in the final months of his debilitating illness, which included pleurisy and bronchitis, when he learned that his views were increasing in popularity in Russia. Marx’s legacy in the twentieth century was twofold: the revolutions supposedly based on his ideas and the academic scholarship in history, economics and other disciplines that is based on his theories. Ironically, it was in Russia, not in England or in Germany, as Marx had envisioned, that his doctrines were put into practice. Between 1917 and 1921 Vladimir Lenin led the Russians through a violent overthrow of the old order and his
successors, primarily Joseph Stalin, set up a Communist dictatorship in what became the Soviet Union. In the second half of the twentieth century many other countries, such as China, Vietnam, Poland, Romania, and Cuba, also set up regimes purportedly based on the ideas of Karl Marx. All East European regimes were overthrown or collapsed, including that of the Soviet Union, at the end of the twentieth century. Meanwhile, in the academic institutions of Western Europe and North America Marxian thought is still prevalent and pervasive.

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For the German economist and philosopher, Karl Marx (1818 - 1883), the Absolute Spirit was a distortion of reality and a grand error. Marx argued that the alienation of Absolute Spirit from Itself is not the real alienation going on in world history. This is the philosopher's dream. The real and important alienation is that which individual laboring human beings experience.
This is the alienation that must be overcome, not by some World Spirit coming to know itself, but by the work and struggle of human beings.

Marx saw the class society under the capitalist mode of production as the chief cause of the alienation of workers. This alienation includes at least four defining characteristics:

1. Alienation of the worker from the tools of labor.
2. Alienation of the worker from her own creative laboring activity.
3. Alienation of the worker from the products of labor.
4. Alienation of the worker from other workers.

In the following selection from Marx on “Alienated Labor,” pay close attention to the different forms of alienation. See if you can identify the descriptions of the four types of alienation.

Selected reading: From the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts (1844)*, by Karl Marx.

For Marx, Absolute Spirit does not constitute the real drama of human history. It is rather human beings in society, striving for the basic necessities of life, which are the real actors in this drama. Moreover, it is not the moments of the unfolding Idea, but rather the relations of production that plays the major role in world history.

Marx viewed the driving force of capitalism to be a conflict between labor and capital. Capital is the accumulated wealth that the capitalist puts to use by exploiting the labor of workers. The capitalist owns the means of production (the factories and the land) and therefore can exert significant control over the activities of the workers. Labor is the life activity of the
workers in so far as it is employed to obtain the basic necessities of life. The basic relationship between the wage laborers and capitalists is **dialectical**, that is, the propertyless wage laborer exists only in a relationship to the capitalist who owns the means of production. The exploited only exist in relation to exploiters.

The profit gained by using wage labor is not a mere return on investment, what is left after one subtracts expenses from revenue; it is unpaid labor. This unpaid labor, or **surplus value**, is appropriated by the capitalist and often empowers him or her to increase production and exploit more labor.

In this process of production, the worker experiences several forms of alienation. Alienation is rooted in the separation a person experiences when she does not succeed in objectifying herself in the world. What is it like to objectify oneself in the world? The idea of objectification is really very simple.

Human beings objectify themselves through the forming and shaping of nature. In the most basic form of objectification, the human being changes nature into herself by consuming plants and animals as food, transforming wood into shelter, and otherwise producing survival conditions. But having once secured the necessities of life, the human being seeks other sorts of fulfillment. When a child shows you a drawing she has made, she takes pride in her work. She has expressed something of her inner nature in the drawing. There she is, in the drawing, out there in the world! If I build a home I can see myself in the home; it is my work, with the stamp of my style and preferences. In this sense I put myself in the environment. I transform the environment into something human. When someone walks down the graduation isle and receives a diploma, there, symbolized in the diploma, are her long days of study and creativity.
All of us all seek to objectify ourselves; this is what realizing one’s potential is all about.

I am prevented from objectifying myself when someone else controls my labor activity, and takes possession of my tools and the objects I produce. According to Marx’s essay on “Alienated Labor,” this loss of the means to objectify myself is precisely what happens under capitalism.

The transition to capitalism changed the way workers relate to production. The tools of the craftsman become the machines of the factory. The craft knowledge of the worker becomes the specialized knowledge of the factory engineer and is incorporated into the machine design, with modifications to maximize efficiency. The creative labor of the shoemaker becomes the repetitive movements of the factory worker on the assembly line. The worker becomes an extension of the machine, and the mark of the artisan or crafts-person on the product of labor becomes the brand name of the capitalist. Workers do not generally socialize with other workers involved in the production of other commodities sold on the market. Most producers remain anonymous. Thus, the factory worker experiences a separation from the object of labor (the product), the work activity, and other workers.

As metaphysics, Marxism is sometimes referred to as dialectical materialism. (Marx, however, may not have viewed himself as doing metaphysics.) This does not mean that Marx believed everything is reducible to the physical or matter. Arguably, Marx's materialism recognizes human consciousness as well as objective conditions of nature. Human consciousness, however, is not related to a divine consciousness or an Absolute Spirit, but to other persons, the means of production, and nature. Marxist thinking points away from abstract spirit and towards the lived experience of persons within given economic and social conditions.
Review questions:

1. Identify and summarize four types of alienation.

2. For Marx, what is the alien power that causes the alienation summarized in 1. above? How is this alien power different from Hegel's Absolute Spirit?

11. Friedrich Nietzsche: The death of God

Historical Essay

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) was born in Prussia just before that state, under the leadership of Prince Otto Bismarck (1815-1898), unified most of the German states into the Second German Empire. Nietzsche was the descendant of a long line of Lutheran ministers, and he commenced his schooling with the understanding that he, too, would become a Protestant pastor. Nietzsche, however, like many young Europeans during the nineteenth century, lost his religious faith, and he studied philosophy and philology rather than theology at the universities of Bonn and of Leipzig. Shortly after graduation, at the age of 25, he was awarded a full professorship at the University of Basle in Switzerland.

While at the university, Nietzsche taught courses in classical philology and, by his own admission, the years lecturing as a university professor constituted the most un-heroic period of his life. Still in his youthful stage of romantic idealization of Prussian nationalism, he volunteered for the army when the Franco-Prussian War began in 1870. Found unfit for active military duty, he served only briefly in the medical corps. Since the sight of blood and suffering
made him ill, he was dismissed. On other occasions, too, Nietzsche sought to serve in the army, but the German command rejected him as physically unfit. Ill health also compelled Nietzsche to terminate his career as a professor in 1879. Through most of the 1870s he had complained of severe stomach pains, headaches, eye problems and other symptoms, and, finally, at the age of thirty-five Nietzsche thought that he would die. Nietzsche, however, did recover and began a period of prolific publication during the 1880s.

Major works that he wrote during this time include *On the Genealogy of Morals*, *The Gay Science*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, and *Twilight of the Idols*. Although he was very productive during the decade, this stage of his life was very difficult for Nietzsche. Wandering about Italy and Switzerland, he traveled about from town to town with suitcase in hand and took lodgings in inexpensive accommodations. In a small room of a given town he would set himself to the task of producing philosophical writings that, unfortunately, were ignored by his contemporaries. For instance, the publisher refused to print all parts of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Nietzsche, himself, had to pay for the printing, and only forty copies were sold. He also experienced personal misfortune during this time. In 1882 Nietzsche met Lou Salome in Rome, but she rejected his overtures of love in order to become romantically involved with Nietzsche’s philosophical friend Paul Ree. Then, three years later, his beloved younger sister, Elisabeth, married an anti-Semite, much to Nietzsche’s disgust. Contrary to popular impressions, which originated with the highly selective editing of his writings after his death, Friedrich Nietzsche was neither an anti-Semite nor a proto-Nazi.

In 1889 he fell into a prolonged state of insanity and paralysis that lasted eleven years until his death in 1900. While in Turin, Italy he observed a coachman severely whipping a horse.
Aroused by the animal’s suffering, he lunged for the man, but before reaching him, Nietzsche collapsed. For the next seven years he was in the care of his mother. When his mother died, his sister took Nietzsche into her home and cared for him until his death in 1900. It was Elisabeth who began the second series of publications of his work, and it was these editions that brought Nietzsche a renown that he was unable to recognize.

Nietzsche’s name and his writings, often a distorted or misunderstood version of them, soon became prominent in Europe and North America. Part of the responsibility for the misinterpretation of Nietzsche that prevailed during the early twentieth century belongs to his sister, Elisabeth, who edited his works for a second edition of his writings. The popular understanding of Nietzsche is that he promoted anti-Semitism, nationalism, and some form of racial Social Darwinism. Although these trends were prevalent during his lifetime, Nietzsche opposed them. Unfortunately, for Nietzsche’s reputation, the Fascist leaders, Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler, seized the Nietzsche as expressed in his sister’s highly selective edited versions of his writings and used him to espouse their agenda. Fortunately, during the twentieth century the connection between Nietzsche and Fascism has been correctly shown to be inappropriate.

Nietzsche’s genuine impact on the twentieth century has been derived from his study of morality. He argued that morals are not absolute and eternal, but rather humans create their values and use the belief in an eternal and a universal deity as a means of instituting their self-created values as a universal and absolute morality. Nietzsche asserted that the Church had used the god of the Bible as a means to impose a value system in Europe during the Middle Ages. This value system, he added, had effectively endured as a medium of prescribing cultural meaning and social order until the nineteenth century. In *The Gay Science* he presents the
famous story of the “madman” who announces “the death of God,” which is Nietzsche’s way of saying that the basis of western morality, the Christian religion, is no longer viable. Since the publication of *The Gay Science* this notion has been provocative in two ways: It has outraged many Christians who strongly believe in God’s existence and who anchor their morality on His existence. Secondly, it raises the issue of the relationship between moral codes and religious beliefs. Since Nietzsche, many persons do not find it necessary to have religious beliefs as the basis of their morality.

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Karl Marx critiques the idea that the human individual is a mere expression of an Absolute Spirit trying to realize itself in the world. Marx argued that the real project of human beings was the liberation of all workers from exploitation and economic inequality.
Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), a nineteenth century German philosopher argued that the lives of human beings have no given purpose whatsoever. The death of God was Nietzsche's analogy for the complete absence of any assigned meaning to human existence. It is up to each of us to create a meaning and a purpose to our lives. Aphorism 125 of the Gay Science provides the famous "death of God" analogy for the loss of faith in any absolute guide or standard. As you read this aphorism, notice how the character of the madman illustrates the experience of the death of God and the difficulty of communicating this event.

Selected reading from The Gay Science, section 125, by Friedrich Nietzsche.

The death of God was taken seriously by modern secular existentialists such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), and Albert Camus (1913-1960). For these existentialists, the human being has no given destiny, worldly or divine. As Albert Camus argued in the Myth of Sisyphus, we are thrown here on earth, listening for meaning in a universe that is silent. There is no ultimate meaning to our short lives. Human beings are the beings that must bring meaning to this world. Nietzsche was announcing the withering away of religious belief and the questioning of the foundations of morality. This announcement, thus far, has turned out to be wrong about religion. Religious belief is still alive and well throughout the world.

Most existentialist thinkers, while denying absolute and universal ethical standards or ultimate meaning to human existence (Soren Kierkegaard is a notable exception), nevertheless, offer various accounts of the fundamental features of the universe.
Nietzsche presents us with a metaphysical view or at least a thought experiment about freedom. In this thought experiment, all of nature, including human beings, is the expression of the will to power. This will to power becomes individualized in human beings because we are conscious of our desires and aspirations. Our aspirations, however, are free from any commanders, gods, or absolute standards. There is no vocation, no calling, of humankind. We are either examples of ascending life or descending life. Ascending life is life affirming. Even when the going gets tough, a person who exemplifies ascending life will say yes to her fate and try to overcome all obstacles. Such a person has discipline and tries to accomplish something of consequence in life. As Nietzsche describes it:

One thing is needful—To “give style” to ones character—a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye. (The Gay Science, Section 290, p. 232)

The person who turns away from life, who just can’t handle the challenges of life, exemplifies descending life. Such persons often become resentful toward those who are happy or successful.

According to Nietzsche, we are free from standards. The gods are dead. But what are we free for? Is everything permitted? Is one path better than another? Is there anything worth fighting for? Furthermore, when we create our own standards, why should anyone, including ourselves, act in accordance with such standards? These are questions we shall confront again in the section on ethics. The essential point here is that with existentialism, metaphysics focuses on the concrete, lived situations of that being which is aware of itself as a being-in-the-world, human being.
Review questions:

1. Does Nietzsche’s declaration that God is dead have any application today? Explain.

2. Why does Nietzsche find the Death of God to be an opportunity?

3. What is the will to power? Does this notion have any place in evolutionary biology?

12. Contemporary philosophy of mind

The philosophy of mind is part of the study of metaphysics. By some accounts, mind is a fundamental feature of the universe, at least for the moment of its presence. During the past ten years, there has been somewhat of a renaissance in the study of consciousness. A host of new books and journals trumpet small victories in determining the nature of mind; yet close inspection of such ambitious claims arguably show that we are no more closer to unlocking the secrets of mind than Aristotle was more than 2400 years ago. Perhaps Aristotle came closer than some of our contemporaries!

Sometimes what is closest to us is the most difficult to understand. When I ask my students to imagine a red patch and then to tell me where the red patch is, most answer, "in my mind." And when I ask them where their minds are, most answer "in my head." Then we do a thought experiment. We imagine using a modern imaging device such as a Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) machine, or an imaginary brain operation, to see inside the brain and look for the red patch. Most students argue that we won't find the red patch by using these methods. No, all we shall find is some gray Jell-O like material called the brain. But what about that red patch? I am certainly conscious of this patch. It appears that what is closest to us can be difficult to
understand! The following section enters into the mysteries of what is closest to us: conscious experience.

12.1 The problem of consciousness

Historical Essay

Philosophizing about the mind is as old as the discipline of philosophy, itself. Plato developed a theory of the soul in the Republic, the Phaedrus, and in other dialogues, and Aristotle wrote a book, De Anima, on the soul. The discipline, called the philosophy of the mind, however, is primarily a late nineteenth and early twentieth century development. The philosophy of the mind is now recognized as a sub-discipline of philosophy. Through the course of the twentieth century the philosophy of the mind developed in conjunction with psychology.

An important influence in the development of the philosophy of the mind has been the computer. Though designs for a digital computer were developed during the nineteenth century, the digital computer was further developed and built during the Second World War. The Germans, the Americans, and the British, all were working on such a machine. In the British case, the name of Alan Turing (1912-1954) is prominent. During the war Turing worked at Bletchley Park on a computational system to crack the German code called Enigma. His use of both logic and electronic machinery to crack the enemy’s secret code has credit Turing as the founder of computer science. At the end of the war, he talked about “building a brain,” which was to be the realization of his vision during the 1930s of a universal machine that could think. In 1950 Turing wrote an article, called “Computing Machinery and Intelligence,” which considers the question whether machines could one day think. He answered in the affirmative
and developed an examination process, called the Turing Test, to evaluate the responses of a machine. He argued that if a machine’s responses to questions could not be distinguished from human responses, then, the machine must be thinking, meaning that it has intelligence.

Turing’s work at the middle of the twentieth century is historically significant in the area of artificial intelligence, or AI. The studies of twentieth century cognitive scientists and the construction of machines that simulate thought processes has prompted philosophers during the last 50 years to examine basic questions about consciousness. Four philosophers currently working in this area are John Searle, Paul Churchland, Douglas Hofstadter, and Fred Mills. Much of their work has been done since the 1970s.

John Searle (1932- ) is currently the Mills Professor of Philosophy at the University of California in Berkeley. After completing his undergraduate work at the University of Wisconsin in 1955, he pursued his graduate studies as a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University in England. Prior to accepting his appointment at Berkeley in 1959, he was a lecturer at Oxford for three years. Searle has published numerous books, including Chomsky’s Revolution in Linguistics, Minds, Brains and Programs, Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of the Mind, and The Mystery of Consciousness. Searle is a philosopher who argues against the notion that computers can think. In presenting his case against artificial intelligence, he provides an illustration known as the Chinese Room Argument. The point of his illustration is that just because a machine behaves as if it has intelligence does not mean that, in fact, the machine does think. In developing his ideas in this sub-area of philosophy, Searle has contributed the following concepts: a Theory of Intentionality and a Theory of Consciousness.
Paul Churchland (1942– ) is a Professor of Philosophy who earned his doctorate in this field from the University of Pittsburgh in 1969. He is currently a member of the Cognitive Science Faculty at the University of California in San Diego. Churchland’s areas of investigation include cognitive neurobiology, artificial intelligence, the philosophy of science, and the philosophy of the mind. In the 1980s he demonstrated that artificial neural networks, after a period of training, could generate correct output. Churchland’s goal is to use these artificial networks to model the microarchitecture of the brain in order to show that the biological brain produces mental processes. This work is part of his effort to develop a unified materialist theory of the mind. Churchland has numerous publications, a few of which include Matter and Consciousness and The Engine of Reason, The Seat of the Soul: A Philosophical Journey into the Brain.

Douglas Hofstadter (1945– ) is the son of the renown American physicist, Robert Hofstadter, whose work with protons and neutrons earned him the Nobel Prize in physics in 1961. The younger Hofstadter is a Professor of Cognitive Science and Computer Science at the University of Indiana. In 1979 his first book, Godel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid won the Pulitzer Prize. In this 800-page book Hofstadter examines computers, language, music and the way humans think. Since that time he has written The Mind’s ‘I’, which he co-authored with Daniel Dennet, and Le Ton beau de Marot: In Praise of the Music of Language. Finally, in 1994 he co-authored a book with Andrew Hodges on the person who was primarily responsible for establishing artificial intelligence. The book is Alan Turing: The Enigma.

Fred Mills (1956– ) is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Bowie State University in Maryland. In 1978 he completed is undergraduate work at the State University of New York
Mills is not an ivory tower philosopher, but rather, he is very engaged in public policy issues and current events. At present, he is a member of the Institutional Ethics Forum at Children’s Hospital in the nation’s capital. During the 1980s he served on the staff of Congressman Robin Britt and later on the staff of Congressman Bill Richardson. He was an activist against the Reagan policies in Central America and is currently an advocate for immigration rights. Mills has a strong interest in the philosophy of the mind, and is a member of the editorial board of the Mind Project (Illinois State University). In 2001 and again in 2002, he was a NASA fellow during the summer. In 1996 he published *Crossroads of Traditional Philosophy: A User’s Guide*, a college textbook that emphasizes the classical primary sources in the study of philosophy. He has also published several articles on the philosophy of the mind and on artificial intelligence.

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What is consciousness? Where is consciousness (if anywhere at all)? How is consciousness related to the body? What function does consciousness have in the overall
Is consciousness an attribute of the mind? If so, is the mind the same thing as the brain or is the mind something else? If the mind is not the same thing as the brain, what relationship does it have to the brain? These questions, once the domain of philosophy, are now the subject of inquiry in a variety of disciplines, among them cognitive science.

During the last two decades cognitive science has become an interdisciplinary field of research involving neuroscience, artificial intelligence, evolutionary biology, psychology, linguistics, and philosophy. During the last ten years there has been a renewed interest in consciousness studies, giving rise to numerous new books and an international journal dedicated to this issue (for example, *The Journal of Consciousness Studies*). We will examine some of the basic features of the debate over the nature of mind.

**12.2 Behaviorist strategy**

During the last century behaviorism had a strong influence on the debate over the ultimate nature of the human mind. The subjective (inner) aspect of mental states was denied or reduced to dispositions to behave by philosophical behaviorists. Behaviorists typically translate so-called mental states into observable or potentially observable dispositions to behave in certain ways. A disposition can be expressed by a set of hypothetical statements. John is considerate means that given certain social conditions and a history of interactions between John and his environment, John will behave in certain ways. For example, John sees an elderly person crossing a busy
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Intersection. John is considerate means that John will probably help this person to cross the street. Maria is an expert chess player means that she will play like an expert most of the time, given the opportunity to play with other chess players. Sarah is angry means that Sarah has a disposition to emit loud noises, slam her fist on the table, and a host of other behaviors. Notice that capacities and emotional states are translated into behavioral descriptions or hypothetical (if, then) statements.

The problem with philosophical behaviorism is that most of us have subjective, private (inner) mental states that are not communicated or translated into behaviors. I am daydreaming right now about my vacation in El Salvador. There is no observable disposition that reveals this very real experience of day dreaming. There may be neurological states that occur while I am daydreaming that normally occur when I am daydreaming, but these neuro-physiological events do not appear to be numerically the same as my colorful daydream, although physical processes in the brain may somehow provide the basis for such experiences. A complete theory of mind needs to account for such conscious experience and explain how it is based on physical processes (if indeed it is).

The behaviorist project has undergone considerable criticism because the behaviorists arguably could not explain the private "raw feels" or "qualia" or "what it is like to be" in a given state. We might argue that subjective experience (or phenomenal experience) accompanies our publicly observable behavior or occurs without any publicly observable behavior at all. There seems to be something that happens between the input (some stimulus from the environment) and the output (an observable behavior) that is not reducible to observed behaviors nor patterns of activation in the brain.
Some methodological behaviorists admit there is such a thing as conscious experience, but maintain that conscious experience is not the proper object of scientific study. These methodological behaviorists, like the philosophical behaviorists, focus on publicly observable, quantifiable, and measurable phenomena as the proper object of scientific research.

12.3 Functionalist strategy

The functionalist approach, beginning in the nineteen sixties, focuses on the mind as an information processor that performs certain functions such as perception, object recognition and memory that are causally related to other functions. These functions can be described by drawing diagrams and pointing out the jobs each function accomplishes in relation to an overall system. The functionalist approach does not require reference to any inner, private experience. For any given cognitive function, we explain that function by determining its causal relation to other functions in the overall system. For example, visual perception processes visual information in such a way as to cause appropriate behaviors in relation to the environment. When a person driving a car sees a red light, she puts her foot on the brake. But as David Chalmers, (e.g. 1996) points out, these functions are often accompanied by conscious experience.

Functionalism, like behaviorism, does not account for subjectivity or what it is like to be a perceiving subject. Thus functionalism itself does not give a complete account of consciousness any more than philosophical behaviorism.

But why try to explain consciousness at all? One could deny that such things as subjectivity and qualia exist (the eliminativist solution). For example, one could reduce what
goes on in the mind to physical events in the brain (physicalist reduction).

Another strategy for dealing with mental states is to admit that there is a mental (phenomenal) world, but that it has no causal efficacy (epiphenomenalism). This strategy relegates consciousness to the sidelines, outside of the realm of scientific investigation.

Still another strategy for dealing with mental states is one we have seen before. One could take conscious experience as primary and reduce the physical world to ideas in the in mind, that is, to phenomena (remember Bishop Berkeley).

Finally, one could resort to Cartesian dualism and maintain that mental states are a different sort of being from physical processes. We have seen this view before in Cartesian dualism. Would substance dualism resolve account for how consciousness is related to the physical world (to the human body and the environment)?

12.4 Paul Churchland: Critique of dualism

While the outright rejection of inner mental states is not a satisfactory way to account for phenomenal experience, Cartesian dualism arguably raises more questions than it solves. Remember, for Descartes the mind (a thinking thing) is a different sort of substance from the body (a corporeal thing). Since the brain is part of the body, the mind is not the same thing as the brain. In order to account for how the two interact, Descartes resorted to a theory of animal spirits. These animal spirits pass to and from the pineal gland, the midway station between the mind and the brain. In The Passions of the Soul, Descartes explains:

...I had clearly ascertained that the part of the body in which the soul exercises its functions immediately is in nowise the heart, nor the whole of the brain, but
merely the most inward of all its parts, to wit, a certain very small gland which is situated in the middle of its substance and is suspended above the duct whereby the animal spirits in its anterior cavities have communication with those in the posterior, that the slightest movements which take place in it may alter very greatly the course of these spirits; and reciprocally that the smallest changes which occur in the course of the spirits may do much to change the movements of this gland (p. 362, Wilson Ed.).

These animal spirits were conceived as a thin, subtle fluid that mediates the relation between mind and body. The use of the pineal gland in this way is a sorry chapter in the history of philosophy. Descartes did not successfully account for the apparent intimate interactive relationship between the mind (a non-spatial, private thing) and the body (an extended, public thing). Since the mind has different qualities than the brain (for example, the mind is not arguably extended in space), how can it act upon a part of the brain? How can conscious experience, in any event, cause anything to occur in the material world? Mental causation would arguably violate the principle of the conservation of energy.

Some philosophers resorted to parallelism by doing away with interaction and setting up two parallel and precisely coordinated worlds (see, for example, Nicolas Malebranche, 1638-1715). The problem of interaction is then moved to the problem of coordinating the mental and physical worlds. After all, when I decide to move my arm, a physical arm rises up in the physical world. But how do the two worlds get to be so well coordinated?

Benedictus de Spinoza (1632-1677) tried another kind of parallelism, by making the two
substances (thinking and corporeal) attributes or aspects of the same substance. But what does 'attribute' or 'aspect' really mean? To this day commentators on Spinoza are not sure whether Spinoza reduced mind and brain to one sort of being or not.

Gottfried Wilhelm Baron von Leibniz (1646 - 1716) thought that each of us is a mind (monad) with a separate phenomenal world. As a monad, I have access only to my own phenomenal world, as if I were watching my own video. If we were discussing an issue, my video would correspond to yours. While my video includes you, yours includes me. The videos represent the same natural world except for the difference in perspective. In my video you are before me, and in your video, I am before you. (Of course, Leibniz had no access to the video metaphor, but it helps us to use it here.) These worlds are coordinated by a pre-established harmony. Thus, while I raise my hand in my video, your video contains the appearance of a person raising his hand. But the videos (phenomenal worlds) are numerically distinct.

Some of these early modern theories seem a bit strained. On the one hand, the mind seems to be a different sort of thing from the body. On the other hand, once we posit their separateness, it is difficult to see their connection.

Today dualism still does not make very many philosophers happy.8 With the recent great strides forward in neuroscience, we can be confident that mental states and abilities are probably associated in some way with neurological activity. We know this because new imaging technology lets us see which areas of the brain are most active during various human cognitive activities. Furthermore, a growing body of evidence from brain injury studies links damage to

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8David Chalmers (1996) has developed a property dualism which he argues is not reductive nor presupposes that there are two sorts of beings or substances in the world.
certain parts of the brain with the loss of certain cognitive, motor, and affective abilities. This is not to say every special area of the brain is always limited to certain specific functions, only that, with damage to certain areas of the brain, certain functions are usually disabled or compromised. I say ‘usually’, because there is mounting evidence that in some cases and for some cognitive functions, the brain may compensate for damage to one area of the brain by developing the lost function using other parts of the brain. Some neuroanatomists now favor a modular theory of the brain that maintains that certain neurons may serve double duty for various functions and that certain functions may be carried out simultaneously without direct coordination between those functions. In any case, none of the recent work in neuroanatomy proves that mental states or abilities are identical or caused by the activities in the brain, only that there is some correlation between brain states and mental states.

Reducing one of these, mind or brain, to the other doesn’t satisfy everyone either. After all, my feeling of anger or love, my perception of red or yellow, and my sensation of pain do not seem at all like that gray stuff, with billions of neurons firing. This is not to say that a deeper understanding of the neuron will not some day enlighten us as to the connection between the brain and the mind. It is to say that any physicalist reduction (reducing mental events to brain events) or functionalist reduction (explaining mental events in terms of functional relations) needs to explain these conscious experiences.

The following selection from Paul Churchland provides a good summary of some classic objections to dualism.

Selected reading: From Matter and Consciousness, by Paul M. Churchland.
Review questions:

1. Summarize Churchland's objections to dualism.
2. How does Churchland account for the nature of mind?

12.5 Fred Mills: The easy versus the hard problem of consciousness

One way for us to enter into the problem of consciousness or the theory of mind is to focus in on what one modern theorist calls the "hard problem". While Churchland's objections to dualism may inspire us to reduce mind and body to one sort of thing, we need to account for what David J. Chalmers calls the "Hard Problem", that is, how does conscious experience arise from physical processes in the brain? There appears to be a conceptual gap between physical processes and psychological ones.

The following selection from an article by Fred Mills describes the so-called “conceptual gap” problem in consciousness studies. The selection examines two fundamentally different approaches to the conceptual gap between mind and body. One approach starts with the knowledge of phenomenal experience. The other approach favored by contemporary cognitive science, starts on the side of physical objects.


Review questions:

1. Describe the conceptual gap in consciousness studies.
2. On what side of the gap does Mills suggest we start in studying the problem of the nature and origin of consciousness?

In order to bridge the explanatory gap (discussed by Mills, above) different strategies are currently being tried. One strategy suggests that consciousness is closely related to the firing of neurons in the brain. Francis Crick and Christof Koch (1995) suggest that neuroscience may some day be able to explain consciousness.

We believe that at the moment the best approach to the problem of explaining consciousness is to concentrate on finding what is known as the neural correlates of consciousness—the processes in the brain that are most directly responsible for consciousness. By locating the neurons in the cerebral cortex that correlate best with consciousness, and figuring out how they link to neurons elsewhere in the brain, we may come across key insights into what David J. Chalmers calls the hard problem: a full accounting of the manner in which subjective experience arises from these cerebral processes. (Crick, Francis, and Koch, Christof. “Why Neuroscience May Be Able to Explain Consciousness.” Scientific American. December 1995, p. 84.)

What are the sorts of things that Crick and Christof ought to explain, once they have identified the physiological processes in the brain responsible for consciousness? John Searle argues that any strategy for explaining mental processes must account for the four basic features of mental life.
12.6 John Searle: Four features of the mental

John Searle points out that a complete theory of mind needs to account for four features of the mental. In *Minds, Brains, and Science*, Searle sets out four features of mental life that makes it difficult to explain mind in terms of matter and then tries to overcome these difficulties. These four features are consciousness, intentionality, subjectivity, and mental causation.

By consciousness, Searle means one’s current awareness. For example, “I at this moment of writing this, and you, at the moment of reading it, are both conscious” (Searle, p. 15). For Searle, the existence of consciousness is amazing and at the same time it is the “central fact of specifically human existence” (p. 16). It is amazing because it is not easy to see how our brains give rise to conscious experience.

Intentionality is a technical term for those mental states that are *about* or *refer to* something. For example, when I see, I always see *something*. When I desire, I always desire *something*. Thinking is directed towards objects other than itself. Once again we face an interesting philosophical issue. How does physical stuff (the brain) get to be about or refer to things?

Subjectivity is, at a first approximation, perspective. I view the world from my point of view and you view the world through yours. We cannot share the numerically same experiences, though we might be able to imagine what each other’s experiences are like. As Searle remarks, “This subjectivity is marked by such facts as that I can feel my pains and you can’t. I see the world from my point of view; you see it from your point of view.” For Searle, this raises another interesting problem. How can constituents of the world that are completely objective explain subjectivity?
Finally, Searle views our experience of mental causation as posing an additional challenge to the philosophy of mind. Searle argues that “we all suppose, as part of common sense, that our thoughts and feelings make a real difference to the way we behave, that they actually have some causal effect on the physical world” (p. 17). So when one decides to open the refrigerator does one actually cause something to happen in the brain, or is the brain ultimately in charge?

Searle argues that any theory about mind that does not explain all of these features of the mental must be mistaken. Searle’s own solution to this problem is to view mental processes as the macro-properties of brain processes. Just as the molecular constituents of water are not wet, yet give rise to a liquid, so too do the microelements and processes of the brain, which are not themselves conscious, give rise to consciousness and other mental properties.

Douglas Hofstadter raises these same issues and more in a fictitious dialogue between three undergraduate students interested in the nature of mental processes and the possibility of artificial intelligence. This dialogue also illustrates the close interface between the philosophy of mind and certain subfields of computer science (e.g., autonomous agent theory, connectionism, classical artificial intelligence, and decision theory).

12.7 Douglas Hofstadter: Can machines think?

One approach to the study of mind is to explore artificial intelligence as a way to model mental processes. Where does artificial intelligence fit into this debate? Some of the artificial intelligence theorists aim at developing computer systems that process information and solve certain problems, arguably much the way humans do. Some of the "strong" artificial intelligence (AI) theorists (to borrow a term from John Searle) claim that the human mind is analogous to a digital computer. Daniel Dennett, in *Consciousness Explained* (1991), likens the human mind
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more to a parallel processing system. Some strong AI theorists have set out on the ambitious
task of producing a thinking machine, yes, a machine with a mind, whatever that is! Do you
think such a project can work? The following dialogue by Douglas Hofstadter may help us to
think through the difficulties in constructing an intelligent machine.

Selected reading: From “The Turing Test: A Coffeehouse Conversation,”by Douglas R.
Hofstadter.

Review questions:

1. Do you think that someday a computer could be built which has conscious experience,
   just like you and I?

2. Could a computer have lived experience? Defend your position with arguments. Also,
   raise possible objections to your position and answer those objections.

3. How many interlocutors are speaking in the dialogue? Are they male or female? What
   subjects do they study? Who favors some form of AI and who is the skeptic?

4. What is the Turing test? Describe this test in detail and explain what the test tries to
determine.

5. According to the conversation, what is the difference between a simulated hurricane and
   the real hurricane? Does this difference make an important difference when it comes to
   simulated versus real intelligence?

6. Why is the notion of pattern so important in this conversation?

7. How does consciousness raise a problem for strong AI?
Part Four: Ethics

13. What is ethics?

Ethics is the theory of morality. As a part of the subfield of philosophy that is concerned with the study of values—axiology—ethics studies the meaning of value terms, such as good and evil, just and unjust, and right and wrong. Ethics, at times, has also been concerned with what constitutes (if anything) the complete, or good life for human beings. For these reasons ethics is practical.

Why engage in the theory of morality? Why not just moralize or preach? Moralizing is much easier, for when we moralize we give our opinions about what is good and evil, just and unjust, right and wrong, without having to justify our beliefs or explain their origin. Those who moralize are often not aware of why they subscribe to certain moral points of view and have difficulty defending their position against other points of view when challenged. Such an approach to morals can easily degenerate into base prejudice. It may even take a gadfly like Socrates or Gandhi or Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. to wake such persons up to a deeper level of self-examination.

The theory of morality

Ethics is the theory of morality. A theory is an account (explanation) of a phenomenon. The account is what makes ethics different from mere moralizing. Morality certainly exists and is part of our everyday lives. But exactly what it is, where it comes from, and whether or not we

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9 This statement is not meant to exclude the consideration of animals or animal interests from the study of morality.
should subscribe to a morality at all are legitimate and urgent questions for serious inquiry. Such deeper thinking about morality can help us come to terms with public policy issues that may effect our loved ones or us. Such issues of ethical concern include abortion, the death penalty, affirmative action, euthanasia, negotiations in business, pre-marital sex, fetal research, immigration reform, welfare, sexual harassment, environmental protection, homosexuality, school prayer, animal rights, and environmental justice.

**A thematic division: absolutism, relativism, and skepticism**

In order to simplify our overview of ethics, we may divide the theory of morality into three basic approaches: absolutism, relativism, and skepticism. Not all moral theories fit neatly into this division, but it does help us to get started.

The **absolutist** usually argues that morality is based on objective, and perhaps eternal and universal criteria. At a first approximation, “the standard is objective” means it does not depend on any one person’s point of view. If you and I disagree about whether abortion is ever morally acceptable, an objective criterion (if there is one) would provide a standard that we might consult to resolve our disagreement. An **eternal** criterion is one that never changes, even if the circumstances change. And a **universal** criterion is one that applies to everyone in every society. On what might such a standard be based? Such a standard or criteria might be based on divine commandments, human reason, or intuition. Such views suggest that human beings are not without guidance when it comes to moral dilemmas. We need only properly reflect on or believe

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10 Other textbooks may offer other thematic divisions, for example: consequential, deontological, and virtue theories. I do not claim that one division is better than another.
in the objective moral criteria to discover basic principles of good and evil. When it comes to comparing moral perspectives, we have a final arbiter: the standard.

The relativist believes that morality is relative to cultures or even individual persons. "Do your own thing," says it well. Or, "when in Rome do as the Romans do." If I think that it is wrong to kill, this is not because I have discovered some objective principle, but rather is due to my own individual or cultural perspective. Even if everyone I talk to agrees with me that those who have an abundance of food should provide famine relief to those in hunger, this does not mean we have discovered a standard moral principle. The number of persons who share a point of view does not lend any more objectivity to that point of view. The agreement is merely accidental.

At one time many persons believed that slavery was morally acceptable while others fought for abolition. The relativist would not assert that either side had a monopoly on the truth, though she might take sides. For the relativist, in the area of morality we cannot compare opposing points of view to a standard in order to determine which view, if any, is correct because there is no correct point of view. Beyond perspectives there are no objective criteria by which one might resolve conflicting perspectives. There may be a final arbiter with the power to decide the moral issue, but such arbitration is based on persuasion or brute force, not on access to the correct perspective.

If in some country certain villagers choose to kill female infants, our moral repugnance might have no validity to those villagers. After all, every individual and every culture establishes moral rules according to their own points of view. For the relativist who looks on in horror, the villagers in question are not ignoring an absolute moral standard because there is no
One version of relativism, the emotive theory of morality, argues that normative statements (statements about what ought to be done) are merely attempts at persuading others to do what we want them to do. If you are an emotivist, saying that one ought to do something is equivalent to making an emotional appeal to other(s) to think as you do. Saying: “You ought to help the homeless when the temperature dips below freezing,” is really urging someone to do something that you want them to do, in this case, help the homeless. It is not to appeal to some standard with which we ought to conform. Morality, on this view, is about communicating our likes and dislikes in such a way as to urge others to adopt the same likes and dislikes. When I say, "You ought not harm an innocent person," I am only exhorting you to behave in a certain manner. I am appealing to your emotions. Thus "you ought not do x" means "Please do not do x." Value terms like good and evil are really devices for persuading others to pursue or avoid certain behaviors.

The skeptic sees no basis at all for morality, not even individual perspective. As Feodor Dostoevsky’s Underground Man would testify, commitment to anyone or anything makes no sense. The relativist has no good reason for preferring one moral perspective over another. Morality has no moral basis at all and is motivated either by whim or by a-moral causes (such as sublimated emotions). The skeptic then, has a hard time committing to any moral point of view.
14. Classical ethics

Historical Essay

The Sophists and the Stoics

Contemporaneous with Socrates, but emerging just prior to his career as a philosopher, was the philosophic school called the Sophists. The Sophists came to prominence as philosophers at the beginning of what is called the Classical Age of Greece, which historians say begins about 500 BC and ends with the opening of Alexander’s campaigns to conquer the world in 333 BC. Arriving from the Greek colonies in Asia Minor (present day Turkey) to the Greek mainland of the Balkan Peninsula after the Persian Wars, the Sophists presented themselves as paid-for tutors of the aristocratic youth. They traveled to many city-states on the Greek mainland, but they came to prominence in Athens during what is termed its age of democracy, a designation that is objectionable to some because of the prevalence of slavery in Athens during the fifth century BC. This is understandable because, aside from philosophy, the Sophists taught rhetoric, the acquisition of which skills would augment a young man’s career in political debate and in the courts of law.

Most of our information about the Sophists is derived from the writings of Plato and Aristotle, especially the former, and the image presented therein is a negative one. Our current understanding of the term, sophist, which means one who argues to win, often like a lawyer to win for money, is how Plato portrayed the philosophical antagonists of his teacher, Socrates. Despite Plato’s misgivings, the Sophists did play a historically significant role in the development of philosophy. Prior to the Sophists, Greek thinkers primarily asked basic questions about the nature of the cosmos. Finding many of their predecessors’ examinations to
be fruitless, the Sophists shifted the arena of investigation to that of human nature. Their teaching was oriented towards the everyday concerns of human living, not metaphysical speculations. Furthermore, along with Socrates, the Sophists had another historically significant role. In discussing human nature and ethical questions, the Sophists displaced the long-standing, mythical answers of the poets. By teaching a complete curriculum, including philosophy, the Sophists’ pedagogy put a priority on rational thinking.

Unlike Plato, who was arguably an absolutist (some Platonists differ on this point), the Sophists were ethical relativists. One of the most famous Sophists, Protagoras (ca.490-ca.420 BC), stated that humans are the measure of all things that are and that are not. It is not that Protagoras denied the existence of truth; he asserted that truth is abundant and diverse. Being such, Protagoras and the other Sophists concluded that truth is relative for persons within their own cultural community. The Sophists were drawn to this conclusion because they had traveled not only to many different Greek city-states with their own diverse customs and laws but also to the non-Greek world. Many had traveled to the western provinces of the Persian Empire and had witnessed thriving communities within a vast multi-national state. The Sophists made the pragmatic conclusion that what is beneficial for the community becomes the determination of truth.

While Plato and the Sophists were at odds regarding the nature of truth, they shared one very important commonality. They lived within the historical world of the Greek polis (city-state) system, and they adhered to its structure as basic in forming human nature. The same was true for Socrates and Aristotle. In fact, in the case of the former, Socrates was not prepared to escape Athens’ sentence of death upon himself, even when given the opportunity to leave. The
world of the Greek polis, wherein the citizen formed his individual nature within a close-knit community, ended with the conquests of Alexander the Great that occurred between 333 and 323 BC. The political legacy of Alexander’s military victories was a world of large contending kingdoms that had swallowed up the formerly autonomous city-states. The political legacy had a corresponding cultural legacy in that Greeks who had been provincially attached to their native city-state on the small Balkan Peninsula now became cosmopolitan itinerants in a complex and alien world. Many Greeks were lured from their native polis by the enticements of high salaries in the governmental bureaucracies of the post-Alexandrian kingdoms that stretched from the eastern Mediterranean Basin to central Asia. Plato’s Republic, which, politically speaking, was still centered on the city-state, was now outdated in the strange new world that appeared after Alexander’s conquests. In the post-Alexandrian world the autonomous city-states were subsumed by large kingdoms and subjected to the governance of state bureaucrats. Partly in response to these changes, new philosophies arose in what is termed the Hellenistic World; one of these was Stoicism.

Zeno (334-262 BC) of Citium in Cyprus, an island south of mainland Greece, is considered the founder of Stoicism. He was a youth when Alexander conquered most of the world known to the Greeks. During his early manhood Zeno migrated to Athens where he imbibed the various philosophies, especially Cynicism, taught in the city. Eventually, Zeno became a teacher, himself, and he gave his lectures along an arcade of painted columns, or stoa, from whence comes the name of this school of philosophy. Zeno was just one of many teachers to popularize Stoicism during the Hellenistic Era.
When Rome conquered the Mediterranean Basin, including Greece, many of the Roman governmental leaders adopted Stoicism as their philosophy. Marcus Aurelius, a Roman emperor during the second century AD, wrote books on Stoic philosophy. Stoicism, however, appealed to all classes of persons during the Roman Empire, even to slaves. Epictetus (ca.50-130 AD) is an example of a slave who adopted Stoicism. When he gained his freedom, he became a teacher of philosophy in the city of Rome. The essence of Stoicism is that it is best for the individual to live in accordance with Nature because Nature is governed by rationally intelligible principles. Stoics put a priority upon human reason, which they believed would enable the individual to make sound and sober judgments in a world of varied circumstances. Epictetus stated that an individual would obtain inner tranquility when he could distinguish what was in his power to affect and what was not. Once knowing to distinguish between the two, Epictetus advised that the individual should focus on the former and accept the consequences of the latter. For instance, since a person cannot avoid his own death, he should not spend a lifetime worrying about it. Stoics believed that there was no life after death and, upon one’s death, the person merely dissolved back into Nature.

Stoicism has had a tremendous impact in the Western World. During the centuries of the Roman Empire it was a belief system that rivaled Christianity. While some within the empire searched for a better life, especially one after death, others calmly accepted what they discerned to be the natural circumstances of human life. Moreover, the ethical emphasis upon performing one’s duty, which Stoicism prescribed, influenced the conduct of the early Christians. Even after the fall of the Roman Empire, Stoicism remained important. More than a millennium after Rome’s fall, European males of the upper classes were educated with the Classics, or Greco-
Roman literature. This was especially true of England’s public schools that produced the men who governed the British Empire with the so-called stiff upper lip, which is really a colloquialism meaning to do one’s prescribed duty. Today the dictionary meaning of stoic, with its emphasis upon the courageous acceptance of duty amid the vicissitudes of life, still carries the essence of the original philosophy.

**Select Bibliography**


By classical ethics we refer to the Greek and Roman tradition from Plato through roughly the Stoic period. One of the great debates in the classical Greek period was whether there was some standard of justice or whether humans are left to create their own values based either on individual fiat or the conventions of the city state in which one happens to live. Another issue of great importance was how to determine the complete or happy life of a human being. Is there a completeness or excellence (the Greek word is “arete”) proper to human nature, and if so, what is it? These are enduring questions.
Plato's dialogues raised many of the ethical issues that were to occupy the next two thousand four hundred years of ethical inquiry. In the following passage on the story of Gyge’s Ring, the interlocutors in the dialogue discuss whether being what we call moral is for weak people who are afraid of the legal system. Is it really in our interest to be just? Might it not be the case that the unjust have more fun? Imagine along with the interlocutors, that you too have found such a ring that could make you invisible. You could get away with anything you wanted without getting caught. Would you give up the facade of righteousness and take advantage of the ring's powers? Or would you continue as you are? Does justice really pay? Are just persons normally happy? Can an unjust person be happy? These questions are important to the person who asks why one should be moral at all.


Review questions:

1. What would you do with Gyge’s ring? If you don’t feel like answering this question about yourself, what do you think most people would do with such a ring?

2. What is the main argument that Glaucon defends with regard to the origin and nature of justice and the just life?

   Is morality for the powerless who cannot get away with doing whatever they want? Is the possession of Gyge’s Ring an illustration that we are moral only due to coercion? Or does being moral bring its own rewards? Why be moral in the first place? Plato has set up a challenge that
haunts us still today. In order to understand Plato's answer to this question, we need to know something about his theory of the human soul. In Book IV of the Republic, Plato offers an account of the soul that divides the soul into three parts: the rational, appetitive, and spirited parts.

Selected reading: From Republic, Book IV,(439a - 443b), by Plato.

The tripartite soul

Each part of the soul, for Plato, has a share in Eros (passion, love, desire). (1) The rational part, which guides and directs our activities, has its desire. (2) The spirited part of the soul, which gives us courage or cowardice, has its passion. And finally (3) the appetitive part of the soul, which desires food, sex, and pleasure in general, has its share of eros. Just as the state achieves a harmony when each part performs its function well (artisans, soldiers, and the philosopher kings), so too does the soul, when each of its parts performs its functions well (appetitive, spirited, and rational). When each part of the soul has the right measure of eros, no one part can lead the individual to excess. The goal is to strike the right balance. The soul is in harmony and the rational part directs the other two parts. This does not mean that reason becomes a dictator to the exclusion of appetite and spirit, only that reason gets to guide the direction in which our moderate appetite and spirit takes us. Such harmony in the soul is the same as happiness. And such harmony occurs when the rational part knows the standard of justice, that is, the eternal form of justice.

Again, a person whose soul is in harmony, where each part performs its function well, is just. Knowledge of justice begets being just, and this same person, by being just, has a soul in the right order, which is the very condition of happiness. Justice, Happiness, and Harmony
The bad person, by contrast, has a disharmony in the soul that precludes happiness. The party animal who drinks alcohol and smokes marijuana every night may have some happy moments, but is miserable in the end. The appetitive part, in this case, has too much *eros* and the balance in the soul is lost. Such persons are only hurting themselves. Hurting oneself or others is evil because it gives rise to an imbalance in the soul of the one who commits the evil. Since each person seeks happiness, only ignorant persons commit evil, harming themselves and putting happiness out of reach. No one knowingly does evil because no one seeks his or her own unhappiness. Evil, then, is due to ignorance.

There does not appear to be much room in Plato's view for moral weakness, that is, knowing the good but doing evil. The person who takes advantage of Gyge's Ring is ignorant of how much harm she is doing to herself. It is not strength and fearlessness and power that makes her take advantage of the Ring, but ignorance of the true end of human life: a soul in harmony, a just soul.

Although the proper education and the practice of justice play a role in the formation of a virtuous character, knowledge of the Form of justice arguably plays the major role in the choice of a just life. Aristotle, Plato's greatest student, argued that practice plays a major role in the formation of a virtuous character. For Aristotle, knowledge of goodness did not mean that one would act morally. A new concept of the weak will was introduced. In addition, it was no longer sufficient to know the good and do morally good things to be happy. The good life, for Aristotle also called for some degree of material well being, that is money, property and comfort.
The good life would then be an existence that is all it needs to be. Some may now call that contentment or tranquility. The point is that nothing is missing.

Review question:

1. What are the parts of the soul and their functions in Plato?
2. What is *eros*?
3. What is justice in the soul?

2.2 Aristotle: Practice makes virtuous

Aristotle’s ethics is clearly a virtue-oriented theory of morality. The Greek word “*arete,*” roughly translated “virtue,” literally means the excellence of a thing. Just as the excellence of a carpenter is to work wood well and produce beautiful or functional wooden objects, one can also determine the excellence of a person. What is the end or the good of human beings and how does one achieve this end? For Aristotle the end of human beings is happiness and happiness is an activity of the soul in accordance with *arete.* We are not born with moral virtue though we are born with the potential to develop virtue. Moral virtue comes about through practicing virtuous behavior, that is, through forming the right habits (*ethos*). As Aristotle remarks, “the virtues we get by first exercising them, as also happens in the case of the arts as well” and we therefore “become just by doing just acts” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. 1: Ch. 13, 1103a).

Aristotle’s ethics then, offers an account of how one identifies and forms the character traits that constitute the excellence of a human being.

Aristotle emphasized that one must practice moral behaviors that are in accordance with

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11 In fairness to Plato, early childhood education (gymnastics, music, and academic study) does play a role in
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the golden mean in order to develop a good disposition. The golden mean is the midpoint
between extremes. Thus the virtuous person would avoid cowardice and rashness, altruism and
stinginess. For Aristotle we are what we practice. It is not enough to know what is good and
evil. If it pains us to be just we are a long way off from virtue. We must learn, through practice,
to take pleasure in virtuous behavior. And this requires early childhood education as well as
repetition of virtuous behavior as adults. As Aristotle argues,

moral excellence is concerned with pleasures and pains; it is on account of pleasure that
we do bad things, and on account of pain that we abstain from noble ones. Hence we
ought to have been brought up in a particular way from our very youth, as Plato says, so
as both to delight in and to be pained by the things that we ought; for this is the right
education. (Nichomachean Ethics, Bk.II: Ch. 2, 1104b)

Through such “right education” one can build a virtuous character, that is, a character that
gladly applies the golden rule in social life.

Review questions:

1. Aristotle did not think knowing the good was sufficient for becoming good nor for
   attaining happiness. Explain the role of practice in becoming moral.

2. What is the practical rule for virtue?

2.3 The Sophists: moral relativism

In contrast to Plato and Aristotle, for whom there was a standard for moral virtue, the
early Greek Sophists (Protagoras, Gorgias, and others), contemporaries of Socrates and Plato,
rejected the notion that there was some absolute standard of morality. Each person is the measure of what is good for her so long as she thinks it is good. There is no eternal form of good by which she can compare two different points of view. The Sophists were paid tuition by the parents of Athenian youth to teach these youth how to succeed in the business of being a citizen in the city-state. The lessons may have included how to be persuasive, how to get and stay wealthy, and generally how to stay ahead. The debate between the Socratics, who believed in a moral standard or at least some sort of moral instinct, and the Sophists, who maintained that morality was relative to each person and culture, has raged for more than two thousand years.

Here arises the relativist's dilemma. If there is no absolute good, then how can I urge someone else to follow certain principles. Presumably, my own principles have no secure foundation in any objective standard of morality. Are my own principles, then, based only upon the values with which I was brought up by my parents and peers? Not necessarily, because I know that I do not have to act in accordance with the values of my parents and peers. Are my principles then, based merely upon my own feelings about certain things? If that is the case, then not only do moral principles have no basis in a rational standard, they have no basis in reason at all. In any case, I know that I do not have to submit to my feelings, that is, I do not have to act in accordance with what I feel about situations. Upon what then, do I base my decisions to act one way rather than another? Upon what then, do I ground my moral principles? Nothing at all. The point of relativism is that there is no ground beyond the point of view of each individual.
Tranquillity as the goal

The Stoics modified the Greek idea of happiness. The Stoics, like Aristotle, believed that happiness was derived from both knowledge and a certain sort of practice. The Stoic contribution was the emphasis on a distinction between knowledge of what occurs by nature and knowledge of that which is within our control. What occurs by nature is necessary and we should not get too emotionally involved in such events. What occurs by our own volition is contingent and we should pay most attention and concern ourselves with what is within our control. The *Manual of Epictetus* states:

> Of all existing things some are in our power, and others are not in our power. In our power are thought, impulse, will to get and will to avoid, and, in a word, everything which is in our power. Things not in our power include the body, property, reputation, office, and, in a word, everything which is not our own doing. (p. 468)

The adjustment of our attitude toward the world is arguably the key to tranquillity. For the Stoic, happiness is the tranquillity gained by detaching oneself from caring about things that are not within our control. Thus, we should not let dying upset us, or terrible disease or accidents, since these things are not in our control. We should worry about only those things that are in our control. This view involves adjusting one’s attitude in order to attain tranquillity about life no matter how difficult things get. This detachment became an affirmation of necessity. The *Manual* thus advises us to “ask not that events should happen as you will, but let your will be that events should happen as they do, and you shall have peace” (p. 470).

The Stoic ideal even applies to one’s own immediate family. The *Manual* advises one
not to expect that one’s loved ones will live forever: “It is silly to want your children and your
wife and your friends to live for ever, for that means that you want what is not in your control to
be in your control, and what is not your own to be yours” (p. 471). If one is a stoic, one expects
nature to take its course. One practices a state of detachment that frees one from strong passions.

Does this mean one should not get deeply upset about a death in the family?

The path to tranquillity requires the proper exercise of judgement. For the Stoic, what
makes the death of a loved one evoke grief is not the event itself, but the judgement one makes
about the event. By making the right kind of judgements about what is out of one’s control, one
avoids unpleasant feelings or strong passions. The goal is to make it through this life as a
spectator to one’s own existence, like an actor n a play. “Remember that you are an actor in a
play, and the Playwright chooses the manner of it” (p. 472).

Review questions:

1. Summarize the views of Epictetus. Focus on the distinction between things that are in
our control and things that are not in our control. What attitude ought we have toward things that
are not in our control in order to attain tranquillity?

2. In what sense were the Stoics absolutists? What was the source of the standard?

3. To the Stoic, what is the significance of the distinction between those things that are by nature
or necessary and things that are in our control?

4. Some philosophers felt that such tranquillity was a running away from passion and
authentic being-in-the-world. Who would not grieve at the death of a loved one or a terrible
incapacitating accident? Do you agree with Nietzsche on this point? Is feeling suffering OK?
Or should it be avoided as the Stoics claim?
3. The problem of evil

The problem of the origin of evil is both a philosophical and theological issue. Regardless of whether you believe in a moral, divinely ruled world order, the questions raised in a theological context are philosophically interesting. Is the good what it is because God wills it, or does God will something because it is good? The Platonic Socrates raises this question in the *Euthyphro*: “The point which I should first wish to understand is whether the pious or holy is beloved by the gods because it is holy, or holy because it is beloved by the gods.” What is at stake here is the very criterion of what constitutes the good. Is anything intrinsically good or is all good derived from the will or command of God? When I try to justify my moral beliefs, do I appeal to the authority of God or do I give reasons that are independent of this authority? Do I give up my autonomy as a moral agent by claiming that I act on authority and for no other reasons? Can mere obedience constitute a moral reason? Can we then ask why God wills one thing rather than another? If God has a reason, then is that reason the criteria of good?

I do not pretend to have the definitive answer to these questions. And again, I am not assuming that one must believe in God in order to enter into these questions. But if one did believe in a deity, how would one answer such questions. Raising these issues does help us to clarify what we mean when we say we have justifications for moral decisions.

Selected Reading: *Euthyphro*, by Plato.

Review questions:

1. What are the two trials about that are mentioned in the dialog?
2. Do you believe that the good is determined by the will of god or that there is an intrinsic good? Or maybe that there is no absolute good at all? Explain.

7.2 Saint Augustine: On evil

Historical Essay

Aurelius Augustine (354-430 AD) was born during the decline of the Roman Empire. Just before Augustine’s birth, Emperor Constantine, in 313, recognized Christianity as a legal religion, thereby, ending centuries of state persecution of the Church. During Augustine’s early adult years, a later emperor, in 380, in an effort to prop up the state, made Christianity the official religion. Shortly after this event, Augustine converted to Christianity and became the Bishop of Hippo in North Africa, at that time still a province in the Roman Empire. Eventually the Catholic Church canonized Augustine so this prominent historical figure who had lived at the end of Antiquity and the beginning of the Middle Ages is now most often referred to as St. Augustine.

Much of what is known of Augustine is derived from his autobiography, Confessions, a very remarkable book. Not only does it provide a detailed account of his life’s adventures, leading to his conversion, Confessions makes a statement about human nature in stark contrast to the one propounded in Classical Greece, especially by Socrates.

The teachings of some, but not all, Greek philosophers had nearly equated virtue with knowledge, meaning, that if a person knows what is right, he would do it. Augustine’s book shows that idea to be a much too simplistic view of human nature. Augustine’s Confessions presents a highly educated man who knew what was right but did not, and at times did not even
want to choose to, do what his understanding had determined was right. Again and again, his own self-confessions show that he deliberately chose to do wrong. Similar to Paul’s thinking in the New Testament, Augustine portrayed the human will as too weak to resist wrong and to act virtuously.

The problem, according to Augustine, is that human nature has been fundamentally flawed since the beginning of the human race. Although created sinless, the first humans, Adam and Eve, sinned and, according to Augustine, all humans since then have been corrupted. The belief that Augustine formulated regarding humanity’s fundamentally flawed human nature is called the doctrine of original sin. This notion, which posits humans as basically bad, has had a tremendous influence in the Western Heritage, especially during the Middle Ages. Even since the Enlightenment, which generally assigned a positive view of human nature, the notion that humans have been profoundly corrupted remains strong among very conservative Christians in the western World. During the Middle Ages, the Church assumed the vital role in mediating between woefully sinful humans and a holy God. Only God’s grace as administered through the sacraments by the clergy, not an enlightening education, could redeem humanity from its predilection to do evil. Even groups, like the Calvinists, which split from the Catholic Church during the Reformation, adhered to the doctrine of original sin. When the English Calvinists came to North America as Puritans, they established rigid social controls to keep in check what they considered was humanity’s natural propensity to do wrong.

Augustine lived long enough to see migratory groups from Asia, called barbarians by the civilized Romans, sack the major cities of the empire. In 410 the Visigoths sacked Rome and this event shocked many Romans. With the imperial city, including the seat of the papacy, in the
hands of the barbarians, many Romans thought that the end of the world had abruptly arrived.

To refute this belief, Augustine wrote *The City of God*. In this major work he presents a philosophy of history that borrows heavily from Plato’s theory of the Forms. Prior to becoming a Christian, Augustine had studied Platonic philosophy, and in *The City of God* as well as in many other books he wrote as a bishop, he synthesized Plato’s thought with Christian beliefs. Augustine argued that in reality there are two cities: the kingdom of God, which is eternal, and the many kingdoms on earth, like Rome, which are only temporal. God’s kingdom, Augustine stated, is unchanging, perfect, and true, while man’s kingdoms on earth are only poor reflections of God’s kingdom. Moreover, he concluded, the earthly kingdoms do not last, and what is important is for a person is to be a member of God’s kingdom.

Augustine died in 430 AD as the Vandals, Germanic warriors that had crossed into North Africa from Spain, besieged the city of Hippo. Forty-six years later, in 476, another band of Germanic warriors seized Rome and deposed the boy emperor. That date marks the fall of the Roman Empire in the West. While the Roman Empire, in the form of the Greek Byzantine Empire, continued on in the East, the date of 476 is often used to mark the end of Antiquity. Augustine was one of the last great thinkers of Antiquity as well as the thinker who shaped philosophy in Western Europe for the next thousand years.

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The second, related question focuses on the origin of evil. If, again, we assume a moral world order and an all good, infinite divine presence, how do we account for human acts of evil? Saint Augustine argues that there are not two separate principles in the universe (good and evil) but that evil is somehow a lack or falling away from good. Good, in a sense, is positive, whereas evil is negative or what Augustine, utilizing an Aristotelian concept, calls “privation.” Just as disease is a privation of health, moral evil is a privation of good. For this reason good can exist without evil but evil, since it has not positive being, requires the pre-existence of good.


Review questions:

1. For Augustine, what is the origin of evil?

2. Do you agree that evil does not have any positive existence? Is evil merely a lack of good?

3. Does Augustine’s explanation of evil account for the tragic events of September 11, 2001, suicide bombings, and other attacks around the world on non-combatants?
16. Early modern and nineteenth century ethical theories

16.1 David Hume: Moral sentiment

Hume argued that moral values are not matters of fact, nor are they derived from reasoning about relations between ideas. Morality, claimed Hume, is based on a universal moral sentiment. All of us feel pleased by and approve character traits and behaviors that promote utility (general welfare) and are adverse to and blame those traits and behaviors that cause harm. While different societies may develop different moral rules, these rules are nevertheless based upon the perception that they will bring about the overall welfare of the society.

Hume acknowledges that self-love is a powerful incentive to action, but insists that it is not the only incentive. We do not always do things just because they are in our own interest. Nor do we only praise those actions taken by others that promote our own interest. Moral sentiment, a sense of benevolence and humanity, is arguably present in all persons. And it provides a motive for praising virtue in others even when we are not directly benefited by their actions. Virtue, a mental quality, is determined by the universal approval of certain character traits, like honesty, justice, gratitude, and moderation.

Hume also argues that morality is not derived from reason, that is, there is no standard or rule for moral behaviors that one can derive merely from reflecting on one’s impressions and ideas. When I see a person come to the assistance of someone in need, I do not praise the good deed because the deed itself presents itself as good; rather, the deed is good because it evokes a certain sentiment in me. And the sort of deed that evokes this sentiment promotes utility (it benefits oneself or others). When you see an innocent person getting beat up, the evil in the action is derived from the repugnance you feel; evil is nowhere to be found in the impressions of
the beating itself. And for the person being beaten, evil is to be found in the pain of being beaten.

Morality boils down to feelings.

What role, then, does reason play? For Hume, once moral sentiment picks out what is praiseworthy and what is blameworthy, reason can determine the means for achieving desirable ends. Reason, however, does not provide the end. As Hume states, “Reason, being cool and disengaged, is not motive to action, and directs only the impulse received from appetite or inclination, by showing us the means of attaining happiness or avoiding misery.” If I desire to help someone get to the doctor’s office, I examine the present circumstances and deduce the best way to get to the doctor. Reason is the slave of the desire, it does not posit its own ends. We can never derive what we ought to do from what is; only after we feel a certain way about some course of action do we decide to pursue it and identify the means to that desired end.

What is ultimately praiseworthy is not the mere behavior that promotes utility, but the character behind the behavior, the moral virtue that begets moral behaviors. For Hume, our behavior serves as a sign of our motives, and it is the right kind of motive that makes us moral and praiseworthy. As Hume States in the Treatise:

‘Tis evident, that when we praise any actions, we regard only the motives that produced them, and consider the actions as signs or indications of certain principles in the mind and temper. The external performance has not merit. We must look within to find the moral quality. This we cannot do directly; and therefore fix our attention on actions, as on external signs. But these actions are still consider’d as signs; and the ultimate object of our praise and approbation is the motive, that produc’d them. (3.2.1.2)

The following two passages summarize Hume’s theory of morality. The first passage is
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported from a book dedicated to ethics, An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals (1751). Hume considered this work to be the best of his philosophical writings. The second passage is from A Treatise of Human Nature and focuses on the argument that reason is not the origin of moral values.


Review questions:

Summarize Hume's argument that reason is not the origin of moral values.

1. Why does Hume draw attention to the inference from is to ought? What importance does this move from is to ought have for moral theory?

2. Hume argues that moral sentiment is universal. Do you agree? Explain.

3. How do we determine that character traits and acts that promote utility are good?

16.2 John Stuart Mill: Utilitarianism

Historical Essay

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) is, perhaps, Britain’s premier example of nineteenth century classical liberalism. Some of that liberal heritage was based on the utilitarian principles that Mill advocated in his writings. During his lifetime Britain underwent some major transformations, such as industrialization and rapid urbanization. These changes, especially in the burgeoning cities, uprooted the Britons and their institutions from longstanding traditions that
conservatives, like Edmund Burke and Benjamin Disraeli (1803–1881), considered essential in preserving society. Liberals, like Mill, sought to replace many eroding traditions with utilitarianism. Today governmental leaders of western countries, including those in the United States, use the principles of utilitarianism to make policy decisions based on cost-benefit analysis of a given policy’s impact on the entire population.

Much of what is known about Mill’s early life is derived from his *Autobiography*. He was the oldest child of James and Harriet Burrow Mill. His father was an economist, a progressive liberal, the author of a history on India, and a friend of Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832). Bentham was a philosopher during the Enlightenment and the founder of utilitarianism. When Mill was three, his father, himself, undertook the direct education of his son, which included regular visits with Bentham, the study of the Greek language at age three, and no playtime with boys his own age. Before the young Mill was even a teenager, he had read extensively in history, studied thoroughly Aristotelian logic, and was familiar with the economic theories of Adam Smith and David Ricardo.

While much of this learning served Mill well later in life, as he became a prolific essayist on political economy, utilitarianism, logic, and liberal democracy, he suffered an emotional and mental crisis when he reached early manhood after having endured years of his father’s rigorous pedagogy. According to sentiments expressed in his *Autobiography*, Mill lamented the lack of emotion expressed by his father for him and his siblings, considered the mechanical nature of his education to limit the human personality, and worried about the lack of useful goals in his life. After about a year, Mill recovered, in part, due to his association with young political radicals from whom he received inspiration. Thereafter, he devoted much of his life to publishing essays,
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journal articles, and books on current issues of the day, including democracy and socialism, as
well as intellectual subjects, such as logic.

Mill’s most enduring legacy may be in the area of social ethics and political philosophy. His significant works in these areas include Considerations on Representative Government and the classic On Liberty. These books were published in England during what historians call the Victorian Equipoise when the political system, through a series of reform bills, was being transformed from an oligarchy to a democracy. In On Liberty Mill insightfully shows that the tyrannies of the past, the absolute monarchy and the authoritarian church, were no longer a threat to individual freedom in Britain. In the future Mill warned it would be “the tyranny of the majority” that would prove a danger to individual liberty. As Britain moved towards a mass democracy, Mill, in his writings, argued on behalf of a society open enough for disliked minority groups and unpopular opinions to exist. Familiar with and proud of England’s parliamentary system, he insisted that all views be given a judicious consideration in free debate. Mill revealed his liberal sentiments when he asserted that, after a thorough examination of all views, only the best ideas would be chosen. Such practices, at least according to middle class perceptions, did seem to prevail in Britain’s political system during the middle decades of the nineteenth century.

For a few years during the 1860s Mill had a brief political career in Parliament as a member of the Liberal Party, representing Westminster. As a parliamentarian with radically liberal views, he supported the North in the American Civil War, the expansion of the franchise in Britain, peasant ownership of land in Ireland, and the admission of the secular atheist, Charles Bradlaugh, to a seat in Parliament. During these years he also campaigned on behalf of women’s right to vote. In 1867 he helped to found the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies. In
Mill employed classical liberal arguments to demonstrate that the denial of women’s suffrage was a tyranny that infringed the individual liberties of half of Britain’s population. Mill’s parliamentary career, perhaps, to his personal satisfaction, was short, and he was not re-elected to his seat during the 1868 election.

Mill spent much time during his final years in Avignon, France where he had a cottage. Avignon had been the place of his wife’s death in 1858, and thereafter, he returned to his French residence regularly. Although their marriage consisted of only a few brief years, Mill acknowledged often that Harriet Hardy Mill had been profoundly important to him as a soul mate and an intellectual confidant. In 1873, a few days after a fifteen-mile walk to study the flora of the region, Mill died of a fever in his cottage at Avignon. His devoted stepdaughter, Helen, published his remaining works, such as Three Essays on Religion.

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Utilitarianism provides us with a standard for moral practice that seems to be derived from common sense morality: what is good is what makes the most people happy. For Jeremy Bentham (1748 - 1832), one of the founders of utilitarian ethical theory, what brings pleasure is good and what brings pain is bad. For utilitarians, morality involves the consideration of other persons’, and perhaps animals’, interests as well as one's own. What is morally good is what creates the greatest happiness for the greatest number. One could calculate the pros and cons of the probable consequences of one’s actions by weighing the pleasures and pains normally associated with such actions. The alternative with the least pain and most pleasure wins; it is what one ought to do. The principle of utility, simply, is the principle of happiness or pleasure.

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) developed this theory further by distinguishing between different sorts of pleasures, the intellectual ones being higher than the lower, brute pleasures. Nevertheless, the moral standard is the same. What is good is what will result in the most happiness for the greatest number of persons. One must do one’s best to calculate the consequences of one’s actions.

The following passage from John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism* focuses on the meaning of utility.


We can easily imagine the application of the utilitarian ethics to practical situations. If I must decide between allowing a boat full of Haitian refugees to dock on the coast of Florida, I can compare the suffering of the sick and starving refugees to the displeasure some Floridians
The pleasure of the persons whose lives are preserved arguably outweighs the pain of the Floridians. But what if 10,000 refugees made their way to the shore at the same time? Probably there are enough resources that Floridians still would not suffer so much in comparison to the suffering of 10,000 persons who might be turned back at sea or interned at Guantanamo in Cuba.

We can take our example a step further. What if the number of refugees increased to the hundreds of thousands? Such a scenario illustrates that at some point the tables turn and the scarcity and suffering for a significant number of Floridians becomes a reality. That is where the difficult decisions arise. The calculus of utility may result in asking other countries to assist in providing asylum to a number of refugees. If this does not work, the calculus may finally lead to denying assistance when such assistance results in the production, overall, of more misery.

Still another example is whether to build basketball courts or parking spaces in a neighborhood where there are few parking spaces and few opportunities for productive recreation. One would have to compare the pain of drivers who must walk several blocks from where they find parking to the happiness of children who could play basketball. Also, conversely, one would weigh the pain of lacking such courts with the happiness of drivers finding parking close to home. What would you choose?

Assuming you are a child or a driver won't help you make the decision. The utilitarian

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12 I am indebted to Peter Singer’s treatment of the refugee issue from the utilitarian point of view, in Practical Ethics, second edition, Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 247 – 263. The Haitian Refugee example is my own.
point of view only works if you consider other persons’ interests equally with your own. The equal consideration of interests means that everyone's pleasures and pains count. (Peter Singer, 1993, extends such consideration to animals.)

Imagine a world where you did not know your position in it. You stand outside the world like a divine spectator. You could be that child looking for something to do. Then again, you could be that adult looking for a parking space. And again, you could be an adult looking for a space who also likes to play basketball. Since you do not place yourself in anyone's shoes (or better yet, you place yourself in everyone’s shoes), you can give equal consideration to everyone's happiness. You might need some additional information, such as the number of persons who will profit from each scenario. Then you can perform your calculus. Of course this is not an exact science; ethics never is. But at least it gives us a tool for determining what is right and what is wrong.

Another example that illustrates the utilitarian standard is triage as it is employed in emergency rooms. Here the rule of service is not first come first served. Nor is it the raw numbers that count most. If there are five persons with minor ailments and one gun shot wound victim in the emergency room, it is better, from a utilitarian perspective, to let the five minor cases suffer in order to alleviate the suffering of the gun shot wound victim. It is true that the standard says “greatest happiness of the greatest number” but most utilitarians give greater weight to the first part of the formula. When weighing the overall amount of suffering we do not count heads but rather the degree and quality of suffering. We only count heads when all other things relevant to pleasure and pain are equal.
Review questions:

1. What does J. S. Mill argue are the only desirable ends? Why does Mill think this idea excites in many minds "inveterate dislike"?
2. How does Mill use differences between Human and Animal appetites to defend his view?
3. For Mill, what is the standard for determining the right thing to do? Do you agree? Why or why not?

16.3 Immanuel Kant: The categorical imperative

Kant is an absolutist because he argues that there is an absolute moral standard binding on all human beings. This moral standard is found by consulting our own rationality. In direct opposition to David Hume’s view, Kant asserts that Reason does provide us with a moral law that guides our moral practice. In order to understand this moral law, we first need to recall our study of Kant’s metaphysics and epistemology.

Recall that for Kant, the world that appears, the phenomenal world, is the result of the human manner of organizing experience. We only know reality as it appears (phenomenon), not as it is in-itself (noumenon). The noumenal world is the world as it is apart from the human way of knowing things. The noumenon is hidden from our view because to know something is to bring it through our filter, that is, the forms of space and time and the categories of understanding. We only have immediate access to the appearance of the world (the phenomenon).

Also recall that everything that comes to pass in the phenomenal world is subject to causal relations. Thus, the physical world is subject to the laws of Newtonian physics and the
inner mental world is subject to laws of empirical psychology. If human reality were subject to the laws of physics and empirical psychology, our behavior could, in principle, be explained in purely mechanistic and psychological terms. For Kant, however, every person is not merely an appearance, but is also a *noumenal* self. This noumenal self, however, cannot be known by human thinking. If we cannot know anything about this hidden self, why talk about it? That is a good question!

We talk about the noumenal world because it may provide the basis for human freedom. Although we are bound by the mechanisms of nature as phenomenal selves, Kant argues that as noumenal selves we are free. Unfortunately, we can only think about freedom in very vague or negative ways because the noumenon is not completely intelligible. At least we can claim, says Kant, that our ultimate moral character is formed free from determination by natural conditions.

The human will, for Kant, stands in between two sorts of ultimate incentives: sensuous incentives, grounded in the body, and a rational incentive, grounded in our rational nature. The will is free to choose its fundamental incentive. This freedom elevates the human being above the deterministic laws of nature. We are not complex automatons. Our behavior cannot be completely explained in terms of psychology.

In order to become a good person, we must act in accordance with the right incentive. If self-love, pleasure, happiness, or some other sensuous motive primarily guides us, we cannot be good. We are acting out of motives determined by our particular wants and needs. Kant calls the condition whereby one's will is determined by motivations based on desire and self-love heteronomy of the will.

If we free ourselves from heteronomy of the will, we are freed from the chains of our
particular desires and particular situation. What are we then free for? The human being who is free is free to act in accordance with her own law based on her own rational nature. If we subordinate our will to a law based upon our own reasoning capacity—the moral law—we are truly free from self-love. Kant calls such a state autonomy of the will.

If I help an elderly person burdened by groceries to cross the street, the act, considered in itself, is neither good nor evil. It is the intention that counts. What motivated me to help this person? If I offered assistance because I wanted a reward, it was not done in accordance with the moral law. If I offered assistance just because it was the right thing to do, I am on the right track. Let us go a bit deeper into this idea of doing something because it’s the right thing to do.

The autonomous will acts out of duty, that is, acts in accordance with the moral law just because it is the right thing to do and for no ulterior motive. Doing something that others praise as noble is not enough to determine personal merit, even if, as Hume argues, the character trait is universally praised. I may do the right things for the wrong reasons! And if I have good intentions but fail to realize them, I might still be good. The actual consequences of our actions are not morally very important for Kant. It is the intention that really counts.

What is the moral law? Just as reason when applied in the natural sciences seeks what is universal and thus searches for the laws of nature, so in social practice reason seeks those moral principles that can be universalized. If I am to choose a course of action, I must ask myself if this is the sort of thing I would will that all persons do. For example, if I decide to lie, I discover that should I universalize lying, everyone would lie and communication would certainly break down; indeed, I would be willing that I myself be lied to. So lying does not conform to the moral law. The moral law is most simply stated in the golden rule: do unto others as you would have
them do unto you. Kant's version is a bit more technical: "Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law." (Foundations, p. 39).

Kant calls this moral law a categorical imperative. It is imperative because one must heed its call. It is categorical in that there are no special conditions under which one must adopt this maxim. One is absolutely obligated to conform to the moral law. A hypothetical imperative is one with the form: if you want to achieve some goal ‘x’ then you must adopt this maxim. So, if I am not interested in the condition (achieving some goal ‘x’), I need not obey the maxim. A good person acts in accordance with the moral law out of duty, that is, just because it is the right thing to do.

The real struggle for the Kantian moral agent is to become good. How can I know if I am acting out of pure duty, that is, just because it is the right thing or out of self-love? I help someone get the baby carriage through a heavy door because I know it is the right thing to do, but I also get some pleasure from helping others and seeing a baby smile. For Kant this is no problem, so long as the motivation for the action was the moral law. It is OK to feel good about the very same action that was done out of duty, so long as feeling good was not the principle motivation for doing it. This reminds one of community service. If someone is sentenced to community service and helps children learn how to play baseball, does the element of coercion destroy the morality of the act? Have you ever done anything just because it was the right thing to do? Does the categorical imperative make sense to you as the standard of morality?

In the following passage from Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals, Kant zeros in on the good will. Search along with Kant for what constitutes a good will.
Selected reading: From *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals and What is Enlightenment?* (originally published in 1785), First Section, Transition from the common rational knowledge of morals to the philosophical, by Immanuel Kant.

Review Questions:

1. Describe the good will. What sort of person has a good will? Give concrete examples of the good will in action.

2. What is the highest practical vocation of Reason?

3. If nature had designed humans for survival only, what would have been the best means?

4. For an action to have genuine moral worth it must be done from duty, not inclination. Give some examples of moral behavior.

5. The will is free to be determined by either duty or the inclinations. Can we ever act from duty, that is, do something just because its good?

6. For Kant, how important is it to accomplish your intentions? What if you meant well, but did not succeed; how would this effect the moral worth of your failures?

16.4 Friedrich Nietzsche: Relativism

Kant’s ethics rehabilitated the concept of an absolute standard in response to Hume’s critique of both rational and religious standards. Kant elevates the human will above all psychological motivations into the free realm of the moral law.

The late nineteenth century German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 - 1900) launched a re-evaluation of all moral values by investigating the origins of morality. Nietzsche
claimed to have uncovered the links between all moralities and their a-moral origins—psychological and physiological causes. Behind every morality are these alleged a-moral conditions and motivations. Even Kant’s rational ethics were viewed as ultimately motivated by underlying psychological causes. Hear what Nietzsche has to say about Kant’s categorical imperative, which each of is supposed to recognize in ourselves:

What? You admire the categorical imperative within you? This “firmness” of your so-called moral judgement? This “unconditional” feeling that “here everyone must judge as I do”? Rather, admire your selfishness at this point. And the blindness, pettiness, and frugality of your selfishness. For it is selfish to experience one’s own judgment as a universal law; and this selfishness is blind, petty, and frugal because it betrays that you have not yet discovered yourself nor created for yourself an ideal of your own….(The Gay Science, section 335, p. 265)

The basic argument against following absolutes is that Individuals and peoples create their own ideals and values. In Nietzsche’s poetic masterpiece, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Nietzsche clearly identifies the Will to Power (life energy) as the force in human beings that expresses itself through the human creation of the values of good and evil. Every society expresses its will to power--to survive and create meaning--through its creation of value. In the following passage, “On the Thousand and One Goals,” Nietzsche explains why nations create values and set goals.

Selected reading: From Thus Spoke Zarathustra, “On the thousand and one goals,” in The Portable Nietzsche, by Fiedrich Nietzsche.
Notice that in *Zarathustra* each people creates its own law tables and posits god(s) to sanctify their “esteeming” (positing of values like good and evil, just and unjust, noble and base). The moral values of one nation may differ from those of another, because the experience and struggles of one nation might be different from the experience and struggles of another. The origin and source of this positing of good and evil is not a divine revelation. *People* create moral values. It is only after people create such values that they bring the divine into the picture. The claim that a divine revelation gives rise to certain moral rules is used to lend strong support to those rules. So the real genealogy of moral laws is arguably as follows:

1. A nation values certain things and codifies these values into laws.
2. Certain leaders declare that a higher authority, such as a God or Gods, ordained these laws or commandments.
3. The Gods sanctify those values that were originally the creation of human beings.

For Nietzsche, the belief in God had provided support for the whole of European morality. Obedience to moral conventions, on this view, depends upon faith in God. The use of the concept of the death of God was arguably Nietzsche’s way of announcing that the belief in the Christian God had become untenable, and thus the whole morality that rested upon it was about to break down. For Nietzsche, however, this event was a cause for “cheerfulness.” Those who are free spirits and who do not require a given moral standard would find a new cheerfulness in the death of God. In the *Gay Science*, Nietzsche describes the new freedom that arises with the death of God. Nietzsche declares that free spirits will feel:
...as if a new dawn shone on us; our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, premonitions, expectation. At long last the horizon appears free to us again, even if it should not be bright; at long last our ships may venture out again, venture out to face any danger; all the daring of the lover of knowledge is permitted again; the sea, our sea, lies open again; perhaps there has never yet been such an “open sea.” (The Gay Science, section 343, p. 280)

The “open sea” is an analogy for the opportunity to give meaning to our earthly existence, an existence that has no pre-assigned meaning. *Life has no meaning until human beings give it meaning.*

Review questions:

1. What is a slave versus a master type morality?

2. For Nietzsche, what is the origin of moral values?

3. What does the declaration “God is dead” mean for Nietzsche?

4. Compare Nietzsche’s notion that morality has an amoral foundation to Kant’s claim that there is a moral law.

5. Explain Nietzsche's critique of rational standards of morality.

6. For Nietzsche, what is really behind a nation’s laws and goals?

7. For Nietzsche, why is the belief in a god so critical to European morality? Is there a necessary link between ethics and religion? Does ethics depend on religion?
17. Contemporary Ethics

17.1 Jean-Paul Sartre: Existentialism and Human Freedom

Historical Essay

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) was the twentieth century philosopher who, along with Albert Camus (1913-1960), is most often associated with existentialism, a philosophy that became fashionable in Western Europe and North America. During Europe’s postwar recovery after the Second World War, Sartre became a celebrity, both as a philosopher and as a writer. This status continued into the 1960s when Sartre became involved as an anti-establishment icon in various student movements and as his existentialist writings became very popular among university students.

Sartre was born in Paris into a family with a strong academic background. On his mother’s side, Sartre was a younger relative of the famed theologian and missionary, Albert Schweitzer. Sartre’s father died when he was only a baby so he and his mother moved into his mother’s parents’ household. According to his autobiography, Sartre lived a pampered life as an only child, but that privileged life of being the center of attention was rudely disrupted when he began school. Sartre compensated for his small stature, frail frame, and cross-eyes by developing a quick wit and a sharp humor that eventually helped to make him popular, especially with women. At the Ecole Normale Superieure in Paris, where he studied philosophy, Sartre met his lifelong companion, Simone de Beauvoir. Sartre and de Beauvoir matriculated from the university with a first and seconding ranking, respectively.

During the tumultuous 1930s, when many intellectuals became politically active, Sartre lived an apolitical and relatively quiet life. For a few years he taught philosophy in France’s
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported secondary schools. It was at this stage of his life that Sartre began two things that would change his life: the writing of novels and an excessive use of drugs. In 1938 he published Nausea, which Sartre, in a 1975 interview, said was the best of his work. Just after Nausea was published, Sartre was drafted into the French army during the European war scare in the autumn. Twelve months later war erupted in Europe when Germany launched an invasion into Poland. In June 1940 the Germany army blitzed its way into France in a matter of a few weeks. Sartre was taken as a prisoner of war when the French surrendered to the Germans. For a year Sartre was in a German POW camp where he continued reading philosophy and writing plays. In 1941 Sartre either escaped or was released from the prison because of ill health (There is some discrepancy on this matter.) and he returned to Paris where he wrote and produced plays during the years of German occupation of France. Before the war had ended Sartre had already received considerable fame with his philosophical study, called Being and Nothingness, his play No Exit, and his journal, Modern Times.

While Allied liberation of the France during 1944-45 did not provide the French with political stability, it did bring considerable relief from the Nazi ordeal. This relief was expressed in an unplanned and, perhaps, unexpected euphoric outpouring on the night of October 25, 1945. The occasion was a public lecture, entitled “Existentialism is a Humanism,” by Sartre at the Salle des Centraux. Sartre arrived an hour late to a packed hall, where, outside, excited persons were milling about in the street waiting for him. That night he lectured eager listeners with a message about an individualistic freedom that requires committed action. This lecture made Sartre France’s intellectual celebrity and contributed to making existentialism the most popular philosophy, first, of Western Europe and, then, of North America. It was during the postwar
period that another existentialist writer, Albert Camus, was producing his highly acclaimed novels, such as *The Plague* and *The Rebel*.

By the mid 1950s Sartre’s popularity, according to the historian Paul Johnson, had waned slightly since the late 1940s, in part, due to his open support for the Soviet Union. While this communist state had often been defended by left wing European intellectuals in the past, that support was lost during the middle years of the decade when Soviet tanks brutally crushed popular uprisings against dictatorships in Eastern Europe and when Nikita Khrushchev, the premier of the USSR, revealed the extent of the crimes committed by the Soviet state under Joseph Stalin. Despite Sartre’s public criticisms of the Soviets’ slave labor camps and the Soviet invasion of Hungary, his public statements of support of Soviet communism cost him the loss of some friendships, including that with Camus. Despite some controversies regarding the Soviet Union, Sartre did receive considerable acclaim for his support of the Algerians in their war of national liberation against French imperialism. At the peril of his own safety—attempts were made on his life during the 1960s—Sartre condemned French imperialism.

Sartre continued his activism during the 1960s and 1970s. Throughout the world there were many youth movements against a manifold variety of injustices and oppressions. The 1950s and the 1960s constituted the period when many colonies had attained their independence from European rule. Out of former French Indo-China emerged two Vietnams, Cambodia, and Laos. During the 1960s and 1970s the United States fought an anti-communist war there, especially in Vietnam. Many young persons, and intellectuals, like Sartre, perceived the American action in Vietnam to be imperialistic and a crime against humanity. During the late 1960s students in Paris attempted to take over the university system in order to change the
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported system of higher education in France. The students sought common cause with French labor unions against what the students condemned as France’s authoritarian state under President Charles de’ Gaulle. Sartre supported the students in these endeavors. In these years Sartre asserted that he was looking for some form of “libertarian socialism.”

By the middle of the 1970s Sartre had reached his 70s, and he was becoming incapacitated from too many years of excessive drinking, use of drugs, and heavy cigarette smoking. He did not produce much writing anymore, but he did receive an occasional honor, such as a doctorate from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and in 1976 a film on his life was released in Paris. In March 1980 he was hospitalized for edema of the lungs. His life-long companion, Simone de Beauvoir, visited him regularly until he died on April 15. Four days later a funeral procession was held in his honor, and 50,000 lined the streets in commemoration of the famous French philosopher. After his death the Critique of Dialectical Reason was published. In this work Sartre develops a sociology that seeks to reconcile certain features of Marxism with his insistence that human reality transcends the very institutions to which it gives form and life.

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Although Sartre did not develop a complete ethical theory, his arguments for human freedom and responsibility are worthy of consideration in the theory of morality. For Sartre offers an account of the anguish involved in human choice. Like Nietzsche, Sartre saw human beings as the source of moral values. We cannot appeal to reason for moral standards, or to human nature, for we do not have a fully developed nature until we choose who we are. But even after we choose we cannot rely on past choices to solidify our principles and establish our character. For each moment provides another opportunity to choose. If I have been a good teacher and treated my students fairly, I cannot rest on my past actions; I must re-choose being a good teacher each morning. In the following essay, Sartre explains the basic features of the existentialist perspective.

Selection: From “Existentialism Is a Humanism,” by Jean-Paul Sartre.

Review Questions:

1. For Sartre, what does the notion that existence precedes essence mean?
2. If we are free in the Sartrean sense, then does following someone’s advice relieve us in any way of the burden of choice? Explain.
3. What is the source of value for Sartre?
4. Would Sartre accept the argument that we are generally determined by our unconscious drives to make the decisions we make? Explain.
17.2 John Rawls: Justice and the original position

Historical Essay

John Rawls (1921-2002) is an American philosopher whose two major works have focused on political philosophy with an emphasis on ethics. Rawls’ life spans much of one of the most tumultuous centuries in the history of humanity. Although spending most of his adult life as a professor of philosophy, Rawls did participate in one of that century’s immense events during the 1940s, and his participation in World War II did have a profound impact upon his philosophical writings.

He was born in Baltimore, Maryland into a prominent family. He began his education in the city’s school system, but soon traveled to Connecticut to attend a preparatory school called Kent. After he graduated in 1939, he entered Princeton University and completed his studies in 1943. His tour of duty took him to New Guinea (present day Indonesia), the Philippines, and Japan, which comprised much of the United States’ Asian theater of the Second World War. As an infantryman, Rawls saw, first hand, the atrocities committed by the Japanese army and he also witnessed the devastation caused by America’s atomic bombing of Hiroshima. In the aftermath of the Second World War, Rawls, like millions of others, became familiar with the genocide carried out by the Nazis during the early 1940s. According to his biographer, Thomas Nagel, Rawls’ acute and profound awareness of these atrocities and wartime horrors has impacted his philosophical arguments in developing the rationale of a liberal society, based upon the principles of justice.
During 1946, as the Truman Administration demobilized the military, Rawls left the army as a private in that year. During the postwar era he returned to Princeton University where he pursued a doctorate in philosophy, a degree he earned in 1950. One year earlier he had married Margaret Fox, who was a graduate of Brown University. For almost 50 years thereafter, Rawls began a teaching career in some of America’s premier universities. From the mid 1960s to the late 1990s he taught at Harvard University. In 1995 Rawls suffered his first of several strokes, which has since limited his academic output. He did, however, complete two works on political liberalism, *The Law of Peoples* and *Justice as Fairness*, during this time.

Rawls’ most famous work is *A Theory of Justice*, which was first published in 1971. This book appeared during a turbulent period in the history of the United States when many Americans were openly questioning the justice of institutions in American society and the nature of the government’s foreign policy in Southeast Asia. A variety of issues, such as the discriminatory nature of the draft, the aerial bombings of North Vietnam, legal racial segregation in many American cities, urban poverty, mandatory school busing, the conduct of the police, and abortion, were the causes for which millions protested. For many Americans it seemed that the ideals of the Republic at its founding, liberty and equality, no longer existed within the country. The publication of *A Theory of Justice* was an attempt to construct rationally the basis of a liberal democracy that preserved both individual liberty and social justice. The appearance of Rawls’ book inspired an immediate dialogue in political philosophy and ethics during the 1970s. In 1975 Rawls published *The Independence of Moral Theory* to address some of the criticism of the arguments in his earlier book. The public discourse that Rawls began over 25 years ago has continued, and in 1999 a second edition of *A Theory of Justice* was published.
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John Rawls is a Meritus Professor of Philosophy at Harvard University. His influential work, *A Theory of Justice*, offers a modern version of the contract theory of morality. A contract is an agreement between parties. In order to have a valid contract, the parties must enter freely into the agreement, have equal knowledge about the terms of the agreement, and refrain from misrepresentation. A contract theory of morality bridges the conceptual gap between a state of nature where anything goes and civil society where there are moral and legal conventions. Contract theory supposes some ideal agreement between rational decision-makers who leave the state of nature and enter into civil society with a certain set of rules or laws. Each party agrees to abide by the rules under certain conditions.

Was there an original state of nature in which humans agreed to some kind of original contract? Probably not. In any case, Rawls is not claiming that there was actually a time when humans agreed to enter into civil society. He is concerned to discover “the principles that free and rational persons concerned to further their own interests would accept in an initial position of equality as defining the fundamental terms of their association” (p. 10). In order to discover along with Rawls the principles of justice, we must perform a thought experiment wherein we
imagine that we, along with others, are ignorant of our particular place in society. We do not
know if we would be born with some disability or talent, nor do we know what anyone else’s
position would be. We know nothing about how advantages or disadvantages would be
distributed for it is precisely the rule for such distribution that must be decided. Rawls calls this
the “original position”:

No one knows his place in society, his class position or social status, nor does any one
know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence,
strength, and the like. I shall even assume that the parties do not know their conceptions
of the good or their special psychological propensities. The principles of justice are
chosen behind a veil of ignorance. This ensures that no one is advantaged or
disadvantaged in the choice of principles by the outcome of natural chance or the
contingency of social circumstances. (Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, p. 11)

What sort of basic principles for the ordering of society and the terms of association
would we employ as free and rational persons if we begin from this original position? Again,
Rawls does not claim that there ever was some historical moment when a group of persons had
such an opportunity. Yet by this abstraction Rawls argues that we can perhaps discover the
principles we would choose if we were in such a position. Rawls argues that if we consider
ourselves in the original position, we would first of all require that society guarantee “equality in
the assignment of basic rights and duties” (p. 13). Rawls is referring to political liberty, freedom
of speech and assembly, the right to own property and other liberties one finds in liberal
democracies.

Second, we would want social and economic inequalities to be distributed in such a way
that such distribution benefits everyone, especially the disadvantaged. Although Rawls suggests that justice requires equal opportunity, he also has no problem with a few of the more talented getting greater benefits so long as the least advantaged also benefit. It appears that Rawls thinks persons in the original position would want to ensure that the more talented have an incentive to go after the rewards that come with their contribution to society, but these rewards should not come at the expense of the least advantaged. As Rawls argues:

Those who have been favored by nature, whoever they are, may gain from their good fortune only on terms that improve the situation of those who have lost out. The naturally advantaged are not to gain merely because they are more gifted, but only to cover the costs of training and education and for using their endowments in ways that help the less fortunate as well. No one deserves his greater natural capacity nor merits a more favorable starting place in society. (p. 87).

For Rawls this second principle rates below the first. The first principle of justice, that everyone is guaranteed basic rights, cannot be subordinated to a scheme that would beget greater social goods at the expense of individual liberties. So for Rawls, schemes that trade liberties for social goods are not just.

Once we have established the principles of justice, we could then compare actual social relations and moral standards to those suggested by these principles. The original position may be used as an impartial vantage point from which one may judge actual civil society.

Review questions:
1. What purpose do the notions of the veil of ignorance and the original position serve?
2. What are the main principles of justice?
3. Compare Rawls’ theory of justice to Kant’s theory of the moral law.


5. Compare Rawls’ theory of justice to virtue ethics

17.3 Charlotte Bunch: Feminism and the global approach

Historical Essay

Charlotte Bunch (1944- ), renown as a writer, a feminist, and an activist, is currently a professor at Rutgers University in New Jersey. She earned her B.A. from Duke University in North Carolina and earned her doctorate in education and social change from the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, DC. After graduating from Duke, Bunch married but the marriage only lasted four years. In 1971 she divorced and then publicly declared her lesbianism.

Since the early 1970s Bunch has been an advocate of women’s issues and gay causes. In 1974 she founded *Quest: A Feminist Journal*. She has also published numerous books which include *Lesbianism and the Woman’s Movement*, *Learning Our Way: Essays in Feminist Education*, *International Feminism: Networking Against Female Sexual Slavery*, and *Passionate Politics: Feminist Theory in Action*. Aside from her academic activities, Bunch serves on the boards of Ms. Foundation for Women and the Women’s Division of the Human Rights Watch.

Bunch strongly believes that feminism is a “transformational” force and that it is necessary for people to begin to look at the world through women’s eyes. To achieve these ideals, she founded The Center for Women’s Global Leadership at Douglas College of Rutgers University, where she currently teaches. The center is an organization to advance the feminist perspective in policy making at the local, national, and international levels throughout the world.
It also takes a strong stand in support of sexual and reproductive health for women which includes, among other things, abortion as a woman’s right of choice.

In 1995 she along with many other western feminists attended the Conference on Human Rights, sponsored by the United Nations, in Beijing. Bunch and feminists from North America and Western Europe strongly supported women’s issues as well as the inclusion of gender and sexual orientation in a human rights agenda. This position caused a division among attendees at the conference. Representatives from Islamic states and Catholic countries, following Vatican leadership, opposed the feminist agenda, in part, because of the controversial abortion issue.

For over thirty years Bunch has made a determined contribution to promote a worldwide network in support of feminist and lesbian causes. For her contributions, Bunch, in October 1996, was inducted into the National Women’s Hall of Fall.

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A feminist perspective: Charlotte Bunch

In the following selection, Charlotte Bunch argues that feminists must be aware not only of the impact of gender on their perspective, but also the impact of race, class, and culture as well. Bunch also analyzes the patriarchal distrust and fear of persons who are different and
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argues for not mere toleration, but appreciation of diversity. This can only occur if we practice
putting ourselves in situations where we can understand the perspectives of others.

Selected reading: From "A Global Perspective on Feminist Ethics and Diversity," in
Explorations in Feminist Ethics: Theory and Practice, Susan Coultrap-McQuin and Eve

Review Questions:

1. What does Bunch mean by ethnocentric bias?

2. Why is it so important to learn from the experiences of others?


4. For Bunch, why is Ethics a critical part of politics?

5. How does a global feminist ethics approach the issue of diversity?

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the subfields however, differ somewhat from Audi’s presentation.

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III. METAPHYSICS AND PHILOSOPHY OF MIND


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