

The Ethics Workbook I: World History

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The Ethics Workbook I: World History

Introduction

Ethics is the study of how to know what's right and what's wrong. I'm sure you have noticed that there is usually disagreement about this, especially in complicated situations. Sometimes parents, schools or governments, make rules to make it clear what they think you should do in a certain situation, but even then we don't all agree that the rules are right. And besides, these rules can't possibly cover all of the possibilities.

This workbook will help you to learn how to decide for yourself what's right and what's wrong. To do this you're going to learn what people in the past have thought and said. Some of them were great thinkers and leaders, and some were ordinary people. We're only going to use their ideas to get **you** thinking and discussing what **you** think is right and why **you** think so.

The key is to participate in discussions with an open mind and to **figure it out for yourself**. Listen carefully to what others think and say so you can better decide what **you** think is right. That doesn't mean that you can't debate someone you disagree with, what it means is that you must listen to all sides **before** you settle on what you believe.

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Chapter One

Ancient Egypt

As a first step in our study of right and wrong, we are going to find out what kinds of things the Ancient Egyptians thought were good and bad. Then we're going to think about and discuss our opinions of what the Egyptians thought.

As you know, the ancient Egyptians believed strongly in a life after death. In order to get a deceased person ready for the afterlife, it was customary to embalm the body to preserve it in the form of a mummy. The body was treated chemically, and then wrapped with strips of linen. Woven into the linen were sheets of papyrus that had important writing on them. We know this writing today as the *Book of the Dead*. It is a very important document, which tells us a lot about what the ancient Egyptians believed. The *Book of the Dead* contained all of the instructions and magic spells needed to help the soul of the deceased get into the next life. Among the contents, was a list of confessions, which the dead person would make before the gods. We are going to study some of these, because they tell us what the ancient Egyptians thought was important.

We have put a few of the confessions into two groups. Each group represents a kind of behavior, which is viewed as either right or wrong. See if you can find any key difference between the kinds of behavior described in group one with the kinds of behavior described in group two? In other words, what do the things in each group have in common, and what is the big difference between the groups?

Group One

I have not defrauded the poor of their property.

I have not committed theft.

I have not killed man or woman.

Group Two

I have given bread to the hungry man,

and water to the thirsty man,

and clothes to the naked man...

Book of the Dead, Chapter 125 rewritten and simplified

Now see if you can complete the following sentences in a way that shows that you understand the differences between the groups.

1. The actions in group one are about different things, but they are really all the same because...

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2. The actions in group two are about different things, but they are really all the same because...

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These two thoughts are at the root of all ethical thinking. Try to write the two ideas in the form of rules for behavior by finishing the following sentences.

1. A person should try not to do things that...

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2. A person should try to do things that...

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But, like everything else in life, ethics isn't always that simple. Let's look at the *Book of the Dead* again where it says: **I have not committed theft. I have not killed man or woman.** *Is it always wrong to steal, or even to kill, someone? Think about this, and then write your thoughts down in the space below. This is a way for you to get ready for a class discussion of this question.*

Here are a couple of ideas to help you get started: 1. Do the circumstances surrounding an action change whether that action is right or wrong? In other words, could the same action be both right and wrong depending upon circumstances? 2. Does the person's intention, or in other words what the person is trying to do, or wants to do, determine if that action is right or wrong?

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What about the Book of the Dead when it says: **I have given bread to the hungry man, and water to the thirsty man?** *Is it always right to help others? In the space below, jot down your ideas about this, and get ready to talk about it.*

*Again, here are a couple of thoughts to help you. Does everyone **deserve** to be helped? Should we help **everyone**, or are there only certain people we should help? List your ideas in the space below.*

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Ma'at was a very important Egyptian goddess, often shown as twin girls who represented justice and truth. For the Ancient Egyptians this meant balance and order in the natural world. Anything that upset this balance was viewed as being bad because it caused trouble. This is a very interesting idea that we're going to think about. *Read the following lines from the Book of the Dead and see if you can explain in your own words how they show this idea.*

**I have not held back the water when it should flow.
I have not diverted the running water in the canal.
I have not put out a fire when it should burn.**

Book of the Dead, Chapter 125 rewritten and simplified

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Chapter Two

Hebrews

One of the greatest foundations for ethics is the *Old Testament of the Bible*. This writing comes to us from another ancient people, the Hebrews. The Hebrews were part of ancient Mesopotamian civilization. They lived at about the same time as the ancient Egyptians, but they had some very different ideas. Next, we're going to compare some of the lines from the first part of the *Old Testament*, called the *Book of Genesis*, to some things we have already read from the *Book of the Dead*.

And God said, let the earth bring forth living creatures, cattle and creeping things, and beasts of the earth.

And God said: Let us make people and let them rule over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth. And God blessed the people and said to them, multiply, and replenish the earth, and conquer it: and rule the fish of the sea, and the birds of the air, and every living thing that moves on the earth.

Genesis 1:24-28 shortened and simplified

What major difference can you see between the Egyptian and the Hebrew idea of the relationship of people to nature? Use the space below to outline your thoughts.

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As we continue to study ethics, we will see that there are two basic ways of looking at our relationship with the world around us. These two ideas have led to the growth of two very distinct kinds of ethical philosophies. The Hebrew idea that we read about in *Genesis* is very basic to our own western tradition. The Egyptian view is more basic to eastern philosophy. We'll learn more about this when we study China and India, but for now let's take a closer look at our own western culture, which begins with the Hebrews, and includes other Mesopotamian civilizations. Let's see if the Hebrews and the Egyptians agree or disagree about other ethical ideas.

Another book from the *Old Testament* is called the *Book of Deuteronomy*. It contains lots of rules that can be compared to the words in the *Book of the Dead*.

Honour your father and your mother.

Do not kill.

Do not steal.

Do not tell lies against your neighbor.

Deuteronomy 5:16-20 shortened and simplified

There seems to be much agreement, even in these two very different cultures, about the basics of right and wrong. *Find some comparisons between these rules and the rules we read from the Book of the Dead.*

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Notice something else about the way these rules are written. They are very strict. Read them again slowly: **Do not kill. Do not steal.** *What indication do you get that there are no "ands, ifs or buts" about them?*

In the space below tell if you believe that rules should be strict, and be strictly enforced. Try to think of some examples from your own personal experiences.

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Let's look now at what *Deuteronomy* says about doing good for others:

If there be among you a poor man, do not harden your heart, or turn away from your poor brother. Be generous to him, and lend him enough for his need. For the poor will always be with us: therefore I command you to be generous toward them.

Deuteronomy 5:7-11 shortened and simplified

Think about these rules requiring a person to help the poor. Are we obligated to help the poor, or are there circumstances under which we should help, and circumstances under which we should not help? For example is there a difference between helping a neighbor, or relative, and helping a stranger? Use the space below to prepare for a discussion.

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This opens the door to discussing the issue of special relationships to special people, and how they might alter a person's ethical obligations. *Read the part of Deuteronomy about parents again: **Honor your father and your mother.** What do you think this means?*

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If we read further in *Deuteronomy* we will find out what happens to a son who fails to follow this rule.

If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son, who will not obey his father, or his mother, then his father and his mother should bring him to the elders of his city. And they will say to the elders, our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey us. And all the men of the city will stone him with stones, and kill him.

Deuteronomy 21:18-21 shortened and simplified

What are the pros and cons of such strict and unbending rules? Try to think of some situations in which this kind of ethical standard might be good and necessary and then some situations where it might be bad. Jot down your thoughts so you can be better prepared to share your ideas with the class.

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Notice that, in the case of the rebellious son, the parents brought him before the elders of the city to decide how to deal with the problem. This introduces us to the idea of laws. *Think about the law for a minute. What do you think the law is, and why did it develop in early civilizations? Is using the law the best way to handle problems? Why is it good? Why isn't it good? Try to think through both sides of this, and make some notes on your key ideas.*

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The next lines give us a clue as to how the legal system worked for the Hebrews:

If there is a dispute between men, and they come before the judge, the judge will decide. If the wicked man deserves to be beaten, the judge will have him beaten according to his crime.

Deuteronomy 25:1-2 shortened and simplified

Compare this system with our own legal system. To what major similarities and major differences can you point? Make a list.

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Chapter Three

Ancient Mesopotamia

When you studied about ancient Mesopotamia you learned that the land between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates was the home of many civilizations. Among the most important of these was ancient Babylonia. Its capital, Babylon, was at one time considered to be the richest, most beautiful, and advanced city in the world. Hammurabi was king of Babylon and he is famous for issuing the first written code of laws. Hammurabi had his laws chiseled into a flat stone monument so that everyone would know exactly what the rules of Babylon were. We are going to study some of Hammurabi's laws, and carefully compare them to both the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* and to the *Old Testament*.

But, first we need to review the discussion we had about the difference between western and eastern ideas about how people relate to nature. *Take a few minutes to look back at the first part of Chapter Two and see if you can finish the following sentences:*

1. Ancient Egyptian ideas are basic to eastern philosophy because...

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2. Hebrew ideas are basic to western philosophy because...

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Now read some lines from Hammurabi's Code and write a paragraph telling if Hammurabi's Code is more western or eastern in its philosophy. Treat this like a test to see if you really understand.

If any one be too lazy to keep his dam in proper condition, and the dam breaks and all the fields are flooded, then shall he in whose dam the break occurred be sold for money, and the money shall replace the corn which he has caused to be ruined.

If he can't replace the corn, then he and his possessions will be divided among the farmers whose corn he has flooded.

If any one opens his ditches to water his crop, but is careless, and the water floods the field of his neighbor, then he will pay his neighbor corn for his loss.

If a man lets in the water, and the water overflows the plantation of his neighbor, he must pay ten gur of corn for every ten gan of land.

Hammurabi's Code 53-56 simplified

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Now let's do some more comparisons. Read the following rules from Hammurabi's Code and compare them to the Old Testament.

If a man puts out the eye of another man, his eye will be put out.

If he breaks another man's bone, his bone will be broken.

If he puts out the eye of a freed man, or breaks the bone of a freed man, he must pay one gold mina.

If he puts out the eye of a man's slave, or breaks the bone of a man's slave, he will pay one-half of its value. If a man knocks out the teeth of his equal, his teeth will be knocked out. If he knocks out the teeth of a freed man, he will pay one-third of a gold mina.

Hammurabi's Code 196-201 simplified

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We call what's happening in Hammurabi's Code a **relative** ethical standard because circumstances change the outcome. We have already begun to talk about this, and you have developed some views on it. We are going to talk about it some more.

What kinds of circumstances are changing the outcome here in Hammurabi's Code? Does this seem right or wrong to you?

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Hammurabi's Code is very different from the *Old Testament* in the way it applies the rules. Compare the following lines from Hammurabi's Code with similar lines from the *Old Testament*. *Look back at Chapter Two and compare them carefully. What's the difference?*

If after a judge tries a case, and presents his judgment in writing, an error appears in his decision, and it be through his own fault. Then he shall pay twelve times the fine set by him in the case; and he will be publicly removed from the judge's bench, and never again will he sit there to render judgment.

Hammurabi's Code 5 simplified

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Remember the importance of the family relationship in the *Old Testament* and the son who disobeyed his parents? Here is a similar case from Hammurabi's Code. *Compare the two.*

If a man wants to put his son out of his house, and declares before the judge, "I want to put my son out," then the judge will examine into his reasons. If the son is guilty of no great fault, for which he can rightfully be put out, the father will not put him out.

If he is guilty of a grave fault, the father must forgive him the first time; but if he is guilty of a grave fault a second time the father may put him out.

Hammurabi's Code 168-169 simplified

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This is a whole new idea in ethics. *See if you can figure out what it is. Finish the following sentence with one word.*

The rules must be _____.

See how this principle shows up again and again in Hammurabi's Code:

If a man is captured, and he has the means to buy his freedom, he will buy himself free; if he has nothing in his house with which to buy himself free, he will be bought free by the temple of his community, if there is nothing in the temple with which to buy him free, the

court will buy his freedom. His field, garden and house will not be given for the purchase of his freedom.

Hammurabi's Code 32 simplified

If anyone takes over a field to till it, and obtains no harvest from it, it must be proved that he did no work on the field before he must deliver to the owner of the field.

Hammurabi's Code 42 simplified

If anyone owes a debt for a loan, and a storm destroys the grain, or the harvest fail, or the grain does not grow for lack of water, he pays no rent for this year.

Hammurabi's Code 48 simplified

If a man marries a wife, and she be seized by disease, if he then wants to marry a second wife, he cannot put away his first wife, who has been attacked by disease. He must keep her in the house that he has built and support her so long as she lives.

Hammurabi's Code 148 simplified

In the space below write a short essay about what, being fair, means. Try to describe in your own words why it has been a cornerstone of ethical thinking since earliest times.

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We discussed briefly the idea of intent and whether that has any bearing on right and wrong.

Read the following from Hammurabi's Code and decide how Hammurabi would have answered that question.

If a builder builds a house for someone, and does not construct it properly, and the house, which he built, falls in and kills its owner, then the builder shall be put to death.

Hammurabi's Code 229 simplified

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Try to interpret the following lines.

**If a physician opens a tumor with an operating knife, and saves the eye, he will receive ten shekels in money.
If a physician opens a tumor with the operating knife, and the eye is lost, his hands will be cut off.**

Hammurabi's Code 215, 218 simplified

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Ethics workbook I: World History

Chapter Four

Ancient Greece

You have already learned that the ancient Greeks gave birth to the idea of democracy. They believed that a vote of the people was the best way to make and to enforce the laws. While we saw that earlier civilizations had kings like Hammurabi to hand down laws, and used judges to decide cases, the Greeks introduced juries who voted by majority rule. This was an important change and an improvement for most people. The Greeks believed that right and wrong were basically what the majority of people thought were right and wrong. This idea is called a *group ethic*, and it is still a big part of ethical thinking today. We're going to look carefully at both the up and the down sides of this.

One of the most famous Greeks was Socrates. Socrates was a teacher who lived in Athens during the height of Greek civilization. He had ideas and opinions with which the majority of Athenians disagreed, and he was accused of trying to overthrow the government by promoting his views with the young students of the city. Socrates was convicted by a jury and ordered to drink a cup of poison and die.

One of Socrates students was Plato. Plato wrote a famous account of the death of Socrates. His account was written as a kind of skit in which he tells what people said to each other. In order to make this conversation easier to understand it has been shortened and simplified.

There are two characters in the play: Socrates and his friend Crito. *First we'll read, or act out, the play and then we'll discuss some of the important ideas in it.*

Scene: A prison cell

While Socrates waits for the hour of his execution, his good friend Crito visits him.

Socrates: Why have you come so early Crito? What time is it anyway?

Crito: It's after sunrise.

Socrates: It's a wonder that they let you in. Why didn't you wake me up?

Crito: I was amazed at how peacefully you were sleeping, considering that you've been sentenced to death.

Socrates: At my age dying doesn't seem so bad. Why did you come Crito?

Crito: I came to convince you to take my advice and escape from here while you can. If you won't do it for yourself then do it for me. If you die, I will lose my best friend, and people will blame me for not saving you.

Socrates: Why should you care what people think or say?

Crito: You should know why best of anyone Socrates since it was the opinion of the majority that condemned you to die. And if you're worried that your friends will get into trouble by helping you, forget it. We'll have no problem paying off the right people. Just say the word and we'll smuggle you off to where you'll be safe. Listen to me, Socrates, you can't betray your friends, and your children and yourself by letting yourself die when you could so easily get away.

Socrates: You're a good friend Crito, but I don't see it the way you do. I don't care about the opinion of the majority, even if they can kill me.

Crito: But isn't that the point Socrates?

Socrates: Maybe so but that can't be the reason why I escape. I must know I am right in escaping. Will you help me think it through Crito?

Crito: I'll try.

Socrates: Would you agree with me when I say that we should do no wrong?

Crito: Yes, of course.

Socrates: If someone injures us should we try to injure him or her back?

Crito: No.

Socrates: Then we shouldn't try to pay evil back with evil?

Crito: No.

Socrates: Well we agree on everything so far. But that's not what most people would say is it?

Crito: True.

Socrates: Well then, it seems we shouldn't do what people want but what we hold to be right. Would you agree with that my friend?

Crito: Yes, we should do what we think is right.

Socrates: Then is it right for me to run away against the command of the law of Athens?

Crito: I don't know, I suppose it depends on if the law were just and the sentence fair, which you know they're not.

Socrates: Well what would be the result if people decided for themselves which laws to obey and which to disregard?

Crito: But the sentence is still unjust.

Socrates: All right then what about our rule that it's wrong to pay back evil with more evil? Would you want me to destroy my country to get revenge? Besides, when I agreed to live here in Athens and benefit from its laws, I also agreed to abide by those laws. I have clearly made a pact with the laws of Athens and I can't go back on my pledge. I will obey the law and I will gladly accept my fate.

Crito was speechless. As the fateful moment neared, other friends arrived to be with Socrates at the end. Suddenly the jailer appeared carrying a cup of deadly poison. He handed it to Socrates who calmly drank it. His friends began to cry, and Socrates asked them to be quiet and let him die in peace.

Socrates walked about until his legs began to fail and then he lay on his back. The man who gave him the poison pressed his foot hard and asked him if he could feel; he said no and the man said that when the poison reached the heart he would be dead.

Socrates: Crito, I owe a chicken to Asclepius, will you remember to pay the debt?

Crito: The debt will be paid. Is there anything else?

There was no answer to this question.

Let's think about and discuss some of the ideas in this play. First of all, do friends owe friends something? Is Crito right to worry that people expect him to help Socrates?

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Socrates says it's wrong to retaliate against someone who does you wrong. Compare this with Hammurabi's Code or the *Old Testament* where "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" were the rule. *Why is it natural to believe in the need to pay back equally for what you receive, good for good and bad for bad? What happens if you don't fight back against someone who hurts you? What if you never repay your friends for being loyal? But, why does Socrates disagree with this?*

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What is a feud or a vendetta? How does this kind of behavior lead to a never-ending cycle? What examples of feuds can you give? According to Socrates how do you break out of the feud-revenge cycle?

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Is it ever right to disobey the law? Socrates says no. Can you state his reasons in your own words? Do you agree?

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Socrates makes a big point of keeping his word and meeting his obligations. *Why does he think this is so important? What do you think about keeping one's word and meeting one's obligations?*

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We have studied a little about how ideas of right and wrong have developed in history, and how the idea of law has become established as a way for societies to enforce rules. At first a god or a king handed down these laws. The people had little or nothing to say about them. The Greeks decided that the laws should be made by the citizens of the state through the process of majority rule. This was a big advancement. For the Greeks, their laws were always right and moral because their definition of moral was anything the people customarily believed in or did. In other words, the Greeks believed that their laws were right, no matter what. This may seem hard to understand, but it's important. In fact, this is one of the big points Socrates was making. He believes that the law has a right to execute him, even if he's not guilty.

See if you can state in your own words why you think Socrates believed that he had to obey the law, even when the law was unjust.

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Socrates also opened the door to questioning the law, and to following one's own conscience, if it could be done without damaging the society. Another great Greek philosopher named Aristotle will take this idea a bit further. But before we get to him, let's look again at the traditional Greek idea about morality. Remember, we said that for the Greeks right was whatever the majority said was right. We named this idea a **group ethic**.

Think about this, and prepare for a discussion. How good an idea is this? What are its strengths? What are its drawbacks?

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Socrates says a lot about telling the truth, keeping your word, and being loyal to your friends. Most of us would agree that these are good to do, but, why? First let's figure out how the Greeks would answer this, and then we'll give our own views.

Greeks loved to tell stories. Most Greek stories had a moral or ethical point to them that the Greeks thought was important to understand, and to discuss. The story was intended to get people, particularly students, thinking and talking. One famous Greek storyteller was a man named Aesop who made up stories about animals that acted like humans. This kind of a story is called a fable. Next we're going to read, or listen to, some of these, and see what the moral lesson is. That part will be easy. Then we'll try to figure out why the Greeks believed it. That will be harder.

The Fox and the Rooster rewritten

As a hungry Fox trotted into a clearing in the woods, he spotted a rooster perched on a high tree branch. Thinking of a tasty meal, the Fox called to the bird and said "hello friend rooster have you heard the good news?"

"No" said of the rooster. "What is it?"

"All the animals have made a peace treaty, and have promised never to hurt each other again."

"What," said the rooster, "That's great!"

"Why don't you come down and celebrate with me?" asked the Fox.

Just then the Fox noticed that the rooster seemed to be looking intently off into the distance and asked: “what are you looking at?”

“Nothing much,” answered the sly rooster, “only a pack of hounds running this way very fast.”

“Oh no!” said the fox suddenly. “I just remembered something important and I have to go!”

“Why in such a rush friend fox?” said the rooster mockingly. “We’ll tell them about the new peace treaty, and you’ll be safe, you’ll see. “

But the fox ran as fast as he could and never looked back.

This story is obviously about lying, and what lying leads to. In what ways does this story show the same reasoning as Socrates used to explain why he wouldn’t break the laws of Athens?

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The Lion and the Mouse rewritten

One day a lion was sleeping soundly in his lair when a little mouse came along and thought he would have some fun. The mouse climbed up the lion's mane and danced on the lion's nose. As the big beast snored, his mouth opened and closed, and the mouse delighted in jumping back and forth across the dangerous gap. The happy little mouse didn't notice the lion's eye slowly open until he suddenly felt the huge teeth tighten around his little body.

“Please don't kill me.” pleaded the pitiful mouse. “If you let me go I'll never forget you and someday I will repay you.”

The lion was amused by the thought of this tiny mouse helping him, the king of beasts, but he admired the little animal's courage and gently put him down.

“You may go friend mouse, but next time be more careful where you play.”

Many years later when the lion was old and walking slowly in the forest, he was caught in a net some hunters had set up. The lion struggled all night with the thick ropes but couldn't get free, and as morning came he smelled the approaching hunters. Thinking he was doomed, the lion roared a mighty roar. Nearby, that very same mouse heard him roar and came running.

“Here's my chance!” thought the mouse as his sharp teeth gnawed through the thick strands of rope. Soon the lion was free, and the smiling mouse watched him disappear into the forest.

Write a short essay about this story. What was the lesson Aesop hoped people would take from it. There's more to the story than you might at first think. Try to get everything possible out of it.

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An important Greek philosopher named Aristotle added some new thoughts about how to know what is right and wrong. He actually wrote a book about it, and we're going to read some of it later. But since it's very long and difficult to understand, we'll start with a simplified summary of his key ideas.

Aristotle believed that every living thing wanted to be happy, and tried to do things which would lead to happiness. Aristotle thought it was good to do this, and, in the case of animals, it was basically all they did do. For example: a hungry lion tries to kill a gazelle and the gazelle tries to run away. This is good no matter how it turns out because it represents the natural way of these animals. Animals actually can't do wrong because they are ruled by instincts and don't really make choices about what they do. A good lion is good at killing gazelles, while a good gazelle is good at escaping lions.

It's different for people. People are ruled by reason, and they do make choices. What makes them human is this fact. Humans are above animals because they can control their emotions and instincts, and decide logically what to do. Aristotle believed that this was what made us human, and to be a good human you had to be good at it.

Aristotle based his ethical ideas more on doing what was right than on not doing what was wrong. He believed that to be good was the same as being excellent at what ever you are supposed to be excellent at, something like the lion and the gazelle. For example: if you are a good athlete you are skilled and successful in contests. If you are a good doctor you cure your patient's illness. But this was only part of it for people. People also must be good human beings. This means that people must exercise the characteristic which sets them above animals. That means being governed by reason, and not by instincts or emotions. When you do this, Aristotle said, you avoid the extremes of behavior and act in a moderate way. Aristotle believed that it was the extremes of behavior that were bad, and the middle choice was good. He called this kind of behavior a *virtue*. Everyone should learn to live by virtues. Only humans can achieve virtues because humans alone can choose what they do. In other words, being virtuous is being truly human. Neat argument isn't it?

Here's an example of how it works:

Aristotle says that courage is a human virtue because it is midway between the extremes of behavior that a human could choose when faced with danger. At one extreme a person could be **fool hardy** and daring at the other extreme a person could be **cowardly**. These two extremes are bad. The person should choose the middle and be **courageous**. Being courageous is a virtue.

For Aristotle being good means living according to all of the human virtues. **Generosity** is another virtue Aristotle thought good people possess. *Try to think of the bad behaviors at both ends of this scale. Think of some other virtues you think are good for humans to possess and what the bad extremes might be for them.*

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Let's consider one last point about virtues before we move on. Aristotle believed that virtues were learned through doing them over and over until they became a habit. People learn as children to do the right thing, and they could just as easily learn to do the wrong things. Upbringing and education were critical for Aristotle. *What do you think? Do children learn to do good or bad by making habits that are hard to break? Write down your thoughts in the space below and prepare for a general discussion of this.*

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Let's review briefly: *See if you can figure out what's new and different about Aristotle's idea of what makes something right and wrong.*

Hebrews: The God you believe in tells you what's right.

Hammurabi: The ruler of your country tells you what's right.

Socrates: The majority of citizen's in your country tell you what's right.

Aristotle:

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One of Aristotle's most important human virtues was friendship. His view of what real friendship is adds another big idea to our understanding of ethics.

Read from his book on ethics how important friends are to Aristotle.

**Friendship is a virtue that is necessary for life itself.
No one can live without friends, even money, power and
fame cannot replace having friends. In fact, the rich
and powerful need friends most of all.**

Nicomachean Ethics Book 8, Chapter 1 rewritten and simplified

Do you agree? Why do you think Aristotle thought having friends was so important? Write a short essay in the space below about what friends mean to you? Tell what you think true friendship is.

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Let's see if you agree with Aristotle about friendship. Aristotle says there are three kinds of friendship. One is true and lasting and the other two are false and fleeting. One of the false friendships is based on utility, or the idea of usefulness. People become friends in order to get something useful from each other. They sort of provide each other with a service. For example, a person without a car might become a friend with a person who had a car, but needs money for gas. This kind of friendship lasts only as long as it provides usefulness. Aristotle says old people often make this kind of friendship.

The second false friendship is based on pleasure. Two people become friends because they have fun together. For example, two people both like to swim, so they become friends and go to the beach together. Again this friendship lasts only as long as the fun lasts. Aristotle said young people fall into this kind of false friendship.

True friendship is lasting and is not based on what you personally get out of it, but on what your friend gets. One friend is rewarded by seeing the other friend happy. Sounds great, but how can it happen? Well, Aristotle says that it can't happen unless the two people can really identify with each other and for this to occur certain conditions must be met.

Let's see if we can understand his reasoning, and if we agree with his conclusions, by reading some more of his book. We've condensed and reorganized it a little, and simplified some of the words to make it easier to understand.

Perfect friendship happens between people who are good and alike in their virtue. People who wish their friends well for their sake, and not because they themselves will get something out of it, are the truest friends.

Nicomachean Ethics Book 8, Chapter 3 paraphrase

Of course these friendships don't happen very often because most people are not capable of it. They also require time to develop. To be true friends, two people have to really know each other well, and they have to trust each other completely.

Nicomachean Ethics Book 8, Chapter 4 paraphrase

This type of friendship is perfect in all ways because each gets exactly what is given. This striving for equality is why only the good can be true friends, since the bad always seek some advantage which is inequality.

Nicomachean Ethics Book 8, Chapter 7 paraphrase

This becomes clear when we consider two people who are vastly unequal either in virtue, wealth or anything else. They can never be true friends. In fact they don't even expect to be friends. Kings are not friends with

Ethics Workbook I: World History

Chapter 5

Ancient China

Now we are going to trace the idea of virtues from Greece across the world to China, and learn about a famous philosopher named Confucius. Confucius lived even longer ago than Socrates and Aristotle, and he was a teacher who had a lot to say about right and wrong. Remember that eastern civilizations like Egypt stressed balance between humans and the world around them. People were not expected to control nature, but to live in harmony with it. Keep this idea constantly in mind.

When Confucius was growing up, China was a dangerous and unpredictable country. It was very violent and governments were corrupt. Confucius was worried about how people could live safe and happy lives, and like Socrates and Aristotle, Confucius believed that good government was the key.

Confucius loved formality, and what he called propriety. He believed that people should be polite to each other, and should be treated with respect. This rule was the most important one people could live by. All human relationships had rules of propriety or a formal code of behavior that dictated the roles people must play. How a father should act toward his son, for example, or how a younger friend should behave toward an older friend were all mapped out by Confucius. To go against this would be to upset the balance of nature. This idea is very typically Eastern in its way of looking at life. Confucius's ideas became very influential in China and all over Asia. He wrote a set of rules for people to live by that was supposed to result in a well ordered, stable and happy society.

Let's see if we can figure out, from some of Confucius's words, more about what he believed in and then compare his ideas with the ideas of Socrates and Aristotle. This will be a good way to better understand the society Confucius was trying to create, and to decide what we think about it.

The duke asked Confucius about government. Confucius replied, “there is government, when the Prince is Prince, and the minister is minister; when the father is father, and the son is the son.”

Confucius, Analects

Here's that part about roles that we just mentioned. Think about this idea. Do people play roles in life? How important is it to play the part you're supposed to play? See if you can give an example.

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Here is more of what Confucius has to say:

A man asked the master what was the first thing to consider when establishing a government and the master replied, “ names.”

If names are not correct, language is not in accordance with the truth. If language be not in accordance with the truth, affairs. cannot be carried on to success.

When affairs cannot be carried on to success, proprieties ... do not flourish. When proprieties do not flourish, punishments will not be properly given. When punishments are not properly given, the people do not know how to move hand or foot.

Confucius, Analects

Now here’s the part about formality and politeness. How important do you think it is to be polite and respectful? What good does it do? What about names? Is it important what people call each other?

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But that's not all there is in this quote. There are definitely clues about the kind of government Confucius was thinking about, and also about his opinion of average people. *Write a short statement telling what you can learn about Confucius from what you've read so far.*

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Confucius's view of the role of the people in government is certainly different from that of the ancient Greeks. Let's look more carefully at some more of what Confucius had to say.

Draw some conclusions from each of the following statements.

Confucius said, "those who are born with the possession of knowledge are the highest class of people. Those who learn, and so readily get possession of knowledge are the next. Those who are dull and stupid, and yet can learn, are another class next to these. Those who are dull and stupid and do not learn; they are the lowest of the people."

The master said, "people may be made to follow a path of action, but they may not be made to understand it."

The relation between superiors and inferiors is like that between the wind and the grass; the grass must bend, when the wind blows across it.

Confucius, Analects

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From all of this you might conclude that Confucius believed that government must rely on raw power to maintain order. But this is too simple. Remember, Confucius was a great philosopher who studied right and wrong, and he was seeking a lasting way for all people to be happy. *If you believe, as Confucius did, that people are vastly unequal in all respects, what sort of system do you think would promote peace and harmony? See if you can predict Confucius's answer.*

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A man asked about government and the master said, “the requisites of government are that there be enough food, enough military equipment, and the confidence of the people in their ruler.” The man said: “if it cannot be helped and one of these must be lost, which of the three should be given up first?” “The military equipment,” said the master.

The man asked again, “if it cannot be helped, and one of the remaining two must be lost, which of them should be given up?” The master said, “part with the food. People die; but if the people have no faith in their rulers, the state itself will die.”

Confucius, Analects

Knowing what you do about Confucius's view of average people, why do you think he believed that the ruler needed their approval? Think about the eastern way of looking at things.

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Confucius believed that certain superior people should lead society by example. They should serve in government, and provide the leadership society needs. To be successful these superior people must be virtuous, and act with propriety.

The master said, “he who exercises government by means of his virtue may be compared to the North Pole Star, which keeps its place and all the stars turn towards it.”

Confucius, Analects

What virtue do you think Confucius saw in this kind of behavior?

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There are three principles of conduct which the man of high rank should follow: that in his words and actions he keeps from violence; and he be sincere; and that he avoid bad language.

Confucius, Analects

How important is it for government officials to set a good example? What about other role models, like athletes and entertainers, do they have any influence? Do you agree with Confucius that people are generally molded by what they see and hear?

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**The Master said, ‘if the people be led by laws, which rely on punishments, they will try to avoid the punishments, but have no sense of shame.’
If they be led by virtue, and by the rules of propriety, they will have the sense of shame, and moreover will become good.**

Confucius, Analects

The superior people display great virtues and lead by example. This sounds a lot like Aristotle doesn't it? *Read each of the following quotes from Confucius and explain why you think Socrates or Aristotle would agree or disagree. Treat this like a test. Be as specific as you can. Try to quote something directly from Socrates or Aristotle in your answer.*

The master said, “perfect virtue is according to the constant mean!”

Confucius, Analects

Who does this sound like? Remember, be specific.

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The master said, “by nature, men are nearly alike; by practice, they get to be wide apart.”

Confucius, Analects

What would Aristotle say?

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“What is called a great minister, is one who serves his prince according to what is right, and when he finds he cannot do so, retires.”

Confucius, Analects

Does this sound like Socrates? What do you think?

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Chinese Tales

Folk stories, tales and fables are a way to teach moral lessons. You already read some fables from ancient Greece by Aesop. *See if you can figure out the message in the following tales from ancient China.*

That's True

Two men who had been arguing asked Confucius to settle the dispute.

“We disagree about whether the sun is closer to us at dawn or at noon. I say the sun is nearer to us at dawn,” one man said, “because when it comes up over the horizon it's much bigger than it is when it's overhead at noon. Everyone knows that a thing looks smaller when it's further away.”

“True,” said Confucius.

“Wait a minute,” the other man said, “I say it's closer at noon because when it first comes up, at dawn, it's cool compared to how hot it is at noon. Everyone knows a hot object feels hotter when you get closer to it.”

“That's true too,” said Confucius. “I guess I can't help you with this.”

Liezi, rewritten

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A Perfect Fit

A man needed a new pair of shoes and wanted them to fit perfectly, so he measured his feet very carefully, writing down the length, width, height and circumference. He even checked his arch and the distance between his ankle and his heel.

Later that day when he stopped at the store to buy the shoes he realized that he had forgotten the paper with the measurements on it.

“I can't buy shoes today,” he told the shoemaker. “How will I know if they will fit?”

“Why don't you try them on?” the shoemaker said.

“I wouldn't dare trust that!” the man answered.

Hanfeizi, rewritten

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Ghosts

One day a man asked a great painter what the hardest thing was to paint.

“People, faces, people's pets, anything very common, and familiar,” he answered.

“What's the easiest thing to paint then?” was the next question.

“Ghosts,” the painter said.

“Why so?” the man asked.

“Because they have no shape,” the painter explained, “they’re invisible, and no one has ever seen one. They’re very easy to paint.”

Hanfeizi, rewritten

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Ethics Workbook I: World History

Chapter 6

Ancient India

This idea that harmony can only be maintained in a society where everyone carries out his or her duty was also basic to ancient India. Remember, eastern cultures stress that life is interrelated, and that people are not superior to other living things. This blending of people, animals and gods into a single coexistence is typical of Indian culture. If a person acts in a way that is contrary to his or her rightful role in life, the delicate balance of nature would be affected. A good way to think about this is to imagine life to be like a band playing a song. When every musician plays the right notes at the right time, beautiful music results. But this only works if everyone cooperates and coordinates. Playing your notes at the right time is your *dharma*. In fact, in the case of important people, like princes and kings, great national catastrophes such as floods or droughts might occur if they don't do their *dharma*. This duty to play your part is very important in India.

Indian people like to tell the story of a prince named Rama who lived even before Confucius. This tale is called the *Ramayana*, and it provided lessons for Indian children. Rama was the model for boys to follow, and his beautiful bride, Sita, was the model for girls.

Like Aesop's fables, the *Ramayana* was told and retold countless times and exists in many versions. We're going to retell some of the story. Your job will be to figure out from it what some of the duties of the characters were by analyzing their actions. In other words, what was their *dharma*, and would you have acted the same way.

As you read or listen to the Ramayana make some notes on the following key characters. Each of them does his or her dharma all of the time. See if you can describe in your own words what each one's dharma is. Also think about your opinion of their decisions.

Rama

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Sita

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Dasaratha

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Lakshmana

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Bharata

Ramayana
rewritten segment

Long ago there was a peaceful and happy Kingdom named Kosala. The people of Kosala always did their dharma. Kosala, which was ruled by a wise king named Dasaratha, was protected by walls and moats, and was not threatened by the demons that ravaged the countryside around them. The ruler of these demons was Ravana, the vicious king of Lanka, who had magic powers which made it impossible for any human to kill him. The god Vishnu, who protected the universe, got tired of Ravana's evil ways and decided to destroy him.

To do this, he needed to take on a human form, and was reborn as Desaratha's eldest son, Rama. Acting through Rama, Vishnu planned to end the murderous career of the evil king.

Rama was strong and handsome with all of the qualities of a great prince. He, and his brother Lakshmana, often ventured into the lawless land around Kosala to fight Ravana's demons and protect the people. One day the two brave brothers went deep into the forest until they reached of the land of King Janaka, whose daughter, Sita, was known far and wide for her beauty and grace.

"You have heard," said King Janaka, "that the man who marries my daughter must be a prince of the perfect virtue? I believe you might be that prince."

Rama smiled, thinking of the beautiful Sita and the honor of having her as his bride.

"The test is this," challenged Janaka. "Only the strongest and most righteous young man can lift and string the mighty bow of Shiva. This test will tell if you are to marry Sita."

Sita watched from her throne as Rama waited in a huge assembly hall while a thousand warriors dragged the huge bow forward. She loved the handsome prince at first sight, and when their eyes met she knew he loved her too. Everyone but Sita was stunned as Rama easily lifted the bow and strung it. She knew that the gods had brought them together. The people chanted, "Rama, Rama, Rama," and the wedding ceremony was held immediately.

The same chant echoed everywhere when Rama returned to Kosala with his bride. Rama and Sita were deeply in love and they were incredibly happy. Old king Darsaratha saw this and decided to retire. "I will leave my crown and my kingdom to you Rama and your bride Sita," he told his son. But when he told this to his third wife, who was Rama's stepmother, she was not pleased.

"Why are you angry," asked Dasaratha, "Is it not my duty to retire when my eldest son is ready to become"

king?" The queen, who wanted her own son to possess the throne said: "do you remember a solemn oath you swore to me when I saved your life many years ago? You said you would grant me any two wishes. Do you remember?"

"Yes," the king answered.

"Well here are my wishes. First you will declare my son, Bharata, to be king, even though he is the youngest, and then you will banish Rama into the forest for fourteen years."

"Please don't hold me to this," the King pleaded. But the queen did not listen.

The sad king could not go back on his word, and so he told Rama that he had changed his mind; Rama would not be king, and he must leave Kosala at once.

Rama looked into his father's eyes and said, "yes father." As he turned to leave, his brother Lakshmana said: "I will stand by your side, and we will take this throne by force."

"No," answered Rama. "I must do as father said."

"I will go with you then," said Lakshmana, "but Sita must remain here where it's safe."

"Yes," said Rama.

"No!" cried Sita, her eyes filled with tears, "I will go wherever you go, forever and always!"

"Stop," cried Bharata. "I should not be king, you are the true king, come back."

"I cannot," said Rama "I will keep my word, I am banished for fourteen years."

"I will set your sandals on the throne so the people will know that you are the true king, and I will rule only in your name until you return," said Bharata.

And so Rama and Sita and Lakshmana walked sadly into the forest.

Now, the evil king knew that the three were in the forest and he used his magic to lure Rama and his brother away while he kidnapped Sita, and brought her to his castle. He tried every trick he knew to fool Sita into thinking Rama was dead. He wanted the beautiful princess to fall in love with him and be his bride. But she did not fall for his tricks and remained true to her beloved Rama.

Meanwhile, to free Sita, Rama and his brother made a plan to attack Ravana's stronghold. Rama knew that Ravana and his demons were protected by the gods, and could not be killed by humans, so he made an alliance with the monkey king, Hanuman, and invaded Ravana's kingdom with an army of monkeys. Rama and Lakshmana and the monkey army fought many bloody battles with the ferocious demons. Ravana used all of his magic spells to defeat Rama, but in the end Rama was invincible and, using a magic arrow, he killed Ravana. Standing over the dead body of his evil enemy he said, "I order an honorable burial for Ravana, for though he was evil, he is now dead and death erases all enemies. He is now my brother, and deserves an honorable funeral."

Sita, dressed in a silken gown, and looking more beautiful than ever, ran into Rama's arms; the two lovers cried with joy. They were together again at last and the long years of exile had passed.

But when they returned to Kosala, Rama sensed that something was wrong. "Why aren't the people happy?" he asked his brother.

"The people believe that Sita is bringing disgrace to Kosala," said Lakshmana

"But why?" asked Rama.

"They believe that she has lost her virtue because she lived with Ravana. No one understands how you can take her back after she lived with another man."

“But she was faithful,” Rama replied. “These are lies, all lies.”

“Yes, but everyone believes them, and you know you can't allow this to go on,” said the prince's brother.

Rama thought for a long time before he made his decision. “Take Sita into the forest and leave her.”

“But she will surely die!” protested Lakshmana.

Rama only nodded and said, “do as I say.”

The following day it rained, and fog covered the land. Lakshmana brought Sita into the forest.

“Why must this be?” cried Sita.

Tears ran across Lakshmana's face as he turned to go. “You may return to Rama only by leaving him now.”

Review your notes and prepare to discuss each character's dharma.

Why does Rama send Sita off when he obviously loves her very much? What more important value was being served? Review the section on Confucius and see if you can find any lines that express the same ethical view. How does this fit your understanding of “eastern” philosophy?

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Ethics Workbook I: World History

Chapter 7

Ancient Rome

The most important ethical philosophy that came from ancient Rome was called Stoicism. It influenced all later ethical thinking and added some very big new ideas about where the law comes from. Let's review briefly. Remember how Socrates believed the law came from the people and refused to disobey the will of the people even when it resulted in his own execution? Now, the problem with this is that if you believe the law is whatever the people say it is, there is no such thing as an unjust law, as Socrates found out. This was an area where the Stoics added something significant called *natural law*. We'll study this in more detail later, but for now, let's find out more about what the Stoics believed in generally.

In the first place, they were practical. They wanted to live effective happy lives in the real everyday world. One of the leading Stoics was a man named Epictetus who wrote a "handbook" for life. According to Epictetus, the first lesson to learn is to distinguish between things, which are within our control, and things which are not.

Some things are in our power and some are not. What are in our power are our desires, thoughts and actions. Not in our power are the actions and opinions of others. Pay attention only to what's in your power. If it's not in your power, don't be concerned with it.

Arrian, Handbook of Epictetus

Stoics believed that a person should be indifferent to anything he or she can't influence. What kinds of things are, and are not, in our power?

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Actions are not a problem for people, but opinions about them are. For example, death is not bad, but the opinion that death is bad, that's what's bad.

Arrian, Manual of Epictetus

Is this true? Can you give any examples from your own experiences?

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In order to live a happy and fulfilling life, the Stoics say it is necessary to stop worrying about things that are beyond our control. "Don't cry over spilled milk." This is typical, practical common sense stoic advice. If you can't change it, such as the past, forget it. But, Stoicism isn't about indifference; it's about involvement, because if you realize that only a few things are really in your power, you know, as the Stoics did, that you must be good at controlling those.

What do you think Epictetus is meant by the following advice?

Do you want to win the Olympics? Me too. It would be fantastic. But before you begin, consider this: you must be disciplined, eat carefully, and stay away from sweets and exercise regularly even when you don't want to, in heat and cold, without water or wine. You must follow strict training rules, and face serious injury and defeat. Having considered this, if you still want to, go for it; or you can turn your back like a child, and play at this and that.

Arrian, Manual of Epictetus

What is Epictetus trying to say here? What kind of a person do you think a Stoic is? Do you know anyone who acts like this? Give some specific examples.

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So you see, Stoics take things very seriously, and accept responsibility for their lives. They believe that they must act decisively wherever they can, since most of life is beyond their control. Even Roman emperors, such as Marcus Aurelius, were Stoics. Here are some of the things Marcus Aurelius said in his writings.

Think about how fast things pass by and disappear. Reality is like a river, constantly flowing and constantly changing. Hardly anything stands still. Only fools stake their happiness on such things.

Think about how you will soon be nobody and nowhere, and all the things, and all the people you know will no longer exist. All things perish to be replaced by new things.

Think about where you are standing, between two huge voids, the past and the future, into which everything disappears.

Marcus Aurelius, Meditations

These are powerful words by Marcus Aurelius. Do you concentrate too much on what's passed, or dream too much about what's coming, to be happy now?

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The next quotation from Marcus Aurelius is particularly important because it introduces us to that very big idea that Stoics had, the idea that the law is not something handed down to us, but is a part of the nature of things.

When you get up in the morning, and you don't want to, think about this. I am rising to do the work of a human being. Why wouldn't I want to do the things I was by nature intended to do? Or, maybe I was made to lie in bed and accomplish nothing? Can you look at the bees and ants, spiders and birds working diligently at their natural tasks and say you don't want to do the work for which you were created?

Marcus Aurelius, Meditations

There are laws, which are a natural part of life. The life of every living creature is an unfolding of that creature's nature. *Which of Aristotle's ideas do you recognize some in this?*

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Humans too are governed by these natural laws, which the Stoics considered to be the basis for all human laws as well. In other words, human laws had to be in keeping with natural laws. Or, put a different way, people have a right to live a natural human life without anyone interfering with that. This idea is huge, because it says that people have rights, which are bigger than any laws. *Did Socrates have any rights?*

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The most basic of these natural laws involved the right to live and to be free. It's really simple. People, because of the kind of beings they are, have a right to defend themselves against anyone who wants to kill or to enslave them. The Stoics said this was the basis of all law, and it answers the question that Socrates death raised: who says what the law is? The answer for the Stoics was, all human law comes from nature, and must be consistent with nature. We're going to see this idea again later, because it is the foundation for our own *Constitution* and the *Bill of Rights*.

Ethics Workbook I: World History

Chapter 8

Christianity and Islam

Another powerful ethical teaching, which emerged during ancient Roman times was Christianity. Christianity is a religion in the same tradition as Hebrew Judaism. We read about the Hebrew law in the Old Testament, and learned that it was strict and unbending. Christianity was an extension and variation of this tradition. Christianity added a New Testament to the Bible. This book has some important new ideas that we're going to learn about.

Remember the Old Testament commandment, "***Thou shall not kill?***" Let's start by looking at the New Testament variation of it from the *Book of Matthew*.

You have heard it said thou shalt not kill, and if you do you will be punished. But I say to you that whoever is angry at his brother without cause will be punished, and whoever speaks hatred to his brother will be punished, and whoever calls insults will be punished.

Matthew 5, 21-22

Is it as wrong to utter threats and insults as it is to actually do an act of violence? Think about and be prepared to discuss this. Try to use some present-day examples of how certain words and even thoughts might seem to be as wrong.

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This also introduces us to the idea of intent, or the reason why a person does something. Christianity takes the reason why you do things very seriously. Here is another quote from Matthew:

A good tree bears a good fruit, but a corrupt tree bears evil fruit.

Matthew 5, 17

What do you think this means? Do you agree?

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Let's look at some more comparisons.

You have heard it said an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, but I say don't fight back against evil; if someone hits you on the right cheek, let him also hit you on the left.

Matthew 5, 38-39

You have heard it said that you should love your neighbor and hate your enemy, but I say love your enemies and do good for them even if they hate you.

Matthew 5, 43-44

We first saw the idea of getting revenge on your enemies as being wrong expressed by Socrates who believed that it was wrong because it only leads to more violence. The Greeks replaced revenge with public laws. Christianity also sees it as bad and for a very similar reason. But Christianity's answer is different. Evil is overcome by good, not by laws and punishments.

Do you think that this will work? What strength does it have? How might you argue that this is the only way to overcome evil? Can you apply this idea to an everyday situation?

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Parables

A parable is a short story that has an ethical message in it about what's right and what's wrong. We saw this teaching technique used all through history. Remember Aesop's Fables or the Ramayana. The New Testament has many important parables. One of the most important is called of the *Parable of the Prodigal Son*. Prodigal means wasteful, so it's a story about a wasteful son, and his relationship to his father and his brother. *After you read, or listen to, the story, try to figure out what the moral message in it is and explain it in your own words.*

Parable of the Prodigal Son simplified

One day the younger of two brothers said to his father, "I would like my inheritance now, so that I can be free and make my own life." The father was sad to see his youngest son go but he agreed, and gave his son his share of the estate. The younger son went off to a distant land and there he led a wild life, and wasted all of the money. Soon he was homeless and starving. Sorry for his actions, he decided to return home. He wanted his father to give him a job as a servant or a farmhand.

His father saw him coming and ran into him. Before the boy could speak, the father hugged and kissed him, and said to his servants, "get robes and sandals, put rings on his fingers, and prepare a great feast. We must celebrate the return of my lost son!"

Meanwhile, the older son, tired and sweating, returned from working in the fields, and saw the celebration. "What's this?" he asked. "Your father has ordered a great feast to celebrate the return of your brother," a servant answered. The elder son went to the father and said angrily, "why are you doing this for him? He's wasted all of your money, and cared nothing about this farm. I have worked hard and diligently all my life, and you never had a party for me."

"Son," said the father, "This isn't about you. I love you and all I have belongs to you, but your brother was dead and lost, and now he's back and alive!"

Luke 15, 11-32 rewritten

This story is very important because it adds a whole new area of things that are considered right to do. Try to figure out why in the father welcomes his son so willingly.

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This idea of compassion and concern for another is stressed in Christianity. How important do you thinking it is to be caring and compassionate?

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Let's read another parable about compassion that opens a new question.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan simplified

A man was walking along the road when he was jumped by robbers. They beat him terribly and stole everything he had including his clothes. The man was lying in a bloody heap by the side of the road when another man came along and saw him. But the man looked the other way, crossed the road and kept walking. Soon another man happened by, but he too pretended not to notice. Finally a Samaritan came upon the injured man, and stopped to help. The Samaritan bandaged the man as best he could, and then carried him to the nearest inn where he paid the innkeeper to look after him until he recovered.

“Which of these three was a neighbor to the injured man?” Jesus asked.

**The lawyer said, “the one who had mercy on him.”
“Go and do the same,” Jesus told him.**

Luke 10, 29-37

These two parables are both about compassion, but in some ways they are very different. *What do you see as the most basic difference between the compassion shown by the Samaritan and that of the father of the prodigal son?*

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Do we owe the same duty to strangers as we do to our close relatives or friends? Try to apply this to your own life. List the people you think you owe the most to, and the people you think you owe the least to. What factors increase or decrease your responsibility toward these people?

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Finally, let's go back to Matthew.

Anything you would like people to do for you, you should do for them. This is the law.

Matthew 7, 12

These words are sometimes called the ethics of equality, and they represent a rule that has appeared independently almost everywhere in the world. It is often called the *Golden Rule*.

Let's see how Confucius put it:

A man asked, "is there a word which may serve as a rule of practice for all one's life?" The Master said, "is not reciprocity such a word? What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others."

Confucius Analects

What does reciprocity mean? Define this in your own words. Why do you think it's so important?

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Let's back up some more and read what Aristotle said. *What do you think he means by the following?*

In loving a friend we love what is good for us because each makes an equal return of good to the other; for friendship is said to be equality.

Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics book 8 chapter 13

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This idea is so common in humans that it has been called the most basic rule of ethics. Some people believe it has been ingrained in us through millions of years of living in social groups. *What do you think?*

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Now let's look at the idea of hypocrisy one more time, only in a different form.

A *hypocrite* is a person who condemns someone else for doing something, and then secretly does the same thing.

Here's what Matthew says:

You will be judged by the same rule you use to judge others. Why do you point out the flaws in your brother when you don't look at your own flaws? How can you tell someone else how to act when you are just as bad? You are a hypocrite, clean up your own act before you try to tell others what to do.

Matthew 7, 1 -5

Hypocrisy is seen as a serious wrong. *Do you agree? Why do you think it is thought of as being so bad?*

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Islam

Another great religion followed Christianity and Judaism. Called Islam, it began in Arabia at the same time as the Roman Empire in Europe was collapsing. Islam follows the same teachings as Judaism and Christianity, but has added a third book of teachings, called the *Koran*, to the Old and New Testaments of the Bible.

We have been thinking about the importance of intent in judging right and wrong. Let's look at some lines from the Koran to see what Islam has to say.

God does not demand any duty which exceeds a person's ability. Our Lord! Do not punish us if we forget, or make a mistake, do not expect more from us than we can do.

Koran 2:86 simplified

Like Christianity there is a strong concern in Islam about why people do what they do. *What do you think? Do you have to know you are doing something wrong in order for it to be wrong? Does it matter if you forget or make a mistake? What if a doctor makes a mistake and kills a patient, or a lifeguard forgets to tell swimmers that sharks are in the area? Should different people be held to different standards?*

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We have seen all through history that family, and especially the relationship between parents and their children, have a special place. Here is one thing the Koran says.

Do good for your parents. Your mother suffered to bring you into the world, and sacrificed for many years to help you grow up.

Koran 46:15 simplified

According to this rule, you should help your parents because they helped you. This idea of reciprocity is familiar to us and makes some sense. *But, if this is why you help others, why do parents help their children?*

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Islam stresses the idea that everyone has a duty to learn the ethical expectations by studying the Koran. People were expected to study and to learn to understand the difference between right and wrong. Here are some lines from the Koran.

**Don't you know that God has given you everything?
How can you deny this? You must be without
knowledge, and without guidance, or a book to learn
from.**

Koran 31:20 simplified

People were expected to know for themselves what was right and what was wrong. It wasn't automatic. It took hard work and study. *Should ethics be studied by all students as a regular part of school? What's the best way to learn about right and wrong?*

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Sufi Stories rewritten

We have seen how stories can be powerful teaching tools. A special group of Muslims called Sufis used this technique to get their points across. Many Sufi stories were about a fictional character named Nasrudin. Nasrudin was a mullah, which means he was a wise teacher. We are going to read, or listen to, some of Nasrudin's adventures and see if we can understand the ethical messages in them.

It All Depends

One day a man came to Nasrudin's door and said: "Nasrudin, you are a judge and are wise. May I ask you a legal question?"

"Of course," said the mullah.

"If a man's ox kills another man's ox, is the owner of the first ox liable to pay damages to the owner of the dead animal?"

"Well that depends on many things," Nasrudin answered. "Can you tell me more?"

"Yes," the man retorted, "Your ox has just killed mine."

Nasrudin looked very serious and said: "well, it's clear that an ox cannot think and is not responsible for its actions. If the ox is not responsible, the ox's owner cannot be held liable."

"Oh," said the man. "You are very wise indeed. I agree. The owner cannot be held responsible for the actions of a dumb animal."

Nasrudin smiled until the man added: "I made a mistake. I should have said that my ox killed yours."

Nasrudin paused and then said: "maybe I should think about this case some more. Let me consult my law books, and I'll get back to you."

What is this story telling us about the law as a way of deciding what's right and wrong?

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You Are Right

Two men came before the mullah to have him decide a lawsuit. After the plaintiff completed his testimony Nasrudin said: "I believe you are right." The man smiled thinking he had won.

But when the defendant told his side, and was very convincing, Nasrudin said: "I believe you are right."

The two men looked puzzled and one said: "What do you mean? We can't both be right."

Nasrudin nodded and said: "Yes, I believe you are right."

What do you think this story is telling you about the law?

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Who Me?

Nasrudin's house was broken into and many valuables were stolen. The mullah's wife was very angry.

"It's your fault," she said to Nasrudin. "You should have locked the door."

Before Nasrudin could answer, his sister-in-law added, "and you left all of the windows opened, you should have made sure they were locked."

"You should have expected it since there have been many burglaries lately. Why didn't you leave the dog home to guard the house?" added a neighbor.

"Wait up," said Nasrudin, "Why are you all the blaming me?"

"Who else should we blame?" answered his wife.

"How about the thief?" said the mullah.

Who is responsible? Why do you think people look for complicated explanations for wrongdoing rather than holding the doer responsible? Can you think of any examples of this from your own experiences or from recent events?

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Judge Not

Nasrudin saw a beggar on the street and stopped to talk to him.

“Why are you begging?” the mullah asked.

“Because I have no money.”

“Why don't you have any money?” said Nasrudin.

“Because I drink and gamble at cards every day and if I have any money I try to get to the racetrack to bet on horses.”

“I see,” said Nasrudin, and he gave the man a gold coin.

Just then a second man appeared and asked for money.

“Are you wasteful too?” asked Nasrudin.

“Oh no,” answered the beggar.

“Do you drink and gamble?”

“Absolutely not, I live very simply. I don't require much, and I pray everyday.”

Nasrudin smiled and gave the man a small copper coin.

“Why do you give me so little and the good-for-nothing over there so much?” cried the shocked beggar.

“Because he needs more than you,” Nasrudin answered.

Ethics Workbook I: World History

Chapter 9

The Middle Ages

All of the societies we have studied so far have held individual people responsible for their actions. In fact, we could say that ethics is about individual decision making. But, we have also seen big variations in how people look at what's right or wrong. Next we're going to study a way of looking at right and wrong which stresses what's good for the group that the individual is part of. This idea holds that what's best for the group is most important, and, it ends up being what's best for each individual as well.

Before we get started, think about this issue. *Should people try to do what's best for the group they belong to even if it might not be, at least in the short run, what seems best for them as individuals?*

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Feudalism

After the fall of Rome, the rule of law disappeared and Europe became a dangerous and lawless place. People naturally banded together and formed groups for their own protection. The land was divided into many small territories, which were defended by castles. Nobles and knights ruled, while peasants and serfs farmed the land. This so-called feudal system lasted for over a thousand years.

Feudalism's ideas of right and wrong were based on what would best hold together a strong group. We call this idea *communalism*. A commune is a group of people living together and sharing what they have.

In feudal society people freely agreed to be ruled by other people and to do what they were told in return for protection. To seal these personal agreements, it was common to swear an oath of allegiance. The greatest crime that you could commit was to go back on your word and not stand by your oath. This was called a *felony*. The word felony is still used today to describe the most serious crimes.

Let's look at one of these feudal oaths.

I swear before God that I will be your true and faithful servant and be at your command. I will love what you love, and hate what you hate. I will not think or do anything of which you disapprove. In return you will stand by me, and protect me in all the ways we agreed to at the time I submitted myself to your authority.

Composite of several typical feudal oaths.

An oath is like a promise to do something. How important is it to keep your promises? Should promises be kept no matter what?

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One question that puzzled people who believed in communalism was whether a person should make a profit by selling something for more than it was worth. Here is what Aquinas said:

It is wrong to sell a thing for more than its just price because it is deceiving and injuring your neighbor. Buying and selling is intended for the common advantage of both parties. Therefore, there must be equality between them.

Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica II-II, 77 simplified

This is different isn't it? Let's look closer at what Aquinas said. First of all he uses the term *just price*. This term means the same thing as fair price. But what does that mean? Well, for people at that time, it meant that if you were selling something to make a living, you could set your price only as high as was necessary to pay your living expenses. In other words, you could expect to live comfortably at the level you were already at. You could not get rich by making big profits. For example, shoemakers had a certain lifestyle, as did carpenters and farmers, and so did everyone else. You could sell your goods only at a price that kept you at that level. The *just price* would change with people and places, but it was always intended to keep people from moving up, or down, the social ladder.

To sell anything for more than it is worth, or to buy anything for less than it is worth, is wrong and unlawful.

Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica II-II, 77

Compare this with the way trade is carried on today.

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Thomas Aquinas had a lot to say about right and wrong. Let's see what he says about hypocrisy. Remember that hypocrites pretend to be something they're not.

The seriousness of the wrong will depend on what end the hypocrite has in view. If the hypocrite intends to gain from it at someone else's expense, it is very serious, but if the hypocrite just enjoys pretending, then it's of lesser importance.

Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica II-II,111,4

Here again we see that intent played a big role in how actions were judged. *Let's think about this question again, maybe you've changed your opinion. Do you think that the reason that motivated a person to do something can determine if that action was right or wrong? For example, what if someone who was honestly trying to help a person injures the person? Or is it only the outcome of the action that counts?*

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This is a tough problem for ethics. Let's use this example. *Is it always wrong to lie? If not, what makes a lie not wrong? See if you can come up with a rule for when you can lie and when you can't. Then, apply it to some new situation to see if it works. Write your reasoning and conclusions in the space below.*

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Ethics Workbook I: World History

Chapter 10

Renaissance

After about a thousand years of feudalism, people began to question some of its basic ideas. This new period in history is called the Renaissance. It was a time of change in the way people looked at their relationship with the community they lived in. Communalism was losing ground to the idea of *individualism*. Individualism stresses the importance of the individual people, and places them above the group. People began to believe that there was nothing wrong with striving to get things for themselves, and they became less concerned about their obligations to others.

The Renaissance was the beginning of what we call modern times. We still live in the modern age, and our society today still stresses individualism. So, this is a very important idea for us to study. It's a new way to look at life, and it changes things a lot.

All through the Middle Ages it was assumed that, for the most part at least, people try to do the right thing. In other words, people were by nature basically good. This was one idea that was seriously questioned by Renaissance thinkers. One famous philosopher at this time was an Italian named Nicolo Machiavelli. He wrote a book called **The Prince** which gave advice to political leaders. Let's see what Machiavelli said about the natural goodness of people.

In general, people are ungrateful, unreliable, false, cowardly and greedy. They will promise you anything, and then turn their back on you if things go wrong. And don't think that the person who is closest to you is more reliable. Friendship is based on obligations, and people break obligations most easily.

Nicolo Machiavelli, The Prince, Chapter XVI simplified

What do you think? Are people basically good or basically bad? Is Machiavelli right?

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Now, if you believe that people are the way Machiavelli says they are, your ideas about right and wrong will change.

Machiavelli wrote his book as a guide for the leader of his country. He believed that the government should not have to play by the same rules as ordinary people because the government cannot afford to lose. *Do you think governments should have the same standards of right and wrong as ordinary citizens? What about when governments deal with foreign countries?*

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Here is some of what Machiavelli wrote:

Everyone says that the leader should be honest and trustworthy and not be sneaky. But it's easy to see that in the past leaders who get things done have paid little or no attention to this idea. They have simply outsmarted the others, especially those who keep their word. We all know that there are two ways of getting what you want. The first is through the rules, and the second is to take it by force. The leader must do both. The leader should be half lion and half fox. The lion can't see the traps, and the fox can't fight off the wolves. Great leaders don't rely on either one or the other, but use both. Therefore, the wise leaders do not keep their word if it will hurt them or prevent them from getting what they want.

If people were good this rule would not hold. But, because they are bad, and will lie and cheat you, you are not obligated to be fair and honest with them.

But, it is necessary to disguise your dishonesty and to pretend to be good. People like to think that they are upright, and they are very easy to trick. You must appear to be virtuous, but only a fool actually is virtuous. Pretend to be kind, reliable, fair, honest and loyal. But be ready to do the exact opposite, as long as you don't get caught. It's always best to stay with the good if you can, but only if it works, if not, you must be ready to change tactics. Remember, people must believe you are virtuous, so never give any hint that you are not. People only see what you show them, not what's really there.

Nicolo Machiavelli, The Prince, Chapter XVIII simplified

What was Machiavelli's opinion of hypocrisy?

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It seems that winning is the most important thing for Machiavelli. *How important is winning in the things that you do? Does the urge to win sometimes lead to unethical actions? Can you give any examples from your own experiences?*

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Machiavelli seems different from earlier writers, but there is a very basic way in which he is identical to all the others. Reread the following sentence. *See if you can figure it out? Why does he tell people to lie and cheat? What basic principle of ethics is he using?*

**If people were good this rule would not hold, but
because they are bad, and will lie and cheat you, you are
not obligated to be fair and honest with them.**

Niccolo Machiavelli, The Prince, Chapter XVIII simplified

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Ethics Workbook I: World History

Chapter 11

Enlightenment

After the Renaissance, individualism was a powerful new force in the world. This was a time when people began to try to figure out for themselves how the natural world worked. They stressed logical thinking and scientific experimentation. This period in history is called the Enlightenment. People became curious about everything, and wanted to study everything, including themselves. As part of this, they began to look again at ideas about right and wrong. But this time, they saw people as being part of nature, and subject to the same natural laws as everything else.

Benedict Spinoza

One important ethical thinker of this time was Benedict Spinoza. Let's see what he had to say.

People living in nature have a right to life, and a right to do whatever is necessary to protect and better their life. In other words, people will always protect themselves by trying to get what they think is good, and trying to avoid what they think is bad. This is just common sense. Problems arise because people are ruled by their emotions. Emotions are powerful urges that motivate actions. Because emotions are not carefully thought out, they are unpredictable and dangerous. When people are ruled by emotions, they often argue and fight with each other. The only way to protect yourself from violence is to threaten greater violence in return. This is why nature is so insecure.

Spinoza, Ethics 4,XXXVI Note II, Paraphrase

What you think about Spinoza's opinion of emotions? Is he right about emotions leading to conflict and to violence? Try to give some examples from your own experience.

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People naturally look for a safer way to live. This leads to the invention of governments and laws. Laws are written as an artificial way for people to create peace and harmony. This is the creation of what we call a state, and the people in it are called citizens. Good and bad are created by the state in the form of rules that the citizens must obey. Whatever promotes peace and harmony is good; whatever promotes discord is bad. It's the rules that define right and wrong. Good means to obey the law, bad means to disobey the law.

Spinoza, Ethics 4 XXXVI Note II, paraphrase

Spinoza saw that force ruled in nature and that this solution of creating a powerful authority to govern was no better; one way or the other, force still ruled. This would change he thought, if reason rather than emotions directed human actions. Act according to reason, and everyone will agree. Harmony will result. This sounds good. But why should it work?

Like Aristotle, Spinoza believed that human reason, or the ability to think logically, was at the root of human nature. In fact, to be human was to be able to think. He concluded from this that human reason could never be out of sync with human nature, because reason

was the key element in human nature. In other words, if your actions are ruled by reason, you won't ever act in a way contrary to your own best interests. Here is how he said it:

Everyone, by the laws of nature, desires what they see as good and tries to avoid what they see as bad. If their decisions are governed by reason, which is the basis of human nature, they can only do what is also good for human nature.

Now here's the tricky part.

So, whatever is good for an individual's human nature must also be good for everyone else's. Therefore, when people act according to reason, and not emotion, they will always be in harmony with each other.

Spinoza, Ethics 4 XXXV simplified

This is a really good argument. *See if you can explain it in your own words.*

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And, he says that even though reason may require you to give up something personally because it would not be in the best interests of everyone for you to have it or to do it, that this would still make you happy. In fact it's the only way to true happiness. Promoting the good of others creates happiness because it leads to self-esteem. When a person acts in another's interest and then thinks about it, he or she will approve of themselves. Spinoza called this self-approval, which he said was **the highest object for which we can hope.**

Spinoza, Ethics 4 LII, note

Spinoza seems to be saying that true happiness results from feeling good about ourselves, having self-esteem, and being satisfied with what we did, not from any external

Here is one last quote from Spinoza:

People who are governed by reason don't want anything for themselves that they don't want for the rest of mankind, and because of this, they are just, faithful, and honorable in their conduct.

Spinoza, Ethics 4 VIII

Why does this look so familiar? Do you see a theme developing in the history of ethical thought? What is it? Prepare to discuss this.

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Immanuel Kant

Remember we said that the Enlightenment was a time of science when people tried to figure things out by studying nature. Not all people believed that right and wrong could be understood that way. One very important philosopher of that time was Immanuel Kant. He believed that he could figure out rules of ethics with pure logic, and reason, without looking at the real world at all. Kant believed that if people studied the real world to figure out rules for right and wrong they would end up with different answers because they would be reasoning from different particular situations. He wrote long and very complicated books trying to prove this. His works became the most famous ever written about right and wrong.

Kant's writing is complicated, but his conclusions are very simple. He wanted to find one rule everyone must obey all the time. He gave this rule a fancy name, the **Categorical Imperative**. We will call it *The Rule Everyone Must Obey All the Time*. Here's how Kant said it:

I should never do anything unless I can honestly say I believe everyone else should always do the same thing.

Immanuel Kant, Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals, section 1

What he came up with sounds a lot like the Golden Rule we've been seeing over and over again. Only Kant believed he improved upon it.

Here's how Kant said it works:

If I'm in trouble is it OK to make promises that I don't intend to keep? It may be profitable in the short run to lie, but is it right? Let's word this in a different way, and then apply our ethical rule. Should I lie to get out of a tight spot? Will this hold up as a rule that everyone must follow all the time? Can I say, "everyone should lie to get what they want?" If we put it this way, it's clear that I couldn't say this because it would mean that all promises would be no good. No one could ever trust anyone else, and this would destroy society.

Immanuel Kant, Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals, section 2

The key to using Kant's rule is that you must think carefully and logically. Kant and Spinoza both thought that as long as everyone relied on reason they would always agree. Here are some more examples Kant gave to test his rule:

A man is very disappointed with his life and asks himself if it's OK to commit suicide. The man says: "I want to act in my own best interests, since I see only pain and suffering ahead, I will shorten my life." Then he asks: "can this be a rule everyone must obey all of the time?" The answer is no, because it's a contradiction to say I will destroy a life in order to do what's best for that life.

Immanuel Kant, Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals, section 2

You can also see what Kant means by logical thinking, and reason. Let's read another of his examples:

A man is rich and comfortable. He wonders if he should help poor and suffering people. He says: "why should I care? I don't take anything from poor and suffering people, and so I'm not obligated to give them anything either." Can this be a law everyone must obey all the time? The answer is no because it would mean that you yourself could never expect any help, even if you desperately needed it. It would be illogical for anyone to want the world to be like this.

Immanuel Kant, Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals, section 2

See how Kant is not using an argument based on the facts of any particular case, but looking only at pure logic. *Make up an ethical problem and see if Kant's Rule works. Try to think it through without using any specific details.*

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Compare Kant's Rule: **never do anything unless you can honestly say you believe everyone else should do the same thing**, with Golden Rule stated: **Do to others only what you would have them do to you**. Now reread Kant's example about giving charity. *Can you show any ways in which following the Golden Rule causes possible problems? Try to think of some other examples of ways that the traditional Golden Rule doesn't work and see if Kant's idea works better.*

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Dignity and Respect

Man's ability to reason was really important to Enlightenment thinkers, especially to Immanuel Kant. Kant said that you could put a price on everything in the world except a human being. A human being was of infinite value. The reason for this was that humans were free, and decided for themselves about the course of their lives. They don't exist to serve any other person or for any other reason but to be free for themselves. He called this human dignity. People alone have dignity.

Here is how Kant put it:

People exist only to live their own lives as they see fit, and must never be used by others just to further their own desires.

Immanuel Kant, Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals, section 2

Here is the important point. Since all people view themselves as having dignity, Kant's rule requires everyone to give everyone else the same standing. In other words, if you don't want to end up with a world full of users, you can never use anyone else only to further your own purposes. This is what Kant meant by treating other people with respect.

That you must never use anyone else only for your purposes doesn't mean that it's wrong to expect someone to clean your table in a restaurant, or to ask a clerk to show you a pair of shoes in a shoe store. The word **only** is the key. *Try to think of some examples of a person using another person in a way that would violate Kant's rule of respect. Do you think this is a good ethical rule to follow? How do you define respect? Why is having respect for other people so important?*

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Ethics Workbook I: World History

Chapter 12

Public Ethics

So far we have concentrated on the ethics of private relationships. Now we're going to look at how people act as a society.

People generally live under the authority of a government. Governments enact laws which tell people what's right and what's wrong. Governments have power and they can force people to obey. The right and wrong of government actions is a whole new area called *public ethics*.

How do we know what's right and wrong to do as a whole community?

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There has always been a question about what gives a government the right to tell people what to do. Remember how Socrates answered this? He believed that the majority of people decided what was right and that was it. Later people rejected the idea that the majority was always right. You read about how the ancient Stoics, for example, believed that there was a natural law that determined right and wrong. This idea survived for many centuries and finally became well established during the Enlightenment. This idea became the basis for our own Constitution, and is very important for us to understand.

John Locke

One of the most important Enlightenment thinkers who wrote about this was John Locke. He lived in England about a hundred years before the American Revolution and his work had a big impact on the American Constitution. Let's see how he said government got its right to rule.

Locke tried to imagine what life was like before any governments were formed. He called this a *state of nature*, and he believed that natural law ruled. In this state of nature, Locke thought all people had a right to protect themselves. This was a natural right. In other words, people could use force to protect their life and freedom. No one can kill or injure or make someone a slave. These were natural rights. A person had them automatically. This wasn't a new idea, but Locke added something to it. Locke said people also have a natural right to own things, and to use force to protect what they have. This was new. Let's see how Locke reasoned from the natural right to life and freedom to a right to own property.

In the beginning, nobody had a right to anything in nature. But whatever a man removes from nature through the work of his hands is his. He has mixed his labor with it and this makes it his property.

John Locke, Second Treatise on Government Chapter 5 simplified

Locke believed that people had a natural right not to be enslaved. A slave is someone who is forced to work for someone else. To take something from a person that that person created by his or her labor would be the same as making that person a slave. Locke reasoned from this that people had a natural right to own property. This meant that there were three basic natural human rights: life, freedom, and property.

What do you think of Locke's reasoning? Does it make sense?

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Part of Locke’s thinking was based on a belief he held about the natural world.

It doesn’t injure one person when another takes property out of nature because there is so much land that there is always enough left for others. It is impossible for anyone to acquire so much wealth that it injures others.

John Locke, Second Treatise on Government Chapter 5 simplified

Explain what Lock meant in your own words.

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Do you think Locke was a right? If so, is he still right today?

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Locke thought that the need to protect property complicates the ability of individuals to protect themselves. This led directly to the creation of the governments, Locke said.

People freely agreed to join together into a community to secure the enjoyment of their property. So then everyone agrees to make one government and to place himself or herself under the rule of that government.

John Locke, Second Treatise on Government Chapter 8 simplified

We call this a *social contract* because, according to Locke, people freely agreed to turn power over to a government in return for safety. They made a contract, or a deal, with each other. This is very important because it is the foundation for our own United States Constitution and Bill of Rights. We’ll study this in more detail later.

Do you believe that people have a right to own property? Should this right be absolute? Under what circumstances can an individual's property be taken away?

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All of this had a powerful effect on the founding fathers and it was a very good justification for the American Revolution from England. Listen to Locke again.

The reason why people agree to create a government is to protect their life, freedom, and property. It doesn't make sense that this government could rightly destroy the thing it was created to protect. If the government does threaten the lives, liberties or property of the people it can and should be dissolved.

John Locke, Second Treatise on Government Chapter 19 simplified

Now compare this with the words of Thomas Jefferson from the Declaration of Independence.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it...

As you can see the United States government was founded directly upon the ideas of the Enlightenment. The protection of people's natural rights was the fundamental reason

for government. People rely on government to guarantee them these rights. This system has become very well established as a way to promote public ethics. People have natural rights; they establish governments to protect them; governments pass laws; and the courts settle the issue of who's right and what's fair.

Let's look now at the United States Constitution Bill of Rights and see some specific rights the law says people have.

Amendment I

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

The problem is to say exactly what this means. This is where the courts come in. The courts decide how the law works in specific cases and people agree to go along with its decisions. This is how the system works. The law is like a set of rules to play a game. *But right and wrong are still what the society says they are. How is this any different from what Socrates said?*

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The big question for public ethics is how far can the majority go in forcing its views on either a minority of people or on an individual. And the thing to keep in mind is that these questions are never answered for all time. People are constantly debating and as times change so do the rules of public ethics. Next we're going to examine some specific issues that our society faces today, and you'll get a chance to decide what you think is right.

Let's look at another amendment in the bill of rights.

Amendment IV

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable

searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

Try to rewrite this amendment in your own words to be sure you understand it.

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The most important words in the amendment are *probable cause*. It says you can't search someone or seize property unless you have probable cause that a crime has been committed. *What do you think probable cause means?*

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It's not enough to just have a hunch or even a suspicion if it's not based on some hard facts. Let's see how this rule has been in applied to protect people's freedom.

Read the following case study.

A man was seen by a police officer talking to known drug addicts. The officer didn't hear what was said but

he was suspicious so he stopped the man, patting him down for weapons, and in so doing found heroin.

Was it OK to stop the man? Was it OK to pat him down? Was it OK to seize the heroine?

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Here are the actual words from the Supreme Court ruling.

The police officer is not entitled to seize and search every person whom he sees on the street... Before he places a hand on the person of a citizen in search of anything. . . he must have reasonable grounds for doing so. In the case of a search for weapons he must be able to point to particular facts from which he reasonably inferred that the individual was armed and dangerous.

This is what we mean by the test of probable cause. People’s natural right to freedom is protected by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The government cannot interfere with it unless there is a very good reason. In this case the police officer had no facts, only suspicions and they weren't enough to give him probable cause to interfere with the man's freedom. The answer to all three questions is no.

Now you another try one.

The police were watching a house where cocaine was known to be sold. They saw a man leave the house and ordered him to stop. When a police officer patted the man down for weapons he felt a small lump in the man's

pocket. The officer reached into the man's pocket and seized a small amount of cocaine.

Do you think the police had probable cause to:

- 1. stop the man?*
- 2. pat him down?*
- 3. seize the cocaine?*

Write a paragraph stating your reasons.

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Next we will see that the Fourth Amendment protection from unreasonable search and seizure applies differently to students in schools.

Consider the following case.

A 14 year-old girl was caught smoking in a school bathroom and was sent to the assistant principal's office. She said she wasn't smoking, and that, in fact, she didn't smoke at all. The assistant principal didn't believe her, and decided to look into her purse. He found a pack of cigarettes, and rolling papers. He then thought she could also be holding marijuana so he completely searched her purse. He found marijuana, and a list of students who owed the girl money. The assistant principal then suspected that she was selling marijuana, and turned her over to the police. The girl was convicted in court.

Do you think that the assistant principal satisfied the test for probable cause? Did he have any reliable facts to indicate that the girl was carrying cigarettes?

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It would seem so since she was just caught smoking. But when the assistant principal found the cigarettes he also saw some rolling papers. *Was this enough to satisfy probable cause that she also had marijuana?*

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There were no reliable facts about marijuana. There could have been other reasons for the rolling papers. It would seem that the search should have stopped with the cigarettes. But the court said students in school are not as protected as they would be on the street or at home. School officials only have to have a *reasonable suspicion* that a rule of the school or a law was being broken, and the rolling paper was enough for that.

Why do you think the courts have said that students in school have less freedom?

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Using a reasonable suspicion test consider the following cases by writing your opinions in the spaces below them.

Locker searches

School officials tell students they will routinely use a master key to search their lockers for drugs and weapons, even if they have no particular suspicions.

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Vehicle searches

Acting on a tip from a student that another student was selling marijuana, a school official searched the boy's car. He founded a pager and a notebook with a list of names and amounts of money. In the trunk of the car he found a locked briefcase. He opened it and found marijuana.

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Drug sniffing dogs

The court has ruled that student lockers and cars can be randomly sniffed by dogs. But, dogs cannot randomly sniff the students themselves. *What reasoning do you think the court used here?*

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Drug testing

The school said that to play on athletic teams students had to agree to take a random urine test for drugs. One boy's parents objected and refused to sign the consent form. The school officials admitted that they did not suspect the boy of drug use, but refused to let him play football unless his parents signed. The parents said it was an unnecessary invasion of their son's personal privacy. *Who do you think was right? Does the same reasoning about personal privacy used by the court for sniffing dogs also apply here?*

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Ethics Workbook I: World History

Chapter 13

Capitalism and Socialism

Adam Smith

At about the time of the American Revolution, scientific innovation led to the invention of many new types of machines. This started an industrial revolution which became part of a new way to organize a country's economy called Capitalism. A man named Adam Smith in a famous book called *The Wealth of Nations* first suggested the capitalist system. In his book Smith said that if people were left alone to compete with each other to make and sell things that this competition would lead to the best possible products at the lowest possible prices. Smith believed that competition would balance everything out and that the best of economy would be created. He called this idea the *law of supply and demand*.

When the quantity of any commodity brought to market falls below the demand, people will be willing to pay more for it and the price will go up. When the price goes up more money can be made selling it so people start to produce more. When this happens more product enters the market and the process reverses itself. This happens over and over until the price and quantity settle at the perfect point.

The Wealth of Nations book 1, chapter seven, simplified and rewritten

Smith believed a kind of *invisible hand* pushed and pulled prices and quantities of products until they came into a perfect balance. Economists call this market equilibrium. The best way to run a country's economy, Smith said, was to do nothing and just let it happen. This policy came to be called *laissez-faire*, which is the French name for it.

Let's see if you can understand what Smith was saying. Give a real-world example from your own experience of how the law of supply and demand works.

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John Stuart Mill

Free-market capitalism, as it came to be called, became very popular in Western countries during the 19th Century because it led to an enormous increase in wealth. The United States became very rich and powerful under this system, but *laissez-faire* also meant that no one cared how much wealth individual people could make and no one cared if other people were very poor. Some critics of Capitalism began to question if this was ethical, especially when the factory system led to widespread child labor and created many slums in the cities. One philosopher who thought about this was John Stuart Mill. He said that the best society would result if everybody made decisions that would bring the most benefit to the most people. He called this the *greatest happiness principle* and his philosophy was called Utilitarianism.

John Stuart Mill defined his Utilitarian philosophy by saying:

“...the Greatest Happiness Principle holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness.”

Explain in your own words what you think Mill meant by this.

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Can you think of any difficulties in determining what the greatest good actually is?

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John Stuart Mill believed very strongly in individual freedom and wasn't trying to force anyone to act in the best interests of the majority, but thought that this would be a wise way to behave and people should see this and freely decide to do it. Mill also said this about human actions:

“... the motive has nothing to do with the morality of the action, though much with the worth of the agent. He who saves a fellow creature from drowning does what is morally right, whether his motive be duty, or the hope of being paid for his trouble.”

What do you understand this to mean?

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Think about the following scenario and apply your understanding of Utilitarian ethics to it. Write a short essay to tell how you would resolve this dilemma?

If a cure for a horrible disease could be found by sacrificing one unwilling human being, wouldn't the happiness of millions outweigh the suffering of the one victim, and wouldn't this justify using human guinea pigs in medical experiments?

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Mill really believed strongly in freedom, but he didn't base his belief on the idea that people had rights. He thought that good for society comes from freedom because allowing individuals to be creative and daring would lead to progress. Mill thought that some of the most eccentric people provided society with its greatest gifts.

What do you think?

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But when is too much freedom bad for the group? Mill struggled with this and with how to ethically restrict individual freedom. Here is what he said:

...the only reason power can be rightfully exercised over anybody, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, is not a good enough reason. He cannot rightfully be made to do something or stopped from doing something because it will be better for him, or because it will make him happier, or because, in the opinions of others, it would be wise, or even right.

Mill, On Liberty, Chapter One, simplified

Do you agree with Mill? Give some examples of ways in which your freedom is restricted by society for some of the reasons with which Mill disagreed.

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Andrew Carnegie

One man who got very rich under Capitalism was Andrew Carnegie. He believed strongly in free market capitalism and was a ruthless competitor who built his fortune in the steel industry. Carnegie saw the bad side of Capitalism and wanted to help the poor without reducing an individual's right to get rich. His ideas came to be called *The Gospel of Wealth* which was a set of rules that he thought all rich people should live by for the good of everyone.

Think about some of the things Carnegie said and tell why you agree or don't agree with him.

We assemble thousands of workers in the factory. We employers know little or nothing about them and they know nearly nothing about us. We have no relationship with each other and this breeds ignorance and mutual distrust.

Carnegie, The Problem of the Administration of Wealth, simplified and rewritten

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We accept and welcome the inequality that results from the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few because it is essential to the future of society.

Carnegie, The Problem of the Administration of Wealth, simplified and rewritten

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All civilization depends on the right to own private property. The poor man has a right to his hundred dollars and the rich man has a right to his millions.

Carnegie, The Problem of the Administration of Wealth, simplified and rewritten

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So Carnegie definitely believed in Capitalism and thought that great wealth could only be produced if people got to keep what they earned. This was the incentive that drove the economy and everyone benefited by the success of the rich. Giving someone something for nothing would take away the incentive to work hard and would promote laziness. For this reason, Carnegie, like many others of this time, was opposed to charity for the poor. He believed people should be helped to help themselves, but be not given anything for free, and this opposition to charity extended to the rich as well. Carnegie saw the inheritance of family fortunes by the children of the rich as equally bad and this was where his gospel of wealth came in.

Of all the forms of taxation, taxing inheritance seems to be the wisest. Men who continue hoarding great sums all of their lives when they could do good for the community should be ashamed of themselves. The state should tax estates heavily at death and use the money for the general good.

Carnegie, The Problem of the Administration of Wealth, simplified and rewritten

Carnegie believed that if the rich knew that their fortunes would be taken by the state when they died, they would donate their money to worthy causes that would benefit the poor. In this way they would control what was done with their money and this would be better than losing it.

Why didn't Carnegie think letting the children of the rich inherit their parent's wealth was a good idea? What do you think?

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Carnegie thought that this simple idea would solve the problem of inequality in society.

This policy would work powerfully to induce the rich man to use his wealth for the benefit of the people. This will provide the solution to the temporary unequal distribution of wealth and will reconcile the rich with the poor.

Carnegie, The Problem of the Administration of Wealth, rewritten and simplified

What do you think? Could this work today?

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Socialism

The system of early Capitalism left individuals alone to fend for themselves and this led to much poverty. In order to survive many families were often forced to send their small children into the mills to work. The factory owners saw these children only as low cost labor to be exploited and consequently accepted no responsibility for their welfare. The children in the *poor houses* of Great Britain were herded into the mills by the thousands. The problem rose to the level of national disgrace and in 1832 Parliament took up the issue. Here are some excerpts from testimony at its hearings.

. . . that it was the regular custom, to work children in factories thirteen hours a day, and only allow them half an hour for dinner; . . . and that in many factories they were worked considerably more. . .

[The children] are generally cruelly treated; so cruelly treated, that they dare not hardly for their lives to be late at their work in the morning.

I have seen some children running down [at 5 A.M.] to the mill crying, with a bit of bread in their hand, and that is all they may have till 12 o'clock at noon. . . .

British Parliamentary Papers, 1831-2, XV, No. 706 (Report of Committee on the Labor of Children in Factories)

Robert Owen

Some people began to advocate other ideas about how a society should function. They said that complete freedom creates too many problems and that ultimately these problems would become insurmountable and would destroy the society. A whole new system was needed. One of these so-called *socialists* was an industrialist named Robert Owen. He owned a big textile mill in New Lanark Scotland that employed several hundred people, including many small children. Owen wanted to create a community that would care for and educate these children, rather than just use them for labor. He believed that what a person becomes is the product of his or her environment and that early education is very important. Owen called his school *The Institute for the Formation of Character*.

What does this term "Character" mean to you? How do you think character is formed?

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Here's what Owen said about character:

...the character of man is, without a single exception, always formed for him... by his predecessors; that... give him...his ideas and habits, which ... govern and direct his conduct. Man, therefore, never did, nor is it possible he ever can, form his own character.

Robert Owen , A New View of Society

What do you think Owen meant by this? Do you agree?

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Here are some more of Owen's ideas about on education. *See if you agree with him.*

Children ... prevented from ... learning... are likely to acquire (bad) habits by continually associating with those as ignorant ... as themselves.

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There will be no difficulty in teaching ... what is right and proper... the real and only difficulty will be to unlearn those (bad) habits ...

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Owen's school was radically different from schools at that time. He believed children should start as soon as they could walk *and in this, their chief occupation will be to play and amuse themselves*. Owen believed making children happy was a key to educational success.

Do you agree? Why?

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With older children Owen's school was also different. At a time when education was generally limited to rigorous rote exercises in reading, writing, and arithmetic, Owen advocated a much richer curriculum.

For the benefit of the health and spirits of the children, both boys and girls will be taught to dance, and ... those of each sex who may have good voices will be taught to sing, and those ... who have a taste for music will be taught to play (an) instrument... to give them as much ... amusement as (possible).

Why do you think Owen advocated adding these things to the curriculum? Do you think this is important?

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Communism

Robert Owen and others like him wanted to improve the living conditions for poor people and they thought that if they created successful model communities based on Socialism that this would prove that Capitalism should be changed. Other socialists thought that this was doomed to fail because it was too limited and that only large scale change would work. These later socialists were more scientific about why they thought Capitalism was bad.

Karl Marx and his friend Fredrick Engels began a socialist movement called Communism. They thought Capitalism was the cause of poverty and so they called for a society where the workers owned the factories and other means of production. They believed that the workers produced the wealth and were cheated out of their fair share by the owners of the factories who paid them very low wages. They called for a revolution to right this wrong. During the 20th Century, after communist revolutions in many countries, one-half of the world's population lived under a communist government.

Here are some of the ways Engels answered questions about his ideas, see if you agree or disagree.

When asked: Haven't there always been poor people he said: *There have always been poor and working classes... But there have not always been workers and poor people living under conditions as they are today.* He blames this on *free unbridled competitions.*

Frederick Engels, The Principles of Communism

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On balance, do you think competition is a good or a bad thing in your life ?

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Marx and Engels blamed the problem on Capitalism and on the industrial revolution that they said changed the nature of labor.

Labor is a commodity, like any other, and its price is therefore determined by exactly the same laws that apply to other commodities... on the average the worker gets no more and no less than his minimum.

Frederick Engels, The Principles of Communism

What Engels meant by this was that the price of labor, or the wages of a worker, would drop to the lowest level that people would be willing to accept. And the mass production methods of the industrial revolution drove the workers down into an unskilled mass by reducing...

...the activity of the individual worker to simple, endlessly repeated mechanical motions which could be performed not only as well but much better by a machine.

Frederick Engels, The Principles of Communism

In this situation no worker could demand more pay than any other worker and everyone was forced to take the lowest wages offered. Engels said the only difference between a worker and a slave was that the slave was only sold once while the worker sold himself everyday. *What strategy have unskilled workers been able to use to increase their wages?*

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Marx and Engels didn't believe anything short of complete revolution would solve the problem of capitalism. A new Society will...

...have to take the control of industry and of all branches of production out of the hands of mutually competing individuals, and instead institute a system in which all these branches of production are operated by society as a whole.

Frederick Engels, The Principles of Communism

Marx and Engels blamed everything on individualism and their new communist society was supposed to *abolish competition and replace it with association.*

Think about what Marx and Engels said, then write a short essay telling the advantages and the disadvantages of both individual freedom and group cooperation. Is it necessary to have only one or the other?

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Ethics Workbook I: World History

Chapter 14

Final Projects

Now that you've made a comprehensive study of ethics, it's time to apply your knowledge to a new situation. On the following pages there are student guides for ten research report topics. You will find a lot of information on them in your school's library, and on the Internet. Select one, and working alone or in a small group, research it. Don't take a side. Learn as much as you can about both sides. Then prepare a presentation for the class that helps them understand what you've learned. Be sure to be even-handed in your presentation. Challenge yourself not to tip the class off to what your conclusions are. Then lead the class in a general discussion. Let everyone have his or her say. At the end, tell the class what you believe and why you believe it.

Adoption Confidentiality

Should people who have been adopted have a right to know who their birth parents are? Or, should the natural birth parents have a right not to be identified if they don't want to be?

Framing the Question

Sometimes when adopted children grow up and reach adulthood they may want to know about their natural parents. Many states seal the original birth certificate, and make this impossible. The adoptees argue that they have a right to know the truth about their genetic, ethnic and cultural background. Many people who disagree say that the birth parents have a right to privacy and that the government promised not to reveal their identity. It would be wrong to go back on this promise.

Stating the Ethical Issues

Is there a right to privacy? Is it a natural right? Is it protected by the Constitution? Is privacy the same as anonymity?

Is there an agreement between the birth mother and the government, acting on behalf of the infant adoptee, to keep the adoption a secret?

Is there a violation of the principle of "equal protection of all law" since only adopted citizens are denied access to their original birth certificates?

Is there a natural right to know who you are? Does your genetic, ethnic, and cultural heritage define who you are?

Does it violate the ethics of equality to let only the adoptee decide if the adoption facts will be revealed?

Problems to Ponder

Is it possible to reveal relevant information about the person's heritage without telling exactly who the birth parents are?

What are *adoptive search of registries*? Are they an adequate and fair way to solve this problem?

What responsibilities does the government have to resolve this?

Affirmative Action

It seems clear that throughout our history that some groups of people have been discriminated against. They have not received fair treatment in getting an education or a job. Does this injury entitle them to recover damages?

Framing the Question

Many people believe that a good way to right this wrong would be to give preferential treatment to these groups of people at school and at work. We call this idea *affirmative action*. Others say it is wrong to give preferential treatment to any group. They call affirmative action *reverse discrimination*, and they say two wrongs don't make a right.

Stating the Ethical Issues

Is giving preferential school admissions to minorities or unfair to those who are better qualified but denied a job or admission to the school? In other words, is affirmative action a violation of the "equal protection" clause of the 14th Amendment?

Is it fair to base hiring and school admissions decisions only on grades and test scores? Are there other equally important factors?

Are the questions on standardized tests biased against women and minorities making the tests unfair to these groups?

Past discrimination against minorities and women has damaged the educational and employment status of these groups, is affirmative action a fair way to even the score?

Problems to Ponder

Has affirmative action benefited minorities and women?

Have the percentages of minorities and women enrolled in medical schools, law, and other professional schools increased under affirmative action?

Have minorities and women narrowed the income gap with white males?

Has affirmative action reduced poverty?

Has affirmative action led to more jobs for minorities and women? Has it reduced minority unemployment rates?

Animal Rights and Welfare

Should animals be protected by law and enjoy some, or all, of the same rights as humans?

Framing the Question

Today many people have become concerned for the welfare of animals. They point to inhumane practices sometimes seen in farming, hunting, trapping, medical research and even in the circuses and zoos. This has led to efforts to improve the conditions under which animals live. Some people say animals should have rights to protect them just like people do. But others say that animals exist for the benefit of humans, and if they had rights, humans couldn't use them. They say that animals should be treated humanely, but not given actual rights.

Stating the Ethical Issues

Aren't rights just human inventions that don't apply to animals?

Do animals have the same natural right to live and be free that is claimed for humans? If not, what is the distinction between humans and animals?

If the animals have rights simply because they are living creatures then wouldn't insects and plants have rights too?

Are rights based on intelligence? If so wouldn't this reasoning be applied to humans also?

Could animals be entitled to rights because they can feel pain and can suffer?

If animals have no rights, does the human use of animals create a responsibility toward them? If so what is it?

Problems to Ponder

Is there an ethical difference between important uses of animals for such things as food and medical research, and entertainment uses such as for hunting or circuses?

Does it matter if the animal is of an endangered species?

Does it matter if the animal is tame or wild?

Is it OK to genetically alter animals to make them more useful to man?

Can the perceived importance of certain medical research justify inhumane treatment of animals?

Capital Punishment

The United States is one of the few Western democracies which has not yet abolished the death penalty. This political issue is an ongoing controversy.

Framing the Question

The majority of Americans believe that the death penalty should not be abolished. They say that it helps protect society, and that it is an appropriate way to punish murderers. Opponents argue that the death penalty does not deter murderers and is just a form of revenge that may actually lead to an increase in violent crime.

Stating the Ethical Issues

Is the death penalty unfairly applied to African Americans and poor people?

Is the death penalty a "cruel and unusual punishment," making it unconstitutional?

Is it right for the government to sanction the killing of human beings?

Is the death penalty ethical if life in prison with no possibility of parole will equally protect society?

Does executing murderers actually say that killing is OK under some circumstances?

Is it ethical to pursue the death penalty when we know that at least a few of the executions will kill innocent people?

Problems to Ponder

Does the family of the victim have a right to get revenge?

Does the death penalty put too much focus on the killer and neglect the needs of the victim's family and thereby reduce the value of human life?

Do executions actually increase murders because potential killers identify with the executioner and not with the convicted murderer?

Is the death penalty justified because the murder victim could have justifiably killed the murderer in self-defense?

Enhancement Drugs

Drugs have been developed that can enhance the human body in powerful ways. Human growth hormone can cause a normally short person to grow taller. Anabolic steroids can make muscles stronger, and can increase athletic performance. Many people believe that these drugs can also help them look more physically attractive.

Framing the Question

Is it ethical to use artificial substances to alter the normal size and strength of the human body? Is there a difference between treating a person who is “abnormally” short or weak to make him or her more “normal”, and treating someone of average height or strength to make him or her very tall or very strong?

Stating the Ethical Issues

Is it fair to allow athletes who use anabolic steroids to compete against athletes who don't?

Doesn't everyone have a right to take risks and to decide personally which risks to take?

Is it the performance enhancement aspect of anabolic steroid use which is most objectionable, or is it the potential they have for damaging one's health? In other words, is it a sports competition issue or a health issue?

Don't people have a right to enhance their bodies if this will make them happy?

Is there any real difference between taking a pill to help you lose weight and taking one to help you gain?

Problems to Ponder

Is it ethical for society to promote the desirability of being tall, strong and athletic, and then punishing people who try to achieve this?

Should doctors, coaches and teachers admit that anabolic steroids do enhance strength and performance, even if this seems to encourage their use? Or, should they only stress the negative side effects, and possible health risks, in the hope of discouraging use?

Genetic Engineering

The United States Supreme Court decided in 1980 that new forms of life created by scientists through genetic manipulation could be patented. This has set off a massive effort to “invent” new animals, plants and micro-organisms that could be useful or profitable.

Framing the Question

Is it ethical to genetically modify plants, animals or micro-organisms, and to introduce them into the world without knowing how they will impact the environment? Do the risks of mutation or disease that may threaten the delicate balance of nature outweigh the advantages that might be gained? Is it possible to trust profit driven pharmaceutical and chemical companies to make decisions that will protect the environment and society?

Stating the Ethical Issues

Is it ethical to mix embryonic cells of humans with other animals to create a mixed animal-human species?

Is it ethical to genetically engineer headless animals specifically for organ and cell transplants? Is the creation of headless humans ethical?

Is it ethical to alter genetic makeup to create “perfect” children?

Is it ethical to prevent scientific research that could lead to cures for terrible diseases or solutions to world hunger?

Problems to Ponder

Will genetic engineering lead to a widening in the gap between the “haves” and the “have-nots” in society, since people with the financial resources could ensure superior characteristics for their children? Will this lead to an increase in class conflict?

Homelessness

In recent years a new social problem has appeared in America. Hundreds of thousands, maybe even millions, of people have no place to live. They survive on the streets, sleeping in cardboard boxes or plastic trash bags. They are poor, often physically ill, sometimes drug or alcohol addicted and always socially isolated.

Framing the Question

Do people have a right to be homeless if they want to? And, if so, what legitimate rights do they have to use the public spaces in towns and cities? What is the balance between the rights of these homeless people to live in public places and the rights of the community to be free from the nuisance and sometimes crime they cause? Can the community push these people out in the name of protecting the public welfare?

Stating the Ethical Issues

Is it right to punish a person for a condition he or she can't control? Are poverty and homelessness involuntary conditions or do the homeless often choose to be homeless?

Does the community have the right to set standards of public behavior that restrict the ability of the homeless people to eat, sleep and relax in public places?

Problems to Ponder

Is it possible for some people to prefer being homeless on the street among other homeless friends to living alone in a shabby rooming house?

Is most homelessness caused by addictions to drugs, alcohol or gambling?

What is the relationship of homelessness to mental illness?

Is homelessness an acceptable "lifestyle" that should take its place as part of American diversity?

Human Cloning

Since the successful cloning, in Scotland, of Dolly the sheep, the chances for human cloning in the near future have greatly increased.

Framing the Question

Most people believe that there is a vast difference between cloning animals and cloning human beings. They see only negatives from human cloning, and argue that such identical copies would not be truly human. Visions of armies of robotic clones being turned out of laboratory test tubes is repulsive to many who say there are no ethical reasons to clone a human being.

Stating the Ethical Issues

Is it ethical to go forward with a scientific experiment when the outcome is unknown, and when it may be a disastrous mutation or otherwise lead to suffering?

Is it possible to clone a child without wanting that baby to become a predetermined kind of adult? Wouldn't this often lead to parents using their children to further their own desires?

Can a cloned child be psychologically normal knowing that he or she is an identical copy of someone else?

Is it ethical to outlaw cloning, and thereby take away a person's right to reproduce by any means he or she chooses?

Problems to Ponder

Who are the actual parents of a cloned baby? Isn't the clone actually a twin of the person from whom it was cloned? Can this confuse and undermine the traditional family structure?

Would it be ethical to create a clone for the purpose of obtaining perfectly matched organs for transplants?

Legalization of Drugs

Is it right for society through the government to restrict people's freedom to use drugs?

Framing the Question

Many people today believe that drugs are a root cause of crime, and that drugs can completely undermine the stability of the society. They say that only prohibition can work, and that the legalization of drugs will only lead to a massive increase in drug use, and to the problems associated with this. Others argue that it's actually the enforcement of these laws that creates a criminal environment and leads to the problems.

Stating the Ethical Issues

Does the society have an ethical obligation to protect people from themselves? If so, how far can society go? What is the balance between the freedom of the individual, and the right of society to protect itself? Does it do any good either for the individual or for society to enforce the prohibition against drug use?

Problems to Ponder

If drug use would increase due to legalization would it also lead to a reduction in alcohol and tobacco use and thereby offset the harm?

Do drug laws drive up the price of drugs and thereby force drug users into committing crimes?

Do drug laws generate violence by promoting gangs?

Do drug laws cause death from poisonous drugs and overdoses by forcing drug users to use unregulated drugs ?

Do drug laws cause death by creating an environment where dirty needles spread hepatitis the AIDS virus?

Do drug laws create an environment that leads to the corruption of law enforcement officials?

Does the enforcement of drug laws lead to disregard for individual civil and human rights by law enforcement officials?

School Prayer

Does the Constitution prevent students from praying in school?

Framing the Question

Should the schools be allowed to start the day with a prayer if the students and teachers want to and the community agrees? This question has sparked a long debate in America because the Supreme Court has said no. Many people don't understand this, and argue that the Constitution guarantees people this right. But many others say the opposite, that the Constitution forbids it.

Stating the Ethical Issues

How far can government go in limiting the freedom of one person to protect the freedom of another?

The Constitution says that all citizens are guaranteed the "free exercise of religion." Doesn't this mean that the government can't stop prayer in schools?

The Constitution says that there must be a "separation of church and state." The government runs schools. Doesn't this mean that any religious activity must be outlawed in schools?

Is there a difference between prayer, which is an official part of the school program, and prayer done privately by individuals?

Problems to Ponder

If the prayers cannot be used to start the day, is it OK to have a moment of silence? What did the Supreme Court say? What do you think?

Can individual students pray in the school if they do it on their own? What did the Supreme Court say? What do you think?

Can religious holidays like Christmas be celebrated in school? What did the Supreme Court say? What do you think?