A Guide for the Godless

The Secular Path to Meaning

Andrew Kernohan
Department of Philosophy
Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia
Canada

http://myweb.dal.ca/kernohan/godless
December, 2006

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

My aim, in this book, is to apply recent thinking in philosophy to the age-old problem of the meaning of life, and to do so in a way that is accessible to the general reader. I joined the Godless in my teens when I found that I could no longer believe in the religion of my upbringing. So worries about the meaningfulness of life were what originally led me to philosophy. In studying philosophy formally, however, I was soon sidetracked by other issues. Despite popular perception, very few academic philosophers do professional work specifically on the meaning of life. Recently, though, I have wondered if technical work in other areas of philosophy might have something helpful to say about living a meaningful life. This book is the result.

Explaining what I found requires that I describe philosophical theories regarding value, the nature of ethics, emotions, epistemology, semantics, existentialism, and even politics. So the book will serve the reader as an introduction to these issues. But it is not an even-handed introduction; these various theories are introduced in the service of explaining and defending the view that I came to hold. Roughly, my view is this. Constructing a meaningful life requires both our hearts and our heads. To find what is meaningful, we must find what truly matters. Finding what truly matters uses our hearts, because evidence for what matters comes from our emotional responses. But it also uses our heads, because we must reflect critically on our initial responses to avoid the errors to which emotions are prone.

The first seven chapters of the book are mostly critical. I describe arguments, drawn from contemporary value theory, that criticize common views about what is meaningful, worthwhile, and valuable in life. My own views about meaningfulness begin in Chapter 8. There, and in the chapters which follow, I describe how meaning is found through emotional judgments, how such judgments are made, how they can be true, and how they can be used in constructing a meaningful life. More specifically, the first four chapters (Meaning, Purpose, Death, Self-Realization) reorient the search for meaning away from a search for purpose and toward a search for what truly matters. The next three

(Pleasure, Desire, Reasons) criticize our society's prevailing theory of value, the preference satisfaction theory of the economists. Chapters 8 and 9 (Emotion, Judgment) argue that emotions are our best guides to what matters in life, and chapters 10, 11, and 12 (Holism, Belief, Truth) show how emotional judgments about what matters can be true. The next three chapters (Meaninglessness, Choice, Commitment) discuss how a meaningful life is possible, and describe the role of freedom and identity in its construction. Chapters 16 and 17 (Justice, Culture) argue that a meaningful life requires both caring about justice for others and reforming our misdirected culture. The last chapter (Happiness) compares the meaningful and the happy life.

I am indebted to many friends for their advice and support in the writing of this book: Ronnie de Sousa, David Dyzenhaus, Michael Fuller, Kate Follinsbee, Rocky Jacobsen, John Johnson, Ann Kernohan, Marie MacLellan, Ralph Martin, Chris McKinnon, Cheryl Misak, Gloria Penny, Lois Pineau, Kiran Pure, Ghada Sharkawy, Noha Sharkawy, Ron Sherrard, Wayne Sumner, Tarjei Tennessen. I owe a particular debt to my partner, Anne MacLellan, to whom the book is dedicated.

This book took sixteen months of my life to research and write. The writing was not funded by any granting agency or academic institution. I originally began the project because I hoped to find some answers for myself. I wish, however, to share what I found, and hope that you, the reader, will find the book worthwhile.

Chapter 1

MEANING

> "Midway in our life's journey, I went astray /from the straight road and woke to find myself/alone in a dark wood. How shall I say /what wood that was! I never saw so drear, /so rank, so arduous a wilderness! /Its very memory gives shape to fear. /Death could scarce be more bitter than that place! /But since it came to good, I will recount /all that I found revealed there . . . ."
> - Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), *The Inferno*, Canto I, (Dante, 1954: 28)

Sometimes we feel dislocated and abandoned. Like Dante, we seem lost in an unfamiliar forest, with trees obstructing our view and paths leading off in all directions. Some paths appear attractive while others look dismal and dangerous. Some appear well used while others look lonely. We have no idea where to go. Worse still, we do not even know what we are trying to find.

Once, like Dante, we might have accepted the guidance of religion. Back then, we thought we knew the way, but now, we have lost confidence. We have joined the Godless, and we Godless must seek our own way. We are not wicked people; we are good people earnestly seeking a secular path to meaning, a path allowing no recourse to God.

Our quest for meaning began the moment we started to think about life. We did not volunteer for this quest, but short of death, we cannot refuse it. We may, if we wish, follow others unthinkingly. Yet the stakes are enormous; this is the only life that any of us will ever have. We have to discover what truly matters, and use that to set the directions of our lives.

My offer is to explain what contemporary western philosophy can contribute to this search. I do not claim to know the meaning of anyone else's life, or even, with any confidence, of my own. Nevertheless, I think recent philosophical research can teach us something about which paths lead nowhere, and can give us some knowledge of the nature of that which we seek.

People no longer turn to philosophers for wisdom. They turn instead to spiritual teachers, to self-empowerment gurus, and to psychotherapists.

Such help is more accessible, and more directly related to their lives, than is the removed and academic writing of philosophers. Contemporary philosophers have mostly abandoned offering people advice on how to live. Nevertheless, we can find treasure in philosophy's arid realms. Academic philosophers are nothing if not clever and imaginative people. They have created fascinating formulations, arguments, and thought experiments, knowledge of which will profit anyone searching for meaning in life. The trick is to find what is useful.

Surprisingly, seeking what truly matters will lead us to ethics. In contemporary discourse, we have a tendency to equate questions of ethics solely with questions of interpersonal morality or of how we ought to treat others. Yet it was not always so. Traditionally ethics had two departments, one concerned with obligations to other people and the other concerned with how to live a worthwhile life. Contemporary philosophical ethics has returned to thinking about these latter concerns, concerns about the nature of value and about the sorts of things that are valuable.

Meaning, Happiness, and Truth

A meaningful life is not always a happy life. Consider the story of Victor Frankl, psychiatrist and author of *Man's Search for Meaning*. He found meaning amid the horrendous experience of being an inmate of a Nazi concentration camp. Partly because of this experience he developed a form of psychotherapy, logotherapy, that was based on the primacy of the search for meaning in human life. Yet his life in the concentration camp was not, in any usual sense of the term, a happy one. If a meaningful life is not always happy, so too a seemingly happy life is not always meaningful. We seldom judge a life of leisured wealth and mindless pleasure to be full of meaning.

Meaningfulness is that in which we are ultimately interested. If we can have happiness too, then that would be wonderful. We can have, however, no guarantee that meaning and happiness will always be found together.

This lack of a necessary connection between meaning and happiness has an upside. Just because someone is unhappy, depressed, and despairing about his life, it does *not* follow that his life is meaningless. His unhappiness is good evidence that something is wrong either in his life or in the way he thinks about it. Nevertheless, his unhappy feelings do not in any way logically entail that his life lacks meaning.

Someone who is badly depressed will typically see his life and his world as sad, tedious, and lacking in emotional color. Yet his mood may be due to an imbalance in his brain's neurotransmitters that medication can help. He should not conclude from the evidence of his mood disorder that life is meaningless, any more than someone who has age-related, high-frequency hearing loss should conclude that the birds no longer really sing. Similarly, someone who is in the manic phase of a bipolar disorder may exult in her life, and find the world fascinating and joyful. Again, she should not conclude from this evidence that her life is meaningful and going well.

The meaningfulness of our lives is not just a matter of our state of mind. Admittedly someone with incurable depression may ultimately prefer not to have been born. However, this would be an extreme case, one where the severity of the depression cancels all the other blessings of life. Judgments about meaningfulness are judgments about whether or not it is *true* that our activities and the world we live in are worthwhile and valuable. It is not just a matter of how we feel, since our brain chemistry and our psychological health may distort our feelings.

Just as our unhappy moods may influence our judgments about meaningfulness, inaccurate judgments about meaning may influence our unhappy moods. The most successful and most widely practiced forms of psychotherapy work on the premise that depression, anxiety, and other mood disorders are, in an important way, caused by people's distorted views of themselves, their world, and their future. For some people, these cognitive distortions will include false philosophical views about the meaning of life. Such people may find that avoiding false views of meaning can help their moods.

When we ask the question, "What is the meaning of life?" we expect the answer to be one that is true. We also hope that understanding the answer will make some difference to us; we hope that it will make us feel better about our life, less despairing and more happy. Still, the answer to our question and the state of our feelings are two different things. We do not answer the question just by getting the right feelings; all we do is reduce its felt urgency. Answering the question is a matter not only of psychology, but also of philosophy.

This does not mean that feelings are unimportant. Though getting the answer right is primary, the answer must still matter to us. It is not enough that our lives should be meaningful in some objective sense. It is also important that our lives should be meaningful *to* us. A good

answer should be something we care about, something that engages us on an emotional level.

Diversity, Plurality, and Particularity

The question of the meaning of life comes to the forefront at the beginning, middle, and end of our adult lives. In our teens and early twenties, the quest has a special urgency because, to live our lives, we must find meaningful work, meaningful ideals, and meaningful relationships. In middle age, with lived experience of the choices we have made, we must reevaluate and change. Finally, toward the end of our lives, we must look back, hopefully with some satisfaction, on how we have lived.

As young adults, most of us want a simple answer to the question of meaning. We want to find *the* meaning of life; we want to discover one, unique reality that answers all our questions. Some people think the answer lies in the pursuit of enjoyable experiences. Others think it lies in the all-enveloping comfort and ecstasy of romantic love. Still others believe that, after long meditation and spiritual discipline, they will discover an ultimately compelling reality. They believe that their consciousness will lock onto this reality in a way that guides their lives completely.

This latter view once attracted me. However, I no longer think that such a simple answer can be found. We must face the possibility that there is no One Big Thing that is *the* meaning of life. Our quests do not all have one, and only one, goal. Lives can still be meaningful without being so in one, unique way. Lives can be meaningful in many ways.

First, no single goal – freedom, self-development, pleasure, fulfilled desire, absence of suffering, contemplative bliss – need be the only goal that truly matters. Instead we may find a diversity of meaning, many worthwhile goals of which none is the sole answer.

Second, these goals may not be meaningful for just one, uniform reason. Instead, the ways that persons, things, and events provide reasons for our goals may be highly plural. Some things may be beautiful, and some may be awesome. Some people may be admirable, and some may be worthy of your love.

Third, meaning may not be general; it may not be the same for everyone. Meaning may be very particular; different mixtures of different sorts of things, all valuable in different ways, may best suit different people.

This absence of a simple answer is perhaps easiest to accept for people at the middle and end of their lives. We have, at those times, more tolerance for nuance and complexity, and less idealizing romanticism. Unlike a mediaeval quest, where youth and strength were at a premium, age may be an advantage in our modern-day quest.

The forest of life presents us with many paths. Some lead us to enemies such as the fear of death, which, if not vanquished, can bring our searching only to despair. Others lead us to false friends, like religion, whose comforting illusions can delay our journeys permanently. Yet other paths lead us to temptations, simple and incomplete answers, whose blandishments may hold us for a time. We must learn from the latter all we can, and carry this knowledge with us when we leave. Still leave we must, for these incomplete answers are but a part of something larger, more diverse, and closer to the truth that remains for us to discover.

Chapter 2

PURPOSE

> "If one considers an article of manufacture – as, for example, a book or a paper-knife – one sees that it has been made by an artisan who had a conception of it. . . . Let us say, then, of the paper-knife that its essence – that is to say the sum of the formulae and the qualities which made its production and its definition possible – precedes its existence. . . . Thus, the conception of man in the mind of God is comparable to that of the paper-knife in the mind of the artisan . . . . Atheistic existentialism, of which I am a representative, declares with greater consistency that if God does not exist there is at least one being whose existence comes before its essence, a being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it. That being is man . . . ."
> - Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism* (Sartre 1948:26-28)

Thinking about a question in the wrong way will render the question unanswerable. People often believe that the question of the meaning of life is a question about the purpose of life. Some people believe that they are born with an inner purpose, and that to discover this inner purpose would be to discover the meaning of their lives. Others believe that events always happen for a reason, even when they do not understand that reason. Many of those who believe in God see a meaningful life as one that fulfills God's purposes and try to align their own purposes with His. However, many of us no longer believe in hidden inner purposes, unknowable cosmic reasons, or a personal God. Yet we still, mistakenly, conceptualize the search for life's meaning as a search for life's purpose.

The role of function and purpose in the technology of his day influenced Aristotle to apply this purpose-seeking framework to answering the question of how to live:

> Presumably, however, to say that happiness is the chief good seems a platitude, and a clearer account of what it is is still desired. This might perhaps be given, if we could first ascertain the function of man. For just as for a flute-player, a sculptor, or any artist, and, in general, for all things that have a function or activity, the good and

> the 'well' is thought to reside in the function, so would it seem to be for man, if he has a function. Have the carpenter, then, and the tanner certain functions or activities, and man none? Is he born without a function? Or as eye, hand, foot, and in general each of the parts evidently has a function, may one lay it down that man similarly has a function apart from all these? What then can this be? (Aristotle 1953:I.7)

Aristotle's ancient conceptual framework, a way of thinking that philosophers label "teleological," is still with us. To make progress, we must, like Sartre in the chapter motto, reject this whole way of thinking about the question of meaning. We must reorient our quest away from searching for a purpose in life and toward discovering how to judge what truly matters.

Purposes: Psychological, Scientific, and Theological

Without doubt, human beings are purposeful creatures. We have intentions and goals. We formulate and revise our ends in life. We commit ourselves to courses of action and make plans for how to pursue our lives. We understand ourselves through understanding our goals and purposes. We also understand other people in the same terms. We formulate theories about the goals and purposes of others to predict their behavior and to coordinate our actions with theirs. Our everyday understanding of human psychology is irreducibly purposive.

Nothing is wrong with this view of human psychology. Trouble arises, however, when we attempt to project this way of understanding ourselves onto the cosmos. Our early ancestors, quite plausibly, had a better understanding of themselves and their fellows than they did of the world around of them. So they easily came to project their understanding of human psychology onto the natural world. They saw the world in an animist way. They explained the behavior of the seasons, the weather, and the world about them using the plans and purposes of spirits or gods. As they themselves created artifacts to fulfill their own purposes, so too they understood the origins of the world through the purposes of its creator.

Only in the last few hundred years have human beings begun to stop projecting their own psychology onto the universe and to throw off this animistic world view. The physics of Galileo and Newton and the biology of Darwin have replaced the teleological "science" of Aristotle that had held sway for two millennia. The search for purpose in science is over.

However, the archaic search for purpose in the universe has left us a legacy in our thinking. People have not yet outgrown its conceptual structure when they think about life. People still equate searching for life's meaning with searching for life's purpose. They still conceive the object of their quest to be finding some great purpose with which to align their lives. Aligning their lives with this external purpose, they believe, will endow their lives with meaning.

The God-fearing search for a cosmic purpose, the purpose for which some universal spirit created them. Two problems face this conception of our quest. One is that no such cosmic purpose exists. The view that the universe is the artifact of an intelligent designer is simply false. The other problem is that, even if there were some cosmic purpose ordained by an intelligent designer, we would still need to evaluate that purpose. We would still need to ask if it is a worthwhile goal. Aligning our lives with an external purpose, even an intelligent designer's purpose, is not enough to give our lives meaning unless that purpose truly matters. To make this judgment, we have to know the source of what truly matters.

Purpose in Science

The teleological conceptual framework, in which people seek explanations in terms of purposes, is outdated. It is discredited in just about every other area of science, morality, and political theory. To make progress, we must leave it behind.

One wrong-headed interpretation of Darwin's theory of evolution goes like this: The survival of the fittest leads to progress over time. New species arise which are better than those they surpass. The human species is the culmination of this evolutionary progress. Therefore, the human species is the purpose of evolution. However, this interpretation of evolution is false. Evolution is not going anywhere. Any attempt to see human civilization as the purpose of evolution is scientifically unproductive. Individual organisms succeed each other in various environments, and some individuals are more successful at passing on their genetic material than others. That is it. Change, yes; increased complexity, often; but purpose, no.

Richard Dawkins, a well-known contemporary defender of Darwin's theory of evolution and author of *The Selfish Gene*, writes:

> We humans have purpose on the brain. We find it difficult to look at anything without wondering what it is "for," what the motive for it or the purpose behind it might be. The desire to see purpose everywhere is a natural one in an animal that lives surrounded by

> machines, works of art, tools and other designed artifacts -- an animal, moreover, whose waking thoughts are dominated by its own goals and aims. Although a car, a tin opener, a screwdriver and a pitchfork all legitimately warrant the "What is it for" question, the mere fact that it is possible to frame a question does not make it legitimate or sensible to do so. . . . Questions can be simply inappropriate, however heartfelt their framing. (Dawkins 1995:81)

Living in a technological world, a world of sophisticated tools for human purposes, human beings will naturally read "purpose" into their interpretation of the world. So projecting this framework onto the world seems natural for them. Nevertheless, the question, "What is the purpose of living?" is not a legitimate, well-framed, or fruitful question.

Physicists have abandoned explanations that appeal to purpose. The ancients thought that falling bodies always sought their natural place, which was on the surface of the earth. Such teleological explanations got their science nowhere. Modern physics, as we know it today, was able to develop only after it left this sort of explanation behind. Through Galileo and Newton, scientists came to think of motion and the law of gravity in a totally different way.

Biologists, too, have abandoned explanations that appeal to purpose. We can say, loosely, that the purpose of the heart is to pump blood, but that does not get us very far. The sophisticated therapies of modern medicine depend on a much finer grained knowledge of the physiology and biochemistry of the heart.

Political thinking, hopefully, has abandoned explanations that appeal to purpose. In totalitarian regimes, an individual is important only insofar as he fulfills a role in society. He has a purpose, which is to contribute to the good of the state. In democratic regimes, an individual is important in herself. She has inherent political rights. Her worth is not just instrumental; it is not that she is important only as she fulfills the purposes of the state. Her worth is intrinsic.

So, too, we should abandon the search for a purpose when thinking about life's meaning. Otherwise we will be trapped by reasoning that goes like this: The meaning of life is the purpose of life; life has no purpose; therefore, life has no meaning. We must stop looking for instrumental meaning. Our lives are not resources serving some higher purpose. Instead, we should look for inherent meaning, meaning that is to be found within life itself. We should not think of something as meaningful only if it has a purpose. Instead, we should think of

something as meaningful only if it is inherently worthwhile, that is, only if it truly matters.

Of course this does not yet answer our question. We still do not know how it can be *true* that something matters. Without knowing that, we still cannot find out what things truly matter, or even whether anything truly matters at all. However, at least we are no longer questing in a fruitless direction.

Purpose in Theology

In the Jewish/Christian/Muslim tradition, looking for purpose leads ultimately to God, the *summum bonum*, the alleged answer to all questions. The following passage, which is from the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book III by the medieval theologian, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), illustrates this reasoning:

> . . . it follows that good, as such, is an end. Consequently that which is the supreme good is supremely the end of all. Now there is but one supreme good, namely God. . . . Therefore all things are directed to the highest good, namely God, as their end. (Aquinas 1993:32)

The purpose of human life is supposedly to know God, to praise God, to follow God's commands, or to fulfill God's purposes. If we do not believe in God, this line of reasoning continues, then we are in deep trouble. Without God, human life has no purpose and, therefore, no meaning.

Notice that people whose religious background is polytheistic would be unlikely to look to God's purposes for an answer. The ancient Greeks, for example, believed in a plethora of gods, fighting, feasting, and mating with each other. The Greek gods were frequently at cross-purposes. So the Greek gods provided no consistent set of purposes that the ancient Greeks could think of as the meaning of life. In this polytheistic tradition, the natural place to look for meaning was inside of human life itself. People appealed to the gods because people thought them powerful, not because people thought their purposes good. They sought the gods' aid for goals and causes that they already judged worthwhile against human standards. Only in a monotheistic tradition, would God's purposes appear to be the meaning of life.

The Godless do not believe in a monotheistic God. We seek another path; any path leading to God is a dead end. To make progress, however, it is not enough just to give up our belief in God. We must also give up the whole purpose-oriented conceptual structure that Aquinas's

reasoning presupposes. Instead of asking what is *the* purpose of your life, we should ask how to find meaning and value in our lives. Meaning is not something outside of life but something inherent within it.

In any case, it is not at all clear that appeal to God really answers the question of meaning. Appealing to God's purposes for the meaning of life only works if God's purposes really are good. In his essay, "A Free Man's Worship," Bertrand Russell, performed an interesting thought experiment. (Russell 1981) Russell asked us to imagine a universe in which God's purposes were far from benevolent. Growing bored with the endless praise of the angels, God created a solar system in which would evolve creatures with free will. He wanted to see if such creatures would also come to worship Him. When they did, when they freely renounced the pleasures of the world in His name, they lost their entertainment value. So He destroyed their solar system, while at the same time, Russell chillingly imagines, planning to have the play enacted again. Were this story the truth, would any of us seriously worship a God like that?

If we would not worship a God who created us merely for His own entertainment, then God's purposes alone are not answers to the question of life's meaning. Merely fulfilling the purposes of an omnipotent God is not an ethically compelling reason why we should live a particular way.

If, however, we must assess God's purposes against some independent standard of good and evil, then God's purposes are not the source of meaning. Instead, the independent standards, which even God must follow, are the source of meaning. God's purposes drop out of the equation. The ethical standards that govern even God's purposes contain the answer to our question. For something to answer the question of meaning, it is not enough that it is simply a purpose, even if it is a purpose of God's. We must always evaluate purposes as worthwhile or not. The important task is learning how to find which goals are truly worthy.

The threat of God's punishment may give us a pragmatic reason for obedience to His purposes. Still, that does not answer our question in any satisfactory way. Punishment makes obedience inescapable, but it does not make it worthy.

For God to be the answer, He would need somehow to be a self-validating source of purpose. He must both set the standards and follow them. Something about God's nature must make it that His purposes are valuable ones. A theologian might reason like this: Something is good if

it is in accord with God's commands. God, having ultimate freedom of will, commands His own purposes. Because anything commanded by God is good and because God's purposes are commanded by God, it follows that God's purposes are good ones. Nevertheless, this theological argument is circular. A theologian might further appeal to the infinite perfection of God's infinite nature. However, this is an appeal to something that we, as finite beings, are by definition not able to understand. Such theological answers to life's meaning, answers that are either circular or incomprehensible, are of little help on our quest. (Nagel 1987:100)

Whatever our reasons for joining the Godless, we can learn something from the failure of the religious path. The lesson is this: If we abandon the religious answer to the question of life's meaning, then we must also abandon the whole conceptual framework that underlies it. We should stop searching for the purpose of life. Instead we should search for what truly matters, and then use that knowledge to set our personal goals.

To abandon the search for a cosmic purpose, and to replace it with the search for what truly matters, is not to become aimless. We can still have worthy goals and ultimate ends in life. They will not be abstract and cosmic in scale, but they can still be goals that truly matter. We will not find one universal purpose for all people; instead we will find a plurality of meanings for particular persons. Our ultimate ends in life will not be something that we receive from an external source. Instead, they will be goals that we discover through reflection on what truly matters for us.

Chapter 3

DEATH

> "'Why should I live? Why should I wish for anything? Why should I do anything?' Again, in other words: 'Is there any meaning in my life which will not be destroyed by the inevitable death awaiting me?'"
> - Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910), *My Confession* (Tolstoy 1929:20)

With luck, our deaths will be easy. Without luck, our deaths will be hard. However it happens, though, death is the end of life. It is over. We no longer exist. No more possibility, no more consciousness, only utter non-being. The world goes on without us. The sun still shines, nature is still beautiful, the children still play, but we are no longer there. Death is the end.

Death happens to everyone. None of us is special. No miracle will happen. No cosmic force will come to our rescue. Much as our parents or spouse might be willing, no one can die in our stead. Inevitably, we will cease to exist. We cannot avoid our deaths.

Is death, then, the ultimate foe of meaning? Is death the invincible dragon whose jaws doom every quest to failure?

Death and Eternity

Distinguish, first, between death and dying. The process of dying is injury, infirmity or disease. Physical suffering and humiliation are involved in any ailment. Yet we would not say that ill-health always destroys the meaning in a life. Possibly such intense and protracted suffering fills some lives that this suffering outweighs all other values. Possibly these lives are not worth living. But such lives are the exception. Meaningfulness is not the same thing as absence of suffering. It is death, not dying, which is apparently the enemy of meaning.

Distinguish, too, between death and its consequences. When we die, our loved ones will grieve, our projects will go unfinished, and our children will no longer have our care. These are not happy prospects. Nevertheless, they do not destroy the meaning of our lives. Is the grief of our loved ones not a sign that our lives were valuable and worthwhile? Our loved ones are sad because our lives were meaningful, not because our lives were meaningless. Do our unfinished projects and unfulfilled plans destroy the value of the projects we did finish and the plans we did fulfill? Do our deaths make the care we have already given our children

no longer worthwhile? It is death, not its consequences, which is apparently the enemy of meaning.

When we die, we cease to exist. We become nothing. What is it about this non-being that seems to destroy meaning? We are not going to suffer after death, for death ends all experience, both pleasurable and painful. Epicurus (341-270 B.C.E.) pointed this out in his *Letter to Menoeceus*.

> Become accustomed to the belief that death is nothing to us. For all good and evil consists in sensation, but death is deprivation of sensation. . . . So death, the most terrifying of ills, is nothing to us, since so long as we exist death is not with us; but when death comes, then we do not exist. It does not concern either the living or the dead, since for the former it is not, and the latter are no more. (Epicurus 1940:30-31)

To suffer, we have to experience the suffering, and death ends all experience. Even if intense, protracted suffering were to destroy meaning, death itself would not.

Something's coming to an end does not usually destroy its value. None of us would refuse to go to a party simply because it ended at midnight. We would not avoid a movie because it was only two hours long. Nor would we refuse a good meal because we could only eat so much food. Would any of us seriously prefer never to have been born, just because our lives will one day end? We are quite right to be worried about our lives ending, and to be anxious and sad at this prospect. Still, does the fact that all our lives come to an end really make our lives meaningless?

The universe has existed for about fifteen billion years. For nearly all of those fifteen billion years we did not yet exist. That fact does not disturb us. Nor does this fact threaten to make our lives meaningless. So why should its meaning be threatened by the fact that the universe will go on for billions of years after we cease to exist? In his *On the Nature of Things*, Lucretius (c.99 - c.55 B.C.E.), a Roman follower of Epicurus, reminded his readers:

> Think too how the bygone antiquity of everlasting time before our birth was nothing to us. Nature therefore holds this up to us as a mirror of the time yet to come after our death. Is there aught in this that looks appalling, aught that wears an aspect of gloom? Is it not more untroubled than any sleep? (Lucretius 1940:134)

Think how quickly the fifteen billion years before our births seemed to pass. We did not even notice those years; we were not there to notice them. The hundreds of billions of years after our deaths will pass just as quickly for us. The meaning, value, and worthwhileness of our lives have not been destroyed by fifteen billion years of nonexistence before our births. Why should the meaning of our lives be destroyed by billions of years of nonexistence after our deaths?

Death and Purpose

In the last chapter, we saw reasons to abandon the whole conceptual framework of looking for purposes. That conceptual framework is a projection of our own psychology onto the universe. That way of thinking misleads us, too, in our reflections on death. Death appears to make life meaningless if we continue to understand purposes as the sources of meaning.

Assume, for the sake of the argument, that the source of an activity's meaning is always its purpose. Its purpose is some goal that it accomplishes. Generally the goal of an activity occurs as a result of the activity and so occurs after the activity in time. So an activity is meaningful only if it accomplishes some future goal.

Yet, not just any goal can make the activity meaningful. For example, someone whose goal was to count all the grains of sand on a beach might have a lifelong purpose, but it is not a meaningful purpose. The route to meaning which I advocate stops here. It evaluates goals independently of their further purposes. It asks the question, "Does accomplishing this goal truly matter?" We have not yet seen how to answer this question, but we at least know that the answer will not involve looking for further purposes.

However, the purpose-framework does not stop at this point. It can only evaluate goals as meaningful in terms of their further purposes. So the purpose-framework goes on to ask, "What is the further purpose of achieving this goal?" The purpose of achieving this goal will, in turn, be another future, meaningful goal that it helps to achieve. This second goal will, itself, only be meaningful if it helps to achieve yet a third, larger, meaningful goal still further in the future. And so on. We can see that the purpose-framework leads as to worrying about a chain of purposes stretching *ad infinitum*.

Eventually this chain of future purposes will pass beyond the life span of the human beings who initiated the activity. Only if we lived forever, it seems, could we accomplish something inherently meaningful.

Otherwise, everything we do seems only to be instrumental to something meaningful in the future, never now. The source of meaning seems always to be something occurring after our death. Death appears to end our participation in this chain of purposes. Death appears as an end to life's meaning.

We get into this intellectual trap by continuing to think of meaning as some purpose that is external to life. The purpose view is a holdover from the theistic perspective. God, were He to have existed, would have ended the chain of purposes. However, we have looked at the conceptual framework of purposes, and concluded that to make progress we must abandon it. If we confine ourselves to goals and projects that we can achieve within our lives, then we escape the trap. Many of our projects do come to fruition in the present and immediate future. Others will remain unfinished when we die, but that does not prevent the ones we have finished from truly mattering.

Sometimes it seems that, though each individual activity, experience, and relationship within life has a point, life as a whole does not. Each of our activities, experiences, and relationships is just part of a whole, and it seems that the whole thing is going nowhere. (Nagel 1987:96) If we give portions of our life to a social cause, then this time has value only if the cause has value. If our cause proves a false one, then we have wasted our time. Our effort has been part of the cause, and it only has value if the whole thing has value.

However, not all value is instrumental like this. Some activities, experiences, and relationships are inherently valuable; they do not depend for their value on any whole of which they are a part. For example, someone's relationship with her children, while important to their growth, is also valuable for its own sake. Some things just matter in themselves and not because of some further goal they accomplish. We are misled, as before, by understanding meaning as purpose.

Allegiance to the framework of purposes was behind Tolstoy's complaint that death prevents life from having meaning. We must relinquish this comfortable, but misleading, conceptual framework, and search, instead, for what inherently matters.

The Immensity of the Universe

People come to believe that no meaning can be found in life for many reasons connected to human finitude. All these reasons are fallacious. They are cognitive distortions standing in the way of our search. Consider some examples:

One, people are often impressed by the thought that, not only will they die, but also the universe itself will come to an end. In billions of years the sun and stars will become supernovae and then collapse into black holes. In hundreds of billions of years, the black holes themselves will radiate their energy, and the now dark universe will consist only of a vast, thin trickle of neutrinos. All records of human projects will be lost. Nothing will be left that will care, or even wonder, how human beings lived.

However, the inevitable end of the universe billions of years in the future does not prevent the present from having meaning and value. All it shows is that the search for a cosmic purpose will fail. We have already abandoned the search for cosmic purpose for other reasons. The death of the universe poses no more of a problem for the meaningfulness of life than do our personal deaths.

Two, people are often impressed by the sheer physical vastness of the universe and with the billions of years for which it exists. A hundred million stars just like the sun exist in our galaxy. Hundreds of millions of galaxies exist in the small portion of the universe which astronomers have so far examined. How can a human life, which takes place in an absurdly tiny bit of space and time, have any significance?

However, it is not clear how being larger in space and time could make a human life more meaningful. The argument works just as well the other way round. Suppose our lives are meaningless in their seventy-odd years of duration. Would they not just be infinitely meaningless if they lasted for all eternity, or were spread across all of space? (Nagel 1979:12) Living larger and longer would not, by itself, make our lives any more meaningful.

Three, people sometimes reflect that nothing that they do now will matter to anyone in a thousand years' time. In a thousand years, our descendants will no more remember us than we remember our own ancestors of a thousand years ago. Our businesses will have passed a way. People will no longer read our books. No matter how famous we are now, our accomplishments will be no more than footnotes in obscure history texts.

However, this argument works the other way round. Assume the argument's claim that an event will not matter to people across a thousand-year gap in time. Notice that this thousand-year gap exists in both directions. For example, our particular lives now did not much matter to our ancestors of a thousand years ago. If something does not

matter to us because it happened a thousand years in the past, then, by the same process of reasoning, something that happens a thousand years in the future also should not matter to us. One thing that will happen in the future is that our lives will cease to matter to our descendants. Because of the thousand-year gap, however, this should not matter to us now. It should not matter to us now that our lives will not matter to our descendants in the future. Whether or not our lives will matter to our descendants is not something about which we should care. The argument works equally well in both directions. (Nagel 1979:11) The meaningfulness of life is not something to be found only in its future consequences. It is something inherent in life in the present.

Four, people often think that because valuable things come to an end and pass away, this destroys their value. Our activities finish, our good experiences only last so long, and our relationships finish. The good things of the world always perish, and it seems their meaning dies with them.

However, though good things end, the fact that they were valuable remains. The grass was green and alive last spring. Now, in winter time, it is brown, dead, and covered with snow. The green grass has perished, but it remains true, now, this winter, that the grass was green and alive then, last spring. Things perish; the fact that they were once valuable does not. Think, too, of parents, grandparents, or family members whom we loved and who are now dead. Their lives were worthwhile and valuable. It is sad that they are dead, but did death destroy the value of their lives? Are rocks more valuable than roses because rocks are almost eternal, while roses bloom for, at most, a week?

The Perspective of the Universe

People sometimes reflect that their lives, which seem so important to them, really matter very little under the aspect of eternity. From the point of view of the universe, our everyday lives seem silly, our concerns seem petty, and our lives seem meaningless. Worse, we can adopt two perspectives on our lives – both the perspective of our usual, self-centred, self-important point of view and the perspective of the universe. It is a cruel and tragic joke that we can take on both these two perspectives simultaneously. Absurdly, we can see our selves as both important and of no account. (Nagel 1979:14-15)

However, it is not as easy to take up the point of view of the universe as it may appear. Fully taken on, whose perspective could it be? For nothing to matter from the perspective of the universe, it would need

to be a complete, but totally cognitive, perspective without any emotional involvement at all. It might be God's perspective. However, this suggestion is wrong because, in most accounts, God cares about people's lives; it matters to Him what kind of lives people lead. In any case, God does not exist, so no such perspective exists either. It might be the point of view of science. However, science is a collection of theories, and theories have a perspective only metaphorically. It might be the perspective of professional scientists. However, scientists have perspectives very much like ours. They have families, careers, and obsessions as we do.

The point of view of the universe is simply a metaphor for a point of view like ours but with no emotional involvement. When we try to cash out the metaphor, we find that we cannot do it. What would it be like to see the world without being moved by it emotionally in any way? This perspective would be that of someone who is emotionally blind. A possible example is someone who has suffered the destruction or surgical removal of parts of the brain that process emotional response. Such destruction or removal can make the experience of emotion impossible. In his book, *Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman describes a young man missing his amygdala – a part of the mid-brain of animals required to process fear responses – who, though capable of conversation, withdrew by himself, showed no interest in his relatives, and "remained impassive in face of their anguish at his indifference. Without an amygdala he seemed to have lost all recognition of feeling, as well as any feeling about feelings. The amygdala acts as a storehouse of emotional memory, and thus of significance itself; life without the amygdala is a life stripped of personal meanings." (Goleman 1995:15)

Now the question is this: Would it be useful to ask an emotionally blind person, no matter how well informed, whether or not life had a meaning? No one would ask someone who was visually blind their opinion on the artistic merit of a painting. She could perhaps give an answer, but it would, of necessity, have to be hearsay. Nor would we ask a deaf person his opinion on a piece of music. Why, then, should we ask someone who was emotionally blind whether or not anything mattered? Emotional blindness is as close as we can come to understanding the metaphor of the point of view of the universe. On reflection, however, we see no reason to care about the perspective of the universe. It is not a perspective that should particularly matter to us. Our human perspectives are what matters.

Giving Death its Due

People often experience a loss of meaning whenever they feel a loss of their individuality. For example, at lunchtime, in the crowded concourse under an office tower, we may be struck by the existence of so many people similar to ourselves. They are all concerned about their families, their sex lives, their clothes, and their careers, just like we are. In no important way are we different from all the rest. We can sometimes experience this lack of specialness as a lack of meaningfulness.

However, we should argue back to this feeling. If what we are doing with our lives truly matters, then the fact that others are doing the same makes our lives no less worthwhile. It just does not matter to the meaningfulness of our lives that others' lives are similar. If their lives are also meaningful, then so much the better for them.

Nevertheless, the loss of specialness raises an important concern. Existential psychotherapists have discovered that many people defend themselves against their anxiety about death by denying its reality. Denial, as a defence mechanism, takes two forms: First, people often believe, in a deep and unarticulated way, that they are in some almost magical way special and, though everyone else will die, they will not. Second, and perhaps as well, people often have an underlying belief in an ultimate rescuer, who will magically save them from the fate of everyone else. (Yalom 1980)

In the crowded concourse of an office building, we are brought face to face with our lack of specialness, and with our vulnerability to death. This can be a good thing. Being mindful of our mortality is right. Forgetting our mortality, paying it no attention, will make our lives inauthentic. We cannot go through life pretending that we will never die.

On the other hand, obsessive thoughts of death can also cripple a life. Some people, once they truly realize that they will die, cannot stop brooding about death. They may brood so much that it interferes with living. This is just as wrong. Death is a limitation on our lives, but we are familiar with limitations. Just as no one lives as long a life as they would wish, no one is as good looking or as talented as they would wish. Brooding, however, about the limitations to our looks or talents is wrong; we must get on with life and do the best that we can. (Edwards 1981:125) Not denying the reality of death is important, but not letting an obsession with death interfere with our lives is just as important. We must find the mean between denial and obsession.

That we will one day die is a basic, fundamental truth that is always relevant to our quest for what truly matters. Irving Yalom writes, in his text, *Existential Psychotherapy*:

> A confrontation with one's personal death . . . has the power to provide a massive shift in the way one lives in the world. "Though the physicality of death destroys an individual, the *idea* of death can save him." Death acts as a catalyst that can move one from one state of being to a higher one: from a state of wondering about *how* things are to a state of wondering *that* they are. An awareness of death shifts one away from trivial preoccupations and provides life with depth and poignancy and an entirely different perspective. (Yalom 1980:159-160)

Awareness of death helps us to see clearly and to evaluate properly what is important, worthwhile, and valuable. We must be mindful of our deaths to see what is truly meaningful in life.

For each of our sakes, I hope that our deaths, when they come, will be a loss both to us and to the world. It is entirely appropriate that we should all feel anxious and sad at the prospect of this loss. We should all feel regret that we are going to die, but all we can do is live well and face our deaths courageously. Remember, though, death does not destroy meaning in our lives, and mindfulness of death will even help us find it. Give death its due, and no more.

Chapter 4

SELF-REALIZATION

> "Aside from the nature common to the species each individual brings with him at birth a distinctive temperament, which determines his spirit and character. There is no question of changing or putting a restraint on this temperament, only of training it and bringing it to perfection."
> - Jean-Jaques Rousseau (1812-1867), *La Nouvelle Héloise*, cinquième partie, lettre 3. Quoted in (Hurka 1993:14)

Developing our human potential promises to make our lives meaningful. Our potential could be a common human potential, a potential that we all share as members of the same species, or our potential could be an individual potential, a potential that is unique to each of us. Perhaps realizing our potential is the source of all that matters to us.

Evaluating Human Potential

Let us look first at the idea of developing our common human potential. This route to meaning has many branches. Each branch corresponds to a different conception of human nature and thus of human potential. Aristotle, for example, thought that rationality was distinctive of human beings, and that a meaningful human life involved perfecting its potential for rationality. Marx thought that the capacity to produce goods in a cooperative setting was the essential nature of human being, and that communism would perfect this potential. Some branches of the contemporary human potential movement think that human beings should achieve transpersonal states of consciousness through meditation or mind-altering drugs. Other branches of the human potential movement think that people should retrieve their natural, authentic emotional responses through psychotherapeutic techniques.

The various branches of the human potential movement have a common structure. First, each proposes a factual theory of human nature. The examples above each conceive human nature differently, as either rational, productive, suffering, conscious, or emotional. Second, each proposes a factual theory of the potential inherent in this nature, perfecting rationality, perfecting social production, developing consciousness, or getting in touch with authentic feelings. Third, each

branch implicitly makes a value judgment. Developing its favored potential, each assumes, is what truly matters in human life.

Self-realization theories always contain this third, evaluative component. Each of the above theories offers an attractive theory of human nature and its potential for development. Nevertheless, we must move with care. If we accept its factual judgment about human potential, then we can easily accept its value judgment that developing the recommended potential will give meaning to our lives. We make a value judgment when we decide which potential to develop.

All of the above theories, and others besides, do describe real human potentials. People do have the capacity to develop their rationality, their productive powers, their level of consciousness, and their ability to feel. Choosing which potential to develop requires evaluation. We must assess our choices against some independent standard of what is important or worthwhile.

Humans have, by their nature, many potentials that are not worthy of development. Human beings have the capacity to develop their strength, their body weight, their hair length, and many other aspects of their nature. Of course, developing any of these latter human potentials would not give meaning to our lives. Developing some potentials is trivial; developing others is worthwhile. The point, though, is that we are always making implicit value judgments. Always, we must judge the relative importance of developing one potential rather than another.

Another example: All human beings, by their nature, are born with the potential for death. By actively developing this potential, we could die more quickly. Yet thinking that dying more quickly makes our lives meaningful is a crazy thought. Dying more quickly is not what truly matters. Nonetheless, in saying this, in ruling out dying more quickly as a human potential worth developing, we are implicitly making a value judgment.

Distinctiveness

One way to build value judgments into theories of developing human potential might be to select for development only those aspects of human nature that are *distinctive* of human beings. All living things die, so death is not a distinctively human potential. Animals can grow in strength, body weight, and hair length, so these are not a distinctively human potential either. On the other hand, rationality, social productivity, detachment, and transcendent consciousness are potentials that only human beings can have.

Consider, however, that selecting only human traits for development is a highly chauvinistic strategy for defending self-realization. Plants, by their nature, have a potential for growth and reproduction. Animals, by their natures, variously have potentials for developing in size, strength, speed, agility, and even suffering. Ecosystems have a potential for integrity and homeostasis. By valuing only the potentials of human nature, the distinctiveness strategy implicitly devalues the potentials of other living species and communities. If human flourishing were all that mattered, then we should achieve it no matter what the cost to the flourishing of other living things. The unattractive speciesism of the distinctiveness strategy underlines the implicit value judgments it is making.

Consider, too, that some distinctively human potentials obviously do not give meaning to life. Only humans have a sense of humor. Does this make the telling of jokes the meaning of life? (Nozick 1981:516) Of course not. Nevertheless, judging that humor is too unimportant a potential to be the meaning of life is still a value judgment. Humans are the only species that kills for fun. Does this make destruction for the sake of pleasure to be the purpose of life? (Hurka 1993:11) No, wanton destruction is evil. This judgment may be uncontroversial, but it is still a value judgment. Showing that developing some potential is distinctively human is not enough to show it to be the meaning of life. We must always appeal to further sources of value. To discover what truly matters, we must look in other directions.

Consider, also, the following thought experiment: A potential is distinctive of human beings only if human beings have this potential and nonhuman beings do not. Suppose that humans, and only humans, presently have the potential for transcending ordinary consciousness through meditation and other spiritual disciplines. Presently, transcending ordinary consciousness is a distinctively human potential. Suppose that, in the future, chimpanzees were to evolve the potential to meditate and transcend ordinary consciousness. Then the potential for transcending ordinary consciousness will no longer be a distinctively human property. At this point, does the attainment of transcendent states of consciousness suddenly lose its value? More likely a meditation practitioner would judge, not that human lives lose their potential for meaning, but that chimpanzee lives gain the potential for meaning. So it is not because the potential to transcend ordinary consciousness is distinctively human that it is important.

The distinctiveness strategy makes the meaning of life dependent on extrinsic features, features not of humans, but of other species. Absurdly, the meaningfulness of human lives would thus not depend on how humans are. Instead, it would depend on how other species are not. (Nozick 1981:515-516) The distinctiveness of a feature is always extrinsic in that it always depends on whether other species also possess the feature.

Essence

We must seek a better way to build value judgments into theories of developing human potential. One possibility is to select for development only those aspects of human nature that are *essential* to being human. For example, it is an essential feature of gold that an atom of gold contains exactly seventy-nine protons in its nucleus. Having seventy-nine protons is what makes it an atom of gold, and not an atom of another element. If, for example, an atom has eighty-two protons, then it is necessarily not one of gold, but one of lead. Though having seventy-nine protons in its nuclei distinguishes gold from other elements, it is still an intrinsic feature of gold. The number of protons in a gold atom is an intrinsic feature of gold because it does not depend on the nature of other elements. Perhaps human nature has a similar essential feature that determines human potential.

Notice, however, that human beings are much more complex entities than gold atoms, and that determining the essence of humanity will be correspondingly more difficult. The most likely candidate for the human essence is human genetic makeup. Any being with an identical genetic makeup would be a human being. Yet, even if scientists did discover the genes essential to human nature, we would still need to make judgments about what mattered. The relationship between human genetic makeup and human potential is complex. Our shared human genetic makeup permits the development of many potentials. It permits not only rationality and cooperative social production, but also having a sense of humor and killing for pleasure. We are still left to decide which potentials are trivial, which are evil, and which are worthy of development. Thus, showing that some feature is essential to human nature is not enough to show the potentials it permits to be meaningful. We must always appeal to some further source of value to show the potential to be worthy of development.

Individual Potentials

So far we have examined those features that are distinctive of, or essential to, human beings as a species. Perhaps, though, self-realization involves developing a potential that we do not share, the "distinctive temperament" that Rousseau mentioned in the chapter motto. Perhaps we should consider potentials that are distinctive of, or essential to, each of us as individuals. Perhaps we can find meaning by actualizing some potential that belongs to each of us alone. Perhaps without appealing to a further source of value, we can see the meaningfulness of developing our individual potentials.

What makes each of us distinctive? Possibly our individual genetic makeup distinguishes us from each other. So developing our distinctive, genetically-give abilities will make our lives meaningful. However, identical twins have no distinctive potential for self-realization because they have identical genetic makeups. The odd consequence is that, without distinctive natures, identical twins cannot have meaningful lives.

What are our individual essences? Each of us is essentially descended from the union of a particular sperm and a particular egg. Those unions gave us individual genetic makeups. Perhaps these are our essential natures and will point to the natural potentials that we should develop. Yet, we could have been born with genetically determined natural abilities to do trivial or immoral things, like multiplying large numbers in our heads, or killing others. Developing these abilities would not give meaning to our lives.

As well, which talents and abilities we should develop will depend not only on our essential genetic endowment, but also on the contexts of our lives.

> Imagine that a person with more talent for music than for writing finds that, because of factors such as the availability of teachers, she can achieve more in writing than in music. Should she still be guided by her profile and give more time to music than to writing? The individual-essence view says yes, but most of us surely say no. (Hurka 1993:15)

Developing a particular potential is only worthwhile to a person if her circumstances are appropriate. The fact that her individual genetic essence determines her potential is not enough to make it inherently worthwhile for her to develop it.

Perhaps our individual essences are not genetic but emotional. Beneath our everyday selves, we have authentic emotional responses,

determined by our temperaments and upbringing, that are distinctive of each of us. Our task is to get in touch with and develop these authentic emotional selves. Of course, getting in touch with our feelings is important. What happens, though, if we find that underneath we are filled with anger and rage? Knowing and working through this is important. Nonetheless, not developing these feelings into action is also important. Although these feelings are authentic, we do not have a good reason to develop their potential. Here, as often before, this last judgment is implicitly a value judgment.

What Matters

The upshot of this discussion is that self-realization is not, by itself, the source of meaning in life. We always appeal to a prior judgment of what truly matters when we judge whether the realization of some human potential is a worthy end of human endeavor. Finding the source of what matters is the proper goal of our search.

The self-realization path is inadequate because it continues to equate meaning with purpose. People, quite rightly, use the conceptual framework of aims and goals to interpret other human beings. It is a mistake, however, to apply this framework to the interpretation of the flourishing of biological entities. We do this whenever we say things like, "The purpose of an acorn is to produce an oak tree." An acorn is potentially an oak, but that does not mean that its purpose is to develop into an oak. Such talk is all metaphor. It is an attractive metaphor, and the conceptual framework of purposive biology tempts us. Nevertheless, to make progress, we must abandon the framework of biological purposes just as we have abandoned the framework of cosmic purposes.

The realization of our various human potentials is a worthwhile activity, but it is not the only worthwhile activity. Understanding human nature is important. Even if human nature does not determine what a meaningful life involves, it still constrains what a meaningful life can contain. (McKinnon 1999) We must, however, look elsewhere for the true sources of meaning.

Chapter 5

PLEASURE

> ". . . pleasure, and freedom from pain, are the only things desirable as ends; and . . . all desirable things . . . are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves, or a means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain."
> - John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), *Utilitarianism*, 1861 (Mill 1972:6)

Mill's doctrine, that pleasurable experience is the route to a meaningful life, tempts us. So does its close variant, the doctrine that meaning in life is to be found in the avoidance of pain and suffering. The doctrine tempts us because pleasurable experiences do inherently matter to us. The doctrine is dangerous because it says that *only* pleasurable experience is intrinsically valuable. Seeking enjoyment and avoiding suffering, we will see, are neither *all* that matters in life, nor the source of its meaningfulness.

Hedonism

Hedonism, in its crassest form, actually tempts very few people; a life of selfish sensual indulgence is almost the paradigm of a meaningless life. The pursuit of pleasurable experience appeals most to people when they are young, and discovering its limitations often precipitates a crisis of meaning. Nevertheless, subtler forms of hedonism tempt even the sophisticated. Some people believe that their life would become meaningful if only they could experience the joys of a perfect romantic relationship. Others seek meaning in blissful states of transpersonal consciousness, or they seek the oceanic feeling of union with the world. Forms of hedonism that emphasize the avoidance of suffering also tempt us. The followers of the ancient Greek philosopher, Epicurus, sought serenity in rational control over desires for worldly pleasures. The Buddha taught that all life is suffering, and taught a path to the cessation of suffering.

All such views have in common that they locate meaning in having certain types of psychological states. What is of value, they say, is our psychological response to something, not the thing itself. Only psychological states are inherently valuable or inherently evil. If we respond with delight to a lovely view of the ocean, it is not the ocean or its loveliness that is inherently valuable; it is the state of delight that it

causes in our minds. The world outside our mind is never more than instrumentally valuable. Objects in the world are valuable only for the psychological responses they cause in sentient creatures. Only conscious experience matters.

In one way, this is a strength of hedonistic theories. It would be wonderful if, at the end of our searches for meaning, we could find an answer that not only truly mattered, but that also mattered to us. Imagining pleasurable or painful experiences not mattering to people is difficult. If we did discover that pleasurable experience was the true meaning of life, then it would immediately strike us as meaningful. Pleasurable experiences always matter to us.

Cosmic purpose and self-realization theories have the corresponding weakness. For instance, suppose that Marx had been right, and that cooperative production in a social setting was the true human potential, or what he called our "species-being." Now think of an individualist, someone who likes to write poetry by herself, and not as a member of a committee. She will be very alienated from what Marx thought was her true human potential. Developing her potential for cooperative production is not something that is going to matter to her. Even if she came to believe that Marx was right about the meaning of human life, his answer would not feel meaningful to her. All purpose theories have this weakness: Even if we discovered the purpose of life through rational thought, we could always still ask why it should matter to us.

Despite this difficulty, self-realization theories are right that people do often develop their human potential for reasons that are independent of the pleasure which self-development brings. Athletes spend long hours suffering through anaerobic workouts for the mere chance of a fleeting victory. Artists and writers agonize over their work, not for the pleasure of it, but because they think it is worth doing. Professionals and craftspeople enjoy the exercise of their skills, and the money they make, but they also value what they do for its own sake. Conversely, some people take pleasure in activities that they do not value; a gambling addict may take pleasure in his use of a video lottery terminal while judging it a worthless activity and a waste of his time. Saying that people only act for the sake of pleasure trivializes human motivation.

False Experience

The quest for meaning proceeds on two fronts. It looks both for what feels meaningful and for what is truly meaningful. Feeling meaningful is not enough; something must really be meaningful in order

truly to matter. We can point to just too many cases where something else matters besides pleasurable experiences, no matter how meaningful they may feel.

The Pleasure Centre: Electrical stimulation of a small area in the middle of the brain located near the front of the thalamus will produce intense feelings of pleasure. Science fiction writers have imagined "wire-heads," people who have an electrode surgically implanted in their "pleasure-centre" so that they can stimulate themselves at will. Imagine being a wire-head. We can easily imagine becoming obsessed by the wire to the exclusion of anything else. Yet, we cannot imagine the life of a wire-head as a meaningful one.

Freud's Pain: Even those theoretically committed to the importance of pleasure do not value pleasure alone. Freud thought that the pleasure principle governed a child's mental processes; the primary processes always strive toward gaining pleasure. Initially the child finds pleasure through fantasy and hallucination, but this eventually leads to disappointment. Childhood development introduces a reality principle, and the child starts to represent reality even when it is disagreeable. (Freud 1958:219) Yet, for Freud, the reality principle never deposes the pleasure principle. It helps the child defer small, uncertain, but immediate gratifications for large, certain, but delayed gratifications. (Freud 1958:223)

At the end of his life, when he was dying of cancer and in great pain, Freud refused to take any painkilling drugs except aspirin. Freud's biographer, Ernest Jones, reports him to have said, "I prefer to think in torment than not to be able to think clearly." (Jones 1964:655-6; Griffin 1986:8)] On his deathbed, Freud preferred clear thought to absence of pain. Despite the pleasure principle, Freud judged that clarity of thought was ultimately more meaningful to him than was the absence of pain. We can understand Freud's choice better through the framework of Victor Frankl's logotherapy than through Freud's pleasure principle. Frankl wrote:

> It is one of the basic tenets of logotherapy that man's main concern is not to gain pleasure or to avoid pain but rather to see a meaning in life. That is why man is even ready to suffer, on the condition, to be sure, that his suffering has a meaning. (Frankl 1959:136)

Freud valued the use of his tremendous intellect, and was not willing to lose its use merely to avoid pain.

Virtual Reality: The following thought experiment, due to Robert Nozick, is evidence against the hypothesis that feeling pleasure is all that matters:

> Imagine a machine that could give you any experience (or sequence of experiences) you might desire. When connected to this experience machine, you have the experience of writing a great poem or bringing about world peace or loving someone and being loved in return. You can experience the felt pleasures of these things, how they feel "from the inside." You can program your experience for tomorrow, or this week, or this year, or even for the rest of you life. If your imagination is impoverished, you can use the library of suggestions extracted from biographies and enhanced by novelists and psychologists. You can live your fondest dreams "from the inside." Would you choose to do this for the rest of your life? If not, why not? (Nozick 1989:104-105)

The point of the thought experiment is to bring our intuitions regarding meaning into sharp relief. Nozick asks us to imagine a machine-created virtual reality that produces all the pleasurable sensations and emotional responses anyone could want. We might enjoy the machine for a few hours. We might even get addicted to it. Nevertheless we would not, in answer to Nozick's question, choose a life spent only connected to the machine. Something is still missing. Such a life might feel meaningful, yet it is almost a model of a meaningless life. In the virtual reality of the experience machine we are not truly great poets, we do not truly bring about world peace, and no one truly loves us. There is more to meaningfulness than how things feel; there is more to value than finding enjoyment.

Buddhists and Epicureans preach the avoidance of suffering as a path to meaning in life. Still, Nozick's virtual-reality thought experiment tells against this hypothesis too. The machine could protect us from ever experiencing suffering, and give us the benefits of non-attachment without the hardship of years of meditation practice. We need never grieve; our virtual loved ones would never die. We need never know the discomfort of illness, the fear of death, the distress of failure, or the heartache of unrequited love. Yet, even if the machine would never allow us to suffer, none of us would think it brought true meaning to our lives. Avoiding suffering is not enough. James Griffin writes:

> I prefer, in important areas of my life, bitter truth to comfortable delusion. Even if I were surrounded by consummate actors able to

> give me sweet simulacra of love and affection, I should prefer the relatively bitter diet of their authentic reactions. (Griffin 1986:9)

We must ground our lives in truth. How our lives feel to us is not the only standard of value, or even the most important one.

Counterfeit Spiritual Experience: Some gurus preach a spiritual state of unending joy as a path to meaning. However, creating similar states of mind using modern technology may also be possible. Scientists have invented a device called a "transcranial magnetic stimulator" that, applied to the scalp, uses powerful, fluctuating magnetic fields to cause electrical stimulation of the brain immediately beneath. Applied above the motor cortex, it will cause muscles to contract. Applied above the temporal lobe, it causes seemingly spiritual experiences similar to those sometimes had by temporal lobe epileptics. (Ramachandran 1998:174-175; Buckman 2000:113-146) The experience can be that of being in the presence of the divine, of the cosmic significance of everything, and of absolute certainty in the validity of the experience. Could such a machine be an answer to our search for meaning? If not, it must be because meaning has more to it than just the experience of bliss and joy. Perhaps what is important is the object of our spiritual experience and not just the feel of the experience. Technology may be a path to blissful consciousness and the absence of suffering, yet it is the wrong path to meaning.

The Complexity of Mental Life

What is going wrong in these cases? It is just false that only pleasurable experiences are meaningful or that only the avoidance of suffering matters. All the above technological solutions to the riddle of life's meaning presuppose an impoverished picture of human nature. They see human nature as nothing but a purely mental world of sensations and feelings. These sensations are not sensations of anything, or feelings about anything. They are just pure experiences. If human life consisted in nothing but conscious experiences, then only conscious experiences could matter in human life.

On this view, the problem of meaningfulness comes down to dividing experiences into good, bad, and neutral ones. To divide experiences into good, bad, and neutral we must find something in common among good experiences, and something in common among bad experiences. One hypothesis is that all good experiences share a common, pleasurable feeling tone. (Moore 1903:12-13) On this view, pleasure gives meaning to mental experience, and mental experience is

all there is to life. On reflection, however, the hypothesis that all enjoyable experiences have the same feeling tone seems implausible. Consider a list of pleasurable experiences and see if they share some sensation in common: eating a good meal when hungry, enjoying a movie, having a massage, looking at a beautiful view, making love, experiencing a foreign culture. Yes, they are all pleasurable, but no, they share no common feeling tone that we can use to say why they are pleasurable. Pleasure is not another, but distinct, sensation added to our experiences. We do not experience both the taste of food and a sensation of pleasure as well; we just taste the food. Being pleasurable does not define a kind of sensation. Being pleasurable is not an intrinsic property of some sensations and feelings. The hypothesis that valuable experiences all share a pleasurable feeling tone does not work.

Another hypothesis regarding what is common to good experiences is that the person who experiences them *wants* to have them. Pleasurable experiences are the ones that a person wants to have and desires to continue to have. Similarly, painful experiences are the ones that a person wants not to have and, if experienced, desires to end quickly. Being wanted is what all pleasurable sensations have in common, and being desired makes them count as pleasurable. (Sidgwick 1962:127)

This new hypothesis moves us away from the internal sensation view of human nature. Desiring something is not just having a feeling. Desiring something involves taking an attitude toward it. Feelings, like the sensation of thirst or hunger, are complete in themselves. Desire, however, is always directed toward something else. We desire that such-and-such happen. We want to experience so-and-so. This new view makes human nature more complicated because it allows that psychological states have structure. They are not mere conscious sensations. Instead, they are psychological attitudes directed toward some object, or they are about some state of affairs. (Philosophers call this feature of psychological states, "intentionality." Though it seems an obvious notion, working out what it means is a huge and unfinished task of contemporary philosophy.)

This new hypothesis, that our pleasurable experiences are experiences that we want to have, raises two important issues. The first is that having particular conscious experiences is not the only thing that we can want. As a source of value, desire points beyond mental experiences. We want not only states of mind, but also states of the world. Besides desiring to experience the taste of chocolate, we can also

desire that the snow stop falling by tomorrow. In fact, one upshot of the inadequacy of technological solutions to the meaning problem is to make clear that we want more than just the experience of a virtual reality. We want the world truly to be a certain way. Why should we confine our desires to having certain states of mind? Could not states of the world also satisfy our desires? If being wanted is what make things valuable and meaningful, why could not other things besides conscious experience also be valuable? We will examine the route to meaning through fulfilling desires in the following chapter.

The second important issue raised by the new hypothesis is this: Wants and desires are not the only psychological attitudes that have this feature of intentionality, of 'aboutness,' or of being directed toward objects and states of affairs. We have a whole range of emotional attitudes that are also directed toward the world as it is, toward the world as it might become, and toward our mental life. We not only want things, but also admire them, are proud of them, are in awe of them, enjoy them, love them, despise them, and hate them. Why should we single out just one attitude among many – desire – and privilege it as the sole way of identifying value? We will examine the route to meaning through the emotions in later chapters.

To make progress, we have already abandoned the conceptual framework of purposes that dates from Aristotle and the ancient Greeks. We should equate meaning neither with alignment to a cosmic purpose nor with the development of human potential. To make further progress, we must now abandon the sensation view of human nature that dates from the Enlightenment era. Human nature consists in more than a bundle of conscious experiences and sensations. Human nature is directed both outward to the world and inward to experience. Pleasure and pain are still important. Our ability to experience pleasure may be necessary for our lives to feel meaningful. Nonetheless, pleasurable experience is neither all that matters nor the source of what matters.

Chapter 6

DESIRES

> "But whatsoever is the object of any man's Appetite or Desire; that is it, which he for his part calleth *Good*: And the object of his Hate, and Aversion, *Evill*."
> -Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), *Leviathan* (London, 1651), ch. 6, p. 24. [reference from Gauthier 1986:51]

We have examined two routes to meaningfulness and seen the obstacles that they each face. The first, self-realization, had difficulty explaining why the development of human potential should matter to the person whose potential it is. The second, pleasurable experience, avoided this obstacle because pleasure and pain always matter to whoever experiences them. We noticed, though, that a good way to classify experiences as either pleasurable or painful is by seeing which experiences we either desire to have or desire not to have. Our desire for an experience is what makes it pleasurable. Wants and desires, though, extend both to having things happen in the mind and to having things happen in the world. We can desire not only internal experiences but also things in the external world. This seems right; other things besides mental experiences do also matter. Our search leads us now to a third route to meaningfulness, the fulfillment of desire. If we want something, then it matters to us. So the desire-fulfillment theory seems, initially, to lead in the right direction.

Consumerism

Nonetheless, if we seek only the fulfillment of desire, then we will probably not be any happier than we are now. We should not confuse our imagined joy at the prospect of sudden wealth with the long-term tediousness of having our every whim satisfied. Initially, if someone were to win in the lottery, or in the financial markets, or otherwise suddenly to acquire wealth, he would be exhilarated at what this wealth would make possible. Yet the exhilaration would wear off.

Social psychologists have studied wealth and subjective reports of happiness. They have found the following. Once people have enough money to be comfortable, having further wealth makes little difference to how happy they report themselves to be. In the United States, the number of people who reported themselves to be very happy rose with rising per

capita income until the 1950's. Per capita income, in constant dollars, continued to rise until people in 1990 were twice as rich as in the 1950's, Yet people became, by their own account, no happier. In fact, depression rates have increased tenfold in the period since the Second World War. (Myers 1992:41-43) The news media contain plenty of stories of addiction, depression, suicide, and family breakdown among the very wealthy.

Many people are attracted to the view that the only path to meaning lies in getting what we want. Its strongest statement is in the aphorism, "He who dies with the most toys wins." The consumption-based culture in which we all live reinforces this consumerism. The economic theories that underlie our culture justify this view of what matters. Accepted economic theory assumes a particular theory value: Only the satisfaction of human desires has any value. This is the theory of value that Thomas Hobbes endorsed in the chapter motto. People reveal their desires for goods through their choices about what to buy. They reveal the intensity of these desires by how much they are willing to pay for these goods. If the relative value of something is correlated to the intensity of the desire it satisfies, then price becomes the indicator of value. In what follows, we will examine the desire-based theory of value that is so deeply embedded in our culture.

Actual Desires

We must distinguish two different notions of what desire is. According to one notion, desire is a form of emotion. In the emotional sense, we experience desire as a strong longing or craving. A feeling or sensation goes with emotional desire. Its paradigm is sexual desire. According to the other notion, desire is no more than motivation. To say that we desire to do something in this sense is to say no more than that we are motivated to do it. No special feeling accompanies motivational desire.

Emotional desire is, on the face of it, not a good route to what matters. One problem is this. Many things matter, but do not engender the strong longing for them characteristic of emotional desire. For example, we think a view to be magnificent, and are prepared to do to great lengths to preserve it, without always craving to experience the view. We think that our friends matter to us without longing for their company. Emotional desire does not always accompany such judgments. A second problem is this. Emotional desire is a strong form of emotion. Yet why is it the only form of emotion that matters? Consider things that

we merely enjoy, or admire, or of which we are proud. Do they not also matter? Why is emotional desire the only emotion that is important? Emotional desire is too narrow a route to meaningfulness.

Motivational desire is, on the face of it, a more attractive route. Generally if something matters to us, then we are also motivated in some way. Motivation is not an emotion, so the route does not immediately seem too narrow. In the rest of this chapter, we will examine desire in motivational sense.

Desire, in the motivational sense, intimately connects to action. Without contrary desires or weakness of will, desires lead us to act. This connection between desire and action is a causal one. A motivational desire now causes an action in the future.

Desire and motivation are always oriented toward the future, never toward the present or the past. We can wish that things had been different in the past, but we cannot coherently be motivated to change the past. We can, of course, wish the past had been different, but that is more to regret the past than to be motivated to change it. We can coherently want present events to continue, but that just means we want them to continue into the future. (Sumner 1996:128-129) Desire is always directed toward future events.

We can miss seeing this future-directed feature of motivational desire if we confuse it with emotional desire. One person can desire another in the present only in the emotional sense. In the emotional sense, one person longs for, or lusts after, another. We also must not confuse motivational desire with emotions that are like desires, for example liking or enjoying something. "I can enjoy . . . what I already have, while I can want only what I have not yet got." (Sumner 1996:129)

The future-directed feature of desires makes them notoriously poor indicators of what is valuable or worthwhile. Our actual desires are often poor guides to value because we lack enough information either about states of affairs that we desire to happen, or about states of affairs for which we have not yet formed desires. (Griffin 1986:10-20) This creates two distinct problems.

First, the Misjudgement Problem. We have all had the experience of having wanted some state of affairs to happen, but finding out, when it does happen, that it is not worthwhile. Our present desire for some event to happen in the future is enough, according to the desire theory of what matters, to make that event matter to us when it happens. The event, when it happens, fulfills our desire. Yet the event does not truly matter

to us, as we discover when our desire for it is fulfilled. So the theory's prediction is wrong.

Second, the Happenstance Problem. We have also all had the opposite experience, that of having had no particular desire for some state of affairs, but finding out, when it does happen, that it is worthwhile. Our present lack of desire for some event to happen in the future, according to the desire theory, implies that the events happening will not matter to us. The event, when it happens, does not fulfill any desire of ours. Yet, by happenstance, the event actually does matter to us, although it fulfills none of our pre-existing desires. Again, the theory's prediction is wrong.

Rational Desires

If we move to what has been the most influential theory of value in recent philosophy, the informed-desire, or rational-desire, then we can avoid these two problems. For example, James Griffin suggests that what matters to us is ". . . the fulfilment of desires that persons would have if they appreciated the true nature of their objects." (Griffin 1986:11) Richard Brandt writes:

> I shall call a person's desire, aversion, or pleasure 'rational' if it would survive or be produced by careful 'cognitive psychotherapy' for that person. I shall call a desire 'irrational' if it cannot survive compatibly with clear and repeated judgements about established facts. What this means is that rational desire (etc.) can confront, or will even be produced by, awareness of the truth; irrational desire cannot. (Brandt 1979:113)

Brandt calls 'cognitive psychotherapy' the "whole process of confronting desires with relevant information, by repeatedly representing it, in an ideally vivid way, and at an appropriate time . . ." (Brandt 1979:113) For other philosophers, informed desires are not the desires we *would have* when fully informed. Instead, they are the desires we *would want ourselves to have*, or *would advise ourselves to have*, when fully informed. Peter Railton writes that ". . . an individual's good consists in what he would want himself to want, or to pursue, were he to contemplate his present situation from a standpoint fully and vividly informed about himself and his circumstances, and entirely free of cognitive error or lapses of instrumental rationality." (Railton 1986:16)

The rational-desire account solves the Misjudgement Problem by using the idea of full and vivid information to *eliminate* those desires whose satisfaction people would judge to be worthless after-the-fact. Imagine, just for a very simple example, a non-smoker who presently

wants to consume a beer, a pizza, and a cigarette. These are his actual desires. If he were to contemplate his circumstances from a hypothetical standpoint fully and vividly informed about the discomfort of a first inhalation of tobacco smoke, the health consequences of smoking, and free of addiction and weakness of will, then he would likely lose his desire to have a cigarette. His rational desires would then only be to have a beer and a pizza.

The rational-desire theory solves the Happenstance Problem by using the idea of full and vivid information to *add* desires whose satisfaction we would judge to be worthwhile when experienced. Going back to our example, suppose the waiter brings the non-smoker a spinach salad by mistake. He did not want it before it came, but when he eats it, he enjoys it. This is happenstance. The rational-desire theory predicts that if he had contemplated his circumstances from an imaginary standpoint fully and vividly informed about the good taste and healthiness of spinach, he would likely have formed a desire to eat the salad. His actual desires are to consume a beer, a pizza, and a cigarette. His rational desires would continue to include drinking beer and eating pizza, but would eliminate smoking a cigarette, and add eating a salad.

Now notice something very important. To solve the Happenstance Problem, the rational-desire theory must add hypothetical desires that we do not actually have. Our rational or informed desires are hypothetical or imaginary desires that we would only have if we were fully and vividly informed. They are not real desires, the ones that motivate us. In particular, they are not actual, real desires for future activities. Rational desires are hypothetical desires for future events. Hypothetical desires, however, are not ordinary desires, if they are even desires at all. Rational desires appear to be *predictions* about what we would want if fully informed and rational or *hypotheses* about what we would want under rational circumstances.

Avoiding the Misjudgment Problem requires only that our rational desires be an edited set of our actual, pre-existing desires, from which we have subtracted worthless desires. Yet this edited set of actual desires would still be a set of actual, motivating desires. Rational desires would retain their psychological connection to motivation, mattering, and meaning. However, to avoid the Happenstance Problem, the rational-desire theory has to add desires that we do not actually have, that do not already exist. Since we do not actually have these desires, then they cannot actually motivate us. Constructed to avoid the Happenstance

Problem, many rational desires will be merely hypothetical. Hypothetical desires lose their psychological connection to motivation, mattering, and meaning.

We cannot avoid this problem by following Railton's suggestion to consider rational second-order desires. He would have us consider, under rational circumstances, what we would want ourselves to want, rather than what we would want. As before, some wants that we would want ourselves to have under rational circumstances are not wants that we actually want ourselves to want. So we must add these hypothetical second-order wants, wants that we do not actually have. Again, why should we care that we would want to want an event under optimal circumstances if we do not actually want to want it under actual circumstances?

One strength of the actual-desire theory was that it could explain why we are motivated to pursue states of affairs that it calls worthwhile. Thus, it offers to explain why these states of affairs matter to us and explains why they feel meaningful. If the fulfillment of their desires motivates people, then the fulfilllment of their desires matters to them. If the fulfillment of their desires matters to people, than the fulfillment of desires feels meaningful. Unfortunately, the actual-desire theory's focus on the future makes it a very fallible guide to meaning. In fixing this problem, the rational-desire theory loses its direct psychological connection to the feeling of meaningfulness. Only an actual desire for a state of affairs to happen will make that state of affairs feel meaningful to us.

Rational desires give a better account of what is truly worthwhile, whereas actual desires give a better account of what feels worthwhile. Once again, we have found a tension between what is truly meaningful and what feels meaningful. Resolving the tension between truth and feeling is the most difficult problem facing the philosophical search for what truly matters.

Chapter 7

REASONS

> " I may desire any fruit as of an excellent relish; but whenever you convince me of my mistake, my longing ceases."
> - David Hume (1711-1776), *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book II, Part III, Section III (Hume 1888:416-417)

Though it contains some truth – desires and wants are fundamental to human motivation, and in some sense, people only ever do what they want – the desire-fulfillment view leaves much out. The desire-fulfillment view of meaning fails to take account of the reasons why people have the desires that they do. The view accepts that a person's desires are fixed, unchangeable facts about the person. This view that our desires are fixed and unchangeable, however, is wrong. Our innate human nature does not determine our desires. We can find too much evidence to the contrary.

Changing Desires

Our desires change through time. When we are children, we want to play and do things with our parents. When we are adolescents, we want to spend time with our friends and discover our sexuality. When we have a family, we want to fulfill our responsibilities. When we are middle-aged, we want to save for our retirements. When we retire, we find a whole, new set of more leisurely wants.

In part, we form our desires in response to our cultural and economic circumstances. Someone born disabled, homeless, and driven to beg in the streets of Calcutta will likely form very low expectations and very basic wants. His wants might extend only to having enough to eat and drink. In opposite circumstances, someone born very rich will form expensive tastes. She will adapt her preferences to her wealth. Just having enough to eat would not be enough; she will desire caviar, champagne, and expensive restaurants. Born into a culture isolated deep in the Amazon rainforest, someone will want to own only the familiar products of the jungle. Born into the midst of Western consumerism, someone else will want to own things mechanical, electronic, and artificial.

Advertising changes our desires. Advertisers, whatever they might say, do not just take our wants as given, or assume that our desires are innate and unchangeable. They do not see their role as merely telling us

where to find what we want at the best price. Advertising also creates wants; it attempts to attach positive emotional evaluations to goods and services, and it often succeeds. We are often unaware of why we want what we want. Advertising takes advantage of our lack of awareness, of how unprotected we are against wanting on the flimsiest of reasons and associations.

Our desires respond to new information. As we learn more about the nature of whatever it is we want, our desire for it is liable to change. David Hume, the eighteenth-century Scottish psychologist and philosopher who helped formulate the crude psychological assumptions later adopted by economic theory, admitted as much. In the chapter motto, he notes that though we may initially want to eat some fruit, if we find out that it is not edible, then our desire for it goes away.

Reasons for Desiring

It is true, but trivial, that people try to satisfy their wants. We need to look behind the surface of want-satisfaction and assess the reasons for why people have the wants they do. Desires and wants are not the ground level explanation of the way a person is. Nor are their wants and desires the most important thing about people. People have reasons for having the wants they do, reasons which lie at a level deeper than their wants and desires. Their reasons involve emotions and beliefs about the world as it is and as it should be, and we can evaluate their reasons as good or bad.

People normally act for reasons. We can usually find an explanation of why they have the wants and desires that they do. We can understand the reasons why they are motivated to act in the ways that they do. If they have no reasons at all, if we can find no explanation for their motivation, then their actions will appear puzzling, irrational or even crazy.

Imagine someone who always chooses one thing over another for no reason at all. Gerald Gaus gives the following example of how such behavior will seem irrational:

> This is so even with apparently trivial choices, as for example if she always chooses chocolate over vanilla ice cream, though she does not enjoy chocolate more, does not find its color more pleasing, is not seeking to ingratiate herself with her chocolate-loving sweetheart, she doesn't even do it to save decision-making costs. She just always picks chocolate for no reason whatsoever. This, I suggest, is much closer to a paradigm of neurotic, than of rational action. (Gaus 1990:101)

Even if someone always acts to fulfill her wants, she still wants what she wants for a reason. Someone who had no reasons for her desires would not be a psychologically healthy person.

We can most easily see the reasons lying behind desires, wants, and preferences when the reasons are bad ones. Recall the myth of Sisyphus. In Greek mythology, Sisyphus, the first king of Corinth, was disrespectful to the gods. Angered, the gods condemned Sisyphus to eternally heaving a large rock up a hill, only to have the rock always escape and roll to the bottom again. Sisyphus's punishment was not the heavy labor, but the complete meaninglessness of his life. The myth of Sisyphus has become a metaphor for a life lacking meaning. (Camus 1955) Now consider a thought experiment that rewrites this myth:

> Let us suppose that the gods, while condemning Sisyphus to the fate just described, at the same time, as an afterthought, waxed perversely merciful by implanting in him a strange and irrational impulse; namely, a compulsive impulse to roll stones. We may if we like, to make this more graphic, suppose they accomplish this by implanting in him some substance that has this effect on his character and drives. . . . Now it can be seen why this little afterthought of the gods, which I call perverse, was also in fact merciful. For they have by this device managed to give Sisyphus precisely what he wants – by making him want precisely what they inflict on him. . . . Whereas otherwise he might profoundly have wished surcease, . . . his life is now filled with mission and meaning. (Taylor 1970:259)

This second, modified Sisyphus gets his wants satisfied. But does his life therefore become meaningful? It might feel more meaningful to him, but is it really so? The problem is that behind the wants and desires of the second Sisyphus is a "strange and irrational impulse." This impulse is the reason for the second Sisyphus's desire to roll stones, and it is not a good one; it is a strange and irrational one. Wants and desires, as we actually experience them, are not always good guides to meaningfulness. We have to look at the reasons why we have these wants, and recognize that these reasons can be bad ones.

In sum, we should not accept the view of wants and desires that is part of the ideology underlying our economic system. We do not have an enduring set of preferences that we must maximally fulfill to have a meaningful life. Our preferences are not fixed. Instead, we form them in response to circumstances. Behind our preferences are reasons.

Without reasons, our wants and desires would be neurotic or irrational. These reasons can be good ones or they can be bad ones. Our reasons for desiring, not our desires themselves, are the source of what matters.

Reasons and Emotions

What sort of things are these reasons for desiring? We have no reason for limiting ourselves to the simple desire/preference psychological theory of economics. Such a theory may lend itself to the creation of attractively precise, mathematical models of decision making. Nonetheless, it describes poorly the actual mental life of real people. Real people have a whole range of motivating mental attitudes that do not reduce in any obvious way to desires. They have appetites, emotions, goals, intentions, plans, and purposes, and they deploy all these in their deliberations about how to lead their lives. Deliberation ranges over what matters to people, and things matter in many different ways. Often deliberation results in a desire to do something; the outcome of deliberation is a desire in the thin, motivational sense. (Blackburn 1998:121- 137) Behind such desires, however, are reasons; without such reasons desires would be neurotic.

Often, our desires arise out of our emotional life. The reason we want to obtain something is that we enjoy it, like it, admire it, love it, are pleased by it, or are proud of it. We want to avoid something else because we hate it, despise it, are afraid of it, are worried by it, or are ashamed of it. The connection is not always direct. An emotion like jealousy will lead us to various different wants to hurt, to undermine, or to supplant. These wants are more subtle than is just wanting to avoid the object of our jealousy. Sometimes, too, the connection between emotion and motivation can be very indirect; love for one's spouse may send one out into the rain on an errand one would not otherwise want to run. When we explain or justify our wants and desires, it is to our emotional life that we look. Directly or indirectly, our emotions are the reasons why we want as we do. Our emotions respond to our circumstances, and our wants change with them.

If our emotional life explains our wants and desires, then looking to our emotions for a guide to what matters is the obvious route to take. After all, something matters to us only when it engages our emotions. A closer examination of the structural differences between desiring and mattering gives further evidence that wants and desires are poor guides to what matters.

Recall that desires are intimately bound up with motivation, that motivation is oriented toward action, and that action involves the causation of *future* events and states of affairs. Motivational desires are always desires for some event to happen. We do not want objects directly, instead we want to come to possess them or see them or own them. Because wants and desires are motivations, they are always directed toward future events and states of affairs. This leads to two structural differences between wanting and mattering.

The first structural difference is this. By contrast with wanting, mattering is not confined just to future events and states of affairs. Events, both in the present and in the past, can matter to us as well. A lovely walk in the park that she took last week can matter to a person. Today, though, she does not want that walk she took a week ago. She cannot want a past walk since she can only want future events. She can be glad she took it, can wish it had been longer, can have enjoyed it at the time, can have wanted to take it earlier, can hope to have another walk just as pleasant, but she cannot coherently want that past walk now. (Sumner 1996:128-133)

The second structural difference is this. The things that matter to us include not only events and states of affairs but also objects, individuals, and collections thereof. However, we cannot directly desire objects and things. Saying that we desire something is always an elliptical way of saying that we desire either to enter some relationship with it or to do something with it. When someone wants the fancy car in a showroom, he wants to own it, or rent it, or drive it. He does not want it directly. Nor can we directly want or desire other people in the purely motivational sense that we have been discussing. When we say that we want someone, this is an elliptical way of saying that we want to spend time with, to meet with, or to talk to him or her. (One person can, however, want or desire another person in the strongly emotional sense of wanting him or her in a sexual way. The emotional sense of desiring is akin to lust, or intense longing.) Our wants are limited to events and states of affairs, whereas what matters to us can extend also to objects, individuals, and communities. (Anderson 1993:130)

Wanting is not the fundamental evaluative attitude because it has the wrong structure. Wants are not fundamental. They are not given or unchangeable. Always, there are reasons why we have the wants and desires that we do. When we give reasons for our desires, the explanation generally involves a description of our emotional lives. Perhaps, then,

emotions, not wants, are the fundamental evaluative attitudes and the proper guides to value. Emotions, unlike wants and desires, do have the right structures to be guides to value.

First, emotions can be directed not only on the future, but also on the past and present. We can fear, worry about, or look forward to future events. As well, though, we can like, enjoy, hate, or be bored by the present moment, and we can cherish, detest, or be saddened by the past.

Second, emotions can be directed not only on future events, activities, and states of affairs, but also on objects, individuals and communities. We can admire, fear, or be in awe of a natural object. We can love, adore, admire, or despise another person. And we can feel loyal to, or be stultified by our communities.

Our search for meaning is a search, not for some purpose that comes to fruition only in the future, but for what inherently matters now. The fulfilled-desire route, for reasons canvassed in the last two chapters is the wrong route to follow. We must abandon the idea that nothing but getting what we want will lead to a meaningful life. Getting what we want is not the source of meaningfulness. We will try, instead, a route that uses our emotions as guides to what matters.

Chapter 8

EMOTIONS

> "When I am angry, I am actually possest with the passion, and in that emotion have no more a reference to any other object, than when I am thirsty, or sick, or more than five foot high."
> - David Hume (1711-1776), *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book II, Part III, Section III (Hume 1888:415)

We have seen two ways to ask the question of the meaning of life. One asks whether life has a purpose. The other asks whether anything truly matters. The first way is the old-fashioned way, the way of Aristotle and the medieval church philosophers. It leads to a fruitless search for superhuman purposes with which we should align our goals in life. The Godless must abandon this search for a cosmic purpose. Instead, we must accept the second way of asking the question and search for that which truly matters. We can base our goals in life on the outcome of this search.

We have examined self-realization, pleasurable experience, and desire-satisfaction as possible answers to the question of what truly matters. Each theory has proven inadequate. The self-realization theory fails to explain why the development of our human potential should matter to us. Pleasurable experiences matter to us, but they are not all that matter. We want things truly to happen, not just appear to happen. Fulfilling our desires matters to us, and we can desire more than just sensations, but again satisfying our desires is not all that can matter. Desires are always directed on events in the future. What matters, however, includes not only events, but also persons and things. It includes them not only in the future, but also in the present and the past.

The Complexity of Emotions

Emotions have the right structure to be a guide to what can matter. If we love, hate, admire, or despise something, then it matters to us. For something to matter to us is just for it to engage our emotions. Our emotions are not directed only on the contents of our minds. True, we can fear pain or enjoy pleasure. However, we can also fear a bear or enjoy a painting. We can worry about events in the future. However, we can also admire people and things in the past and in the present. Our emotions are not just directed on future events. They are the reasons

behind our wants; they are what we refer to when we explain why we want what we want.

Emotions are very complicated, and neglecting their complexity can mislead us. Emotions are complex because of their role in unifying various aspects of the mind. Joseph Ledoux, who researches the brain mechanisms of emotion writes that emotions are "the thread that holds mental life together." (Ledoux 1996:11) Because of this unifying role, emotions have aspects of all the mental phenomena that they unify. They have conscious, affective, experiential aspects, focusing, cognitive, evaluative aspects, motivational aspects, and physiological, bodily aspects.

If emotions were just sensations, such as just thrills, pangs, twinges, or warm glows, then they would be no better guides to meaning than are pleasurable and painful experiences. Alternatively, if emotions were just unconscious drives, bottled up until they escape into consciousness like pressurized hydraulic fluids, then again they would be irrelevant meaning. If we think of emotions in these simple ways, then we will fail to see how they could possibly be guides to what can truly matter.

Emotions may be the best candidates for guides to meaningfulness, but they are still very fallible guides. A pang of hunger cannot be mistaken; it just is. In contrast, emotions can go wrong in all sorts of ways. Anger, jealousy, or even joy can be inappropriate responses to our circumstances. If we think of emotions as simple feelings, then we will miss the many ways that they can be inappropriate or mistaken. What follows is a simple discussion of the complexity of the emotions.

Direction

Most emotions are directed toward something. It may be something real, or something imaginary, something present or something in the future. We esteem ourselves, admire other people, are proud of past accomplishments, or look forward to future events. This is the feature of psychological phenomena that philosophers call "intentionality." Emotions are about something, someone, or some event – past, present, or future and real or hypothetical. Hume, in the chapter motto, was just wrong when he said that emotions did not "make reference to any other object."

Sometimes we can have feelings without knowing on what they are really directed. We can be irritable without being angry with anyone in particular. Moods, like irritability, depression or generalized anxiety, are directed on everything. Sometimes resolving feelings will involve

figuring out what it is they are about. Sometimes, also, resolving feelings will involve figuring out what is causing them.

Causation

Commonly, our emotions are responses to our immediate environment. The actions of persons and things around us cause us to have the emotional responses that we do. Our emotions are less responsive to distant situations. We respond more easily to the problems of our friends and neighbors than to the plight of people in far-away countries. We worry more intensely about our immediate future than we do about our retirement, old-age, and death. Our children matter to us more than do our descendants far in the future.

In many cases, the person or thing on which our emotion is directed is also the cause of the emotion. For example, someone might be angry with a colleague because of something that her colleague did. In other cases, the object of our emotions is not their cause. For example, someone might be angry with her colleague because she is irritable from not sleeping well the night before. She might even be angry with her colleague because he reminds her of her father, toward whom she is angry without realizing it.

Even if caused by sleeplessness or by unresolved childhood issues, anger is nonetheless real. Being aware of the causes of our emotions helps us figure out if our emotions are appropriate. If someone is only angry with her colleague because of her lack of sleep, then her anger is not justified. In other cases, someone's anger may have more than one cause, perhaps both a lack of sleep and the nature of what her colleague did. Here her anger may still be justified. Nevertheless, to make complex judgments like these, we need some insight into the causes or triggers of our emotions.

Feelings

We sometimes use the word "feelings" to refer to emotions generally. So we talk about feelings of love, or admiration, or contempt. We also sometimes use the word "feelings" to talk about internal sensations or conscious experiences. So we talk of the feeling of pain, hunger, or thirst. We talk, too, of the internal sensation of an emotion, its wrenching, gnawing, or thrilling feeling.

Being aware of these two meanings of "feelings" is very important. If we run the two meanings together, we are liable to identify them. Then we may think that emotions are nothing more than the internal sensation that often accompanies an emotion, its wrenching, gnawing, or thrilling

feeling. Yet emotions are not identical to the conscious experiences that are often a part of them. They are much more complicated.

First, internal sensations are not directed on anything, whereas emotions are. An internal sensation like thirst or hunger is a conscious experience complete in itself. It is not about anything. Similarly the twinges, pangs, and chills that accompany emotions are just sensations, they are also not about something. Full-blown emotions are directed toward something or someone. When we feel awe at the size of a mountain or the power of a whale, our emotion is more than the accompanying thrill. Emotions are not just internal sensations.

Second, internal sensations alone do not provide enough information to discriminate between emotions. Most people can identify the primary emotions such as anger, joy, sadness, fear, or disgust by the internal sensations that accompany them. We cannot generalize, however, from the most basic emotions to more sophisticated ones. Consider two similar emotions like embarrassment and shame. Suppose someone walks off with another person's newspaper, by mistake in one case, on purpose in the second. If people notice him then his hot-faced feelings will be identical in both cases. To distinguish embarrassment and shame, we must consider why he took the newspaper. If he was merely a bit stupid and took it by mistake, then his emotion is embarrassment. If he were guilty of taking in on purpose, then his emotion is shame.

Third, we can have emotions without experiencing any conscious internal sensations. One person can be coldly angry with another over a long period without having the tense, knotted, flushed sensations that accompany an episode of anger. Her anger will color her thinking about the other person, making her less able to see his good points and too able to see his bad points. It will affect the choices that she makes and the things that she does. She can identify her anger at him only by paying attention to her pattern of thoughts and actions. However, she can be angry without continuously having angry feelings.

Fourth, we can be far more easily mistaken about our emotions than about our internal sensations. We can think we are in love when we are not, or think we are not when we are. We can think ourselves angry, when in fact we are feeling guilty. We can get confused about shame and embarrassment, or about envy and jealousy. However, we do not make similar mistakes about our internal sensations. When we feel hungry or

sick or in pain, we know it. We may have to learn the name of a sensation, but we seldom mistake it for something else.

For these reasons, which are drawn from Robert Solomon's *The Passions: Emotions and the Meaning of Life* (Solomon 1993:96-102), emotions are more than just feelings. Emotions are not just mental sensations. We cannot identify our emotions simply by being in touch with our feelings.

Nevertheless, being in touch with our feelings is important. The conscious, experiential, felt, affective aspect of emotions is a significant aspect. We can become deadened to the felt aspect of emotions, just as we can become deadened to physical sensation. People who work with their hands no longer notice nicks and scrapes that would bother an office worker. People who work with hot dishes no longer notice mild burns that would bother even a manual laborer. People who are chronically ill-fed come not to notice pangs of hunger that would send the better-fed running to the refrigerator. In a similar way, people can become desensitized by their circumstances to feelings of anxiety and guilt. Yet they may still be anxious or guilty because their mental life contains other aspects of these emotions. Similarly, people can become desensitized to feelings of joy and enthusiasm. Though emotions are more that just felt experience, it is still important for people to relearn how to experience these feelings.

The intensity of felt experience can be inappropriate. Imagine someone who experiences feelings of grief and sadness for days after dropping a small coin down a storm grating. The intensity of his feelings is out of all proportion to the incident. Imagine someone else who feels nothing, no grief or sadness at all, at the breakup of a relationship. The lack of any intensity to her feeling is inappropriate to her loss.

Cognition

Emotions have a cognitive aspect. Factual beliefs about the objects on which they are directed partly make up emotions. Suppose that one person admires another for having become so wealthy, and that his wealth is the only thing she admires about him. Her admiration depends on her belief that this person is, in fact, wealthy. Suppose that she finds out that she is mistaken, that he is poor instead of wealthy. If she continues to admire this person for his wealth, although she now believes his wealth is nonexistent, then her admiration has become neurotic. It is no longer admiration, but something else.

Emotions become mistaken or inappropriate when they are based on false beliefs. Suppose that, in the example above, the person never finds out that her friend is poor. She admires him based on believing him to be wealthy and her belief is false. Although her admiration is consistent with her beliefs, her beliefs are false. Her admiration is not obsessive or neurotic because it is consistent with her beliefs. Nonetheless, her emotion is still mistaken or inappropriate because it is based on a false belief.

Evaluation

Emotions have an evaluative aspect. Evaluative beliefs, beliefs that the objects on which emotions are directed are in some way worthy of the emotions that we feel toward them, partly make up emotions. Suppose a person discovers that someone whom she admires because of his wealth has acquired it by lying, cheating, and corrupting government officials. She believes, presumably, that lying, cheating, and corruption are despicable. She believes that his acquisition of his wealth is unjust and immoral. If she continues to admire him because of his wealth, though she believes that his actions are not worthy of admiration, then her admiration has become neurotic. Again it is no longer admiration, but something else. (Nozick 1989:88)

Emotions become mistaken or inappropriate when they are based on false evaluations. Suppose that, in the last example, the person believes that lying and cheating is not despicable. She admires him based on a false evaluative judgment. Although her admiration is consistent with her evaluation, her evaluation is wrong. Her admiration for her wealthy friend is not obsessive or neurotic because it is consistent with her evaluations. Nonetheless, her emotion is still mistaken or inappropriate because it is based on an incorrect evaluation.

Attention

Emotions have an attention focusing aspect. A pattern of focus and attention partly makes up an emotion. When we explode in anger at someone, we rivet our attention on him. The person and what he has done occupy all our awareness. Our anger pushes everything else to the side; we notice nothing else. This focusing of attention continues, however, even after our feelings of anger die down. Our attention easily shifts to memories of the incident and the vile things that the other did and said. Even more important is that to which we do not pay attention. By definition, attention is selective; it must leave something out. For

example, our anger makes it difficult for us to see the other's point of view, or to see factors that might excuse or mitigate the other's behavior.

In a similar way, a self-supporting pattern of cognitive focusing partly makes up depression. The depressed person pays attention only to thoughts with sad, self-demeaning, hopeless implications. He cannot attend to evidence that he is a worthy individual, a person with a positive future in a world that is not malignant. In his inferences, he focuses only on consequences that support his sadness: A trifling slight implies that everyone hates him; a small setback implies an imminent future catastrophe. His distorted patterns of reasoning sustain his depressed mood.

Emotions usefully focus our attention on things, but in so doing they make other things difficult to notice. All emotions involve mild versions of what psychoanalysts call "defense mechanisms." Without its characteristic pattern of denial, repression, and rationalization, an emotion would not be the emotion that it is. These defense mechanisms can, however, become too strong. A person's emotions can fail to respond to even strongly opposing evidence and can require absurd patterns of reasoning to sustain themselves. Then the person's emotions become maladaptive.

Motivation

Emotions partly explain motivation. Psychologically healthy people generally want things for reasons. The reason for their wanting what they want always has something to do with their emotions. Someone's motivation may be intrinsic, as when she goes to the store because she enjoys shopping. Someone's motivation may also be extrinsic, as when she goes to the store to please someone of whom she is afraid. Yet in both cases, the reasons for their motivations appeal to their emotions, in one case enjoyment and, in the other, fear.

Emotions are expressed in actions. The most basic emotions – fear, anger, joy, and disgust, for example – produce characteristic innate facial expressions. More sophisticated emotions produce motivations mediated by culture and personality, and to actions mediated by strategy and circumstance. This again makes room for mistakes. The way someone is motivated to express an emotion can be inappropriate. For example, friendly feelings may be expressed on occasion by the giving of presents. Yet someone whom friendship motivates to give presents that are too large or too frequent is motivated inappropriately.

Note, however, that social norms often mediate the expression of emotion in action. For example, different cultures have different conventions for the exchange of gifts among friends. So it is sometimes difficult to discern whether someone is motivated inappropriately or has simply misunderstood the conventions.

Physiology

Emotions are in the body. Emotional responses typically include bodily responses. Behavioral responses such as fight or flight reflexes, autonomic nervous system responses (such as changes in blood pressure or a tendency for body hair to stand erect), and hormonal responses such as the release of adrenaline into the blood stream. Probably, our internal perception of these bodily responses plays a large role in our feelings, in our conscious experience of an emotion. (Damasio 2003:83-133)

Brain processes embody emotions. Emotions are most often responses to situations, persons, things, etc., and they are mostly learned responses. Learning involves memory. Emotion involves three types of memory, each employing a different pathway in the brain. The following is a quick summary of these types of memory. (Damasio 1994) (Goleman 1995) (Ledoux 1996)

Imagine someone who, some years ago, was a bystander involved in a corner-store robbery. People fired guns, and she was deeply frightened. Years later, she hears a bang reminiscent of gunfire, and she responds with fear. Three different brain systems are involved in her emotional response. One type of conditioned emotional response involves a neural pathway directly linking her auditory thalamus and her amygdala. The thalamus is a region of the brain that begins the processing of incoming information. The amygdala is an almond-shaped mass of grey matter in the limbic system that is crucial to the fear response. This learned response is fast, but undiscriminating; it may fail to distinguish a gunshot from other loud noises. In response to any loud noise, this pathway will trigger both her visceral response and her fight-or-flight response.

A second, slower, more discriminating system involves a pathway from the auditory thalamus to the prefrontal cortex, and then to the amygdala. The prefrontal cortex allows for sophisticated cognitive processing of the auditory information. It is an evolutionary recent part of the brain whose development sets primates apart from the rest of the animal world. The prefrontal cortex helps in distinguish a gunshot from other loud noises like a car backfiring. It helps integrate information

about her present context, for example, that she is safe in her home and surrounded by friends. This considered response from the prefrontal cortex then mitigates the response of the amygdala, bringing that response into line with her beliefs about reality.

Third, she will have memory of the incident, of the robbers, the store, the noise of the guns, and of her feelings of fright. This will be a memory of the emotion that she experienced, but will itself not be an emotional response. These declarative memories of the emotion, formed through another brain system involving the hippocampus, can inform the second response, or even occasionally trigger the other two sorts of emotional memory. Declarative memories can become distorted, forgotten, or repressed.

The complex physiology of emotions opens all sorts of possibilities for having inappropriate emotions. A person's level of a neurotransmitter like serotonin could be too low. Her hormone levels in the blood could be too high. She could have damage to her amygdala, resulting in little emotional response at all. She could have damage to her prefrontal cortex, resulting in subtle deficiencies in incorporating emotion into decision making. She could have learned triggers for emotional responses that, because the primitive pathway for emotional learning is undiscriminating, are directed in inappropriate ways.

The upshot of the complexity of emotions is this. The path of the emotions is our best bet so far for a path to meaning and value, but it is a very fallible path, with possible wrong turnings everywhere. Emotions have the correct structures to be guides to value, but they can easily mislead us. We must look for some way to make the path of the emotions less fallible.

Chapter 9

JUDGMENTS

> "The man who is angry at the right things and with the right people, and, further, as he ought, when he ought, and as long as he ought, is praised."
> - Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E), *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle 1953:IV.5)

Our search for meaning has led us to the emotions. This is not surprising. After all, the question of the meaning of life is the question of what truly matters, and for something to matter to us is for it to engage our emotions. Unfortunately, our emotions can easily be inappropriate. The emotions form a maze fraught with the possibility of mistaken turnings.

The previous chapter showed the complexity of emotions and the many ways in which emotions can be mistaken. Consider anger as an example. Getting our anger right, as Aristotle observed in the chapter motto, can be a difficult accomplishment. Anger can be directed onto the wrong person – onto the powerless rather than the powerful who deserve it. Anger can be caused inappropriately – not by misdeeds but by a sleepless night. The intensity of angry feelings can be out of proportion to the seriousness of the misdeed – excessively violent anger, for example, at someone dialing a wrong number. Anger can be based on false beliefs – the pen someone thought stolen and was angry about turns up in his other coat. Anger can be based on false evaluations – no one stole the pen, instead his friend borrowed it. Anger can focus a person's attention to the exclusion of contrary evidence – his anger at his enemy may blind him to his good points. Anger may come on someone unthinkingly – conditioning of the primitive, undiscriminating, anger circuits of his brain may trigger his temper before he can control it. Finally, anger may not come when it is appropriate – we may be too distant geographically from injustice and oppression for them to move us to anger.

Emotional Judgments

Notice how the problem of inappropriate emotions is similar to the problem besetting the actual-desire theory of value. It is entirely possible to desire that which, on closer acquaintance, turns out not to be

worthwhile. It is also entirely possible not to desire that which would, on closer acquaintance, turn out to be worthwhile. Earlier, I called these the Misjudgment and the Happenstance problems, respectively.

The way to prevent the possible mistakes of the actual-desire theory of value was to replace it with the rational-desire theory. On this second theory, what is really desirable to us is what we would desire if we were psychologically healthy, reasoning correctly, and fully informed about the world. Instead of using our actual desire for so-and-so, we use our judgment that so-and-so is desirable as a guide to its value.

Similarly, the way to prevent the possible mistakes of the actual-emotion theory of value is to replace it with the rational-emotion theory. That which is truly worthy of the emotion that we feel is that for which we would feel this emotion if we were free of the distortions to which emotions are prone. As a guide to whether such-and-such truly matters, we do not use our actual emotion. Instead, we use our judgment that such-and-such is worthy of that emotion.

Our best guide to what is meaningful or valuable is not the emotion that we currently feel. Instead our best guide is our judgment about what is worthy or deserving of our emotion. This does not, however, imply that our actual emotions are irrelevant. The emotion we feel toward something is good evidence that it is worthy of or deserving of that emotion. Because of the distortions to which emotions are prone, though, it is not conclusive evidence. We must always make further inquiry.

For many emotions, the English language allows us easily to show when someone is making an emotional judgment. The names of many emotions have a cognate adjective that expresses an emotional judgment. For example:

Admiration	Admirable
Love	Loveable
Awe	Awesome
Enjoyment	Enjoyable
Shame	Shameful
Disgust	Disgusting

Some emotions do not have a cognate adjective to express an emotional judgment. Nevertheless, we can still express the emotional judgment using the phrases “merits,” “worthy of,” “deserving of, ” or “makes sense to be.”

Anger	Deserving of anger.
Pride	Worthy of pride.

For each emotion, we can make the corresponding simple emotional judgment.

In the search for meaning, we make highly particular emotional judgments, judgments from our own particular circumstances. We can see this most clearly for a highly personal emotion like enjoyment. A person needs only to know if an activity is enjoyable-to-her for the activity to matter to her. She does not need to know if the activity is enjoyable-to-everyone.

We can also see the particularity of judgment in other emotions. A person needs to know if someone else deserves her admiration for that someone else to matter to her. She only needs to know if the other person is universally admirable if she is trying to enlist the cooperation of others in a moral project. Another person deserves her admiration (is admirable-to-her) if, under distortion-free conditions, *she* would admire him. Another person deserves admiration (is admirable) if, under distortion-free conditions, *everyone* would admire him. Particular judgments are much easier to make. Nevertheless, the judgments of others will be something that she takes into account in her own reflection.

Making an emotional judgment is an intricate intellectual process. For example, take her judgment that he is worthy of her admiration. When she judges that he is admirable-to-her, she is predicting that she would admire him if her admiration were free of the distortions to which the emotion of admiration is prone. Her inquiry would need to proceed on many fronts. She would need to make a factual inquiry to have all the relevant true beliefs about his character and history. She would need to make an inquiry into her own psychology to discount for her own physiological quirks. She would need to make a normative inquiry to get her auxiliary evaluations right. She would need to make sure that her feelings and her motivation were proportionate to her evaluation. If, after she has made this inquiry, she feels admiration for him, then she should conclude that he deserves her admiration.

Notice how this account of emotional judgment requires that emotions be rational, or responsive to reasons. On this picture of judgement, emotions change in response to evidence. If they did not change in response to new information, then her predicted emotion would always be the same as her actual emotions. Many people will find the idea that emotions are rational to be strange. People often think of emotions as the very paradigm of the irrational. They think that when someone is moved to act out of emotion, then she is not being moved by

reason. People talk of being "possessed" or "seized" by an emotion, or by being "paralyzed" or "consumed" by feeling. They think of emotions as "intruding" on the conscious, rational mind, perhaps coming from the cesspit of unconscious, instinctual drives. The old terminology for the emotions, the "passions," encourages people to think of themselves as passive victims of their feelings.

This view of the emotions is wrong and misleading. We must replace this old-fashioned view of the strict separation of emotion and reason by a more balanced view.

Emotions are rational both strategically and cognitively. Emotions are strategically rational because they help us to act in the world. They are not just useful; they are necessary. Without emotions, we could not decide what to do. Emotions are cognitively rational because they do respond to our beliefs about ourselves, the world, and the future, and to our auxiliary evaluations. If this were not so, then the cognitive types of psychotherapy would not work. However, the strategic and cognitive rationality of the emotions are in tension with one another, with the strategic acting to disguise the cognitive. Let me explain.

Strategic Rationality

People often think of emotions as getting in the way of rational decision making, of intruding on the calm, deliberative thought necessary to good decisions. Nevertheless, it turns out that, in fact, we cannot decide without our emotions playing a role. Theorists have pointed out two ways emotions are involved in rational decision making. Both arguments turn on the fact that, in some sense, we know too much.

Suppose someone has to choose between a profitable business deal and loyalty to a friend. To decide, he starts imagining all the various scenarios that might follow from either choice. He imagines what it will be like when his friend finds out his betrayal, what it will be like to do without the profit, what his family will think, what his employees will think, and so on. Then he imagines the consequences of all these imagined scenarios. Then he tries to figure out the likelihood of each scenario happening. The calculation is huge.

In his book, *The Rationality of the Emotions*, Ronnie de Sousa explained how emotions are sufficient to solve this decision making problem. (de Sousa 1987:192-196) Our memories contain a great deal of information. Some of it is relevant to a decision that we are facing, and some of it is not. In the example above, his friend's personality and the profitability of the business deal is relevant information, but the price

of corn in Chicago and the color of his car is irrelevant. The amount of irrelevant information in his memory is vast, and it vastness creates this problem. How does he know whether a given piece of information is relevant unless he retrieves it and examines it? He cannot know its relevance to his decision in advance. Yet if he has to retrieve and think about every bit of information in his memory to tell if it is relevant to his decision, then his decision making process is potentially endless.

Pure, unemotional rationality can take us only this far. Instead, de Sousa hypothesizes that our decision making is not emotionless. The role of our emotional responses to the situation we face is to focus our attention on some pieces of information and away from others. Emotion makes some pieces of the information salient to our decision, and leads us to ignore the rest. We have learned our emotional responses from experience, and if we have learned well, then our emotions will solve the relevance problem. Learned emotional responses enable us to make decisions in a reasonable amount of time. Emotions are rational in a strategic sense.

In his book, *Descartes Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, Antonio Damasio describes how emotions are not only useful, but also essential, to decision making. (Damasio 1994:170-175) For the person choosing between profit and loyalty, setting up a huge calculation is far as pure, unemotional rationality can go. He hypothesizes, however, that, in a decision like this, a person will use his "gut feelings" about his options. Gut feelings (which Damasio calls "somatic markers") are emotional responses that we learn from experience and that guide decisions. Perhaps here, his gut feelings focus his attention on how bad it will feel to betray his friend and warn him against this option. Thus, his emotions will bring a potentially endless calculation to a close, something that unemotional rationality could not do alone.

Damasio studied patients who, because of injury to their prefrontal cortices, were unable to use their emotions in their rational deliberations. Such patients appeared, on the surface, unaffected by their injuries. Their intelligence, their knowledge of the world, their skills, and their understanding of conventional morality remained as before their injury. Still, their lives were all failing miserably – they could neither work, make and keep to plans, nor keep up their commitments to others. They could go through long processes of cognitive deliberation about what to do, but they could not make decisions. With their emotional systems

damaged, they lost their strategic rationality. They required healthy emotional processing to make decisions.

Cognitive Rationality

Emotions mostly respond to reasons in a straightforward way. We become sad when we hear that a friend is ill, but our sadness goes away when we find we are mistaken and that our friend is well. We admire someone when we hear that he has won a prize, but we cease to admire him when we find out that he cheated. Our anger with someone goes away when we find out that she did not really say what we thought she said. When the reasons are obvious enough, emotions are usually rational.

Sometimes, however, people's emotions do not respond appropriately to their situations. Examples are people who have depression, anxiety disorders, or anger management problems. Being sad in sad circumstances is appropriate, as is being worried in worrisome situations, and being angry at injustice. Nevertheless, being sad, worried, or irritable when the situation does not call for it is not appropriate. Then emotions become dysfunctional.

However, cognitive forms of therapy can help people with emotional disorders. These techniques rely on cognition underlying dysfunctional emotions – not true or valid cognition, but fallacious or distorted cognition. Cognitive forms of therapy do not work directly with dysfunctional emotions, but instead work with the distorted thoughts that underlie them. The dysfunctional emotions do respond to reasons, but they are based on bad reasons. Therapy helps the person to identify the assumptions she is making or the thoughts she is automatically having in these situations. Therapy then helps the person to understand the way her assumptions are fallacious or distorted, and to "talk back" to her automatic thoughts. As the person becomes skilled at identifying and fixing her cognitive distortions, her emotions will, over time and with the aid of her therapist, change and become more appropriate.

For example, someone who is depressed and unable to esteem herself properly will find that her negative feelings are based on distorted assumptions that automatically come to her mind. She might focus only on negative comments received at work to the exclusion of more numerous positive comments. She may personalize the behavior of others. Perhaps she may attribute her boss's surliness to her boss's anger at her, when the more likely cause is that her boss had slept badly the night before. She may be a perfectionist, and continually fail in her own

eyes because she assumes that a job that is not done perfectly is not done well. By getting her to test these fallacious inference patterns and talk herself out of them, her therapist will gradually achieve a change in her self-esteem and in her mood.

The point of this discussion of the rationality of the emotions is contained in the last sentence. Emotions do respond to reasons, but they often respond only gradually and with assistance. The explanation of why the response is gradual is that our emotions have to do two jobs. Not only do they have to respond accurately to the world around us, but they also must guide our decisions. It is the strategic rationality of the emotions that slows their response to reasons. Emotions prevent decision making from being endless. To do this, they focus our attention on what they have learned, rightly or wrongly, to be relevant information. Simultaneously they take our attention away from what they suppose to be irrelevant information. In so doing, emotions make it difficult for us to pay attention to information that might be contrary evidence. So our response to contrary evidence will be slow, and may require assistance.

Consider this example. Someone is walking in tall grass when he sees a slack coil partly hidden in the grass. He takes it to be a poisonous snake. He freezes in fear, his attention focused on the snake. For a long time he cannot move. Every little movement of the grass, and every little rustling sound, he interprets as made by the snake. Only after a minute or two is he able to discern evidence contrary to his belief that the coil is a snake. At last its braiding, its motionlessness, and its failure to move away convince him that he is seeing a coil of rope. The human fear mechanism must work this way: People prone to losing interest in the face of danger would not live long. The human species would not have survived this long if people had to engage in endless deliberation before freezing in dangerous situations.

So the responsiveness of emotions to reasons is in tension with their role in decision making. The result is to make the response of emotion to reasons often a gradual one, and a response that, often, will require assistance. Emotions focus a person's attention away from information that may turn out to be relevant. Often it will take time, and the help of friends and therapists, for a person to see his distortions and denials and to make emotional change. "Love is blind," runs one saying, illustrating how powerful emotions bring the decision making process to an end. "Marry in haste; repent at leisure," runs another, illustrating how even the most powerful emotions can, over time, respond to reasons.

The responsiveness of emotions to reasons is slow and social rather than instant and individual. Thus, some people (especially philosophers) may fail to see that emotions can be rational. If our paradigm of rationality requires rationality to be an instantaneous, individual response to reasons, then we should change our paradigm.

If emotions can be rational, then we can make emotional judgments. If an emotion can respond to reasons, then judging whether so-and-so is worthy of that emotion is possible. An emotional judgment is a prediction. Such-and-such is worthy of our particular emotion only if, avoiding all the distortions to which emotions are prone, we would have that emotion. The emotion that we actually feel for so-and so is evidence that so-and-so is worthy of this emotion, but it is not conclusive evidence. We must do more than just getting in touch with feelings. We must inquire rigorously into their appropriateness.

Chapter 10

HOLISM

> "The totality of our so-called knowledge or beliefs, from the most casual matters of geography and history to the profoundest laws of atomic physics or even of pure mathematics and logic, is a man-made fabric which impinges on experience only along the edges. Or, to change the figure, total science is like a field of force whose boundary conditions are experience. A conflict with experience at the periphery occasions readjustments in the interior of the field. . . . But the total field is so underdetermined by its boundary conditions, experience, that there is much latitude of choice as to what statements to re-evaluate in the light of any single contrary experience. No particular experiences are linked with any particular statements in the interior of the field, except indirectly through considerations of equilibrium affecting the field as a whole."
> - Willard Van Orman Quine (1908-2000) "Two Dogmas of Empiricism", §6, in *From a Logical Point of View* (Quine 1953)

Our emotional judgments give us a guide to what truly matters. They provide a guide, however, that is diverse, plural, and particular.

What matters is diverse because we have seen that no one sort of thing is all that matters. Neither having blissful experiences, fulfilling our human potential, nor satisfying our desires is all that matters to us. Emotional judgments, on the other hand, capture the full diversity of what is potentially meaningful.

What matters is plural because things do not matter to us in just one way. Some things we marvel at, while others disgust us. Some people we love, while others anger us. Emotional judgments capture this plurality of meaning. Emotional judgments require no single, overall judgment of valuableness or meaningfulness. Different people, things, and events matter in a plurality of different ways.

What matters is particular to each of us. Each of us will rightly judge different activities enjoyable, and each of us will judge different people deserving of our anger. Sometimes we need a coordinated

response to an event or person. Then we need to share emotional judgments; what he did deserves the anger of everyone. In questions of interpersonal morality, we need to make emotional judgments that are universal. To find what matters to each of us, however, we need to make only particular emotional judgments.

Our search is not just for what feels as though it matters, but for what truly matters. Can our emotional judgments be true? The question of truth will occupy us for the next several chapters. Do we have good reason to think that an emotional judgment is the sort of thing that can be true? We expect truth of our beliefs but not of our desires, emotions, and other mental states. The question of whether emotional judgment can be true depends on the prior question of whether they are the sort of things, beliefs, that can be true or false or whether they are something else, such as expressions of feeling, that cannot. Are emotional judgments beliefs?

The Problem

Emotional judgments are hypotheses about the emotions that we would have under distortion-free conditions. Emotional judgments predict our emotions in possible but non-actual circumstances.

On the one hand, emotional judgments seem like beliefs. The most natural attitude to take toward a hypothesis or prediction is a cognitive one. We postulate, assume, consider, are certain about, or are convinced of a hypothesis. When we think a hypothesis to be true, then we believe it. Predictions are cognitive, not emotive. Predictions are *beliefs* about what we would feel in more ideal circumstances. Emotional judgments have a cognitive role.

On the other hand, emotional judgments seem like emotions. Emotional judgments are evaluative. When we talk of someone being admirable, or deserving of anger, we have crossed the line from factual judgments to evaluative judgment. Evaluative judgments have a feature that factual ones do not have. They move us in a certain way; they engage us; they give us reasons for caring or acting. The philosopher Peter Railton puts the point this way, "It would be an intolerably alienated conception of someone's good to imagine that it might fail in any way to engage him." (Railton 1986:9) Any answer to the question of what is meaningful must be an answer that matters to us; we want an answer that engages our emotions. Emotional judgments have emotive force.

Now we have a problem. (Smith 1994:4-13) According to the common conception of belief, beliefs are dispassionate and inert. They

do not move us, or engage us, or give us reasons for caring. They have no emotive force. If emotional judgments have emotive force and beliefs do not, then emotional judgments apparently cannot be beliefs.

Our dilemma is this. If emotional judgments are beliefs, then they appear to lose touch with what matters. Yet if emotional judgments are not beliefs, then they appear to lose touch with truth.

We can state the problem in another way. Emotional judgments have a certain functional role in our psychology. What type of psychological state they are is whatever type of psychological state fits this functional role. (Gibbard 1990:71-75) The functional role of emotional judgments has two parts:

(1) We are disposed to involve them in reasoning, in making predictions, in constructing arguments, and to assert them in conversation.

(2) We are disposed to be moved by them, to be emotionally engaged by them, and to have them matter to us.

We can think of three possible types of occupants for this role. The occupants could be emotions, they could be beliefs, or they could be another, special type of psychological state for which we do not yet have a name. (Perhaps, on this third option, judgments are combination states that we could call 'bemotions', or 'emoliefs.') In the next section, we will see that they are not emotions. In the final section, we will see that, contrary to common philosophical opinion, beliefs about emotions under mistake-free conditions are connected to emotive force. If the conception of all beliefs as disconnected from emotion is wrong, then we have no need to postulate a special, *sui generis*, type of psychological state to fill the role of emotional judgments. If such beliefs have emotive force, then we can see emotional judgments as beliefs and thus as assessable for truth or falsity.

Judgment and Emotion

Emotions are involved in highly specific sorts of value judgments, as when we judge someone admirable or despicable or judge an event enjoyable or boring. Either emotions have a cognate value judgment (for example, admiration/admirable) or we can easily construct an associated value judgment (for example, anger/deserving of anger). The simplest view of evaluative judgments would be that an emotional judgment expresses the cognate emotion. When we say that so-and-so is boring, we are expressing our actual boredom with him. This view automatically makes a connection between an emotional judgment and its cognate

emotion. Yet, this view implies that judgments, as expressions of emotion, are not the sort of thing that can be true or false.

The view that emotional judgments are expressions of their cognate emotion makes the connection between judgment and emotion too tight. Someone who is grieving the recent loss of a loved one may be unable to enjoy life, yet still sincerely judge that life is, in fact, enjoyable. We should not take this person's judgment that life is enjoyable as an expression of his enjoyment of life. In his grief, he is not enjoying life at all. When we make emotional judgments, we try to compensate for any unusual factors that we think may be affecting our emotions and leading us astray in our judgments.

Emotional judgments are predictions regarding the emotions that we would have in possible, but seldom actual, circumstances where we are free of the distortions to which emotions are prone. Sometimes our actual emotion is the same as our predicted emotion, and sometimes it is not. Nonetheless, predicted emotions are not actual emotions.

To understand this, imagine someone who does not now admire a certain public figure, but who predicts that she would become an admirer if she knew more about the public figure. Her prediction is not the actual emotion of admiration.

Similarly, someone can predict, now, that when an older friend of hers dies in the future, she will feel sadness and grief. She judges, correctly, that her friend's death will be a sad event for her. Judging this future event to be sad and predicting her future grief is not actually to grieve in the present. The judgment and the emotion are different.

Because of the many ways that emotion can go wrong, the simple view that an emotional value judgment expresses the cognate emotion cannot be correct. One person's judgment that a second person deserves her anger does more than just express her anger at him. On a rational-emotion account of emotional judgments, she judges that he deserves her anger just in case she would be angry with him if she were free of the sorts of distortions to which emotions are prone, or at least were able to discount for them. When she judges that he deserves her anger, she also implies that she is not making any of these sorts of mistakes. If this account of emotional judgments is roughly right, then emotional judgments express conditional emotions, emotions that we may not actually have, but which we would have if we were in the right, distortion-free, circumstances.

Rational emotions can differ from actual emotions in two ways. We can illustrate this by focusing on one way that emotions can be mistaken, that of being dependent on false beliefs.

First, suppose that one person is angry with another. Either finding out more information or finding that some of her beliefs about him are false – finding out, for example, that he did not do some of the deeds for which she is angry with him – may bring her to *lose* her anger at him. Although she is angry with him, more information would eliminate her anger, and so he is not deserving of her anger.

Second, suppose that she is not actually angry with him, but instead is neutral about him. Finding out more information about him or that some of her beliefs about him are false – finding out, for example, that he did do some deeds that she had previously believed he had not – may bring her to *gain* anger at him. Although she is not angry with him, more information would make her angry with him and so he deserves her anger.

To deal with the second sort of case, the rational-emotions account employs a hypothetical emotion that she does not really have. In the second case, she is not actually angry with him, though if she knew more, then she would be angry with him. Her rational emotions are hypothetical emotions that she would have only if she were fully and correctly informed. What are these rational emotions?

The most natural interpretation presents a problem for the view that her judgment that he deserves her anger merely expresses anger for him. On this interpretation, rational emotions are conditional, hypothetical emotions, not actual ones. So, they are not real emotions, the ones that make things matter to her. If, as avoiding the first problem required, her rational emotions were just an edited set of her actual emotions, from which inappropriate emotions were *subtracted*, then the connection to mattering would remain. Her edited set of actual emotions would still be a set of actual emotions. However, to avoid the second problem, the rational-emotion theory has to *add* emotions that she does not actually have. These conditional emotions are not real emotions. In some hypothetical situations, new information would result in her gaining an emotion that she does not in fact have. New information about him would lead her, in hypothetical circumstances, to be angry with him. Anger in hypothetical circumstances, however, is not real anger. So her judgment that he deserves her anger does not express actual anger for him.

We should not think of emotional judgments as emotions at all. Emotional judgments are *hypotheses* about the emotions that we would have under mistake-free conditions. Hypotheses are not emotions. Hypotheses can be accurate or inaccurate, correct or mistaken, and true or false. Hypotheses can be confirmed or disconfirmed by new evidence. Despite their name, emotional judgments are more like beliefs. They are fallible beliefs about what people would conclude under hypothetical circumstances. Now, however, if we take emotional judgments to be expressions of belief, then we must face the problem of connecting emotional judgments to their cognate emotions.

Hypothesis Testing

The conclusion of the previous section was that our emotional judgments are hypotheses that predict the emotions that we would have under distortion-free conditions. Hypotheses can be confirmed or disconfirmed by the evidence. Hypothesis testing is holistic.

A too simple picture of scientific reasoning goes like this. A scientist formulates a general hypothesis, performs an experiment, and conclusively confirms or disproves the hypothesis. This simple picture is wrong because whenever a scientist tests a hypothesis, she has to make assumptions about the environment of the experiment, about the equipment that she uses, and about other aspects of scientific theory. If her experiment fails to produce the result predicted by the hypothesis, then all she can logically conclude is either that her hypothesis is wrong or that one or more of her assumptions are wrong. She cannot conclusively infer that her hypothesis is wrong.

Even in unsophisticated experiments, evidence is never logically conclusive. Suppose that her hypothesis implies that a voltmeter will measure a certain voltage. If the voltage is different from what she predicts, then it could be that her hypothesis is wrong, or it could be that no one has calibrated the voltmeter correctly, or that its needle is bent, etc. The situation is far more complicated in a high energy physics experiment performed to detect a previously unknown particle. Physicists must presuppose enormous amounts of physical theory, and perform complex calculations, to get a prediction. If the prediction is wrong, it might be because the hypothesized particle does not exist, or it might be some problem either in the rest of the theory or in the experimental design.

Only if the assumptions are better confirmed than the hypothesis can the scientist conclude anything. On the balance of probabilities, it is

the hypothesis that the evidence disconfirms and not the assumptions. The assumptions are better confirmed than the hypothesis if they also have been previously subject to testing and if they fit with other assumptions of the scientist's overall theory.

In the chapter motto, Quine offered, as a metaphor for the holism of science, the idea of a "fabric" or "force field" of scientific belief tacked down only at the edges by the evidence. Perhaps more familiar would be Susan Haack's metaphor of a crossword puzzle. (Haack 1993:84-86) Consider the following very simple little example:

■ ■ [1]B ■ ■ ■
■ [2]F L 0 [3]W S
■ ■ U ■ I ■
[4]W H E E L S
■ ■ ■ ■ D ■

Across:
2. A river does this.
4. A bicycle has two of these.

Down:
1. A color
3. Untamed

The clues provide inconclusive evidence for the correct entries. In one-down, for example, the clue is a four-letter word meaning a color. Both "blue" and "pink" fit the evidence of the clue, but only "blue" fits with two-across, "flows," and with four-across, "wheel." These latter entries are auxiliary hypotheses that lead us to prefer "blue" to "pink." These entries, in turn, fit with the evidence in their clues and with the reasoning in other entries. On the evidence of its clue, two-across could be "flood." However, that would not fit with three-down, "wild." And so on. In this analogy, the clues provide evidence for an entry, and its fit with other entries provides auxiliary reasons for an entry.

Our actual entry is the one that we *will* make based on the clues and on the other entries that we have already made. The true entry, however, is the one that we *would* make if all our intersecting entries were true ones. Intersecting entries are true, in turn, if they fit both with their clues and with the entries that they intersect. The truth of any entry depends on getting the whole puzzle to fit together. Whatever truth might be, it requires a holistic fit with all possible reasons and evidence.

At this point the analogy breaks down. For a crossword puzzle, we might think that the correct answer is the one that corresponds to what the puzzle's creator had in mind. The clues, and the ways words fit together, are merely means to guessing what the puzzle creator was thinking. For the Godless, however, the real world has no creator. No divine mind exists for us to guess.

The structure of evaluative reasoning is similar. On the one hand, our judgments try to fit with our actual emotions. On the other hand, our judgments must fit with auxiliary judgments that we assume based on past evidence and reasoning.

Distortion-free Emotions

Our actual emotions are evidence for our emotional judgments, but not the sole evidence. Our primary hypothesis is that we would feel a certain emotion does not face the evidence of our actual emotions alone. It does so only in conjunction with the auxiliary hypothesis that we are avoiding the sorts of distortion to which emotions are prone.

What are the distortion-free conditions for making an emotional judgment? Distortion-free conditions are an ideal that we will seldom attain. Even if we do on occasion attain them, we will be unable to know that we have done so. In distortion-free circumstances, we would know everything that is relevant. For any particular emotional judgments this may be possible, since not all that much may be relevant. Yet, to know that we know everything relevant, we would have to know everything there is to know. Examining each piece of knowledge is the only way to decide whether it is relevant. Given our finitude, we can never fully specify what distortion-free conditions are.

Nevertheless, we can still make emotional judgments. We can do so because we have some knowledge of the distortions to which emotions are prone. When she judges that he deserves her anger, her main hypothesis is that she would feel anger toward him. However, she understands that the evidence of her actual emotions will only confirm her prediction if various auxiliary hypotheses hold. Her auxiliary hypotheses are that she is not making any of the mistakes to which anger is prone, mistakes about direction, cause, information, evaluation, focus, intensity, and physiology. Her auxiliary hypotheses are not *ad hoc* because they are based on experience with emotions. Not just any hypothesis can be added here, only ones based in the nature of emotions.

Now compare emotional judgments with a simple perceptual judgment. Someone's judgment that something is green expresses the belief that, if his visual system were free of the distortions to which vision is prone, then he would see it as green. His evidence for this primary hypothesis is his experience of the object as green. Evidence against his auxiliary hypotheses could change his belief. Such evidence would be information about the ambient lighting, information about faults in his perceptual system, information about the effects of background on color experience, and so on. The acquisition of this auxiliary evidence, however, will not usually effect how he experiences the object. Finding out that the background light is yellow, not white, may change his belief in the color of the object, but he will mostly still see it as green.

The situation is different for emotional judgments. Someone's judgment that someone else deserves her anger expresses the belief that, if her emotions were free of distortion, then she would be angry with him. Her primary evidence for this belief is that she finds that she is angry with him. Additionally, she believes auxiliary hypotheses that she is not making the sorts of mistakes mentioned above as those to avoid in getting anger right. For example, information he did not do what she believes he did can change her judgment that he deserves her anger. In contrast to the perceptual case, however, the acquisition of this auxiliary evidence will, over time, also change her emotional response to him. Finding out that he did not do it will change both her belief that he deserves her anger and her feelings of anger toward him. A mechanism connects beliefs and emotions. Emotions change, albeit slowly and with help, to converge with their corresponding emotional beliefs. Feedback mechanisms generate a slow convergence between emotional beliefs and their cognate emotions.

Judgment, Belief, and Emotion

We are now able to explain the nature of the internal connection between an emotional judgment and its corresponding emotion. First, though, seeing what we are not trying to explain is important.

Sometimes people think that there has to be a necessary or conceptual connection between valuing and mattering or between an emotional judgment and its cognate emotion. If the connection were necessary, then we would invariably find the emotional judgment and the cognate emotion together. However, this overstates the problem. Reflection shows that a necessary connection is not what we should be looking for. From common experience, we can see that having an

emotional belief without the cognate emotion and vice versa is always possible. A grieving person lives in a mood of prevailing sadness, unable to enjoy the world around him. Nevertheless, she may still believe that the world is an enjoyable place. When asked, she may sincerely avow that the world is, in fact, enjoyable. It is just that, in her melancholy, she does not feel any enjoyment. Here we have an emotional belief without the cognate emotion.

A person with a phobia about mice may not believe that mice are fearsome animals. Nevertheless, he still fears them. No matter how strong the evidence that mice are not dangerous, he cannot shake his fear. Here we have a strong emotion without the cognate emotional belief.

Thus, we are not searching for a necessary connection between belief and emotion. We are searching for something weaker. This internal connection is the same as the rational connection between belief and evidence. We can think of someone's emotional judgment, for example that he deserves her anger, as a hypothesis that is subject to confirming or disconfirming evidence. A primary piece of evidence is her emotional response to him. Like all hypotheses, her belief is never tested alone. She can test it only in conjunction with the auxiliary hypothesis that she is free of the distortions to which emotions are prone. In a test situation, her hypothesis that he deserves her anger will imply that she will be angry with him only in conjunction with the auxiliary hypotheses that he did do the things that she believes he did, and that she is not subject to any undermining psychological conditions. If she finds that she is angry with him, then this still may not confirm the hypothesis that he deserves her anger. One or more auxiliary hypotheses may be false. Maybe he did not do the deed, or her psychological conditions are inappropriate. Normally, however, whenever she judges someone to deserve her anger she also is angry with him, and whenever she is angry with someone she also believes him to deserve her anger. "Normally" here catches the rational relationship between hypothesis and evidence, and between emotional judgment and actual emotion.

Thus emotional judgments can be beliefs because, as the special sort of belief that they are, normally they will have emotive force. Emotions and emotional judgments will gradually converge. When we make emotional judgments, we make hypotheses. We test these hypotheses in much the same way that we test factual hypotheses. Both judgment and emotion can change in the testing process, and the result, over time, is convergence.

The insight that emotional judgments are beliefs and not emotions, is tremendously important. For beliefs can be true or false while emotions cannot. Emotions can be appropriate, justified, or fitting, but not true. Yet, when we are searching for an answer to the question of whether our lives can be meaningful, we want an answer that not just feels right but that is right. Thesearch for meaning is the search for truth, and beliefs are the proper candidates for truth.

Chapter 11

BELIEFS

> "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them."
> - David Hume (1711-1776), *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book II, Part III, Section III (Hume 1888:415)

We are concerned that emotional judgments are beliefs so that we can use then to guide us to what truly matters. The last chapter showed why evaluative beliefs normally converge with their related emotions. This chapter will offer further evidence for the emotive force of evaluative beliefs by showing the role of emotion in stabilizing belief.

We saw the intimate connection between emotions and the evaluative beliefs that are emotional judgments. Our felt emotions are the most obvious evidence for the corresponding emotional judgment. That we despise someone is, on the face of it, evidence that he is despicable. It is not conclusive evidence because our emotion always requires examination or processing: Did he do what we thought he did? Did he do it for the reasons we think he did it for? Is he acting in character or did he just make a mistake? Is what he did truly as bad as we think it is? Is our response a healthy one, or are we personalizing or over-reacting to his actions? Though not conclusive, our emotions are generally good evidence for our evaluative judgments.

Usually, when someone's emotions and judgments are inconsistent, some equivocation is going on. Often the equivocation is between judging a person and judging his qualities. For example, we might judge a public figure to be despicable as a person, while still admiring his skills as an orator. Generally, however, our judgments and emotions are consistent and should track each another. Disparity calls for explanation, or processing of the inconsistency. True wisdom, as opposed to mere cleverness, involves a harmony of judgment and emotion.

Emotions also play an important role in stabilizing beliefs. Emotions fix beliefs and give them their strength. If we believe that someone is admirable, then generally we admire her. If we do not admire her, then it is not clear how strong our belief that she is admirable really is. If we believe that something is dangerous, yet feel no fear of it,

perhaps we are just parroting the beliefs of others. Courage consists in overcoming our fear of a truly dangerous situation, not in foolishly believing it safe.

Beliefs are cognitive attitudes. Though they respond to evidence, they are still deeply involved with the emotions. Here we part company with David Hume in the chapter motto. In the eighteenth-century psychology of Hume, belief and emotion are totally distinct from each other. They belong to separate faculties of the human psyche. For Hume, only the passions could move a person to action. Belief and reason are inert and unable to move a person. Hence his claims that beliefs must always be in the service of the emotions, and that reason is the slave of the passions. We must abandon this outdated psychology. Belief influences emotion, and emotion influences belief. Beliefs differ in intensity; we can hold beliefs more or less strongly. Roughly, if we hold one belief more strongly than another, then the former belief is more involved with emotion than the latter belief is. Belief and emotion interact as equals.

Emotions and Strength of Belief

We have a whole range of cognitive attitudes that we can take toward a proposition. Consider this list of cognitive attitudes arranged in rough order of increasing intensity or strength of belief:

i. To wonder whether
ii. To suspect that
iii. To hypothesize that
iv. To assume that
v. To suppose that
vi. To think that
vii. To be of the opinion that
viii. To believe that
ix. To be convinced that
x. To be certain that
xi. To hold the conviction that

We often do talk of a person believing something “passionately” or of a person having “deep” beliefs. Some beliefs matter more than others. Even the idea of the dispassionate scientist is often a myth. Real scientists become committed to their pet theories, and the confirmation of these theories becomes essential to their self-esteem. We are more passionate about our convictions than about our opinions. We are more

committed to our beliefs than to our suspicions. We doubt our suspicions more than we doubt our certainties.

If we are reasonable people, then the strength of our cognitive attitude to propositions will be in proportion to the strength of our evidence for that proposition. We will think that our opinions have more probability of being true than do our suppositions. For a rational thinker, degree of evidence will explain degree of belief. Nevertheless, explaining *why* a thinker has a certain cognitive attitude rather than another, is different from explaining *what* is involved in having that attitude. Strength of evidence provides an intellectual explanation for strength of belief, but it does not provide a psychological explanation of what strength of belief is.

How is strength of belief realized psychologically? One clue is that the stronger our belief, then the deeper is our commitment to it. (Misak 2000:73-78) We are more willing to rely on a stronger belief than on a weaker one. We will be more willing to defend a stronger belief when others question it than we are a weaker one. Nevertheless, a commitment is more than an intellectual attitude. When we are committed to a person, cause, or course of action, we are emotionally bound to that person, cause, or action. We may have taken on the commitment for intellectual reasons, but what makes our commitment a commitment is its involvement in our emotions. We have a commitment to a belief when that belief is bound up with our pride and self-esteem or with our anxieties and worries. What makes cognitive attitudes differ in strength or intensity from one another is their degree of involvement in our emotional life.

Doubt, the converse of belief, furnishes another clue. To believe something more strongly is to doubt it less. Yet doubt, though concerned with the truth or falsity of beliefs, is more akin to emotion than to cognition. Doubts are about beliefs. They are caused by contrary evidence. They have an experiential aspect; doubts nag and irritate; they make us anxious and worried; the feeling of doubt varies in intensity. They motivate us to reconsider and sometimes revise our beliefs. They focus our attention on the belief that we are doubting. They resolve themselves when we form new beliefs. They have an evaluative aspect; we do not enjoy being in a state of doubt. The weakness of our belief is roughly proportional to the strength of our doubt about it. Doubt has a large emotional aspect, and so emotion is involved in the strength or weakness of belief.

We can also see the involvement of emotion in belief in our physiological responses. A polygraph does not detect whether or not someone is telling the truth. It detects, instead, whether or not the testee believes what she is saying. It tests for belief by measuring physiological symptoms of emotional stress. The polygraph usually measures four things, pulse rates, respiration rates, blood pressure, and galvanic skin response (electrical conductivity of the skin due to sweating). Other things being equal, these indicators of emotional stress change between when the testee gives an answer she believes and when she gives an answer she does not believe. Though polygraphs are not reliable enough for court evidence, they work as well as they do because of the involvement of emotion in belief.

Emotion and belief also connect in the brain. An example is what happens in some cases of temporal lobe epilepsy. Some sufferers report experiencing religious feelings of awe and wonder in such attacks, experiences similar to the ones caused by electromagnetic stimulation of the right temporal lobe. What is interesting is the strength of the religious beliefs that can arise. Ramachandran comments:

> The patient may also say, "This is it; I finally see the truth. I have no doubts anymore." It seems ironic that our convictions about the absolute truth or falsehood of a thought should depend not so much on the propositional language system, which takes great pride in being logical and infallible, but on much more primitive limbic structures, which add a form of emotional qualia to thoughts, giving them a "ring of truth." (This might explain why the more dogmatic assertions of priests as well as scientists are so notoriously resistant to correction through intellectual reasoning!) (Ramachandran 1998:298, n.13)

The patient's evidence for the existence of God may be shaky – his experience during an epileptic attack. The strength of his belief, the absolute certainty in his religious conviction, is out of proportion to the evidence. His conviction in his belief comes from the involvement of his limbic system, the seat of emotions in the brain.

Psychotherapy and Belief

The cognitive-behavioral and rational-emotive forms of psychotherapy for emotional disorders work because emotions depend on cognitive attitudes. A person's false underlying assumptions, incorrect automatic thoughts, and distorted reasoning can lead to depression, anxiety, and emotional dysfunction.

Nevertheless, Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) does not see the belief/emotion interaction as just one way. Correcting cognitive distortions works for milder forms of mood disorder. In cases of deep depressions or of personality disorders, however, the dysfunctional emotions work to maintain the patient's core belief systems against the cognitive and behavioral evidence. (Beck 1979:12-16) CBT calls these systems or patterns of strongly held core beliefs and associated emotions "schemas."

Schemas are often formed early in life and contain simplistic, immature, and unconditional beliefs. In her heart of hearts, someone might believe, "I'm a despicable, hopeless, loser." This is a judgmental, absolutist, childish way of thinking. A mature person in better mental health would have a more qualified, nuanced belief about herself: "I've had some bad luck, but it will change. I've made some mistakes, but lots of people still respect me and enjoy my company. Things would get better if I were just more careful."

Like mood disorders, personality traits are maintained by distorting information and evidence in various ways. Schemas protect core beliefs from falsification. A sufferer will make faulty inferences, pay attention only to selected bits of evidence and ignore or deny the rest. He will draw hasty generalizations from little evidence and personalize situations inappropriately. He will magnify the significance of events to support his pre-existing evaluations.

Unlike mood disorders, however, schemas do not respond readily to cognitive techniques. The sufferer is resistant to changing his maladaptive core beliefs. Rational discussion of these beliefs is threatening and upsetting. Often the therapist will need to resort to emotional and experiential techniques such as imagery, role playing, and dialogue between the mature patient and his imagined, childlike self. (Young 1999) The strong involvement of the patient's core beliefs with his emotions prevents his beliefs responding easily to the evidence.

Emotional judgments look in two directions. On the one hand, they are responsive to the evidence of the emotions. On the other, they are held in place or stabilized by emotions. Emotions strengthen beliefs, sometimes in an unhealthy way. Dysfunctional emotions distort the responsiveness of belief to evidence.

An example of this interaction of schema, evidence, and belief is the way many people deal with death. We maintain our everyday complacency only by not dwelling on thoughts of dying. Talking or thinking of death makes many people uneasy. A person may change the topic, fail to concentrate on the subject, make a joke of death, or just leave the conversation. People deny or forget the evidence that they will one day die. They form beliefs in an afterlife or in their own specialness that are based on very poor evidence. As a society we hide death from the living by concealing it in hospitals and funeral homes.

In *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, Tolstoy brilliantly describes his protagonist's difficulty with believing in his own imminent death, despite overwhelming evidence.

> In the depth of his heart he knew he was dying, but not only was he not accustomed to the thought, he simply did not and could not grasp it.
>
> The syllogism he had learnt from Kiezewetter's Logic:"Caius is a man, men are mortal, therefore Caius is mortal," had always seemed to him correct as applied to Caius, but certainly not as applied to himself. That Caius -- man in the abstract -- was mortal, was perfectly correct, but he was not Caius, not an abstract man, but a creature quite, quite separate form all others. He had been little Vanya, with a mamma and a papa, with Mitya and Volodya, with the toys, a coachman, and a nurse, afterwards with Katenka and with all the joys, griefs, and delights of childhood, boyhood, and youth. What did Caius know of that striped leather ball Vanya had been so fond of? Had Caius kissed his mother's hand like that, and did the silk of her dress rustle so for Caius? Had he rioted like that at school when the pastry was bad? Had Caius been in love like that? Could Caius preside at a session as he did? "Caius really was mortal, and it was right for him to die; but for me, little Vanya, Ivan Ilyich, with all my thoughts and emotions, it's altogether a different matter. It cannot be that I ought to die. That would be too terrible. (Tolstoy 1960:131-132; cited in Yalom 1980:117-118)

Everyday complacency cannot coexist with a strong belief in one's own mortality. Existentialists stress that we cannot live

authentic lives without facing our dread of nonexistence. We must work through or process these feelings. If we make emotional judgments on the basis of a childish belief in our own immortality, then our judgments will be false and our emotions will be inauthentic. We must not avoid emotional engagement with life to lessen the loss inherent in our own death. On the other hand, we must not exaggerate the evil of death or become obsessed with it. Death does not destroy meaning in life.

Emotions and the Stabilization of Belief

The above discussion makes it seem as if emotion has a purely pathological role in the formation of belief. Seemingly, its role is to block beliefs from responding to evidence and prevent them from attaining truth. In fact, this appearance is misleading. Emotion plays an important role in stabilizing beliefs, and its occasionally pathological role is subordinate to this.

To see how emotion can usefully stabilize belief, recall how belief testing is holistic. Any given belief is only confirmed or disconfirmed by the evidence when we supplement it with various auxiliary hypotheses. An item of evidence that appears to disconfirm a given belief might disconfirm an auxiliary hypothesis instead.

For example, imagine someone who believes the company of his friend to be enjoyable to him. One day he finds that he does not enjoy her company. Possibly this disconfirms his hypothesis that he would enjoy her company, were he free of the distortions to which emotions are prone. Possibly, however, this disconfirms his auxiliary hypothesis that conditions are distortion-free. Distortion-free conditions include good psychological health on his part. Perhaps his lack of enjoyment of her company on that day means that he has the blues that day, not that he her company is not enjoyable to him. How does he decide which hypothesis to accept, and which to reject?

As a matter of logic, all beliefs in the holistic web are equally susceptible to disconfirmation by new evidence. Emotionless reason does not decide which beliefs to retain and which to reject. Emotional reason, as we will see, provides a solution.

Recall, from a previous chapter, de Sousa's and Damasio's accounts of the role of emotion in strategic rationality, the making

of decisions about courses of action. The problem for finite human minds making decisions in real time is that the mind contains too much information. How are we to decide whether a piece of information is relevant to a decision without retrieving and examining it? However, if we have to retrieve and check for relevance every piece of information that we know, then we will take forever to act. De Sousa hypothesized that the focusing aspect of emotion comes into play here. "Emotions are species of determinate patterns of salience among objects of attention, lines of inquiry, and inferential strategies." (de Sousa 1987:196) Our emotions focus our attention on certain pieces of information and exclude access to others.

Our situation regarding the making of decisions about which beliefs to retain in response to new evidence is analogous. We have an enormous number of beliefs. How do we know to which of these beliefs our new evidence is relevant without calling each to mind and checking it? Yet if we do that, then will our finite minds not just bog down in the checking process? The role of emotions in stabilizing and strengthening certain beliefs provides a mechanism for aiding such decisions.

We form the beliefs expressed in emotional judgments based on our emotional responses. Our fear of the precipice is obvious evidence that the precipice is dangerous. The evidence of our fear is not dispassionate in the way that the evidence of our other senses is because of the focusing aspect of emotional responses. Emotional responses do three things to our cognitive functioning. (Elgin 1996:151) They concentrate our attention on the object of the response, they heighten our awareness of aspects of the situation relevant to maintaining the response, and they distract our attention from aspects of the situation that would change the response. Our emotions frame the way that we see the situation.

When we confront the precipice, our fear focuses our attention on the fall and distracts us from the conversation of a friend. Our fear heightens our awareness of the jagged rocks at the bottom of the cliff, the strength of the wind, and the absence of a railing. Our fear prevents us from noticing that others are, without incident, standing closer to the edge than we are, or from remembering that no one has ever fallen off that particular cliff. Our fear is not only evidence that the cliff is dangerous, but it

emphasizes other evidence that the cliff is dangerous and de-emphasizes contrary evidence.

Fear is not the only emotion that frames evidence. Jealousy sensitizes us to signs of our beloved's betrayal. Anger makes it difficult to see our foe's good points. Admiration blinds us to our hero's foibles. Nor is the framing of evidence restricted to occurrent emotions. Long after our first feelings of indignation have worn off, our cold anger at a rival will reveal itself only in our refusal to countenance evidence of his virtues and our tendency to dwell on evidence of his failings.

The focusing, heightening, and distracting aspects of emotion strengthen some beliefs and stabilize them in the face of evidence. Confronted with new evidence, a person will retain the stronger beliefs in her web of hypotheses and direct potential disconfirmation at more weakly held beliefs. If everything is going well, the beliefs that she holds more strongly will be the beliefs that are more likely to be true. If not, then her emotions are dysfunctional. Emotional reason provides a solution to the decision problem that the holism of belief formation creates.

Objections and Replies

We can have emotions without belief. When we fantasize – conjuring up thoughts that we know to be false – we can generate emotions. Fantasy emotions feel just as real as the standard variety. Nevertheless, having emotions without belief is different from having beliefs without emotion. When we fantasize, we are aware that we are entertaining our thoughts at will. So we are aware that we are entertaining the thoughts although we have no evidence that they are true.

We have beliefs about which we have never thought or felt anything. All of us believe that no giraffes are living on the dark side of the moon, though we perhaps did not realize it until now. How can we be emotionally committed to beliefs that we do not know that we have? Nevertheless, though we have never thought of it before, we are still emotionally committed to that belief. Otherwise we would be curious about how the giraffes got there, worried about whether they have enough food, or trying to get NASA to rescue them.

We can, it seems, have beliefs about which we are not able to care. Depression provides an example. Someone who is

seriously depressed and listless can probably recount all the information she had before her illness, but she would no longer care about any of it.

She would not be committed to it, she would not defend it, she would not rely on it, and she would not be curious about its truth. The explanation is that depression distorts belief. When she is depressed, her emotions strengthen certain of her beliefs. Depression strengthens, magnifies, and focuses her attention on false, hopeless, self-deprecatory beliefs and weakens or minimizes contrary beliefs. So she no longer believes what she used to believe as strongly as she did before. Depression weakens belief, though it does not destroy it.

We can also have beliefs that are at odds with our emotions. An example is a phobia. Suppose someone has a phobia about flying in an airplane. All the evidence supports the view that travel by air is safer than travel by car on a per mile basis. Yet even the thought of getting on an airplane terrifies him. He believes that air travel is safe, but he nonetheless fears it. How strongly does he believe that air travel is safe? The answer is that he does not believe it as strongly as does someone who is not phobic about air travel. Here a strong emotion interferes with the rational response of belief to evidence.

Emotion has led us to belief and the search for truth. Yet we have not left emotion behind. First, emotional responses, both actual and hypothetical, provide the evidence for emotional judgments and evaluative beliefs. Second, belief is itself intimately bound up with emotion. We are emotionally committed to our beliefs; the stronger our belief, the more we care. When we believe something to be worthwhile, it matters to us.

Our search for meaning requires both our heads and our hearts.

Chapter 12

TRUTH

> "To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, or of what is not that it is not, is true."
> - Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.), *Metaphysics*, Γ. 7.27.

Our evaluations, our judgments that something is admirable or despicable, kind or cruel, worthy of pride or of contempt, involve our emotions in two ways. First, our actual emotions are the best evidence for our evaluative beliefs, value, better evidence than our pleasures, desires, or facts about our nature. Second, it is our emotional commitment to these evaluative beliefs that gives them their strength. Without emotional commitment, our evaluative beliefs would have no strength. They would be suppositions or imaginings, cognitive attitudes lacking the conviction of genuine beliefs.

Being emotionally committed to our evaluative beliefs is not enough. We must make the right evaluations. Our evaluations must be the best they can be, formed in response to all the evidence. Our evaluations must be true. The quest for meaning is simultaneously a quest both for what *matters* to us and for what is *true*. It is a quest for what is truly valuable, worthwhile, or good. Still, the question arises: Can it be plainly *true* that anything matters for us?

To answer this question, we must know something about what it means for a belief to be true. Two common answers are the relativist theory and the correspondence theory. Wishing to be open-minded, some people think that no belief is true universally; beliefs are only true for the person (or group, or culture) who assert them. Wishing to be scientific, other people think that beliefs are only true if they correspond to physical reality. On neither of these accounts could our emotional judgments be true. Luckily, neither account is correct.

Relativism

Relativism is not a doctrine that anyone can defend. To defend relativism, someone must claim that relativism is itself

true. But what does she mean by "true" in this context? On the one hand, if she means "true-to-her," then she will not convince us. Just because relativism is true-to-her does not mean it is true-to-us. On the other hand, if she means "true universally" or "true-in-a-non-relative-sense," then she is not being consistent. She is assuming her position is incorrect to argue that it is correct.

What other people say, their views on what matters and why, are always evidence that we should consider regarding our own beliefs. We may eventually dismiss their opinions, but we must, at least, consider them. Their opinions are evidence to which our beliefs must respond, even if our response is to keep the same beliefs.

Perhaps, though, the point of someone's being a relativist is that she will not have to defend her position. Someone who believes that truth is all relative protects herself from having to respond to the views of others. Their views are true-to-them, but not true-to-her. Since their views are not true-to-her, she thinks she does not have to consider them.

Relativism is analogous to what Sigmund Freud would have called a "defence mechanism," or what Aaron Beck would call a "cognitive distortion." It allows the relativist to deny or minimize the evidence of what other people say and believe. It rationalizes her ignoring of their views, protects her from the anxiety involved in confronting them about their beliefs, and insulates her beliefs from being threatened by their contrary opinions. The relativist fails to allow her beliefs about value to respond to all the evidence. Relativism is a failure of courage in the quest for truth.

Similar points apply to a less extreme view such as cultural relativism, the view that truth is relative not to an individual but to a whole culture. Sometimes understanding why members of other cultures act, believe, and feel the way they do is difficult. Nevertheless, our new understanding will repay our efforts. We must expand our minds, open ourselves to the unfamiliar, allow our beliefs to respond to the culturally different, and integrate it into our own belief systems. (Misak 2000) Anything else is laziness, a failure of resolve, and a betrayal of the quest for meaning.

The Correspondence Theory of Truth

Aristotle, in the chapter motto, formulates the common sense idea that truth consists in a correspondence between what we say and what exists. Our task, it follows, is to discover that nature of this correspondence relationship. A simple theory of the nature of correspondence goes like this: What we say or assert expresses what we believe. Our beliefs consist of ideas or mental images. These mental images picture the world around us. The world is a mind-independent reality. Our beliefs are true if our mental images are accurate copies of the world, and false if they are not.

If we accept the correspondence theory of truth, then the answer to whether anything truly matters would be, No. On the correspondence theory, reality would need to contain properties that would make evaluative judgments true. Reality would need to contain properties like admirableness, despicableness, pitiableness, and so on. Such evaluative properties would have to be very peculiar ones. J. L. Mackie described these properties in the following way:

> Plato's Forms give a dramatic picture of what objective values would have to be. The Form of the Good is such that knowledge of it provides the knower with both a direction and an overriding motive; something's being good both tells the person who knows this to pursue it and makes him pursue it. An objective good would be sought by anyone who was acquainted with it, not because of any contingent fact that this person, or every person, is so constituted that he desires this end, but just because the end has to-be-pursuedness somehow built into it. (Mackie 1977:40)

The correspondence theory builds the mattering, the emotional engagement, or the normative force of value judgments into reality itself. Given what science tells us about the lack of purpose in reality, the truth of any value judgment would become very implausible.

Luckily, the correspondence theory of truth, though an attractive metaphor, is an imperfect theory. Its central problem is to explain the notion of resemblance. The copy version might be more plausible if mental images were exact replicas of the reality to which they purportedly correspond. Of course, they are not.

Mental images are fuzzy, often two-dimensional, incomplete, lacking detail. Mental images are, presumably, realized in neural circuits in the brain. Yet the neural pattern that realizes a mental image bears no resemblance to its original. The brain divides information about a face, for example, and stores it in different areas of the cortex – the color of the hair in one place, the shape of the eyes in another, the line of the jaw somewhere else. All resemblance between image and object is lost.

As well, many beliefs are more like sentences than like images. We do much of our thinking in language, talking to ourselves rather than remembering images of things. For example, we have no mental image to go with our belief that $e = mc^2$. A thought like this, a thought that is best expressed in language, does not copy, mirror, or resemble the world of which it purports to be true. At best, the various parts of speech can denote or refer to the world. 'e' refers to the energy contained in a given piece of matter, 'm' refers to its mass, and the belief that $e = mc^2$ is true if e is related to m in the way that the formula says it is. Now the correspondence theory must explain the relation of referring. Reference is not resemblance; the picture theory is no help here. Instead we need a linguistic theory in which reference is some sort of causal relationship that an advanced science of linguistics will specify.

Problems with Correspondence

Nonetheless, we have true beliefs in several important areas where neither the picture theory nor the linguistic theory works very well:

Mathematical beliefs can be true, but they are not true because they correspond to some abstract, mathematical reality. What sense can we make of a realm of abstract, mathematical objects? We believe that $2 + 3 = 5$. Perhaps, as the picture theory suggests, we have a mental image of a two being added to a three to make a five. What mathematical realm does this image picture? Perhaps it pictures another image. Perhaps we picture an image of two fingers and three fingers and can see that we are imagining a total of five fingers. However, the correspondence theory requires a mind-independent reality to which true beliefs correspond, and our imaginary fingers, by definition, are not

mind-independent. Neither our real fingers, nor any other physical objects, are the realities that make mathematics true.

The linguistic version of the correspondence theory of mathematical truth fares little better. Whatever it might be, mathematical reality is not physical reality. It is, instead, a realm of abstract objects. On the linguistic theory, the correspondence relationship is a causal relationship described by science. Abstract objects, however, are not the sort of thing that can enter into causal relationships. Only physical events and states of affairs are the sorts of things that can be causes and effects. The causal theory of correspondence just does not work for mathematical truth.

Beliefs about the future can be true now, but not through correspondence to reality. We can have a mental image now of the future to come, but no reality now exists which it can picture, So how can a belief about the future be true now? A causal theory of correspondence does not help. Causes must always precede their effects. So how can a future reality have a causal effect on a present linguistic belief?

Beliefs about possibilities can be true beliefs. Yet it pushes the limits of credulity to postulate a realm of possible realities that they copy or to which they correspond. Consider what is called a contrary-to-fact conditional – an if/then statement in the subjunctive mood whose if-clause is false. For example, we know enough about kangaroos to believe truly that if kangaroos had no tails, then they would topple over. (Lewis 1973) In the actual world, all kangaroos do have tails. To what reality corresponds the belief that if kangaroos had no tails, then they would topple over? For the correspondence theory of truth to apply here, possibilities must, in some strange way, be realities. Again a causal theory of correspondence does not help, for how can mere possibilities have causal effects on beliefs in the actual world?

Beliefs about the colors of objects are paradigms of true beliefs. Snow is white, grass is green, and dandelions are yellow. Yet the correspondence theory does not give a good account of truth here either. The problem is not that correspondence requires strange, abstract, or possible realities. The problem is that, with colors, there is no reality to which color beliefs correspond.

People sometimes think that there is a simple correspondence between the color of an object and its surface reflectance. We see the color blue, for example, when light with a wavelength between 420 and 480 nanometers (billionths of a meter) hits the retina of our eyes. White light from the sun is a mixture of different wavelengths from 400 to 700 nanometers that includes the ranges of each color. When white light hits a blue object, the object reflects only light of a particular wavelength, say 450 nanometers, and absorbs the rest. Because this falls in the blue range of our visual system, we see the object as blue. Our belief that the object is blue is true because the blueness of objects corresponds to a high surface reflectance between 420 and 480 nanometers.

Color vision, however, is far more complex than this simple picture allows. For one thing, objects appear blue in many more ways than simply reflecting light of a wavelength between 420 and 480 nanometers. (Hardin 1988:2-7) The blue of a gas flame comes from the heat energy of its atoms and ions. The blue of the sky comes from differential scattering of light by dust particles. The blue of the sea is usually a reflection of the blue of the sky. The blue light in a rainbow comes from differential dispersion of light of different wavelengths. The blue of a Xmas tree bulb comes from differential transmission by the bulb's translucent coating. No one feature, like surface reflectivity, corresponds to a given color.

The cones in the human retina are not simple detectors of wavelengths. The three types of cones respond to different wavelengths of light with different outputs. The eye combines these outputs before sending them to the occipital lobe for processing. Because what we perceive is this combination of outputs, information about wavelengths is lost. Therefore, different combinations of wavelengths can produce the same color perception. For example, we will see light of wavelength 580 nanometers as pure yellow. However, a mixture of greenish light of wavelength 540 nanometers and reddish light of 670 nanometers will evoke the same hue. In fact, any hue can be duplicated in infinite ways by using mixtures of different intensities of red, blue, and green lights. Consequently, no one wavelength of light corresponds to a given color.

The correspondence theory of truth just does not work for color beliefs. Nor does it work for beliefs about mathematics, the future, or contrary-to-fact possibilities. This conclusion might tempt someone to think that different theories of truth apply in different domains – correspondence to reality in physics, but something else in mathematics and in predictions about the future.

This eclecticism cannot work, however. People legitimately make inferences that involve premises in different domains, yet they expect these premises to pass on truth to their conclusions. For example, a physicist might start with a physical description of reality as a first premise, use some mathematics as a second premise, and derive a prediction that was a physical description of the future. However, the truth of the first premise (correspondence) is different from the truth of the second (mathematics), and different again from the truth of the conclusion (future). According to the eclectic theory of truth, this mixed inference equivocates; the premises do not pass any unequivocal truth to the conclusion and so the argument is invalid. Yet such mixed inferences are, in fact, valid. So truth cannot be eclectic.

Standpoint

The Godless have a deeper reason for being suspicious of the theory that the truth of a belief consists in its copying, mirroring, or corresponding to a mind-independent reality. In normal cases of picturing, we can have in front of us both the picture and its subject. We can find a standpoint from which to view both the reflection in the mirror and what is reflected. From this standpoint, we can judge if the copy or reflection is accurate. However, when we check the truth of a belief, the belief is in our minds. So the correspondence theory of truth requires that there be a standpoint outside the human mind from which to check the accuracy of our belief. Only from this external standpoint could someone judge that a belief did, or did not, bear the right sort of relationship to reality. (Blackburn 1999:7) To make the judgment of correspondence, he would require both a view of the beliefs in a human mind and a view of mind-independent reality. Whose standpoint is this? It cannot be a human standpoint because it must include a view of a reality independent of the human mind.

It must be a God's-eye-view of the world, a view ever inaccessible to finite humans.

The Christian *New Testament* tells a story of the encounter between Jesus and Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea in the first century.

> 37 Pilate said, 'So, then you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'It is you who say that I am a king. I was born for this, I came into the world for this, to bear witness to the truth; and all who are on the side of truth listen to my voice.'
> 38 'Truth?' said Pilate, 'What is that?'
> (*New Jerusalem Bible,* John 18, 37-38)

Pilate was quite right, while he had the chance, to ask Jesus the question, What is truth? On the correspondence theory, only God could have the right viewpoint to know the answer. Still, Pilate also wasted his question, for without a God's-eye-view of his own, he could not have understood the answer. The Godless cannot accept truth as anything but a human-sized notion. Anything else will just smuggle in a hidden appeal to God.

Recall that belief looks in two directions. First, belief looks toward emotion. In a healthy psyche, emotion enables rational belief formation and gives rational beliefs strength. Second, belief looks toward truth. A thought held in the face of all contrary evidence is a prejudice or an article of faith, not a belief. Beliefs must respond to reasons and evidence in order to aim at truth.

Consider, now, a belief in the correspondence theory of truth. To what sort of evidence could this belief respond? It is not a belief arrived at by mathematical or logical reasoning. Nor is it a belief arrived based on evidence. No human being can have access to a standpoint encompassing both a belief and the reality that it purports to represent. Human beings have no way of first looking at beliefs, then looking at a mind-independent world, and then checking to see if the two correspond. In their quest for truth, human beings are confined to what is humanly accessible.

If truth did consist in correspondence to reality, we might legitimately wonder to what sort of reality true emotional judgments corresponded. It would be a very strange reality indeed, full of peculiar properties like admirableness, despicableness, awesomeness, and so on. It might be such a

strange reality that we would find it unbelievable. Then we would have no way of saying that our judgments were true, and it seems impossible that it could be true that anything mattered.

In a sarcastic vein, we might say that these peculiar properties should not bother the correspondence theory, given the other strange features it requires: Mathematical reality, future reality, possible realities, and a God's-eye-view. It is better, though, to say that these peculiarities give us reason to reject the correspondence theory, and to look elsewhere for the nature of truth. For the Godless, truth must not be something that is in principle inaccessible to human beings. The "to-be-pursuedness" of evaluative beliefs must be found, not in the nature of reality, but in the involvement of beliefs with the emotions.

Minimalism about Truth

The correspondence theory is a theory about the nature of truth. We have seen that the natures of many important truths – truths about mathematics, possibilities, the future, and the colors of objects – do not consist in correspondence to reality. Further, we have seen that if correspondence to reality were the nature of truth, then truth would always be inaccessible to us. Perhaps the assumption that truth has a nature misleads us. In the second third of the twentieth-century, philosophers such as Ramsey and Wittgenstein put forward the radical idea that truth has no essential nature. In the last third of the century, philosophers such as Quine, Rorty, and Horwich formulated the idea in satisfactory ways and made it influential in philosophy.

Our misconception that truth has a hidden nature is caused, says Horwich, by our tendency to think of the predicate 'is true' by analogy to a scientific predicate like 'is magnetic'. (Horwich 1998:2) Magnetism does have an underlying nature. We can generalize and say that any piece of material is magnetic if, and only if, the spins of its component atoms are aligned in one direction. Truth, however, has no underlying nature. We cannot generalize and say that any belief is true if, and only if, it corresponds to reality. We can only say something about each particular belief. Someone's belief that grass is green is true if, and only if, grass is green. Her belief that 235 + 154 = 389 is true if, and only if, 235 + 154 = 389. Her belief that her friend deserves her admiration is true if, and only if, her friend deserves

her admiration. Because truth has no underlying nature, we can say nothing general about all truths.

On this view, truth is a very minimal notion. Truth plays little part in philosophical reasoning. Minimalism trivializes the notion of truth in the sense that truth does not explain anything. Because truth has no underlying nature, we cannot use truth to explain or justify our beliefs. We can explain the truth of a belief, but we cannot go on to use the belief being true to explain anything else. We can say, for example, that our scientific belief that electrons exist is true because there really are electrons. Yet we cannot reverse the direction of explanation and say that there really are electrons because our scientific belief that electrons exist is true. Truth does not solve any problems.

Yet minimalism about truth does not entail that scientific, mathematical, or philosophical problems are trivial. Minimally, someone's belief that 235 + 154 = 389 is true if, and only if, 235 + 154 = 389. However, she still has to add 235 plus 154 to find the answer. The theory of truth does not do the addition for her. Minimalism does not make mathematical problems go away. Nor does minimalism make emotional judgments any easier. Her belief that her friend deserves her admiration is true if, and only if, her friend deserves her admiration. However, to see if her friend deserves her admiration, she still has to reflect on whether she would admire her friend if she were free of the distortions to which emotions are prone. This reflection is not trivial for her, involving, as it does, much self-discovery and communication with her friend.

Minimalism about truth does not trivialize the problem of making emotional judgments. Instead, it makes the problem potentially solvable. The correspondence theory of truth required [1] a God's-eye standpoint from which we could compare our judgments to [2] a peculiar normative reality. Since we can meet neither of these conditions, the problem of making true emotional judgments would be intractable. Minimalism recommends that we do not look to the theory of truth for help with our judgments. It recommends that we just get on with the process of critical reflection on our emotions and try to avoid the distortions to which they are prone.

Someone might think minimalism to imply that the concept of truth is a concept we could do without. Perhaps we could just list all the beliefs we think are true without ever using the word 'true.' We could do this by asserting that grass is green, 235 + 154 = 389, and so on, but the list would be huge. The concept of truth allows us to summarize such lists conveniently. We often meet situations where we want to say that someone's belief is true without knowing exactly what it is that he believes. Suppose that we think him to be a particularly good judge of character, but do not know what he thinks of the Queen. The concept of truth allows us to say that whatever he believes about the Queen is true, though we do not know whether he judges her admirable. This may seem like a trivial usage until we reflect that we could not ask the central question of this chapter without it. Our question was, "Can it be plainly *true* that anything matters for us?" We interpret this question to mean, "Are any of our emotional judgments true?" We ask this question without knowing what all the emotional judgments in question are. We may know some of them, the ones that we are each aware of making, but we mean also to include judgments made by others and judgments that we may not yet have made. Without the concept of truth we could only ask the question by listing the infinity of possible questions that this simple question summarizes.

Had the correspondence theory of truth been correct, the answer to our question whether any of our emotional judgments were true would have been, No. Luckily it is not correct, and we can continue to ask the question. However, we must not expect any help in answering it from our theory of truth. We can only take each emotional judgment as it arises and ask whether we would have the cognate emotion if we were free of the distortions to which emotions are prone. We need the concept of truth to state our question, but not to answer it.

Chapter 13

MEANINGLESSNESS

> "We desire the object because it seems good to us, rather than the objects seeming good to us because we desire it."
> - Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.), *Metaphysics*, 1072a29.

Meaninglessness confronts us both as a general sceptical claim, and as a particular problem with each of our lives. Sceptical meaninglessness denies that meaning is even possible. It claims that our lives lack meaning, not because we are living them badly, but because nothing at all can truly matter. Particular meaninglessness allows the general possibility of a meaningful life, but threatens each life in particular. If we fail to understand what is involved in living meaningfully, or if we lack the wisdom to live well, then our lives may fail. Once we overcome the sceptical threat, we can turn to the particular question of how we can earn meaning in our lives.

Scepticism about meaning may be based on either of two views. The first sceptical view holds that emotional judgments are not beliefs. So emotional judgments can be neither true nor false. It holds instead that the expression of an emotional judgment is just the expression of an emotion or of another psychological state other than belief. The second sceptical view allows that emotional judgments are beliefs, but holds that all such beliefs are false since no normative reality exists to which they can correspond.

Life seems to matter. For something to matter is just for it to engage our emotions. Things matter to us as human beings, beings with a certain cognitive and emotional makeup. To people deeply depressed or with severe brain injury, nothing at all may matter. Yet overall, human beings are emotional beings, beings to whom things matter. If we understand our purposes as guided by value, and value as guided by emotion, then we can see how life can matter. The real question is whether it *truly* matters.

Psychological Projection

The first sceptical view holds that the expression of an emotional judgment is the expression of the cognate emotion or of another non-cognitive psychological state. We have seen reason to reject this view in earlier chapters. On this view, the way that things apparently matter is merely an artifact of psychological projection. In psychoanalytic terms, projection is the attribution of our own feelings, emotions, and beliefs to other people, typically in an attempt to avoid guilt and anxiety. Someone might, for example, deny to himself that he hates person X. He projects this hatred onto Y, and believes, instead, that person Y hates person X. By analogy, some philosophers have argued that our emotional judgments are not properly true of the world, but, instead, are analogous to projections of our emotions onto the world. (Blackburn 1984) In the eighteenth century, David Hume put the position eloquently when he discussed the difference between reason and taste:

> Thus the distinct boundaries and offices of *reason* and of *taste* are easily ascertained. The former conveys the knowledge of truth and falsehood: The latter gives the sentiment of beauty and deformity, vice and virtue. The one discovers objects, as they really stand in nature, without addition or diminution: The other has a productive faculty, and gilding or staining all natural objects with the colours, borrowed form internal sentiment, raises, in a manner, a new creation. Reason, being cool and disengaged, is no motive to action, and directs only the impulse received from appetite or inclination, by showing us the means of attaining happiness or avoiding misery: Taste, as it gives pleasure or pain, and thereby constitutes happiness or misery, becomes a motive to action, and is the first spring or impulse to desire and volition. (Hume 1998:163)

If emotional judgments are analogous to the projection of emotions onto the world, then meaning becomes something we create or invent, not something we can discover. Meaning is a matter of taste, not of truth.

This might be what Joseph Campbell meant when he wrote, “Life is without meaning. /You bring the meaning to it. /The meaning of life is whatever you ascribe it to be. /Being alive is

the meaning." (Campbell 1991:16) We "ascribe" meaningfulness to our activities and our relationships, and to the persons and things on whom we act and to whom we are related. Contrary to Aristotle's view in the chapter motto, we make them loveable by loving them, awesome by being in awe of them, and admirable by admiring them. Of course, we could just as easily ascribe meaninglessness to our lives by resenting, hating, despising, and fearing the persons, things, and activities in your world. Which is right? There has to be some way in which we can reflect on our ascriptions, and correct them as required.

On the projection view, something's being admirable-to-someone, for example, consists in nothing more than her admiring it. Yet she can be mistaken in her admiration. So, her attitudes must allow for correction. On the projection view, correcting her attitudes is purely a matter of her becoming more sensitive, a matter of refining her emotional sensibilities. It is not a matter of how the world is, since she projects her judgments onto the world. Consequently the world does not make her judgments true.

Recall that earlier we distinguished eight ways that emotional judgments could go wrong. Emotions are very complex psychological phenomena and they can go wrong in direction, causation, feeling, physiology, attention, motivation, belief, and evaluation. Someone's admiration might be directed on the wrong person, caused by an extraneous factor, disproportionate in intensity, due to her hard wiring, stopping her from seeing mitigating factors, and motivating her to do something that she later regrets. She can correct these first six ways that emotions can go wrong through knowing herself and refining her emotional sensibilities.

However, the last two forms of emotional mistake are not just matters of her knowing herself. In the seventh type of mistake, her emotions presuppose false beliefs. Her beliefs can be beliefs about herself, but they can also be beliefs about other people, beliefs about events and things in the world, and beliefs about the future. In the eighth type of mistake, her emotions presuppose false evaluations. Evaluations are other emotional judgments that she holds, beliefs that her emotional responses would be a certain way under distortion-free circumstances.

We can conclude, then, that correcting mistakes in our emotional judgments is not just a matter of being more sensitive about ourselves and of refining our emotional sensibility. It is also a matter of having true beliefs about the world and of having true beliefs about value. The projection view requires, wrongly, that our emotional sensibility has priority in explaining mistakes in our emotional judgments. (McDowell 1997:218-221) Emotions are complex. Looking at all the ways in which they can be inappropriate, shows that facts about our emotional sensibility have no such priority. Because emotions are cognitive and evaluative as well as psychological, more than the internal aspect of emotion is involved in judgment. Emotional judgments are not mere projections, "gilding and staining all natural objects." The truth of emotional judgments depends, not only on how we are, but also on how the world is. Truth depends on whether we correctly evaluate ourselves, others, and the world.

Global Error

The projectivist or emotivist view just discussed regards assessing emotional judgments as true or false to be meaningless. ('Meaningless' in the sense of being linguistic nonsense, not in the sense of not mattering.) On that view, emotional judgments are not beliefs, so it is nonsense to think of them as true or false. A second type of scepticism about meaningfulness allows that emotional judgments are beliefs, and so are assessable as true or false. Nevertheless, on this view such beliefs are globally false. J. L. Mackie writes, "The assertion that there are objective values or intrinsically prescriptive entities or features of some kind, which ordinary moral judgements presuppose, is, I hold, not meaningless but false." (Mackie 1977:40)

Mackie thinks all our evaluative beliefs are false, including our emotional judgments, because he holds that truth consists in correspondence to reality. On the correspondence theory, for evaluative judgments to be true, an evaluative adjective, like "despicable," must correspond to a real property of "despicableness.". Mattering, or "to-be-pursuedness," would somehow need to be incorporated into these real properties. Given what we know about the psychologically inert properties that scientists attribute to objects, this view is very strange and

implausible. Properties with such normative force would be incompatible with a scientific world view.

As the last chapter showed, the correspondence theory is implausible in a variety of other cases – mathematics, color, possibilities, the future. As well, the correspondence theory requires the existence of a standpoint outside both the human mind and reality from which to investigate the correspondence relationship. We should replace the correspondence theory of truth with an account where truth explains nothing but has only a minimal, summarizing role to play.

This minimalist view of truth poses no objection, *in principle*, to our evaluative judgments being true. Consider, for example, someone's judgment that the ocean's tides are awesome. If he knew all he needed to know about his own feelings and psychological health, the nature of the ocean's tides, and other evaluative judgments about the tides, then he would likely still be in awe of the power of the tides. His judgment would then be true.

Conceivably, under distortion-free circumstances, we would never feel the cognate emotion to any of our emotional judgments. Then, all of our evaluative beliefs would be false. Nevertheless, we have no principled reason, ahead of any investigation, to believe that all our emotional judgments are in error. We must examine each of our judgments, case-by-case. We cannot rule them all false without doing such inquiries.

Relativism, Particularism, and Divergence

Relativism is another threat to meaningfulness. If truth could be no more than relative truth – truth-for-me, and truth-for-you – then we could make things truly meaningful just by thinking them so. Meaning would then be something that we invented, not something we discovered or earned. This is too easy.

We have seen good reasons, in the last chapter, to reject relativism about truth. We must, however, distinguish between relativism about truth and the particularity of emotional judgments. When we are searching for what is meaningful, we search always for what is meaningful to each of us. Our interest, in this search, is not in universal emotional judgments such as so-and-so is admirable-to-all-of-us, or deserving of the admiration of

all people, or admirable *simpliciter*. Instead, our interest is in particular emotional judgments such as so-and-so is admirable-to-me or deserving of my admiration. These particular judgments determine whether we find meaning in our individual lives. Universal emotional judgments are important to issues of interpersonal ethics, but our issue here is that of a personal ethic.

To see the difference between the particular and the relative, consider the following example. He enjoys beer but not wine. She enjoys wine but not beer. He believes that beer is enjoyable while she believes that it is not. We have four cases regarding his belief:

(1) His belief that beer is enjoyable-to-all is true.
(2) His belief that beer is enjoyable-to-all is true-to-him.
(3) His belief that beer is enjoyable-to-him is true-to-him.
(4) His belief that beer is enjoyable-to-him is true.

Here, we must be careful to distinguish the particular from the universal and the relative from the non-relative. The first claim is universal and non-relative. It is also false. She has no reason to agree with him and she does not believe that beer is enjoyable to her or to everyone. We have no reason to think her wrong. The second and third claims are both relative. Rejecting relativism about truth, we reject the predicate, 'true-to-him', and we should see both claims as uninteresting. Importantly, though, we must distinguish these two relative claims from the particular claim in (4). The fourth claim is true. Though they can usefully discuss or even argue about the fourth claim, he and she can probably agree about it. She has no reason to think that beer is not enjoyable-to-him. She does not believe that beer is enjoyable-to-her, but the fourth claim depends on his circumstances, not hers. She can quite happily agree that if she had had his history and experiences, then she would also find beer enjoyable-to-her.

People often diverge in their judgments about, for example, who is admirable and what is worth cherishing. Some people point to this divergence as evidence that emotional judgments cannot be true or false. Against this view, we should remember the considerable amount of convergence that exists when we emphasize the particularity of emotional judgments. (Smith 1994:188-189)

Existential Absurdity

Existential absurdity is a final threat to meaningfulness. Camus thought that if we followed reason to its end, we would come to find ourselves absurd. (Camus 1955) If we came to understand aright the vast, value-free universe, we would come to see our pretensions as silly and ridiculous. The discoveries of reason reveal our meaninglessness.

Meaninglessness, however, is just one pattern of emotions among others. In *The Passions: Emotions and the Meaning of Life*, Robert Solomon writes:

> And so we begin to suspect, as Camus never did, that the source of absurdity is not meaninglessness at all, but a certain *kind* of meaning. The object of absurdity is not a "confrontation," with an "indifferent universe" or a man talking soundlessly in a telephone booth. The object of absurdity is our Self. Absurdity is a self-demeaning view of ourselves. It never appears in love; it almost always appears in depression and resentment. All are equally "meaningful"; in fact, depressions and resentments are often far more absorbing than the calm of love and friendship. The difference is *within* the meanings, and the meaninglessness of life is in fact a projection of our own sense of worthlessness onto the world. Camus's Absurd, projected onto the universe as a whole, is a *refusal* to accept himself, an attempt to compensate for his own sense of inferiority with a sham nobility and defiance against forces that can only be blamed and safely despised at a distance. (Solomon 1993:51)

A person does not enjoy the special love of any God. He is born into a huge cosmos of which he is a minuscule, and short-lived part. His response is resentment, depression, feelings of inferiority, or loss of self-esteem. He is unable to live comfortably with these self-despising, self-hating, demeaning emotions. So, instead of directing them toward himself, he projects them onto the universe, in a sense of "project"close to the psychoanalytic usage. Instead of taking responsibility, he externalizes the problem. Instead of taking on the task of earning self-worth, he sees meaninglessness as inherent in his situation, and beyond his control.

Self-esteem and its close relatives like self-respect and self-worth are the emotions essential to feeling one's life meaningful. The feeling of meaningfulness comes with a certain esteem for one's own character, a pride in one's accomplishments, a satisfaction with one's personal relationships, a hopefulness regarding one's future, and a sense of the importance of one's own life.

Nevertheless, self-esteem can be false. If our self-esteem depends on false value judgments, the meaningfulness of our lives is in question. If our self-esteem depends on the money that we make, on the admiration of false friends, on our continued ignorance of our lover's infidelity, or on any other false judgments, then it risks being a false emotion.

It is not having self-esteem that makes life meaningful. It is being worthy of one's own esteem. Whether or not we are self-estimable, or worthy of our own esteem, is a judgment that we make on our lives. Self-esteem is something about which we can fool ourselves. Being self-estimable is something we must earn.

We earn self-estimableness not just by paying attention to ourselves. A person worthy of a pattern of life-enhancing emotions is a person who makes the right emotional judgments about more than just himself. Such a person then incorporates these value judgments into himself by his commitment to them.

We have shown, so far, that meaning is possible in life. Our task, now, is to earn it. This is a task that we all share. We must discern how to be better persons, and we must discover how to lead better lives. Then we must become those persons and live those lives.

Chapter 14

JUSTICE

> "Is the life of justice the better and happier life? What we have said already leaves no doubt in my mind; but we ought to consider more carefully, for this is no light matter: it is the question, what is the right way to live?"
> Socrates to Thrasymachus, Plato (428/7 B.C.E. - 348/7 B.C.E.), *Republic* 352 d, (Plato 1941:37)

We should pause for a space and survey the path behind. In the first part of this book, we looked at making true emotional judgments on activities, people, and things outside ourselves. Now our inquiry turns to making emotional judgments on ourselves, on our lives and our characters.

Review

Our search for meaning is a search for what truly matters. Initially, we saw that theories of cosmic purpose and the development of human potential could not answer the mattering question. Why should alignment with cosmic purpose or development of human potential be things that matter to us?

We examined the path of blissful consciousness. We found that, though pain and pleasure certainly matter, other things matter to us besides these states of consciousness.

We examined the path of satisfied desires. We found that, because desire is inherently motivational, it is directed on future events and not on persons and things, either present and past. Again, other things matter to us besides future events.

Finally we examined the path of the emotions. For something to matter is just for it to engage our emotions. The range of things that can matter to the emotions is not limited to future events as it is for desires. We noted, however, that though emotional responses are evidence of what is valuable, they are not definitive guides. Emotional judgments, predictions that we would feel certain emotions under ideal conditions, are our guides to value. Our admiration for something, for example, is not enough; we need to know that it is admirable.

As predictions, however, emotional judgments are beliefs, not emotions. Our value judgment that someone is admirable is our belief, of that person, that she is worthy of our admiration. Beliefs aim at truth.

It seemed at this point that we had confused facts with values. It seemed that if we understand value judgments as beliefs, we would be left unable to explain why the persons and things we value should matter to us. One bad explanation of why true beliefs matter is that they correspond to a strange sort of reality with "to-be-pursuedness" built into it. We rejected that explanation, along with the idea that truth consists in correspondence to a reality only fully comprehensible to God.

Why does what we believe valuable matter to us? Why do we admire what we believe admirable? The answer lies in the nature of belief, not the nature of reality. Belief and emotion are intertwined. Beliefs are related both to the evidence on which they are based, and to the emotions that fix them. Emotions are what give beliefs their strength; they allow us to explain the difference, for example, between supposing something to be true and being convinced that it is true. For emotional judgments, it is good, though not conclusive, evidence for an evaluative belief that we feel the correlated emotion. Our admiring someone is good evidence, though not conclusive evidence, that she is admirable. Saying of someone that she is admirable, but that we do not admire her, is odd, though possible. To do so, we would need to have a good reason for discounting our feelings; the reason might be that our emotions respond to our beliefs more slowly than our beliefs respond to evidence. However, our emotional judgments and our actual emotions cannot always be out of sync. Our emotional responses are ultimately all the evidence that we have for our judgments. It would be very odd indeed if we never admired anyone among those whom we judged admirable.

Meaning and Self-esteem

The big question that each of us asks is this: Is my life meaningful? The answer connects to the emotional judgments that we each make about ourselves. We do not, however, rely on just one emotion or feeling of meaningfulness and its correlated

judgment. Instead we rely on a cluster of self-directed emotions, together with a corresponding cluster of life-affirming judgments.

We cannot make any unified judgment of meaningfulness on our lives. If we look for one, then we will be disappointed. Meaningfulness is not a unitary notion. Because emotions are diverse, meaningfulness is diverse. To ask for more is to doom our search to frustration. We are better off not to ask The Big Question. Instead we should ask only little questions, ones connected to particular emotional judgments. Do not ask: Is my life meaningful? Ask, instead: Am I someone worthy of the esteem of myself and others? Am I the sort of person who deserves love and admiration, who has dignity and self-respect, who has true self-worth?

Our emotional judgments can be directed both inwards on ourselves and outwards on other people and things in the world. The emotional judgments directed on ourselves depend on the emotional judgments we direct on the world. We do not judge ourselves without evidence. The evidence for our self-worth is the quality of the outward judgments that we make and how we act on these judgments. To live well, our evaluative judgments about the world must be true, they must matter to us, and they must guide our lives. If we get this right, then we will be worthy of the cluster of life-affirming judgements that comprise a judgment of meaningfulness on our lives.

To see how this works, imagine a much simpler world. Suppose that we have only two possible emotional responses, love and hate. Correspondingly, we can make only two judgments about the world; other people are either loveable or hateful. To get these judgments right, we must love those who are truly loveable and hate those who are truly hateful, and we must allow these emotions to guide our lives. If we do this, then we will be worthy of our own love and we can love ourselves. In this simple world, a true self-love would make our lives meaningful. We could, however, get it wrong. We could misjudge who is loveable or hateful, we could hate those we judge loveable and vice-versa, or we could express our love and hate in inappropriate ways. If we make these mistakes, then we may become worthy of our own hate. A deserved self-hatred would make our lives meaningless.

The real world is much more complicated. Real people can have a vast array of emotional responses and can make an even vaster array of judgments. Still, the point is to get these judgments right, commit to them, let them guide our lives. By that, we earn a cluster of self-directed emotional judgments that add up to our life truly mattering.

We need much wisdom to get our judgments right. Emotions are complicated, and can go wrong in at least eight ways: direction, causation, feeling, physiology, attention, motivation, belief, and evaluation. To avoid the first six of these difficulties, we need to know ourselves. To avoid the seventh difficulty, we need to know facts about the world and other people. In earlier chapters, we have examined how knowledge of the self and knowledge of the world affect judgment. To avoid the eighth difficulty, we have to get our evaluations correct. In this chapter, we will examine how knowledge of value affects judgment.

Evaluation

Because our emotions are cognitively rational, they will respond (even if slowly) to our evaluations. How we respond to a situation will often depend on how we evaluate the situation. Consider this example from a cognitive therapy manual, *Mind over Mood*:

> Anger is liked to a perception of damage or hurt and to a belief that important rules have been violated. We become angry if we think we have been treated unfairly, hurt unnecessarily, or prevented from obtaining something we expected to achieve. It is not simply the hurt or damage that makes us feel angry, but the violation of rules and expectations. Imagine a man who loses his job. Does he feel angry? It depends. If the man loses his job and considers this a fair decision (perhaps because he broke company rules or the company went bankrupt), he is unlikely to feel angry. However, if the man thinks his job loss was unfair (perhaps others broke company rules and were not fired or only men of a certain race lost their jobs), then he probably feels very angry. Similarly if a child steps on your foot while you are riding on a bus, you feel pain. Whether or not you feel angry depends on your

> interpretation of the intent and reasonableness of the child's behavior. (Greenberger 1995:193-194)

Whether we feel anger depends both on factual beliefs about hurt or damage and on evaluative beliefs about injustice. Similarly, whether we feel guilt depends on evaluative beliefs about whether the act we have just committed lives up to our standards for action. Whether we feel shame depends on whether we, as a whole person, are living up to our standards for how persons should be. We feel shame when we believe ourselves to be defective or flawed. Similarly, we feel pride only when we believe our accomplishments to be worthwhile. Emotions frequently depend on evaluative judgments.

A simple evaluative judgment is an emotional judgment. An example is judging that someone is despicable. It is a prediction that if we were free of the distortions to which emotions are prone, we would despise that person. This prediction relies on the cognitive rationality of emotions; it assumes that our emotions would respond to the beliefs we acquire in this inquiry. The best possible inquiry would require that we had all the relevant information about that person, that we had full self-knowledge, and that our *other* evaluations were correct.

If we did not say "*other* evaluations," this formulation would be circular. For, to judge that the person was despicable, we would need to have already correctly evaluated that he was despicable. Nevertheless, our best assessment would depend on general evaluations such as judging people of his particular type to be despicable. As well our best assessment would depend on evaluations like finding his actions hateful or abhorrent, or his character cruel, selfish, unjust, or whatever. Evaluations are not circular, but we do not make them one at a time and independently of one another. Evaluation, as we have seen, is holistic.

Our judgements, our predictions about how we would feel after inquiring into the matter, have to be based on evidence. This evidence can only be how we, and others, actually feel in particular cases. Yet, how we actually feel can never be conclusive evidence for our judgment. One reason concerns the holism of our evaluative judgments. We have seen how this works in our earlier look at the structure of scientific reasoning.

Our emotional judgments are going to depend both on our initial emotional response and on other evaluative judgments to which we are committed. Our judgment has to fit with both our response and with our other evaluations. Achieving this fit may require that we adjust either our initial response or our other evaluations.

Someone's judgment that he should be angry at being fired will depend not only on his initial angry response but also on his judgment about whether his firing was unfair or unjust. If his opinion is that his boss's action was fair, then his initial anger can be processed and will fade. On the other hand, he may change his opinion of his boss; perhaps she is not a just person like he thought she was. His reevaluation of his boss, however, should look to other clues: her past actions toward him and others, the pressures she is under and responsible for facing, and what his beliefs about justice are.

Morality

Meaning intimately connects to justice and morality. Sadistic acts can be neither admirable nor valuable. Desires for more than a fair share, or that others should have a lesser liberty, are not indicators of value. The reason is this. Value judgments are emotional responses under hypothetical conditions of full factual and evaluative knowledge. Emotional responses depend on, and change with, evaluative knowledge. Full evaluative knowledge includes knowledge of what is just or unjust, and what is morally permissible or not. So, value judgments depend on moral knowledge. Emotional judgments will be false if they depend on false moral beliefs. The meaningful life has to be a just life.

Some threats to meaning are extreme. We can all readily agree that sadism and cruelty are wrong. Someone who judges that cruel acts are enjoyable has made a false judgment about what is valuable. His judgment is a prediction. He believes that he would enjoy this act under mistake-free circumstances of evaluation – in full and vivid knowledge of his own psychology, of facts about the world and other people, and of this judgment's fit with other evaluative judgments. He can go wrong by failing to discount properly for his own warped psychology. He can go wrong in falsely believing that his victims do not mind (or even

enjoy) his cruelty. He can go wrong in assuming that cruelty is somehow admirable, or at least not hateful and abhorrent. The fact that he enjoys cruelty is not evidence enough that cruelty is worthy of enjoyment. Other reasons prevail. His judgment is false; his life is going seriously wrong. He may gain pleasure, but he loses meaningfulness.

Most threats to meaning are less extreme, though more dangerous because less obvious. They arise more from carelessness than ill-will. They come from a lack of thought, a neglect to inquire, and a failure to reflect critically. Consider something as commonplace as the food we eat. Would we enjoy it as much if we were fully and vividly aware of where it comes from and how it is produced? Are we properly aware of the working conditions of the South American farmers who harvest our coffee? Or the mountainside deforestation required to make room for the coffee plants? How do we feel about the labourers harvesting our vegetables amid toxic sprays banned in North America and Europe? How do we feel about the billion or more malnourished people in the world, people whose hunger a very small sacrifice by the billion overfed could easily end? How do we feel about the possible benefits and dangers of the genetic engineering employed in producing our cereals and cooking oils? Or about the environmental degradation produced by continuous use of chemical fertilizers? How do we feel about the conditions under which many animals we eat are raised? Veal calves in crates? Laying hens crowded into battery cages? The slaughter of male chicks surplus to egg production? The conditions in slaughter houses? What judgments would we make about our food if we knew these things? Would we buy fairly-traded, shade-grown coffee, or the supermarket's cheaper house brand? Would we buy organic food, or the easy, cheaper, agribusiness alternative? Would we eat free-range eggs, or the cheaper battery-cage ones?

If we get these judgements wrong, or any of the many others involved in our living and livelihood, then we risk mistakes in our self-judgments. We want our lives to be truly meaningful. We want to make a cluster of positive evaluations on ourselves, and we want these evaluations to be true. The truth of our self-evaluations depends on the sorts of persons that we are and the

sorts of lives that we lead. The sorts of persons that we are depends on the truth of the judgments that we make. We risk it all through thoughtlessness.

Our highest interest is not self-interest in the narrow sense of caring only for ourselves. To judge ourselves worthy of esteem and respect, we must make and live true judgments about our relationships to other people and to the world generally. Morality constrains meaning. The search for meaning leads to a search for justice.

Chapter 15

CHOICE

> "You are free, therefore choose – that is to say, invent."
> - Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) *Existentialism and Humanism*, 1948 (Sartre 1948)

> "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set ye free."
> - *New Testament*, John 8:32

We can now see more clearly the goal of our quest. Our goal is to lead lives that we rightly judge worthy of a cluster of self-directed emotions. We must each build a self, a character, and an identity truly worthy of our own respect and esteem. We must each live a life with which we are deservedly pleased.

We construct the life on which we direct these emotional judgments through the choices that we make. Outwardly directed emotional judgments will guide these choices. We become worthy of our own self-esteem if we guide our choices by judgments that are true of other people and things. We must guide our choices through our admiration for those who are admirable and our indignation at those who deserve it, through our delight in activities that are delightful and our disgust at activities that are disgusting, and so on. We build meaningful lives and identities on the foundation of these outwardly directed emotional judgments. The truth of our self-directed emotional judgments depends on the truth of our outwardly directed emotional judgments. The emotional judgments that we make about ourselves depend on how the emotional judgments that we make about the world guide our choices.

Holism

Previous chapters showed just how difficult it is to get these judgments right. The holism of evaluative judgment means that every judgment must both fit with our immediate emotional responses and cohere with our other judgments. We must be aware of ourselves, of our situations, and of our other judgments.

Consider the following analogy involving colors rather than emotions. Suppose someone is trying to pick the color of a new sofa in the showroom of a furniture store. Picking the best color involves at least three factors:

(1) He must be aware of his own peccadillos. Is he color blind? Does he have an initial tendency to see colors as bright that he later sees as pallid? Does he rely too much on a salesperson's judgment?

(2) He must be aware of the environment of both the showroom and his living room. How does the lighting in the showroom compare with the lighting in his living room? How do the colors of the surrounding items in the showroom affect his perception of the sofa's color?

(3) He must be aware of what the sofa must match. How will it fit with his wallpaper? Will it match his armchair? Would he be better off to get rid of the armchair and match a new one to the sofa?

Good interior decorating is difficult, but it is easy by comparison to constructing a life.

To construct a life, to make emotional judgments that are true, to predict the emotions if we were free of the distortions to which emotions are prone, we also require three types of knowledge:

(1) We must know the truth about ourselves. We must be in able to identify our initial feelings and their origins. Then we can predict how these feelings would change if they were properly processed and worked through.

(2) We must know the truth about the world. We must reflect on what we know both about the world and about other people. Then we must predict how our feelings would change in the light of this knowledge.

(3) We must know a host of *other* true evaluative judgments. We must already know what sorts of things are enjoyable, admirable, despicable, cruel, kind, and so on. Then we must predict how our feelings would change in response to this knowledge.

Truth is an ideal. In the real world, our quest is never finished. We are continually seeking these three types of knowledge and struggling to fit them into a whole. We are constantly revising judgments in response to new understanding

and new responses to the world. In a favorite simile of contemporary philosophy, our situation is like that of a sailor fighting to repair and rebuild a ship at sea. Our ship grows stronger as we replace one plank after another, managing all the time to keep our ship afloat. We use both our hearts and our heads, as our emotions respond to the world and our intellects process our reactions.

Underdetermination

In this quest for meaning, we leave contemplation behind and begin to worry about constructing our identities and leading our lives. As we do so, I become less and less a guide and more a traveling companion. Becoming a person worthy of one's own respect and leading a life deserving of one's own esteem are tasks we all share. We construct the person that we become through our choices. Our judgments guide, but do not always determine, the choices that we make. Judgment underdetermines choice.

Only in very simple, ideal cases, do an emotional judgment and its cognate emotion produce a determinate motivation to act in a certain way. Her sense of wonder for the truly wonderful views along a nature trail provides motivation for a hiker to carry out her litter instead of dropping it by the trail. She could choose otherwise; her will is free. Yet, given her judgment and emotion, for her to choose otherwise would be hypocritical, weak-willed, or irrational.

In real cases, underdetermination lurks in the vagueness of emotional judgment. Many non-evaluative judgments that we make are vague. A standard example is judging someone bald. We can easily judge some people to be bald, and easily judge others to be hirsute. Some people's hair falls between, though, and our judgment becomes indeterminate. The regularity that governs the use of the adjective, 'bald,' has a gap. (Horwich 1998:80-81) Many, if not most, of the adjectives that we use to describe our everyday world have gaps in their application. We know what is green, we know what is not green, but we are vague in between. We know who is tall, we know who is short, but again we are vague between. Emotional judgments, too, have these gaps in their application. All feelings felt and all thinking done, we may be unable to predict how we would respond to a situation because of the vagueness of the auxiliary judgments on

which we have depended. When our judgments are vague, we must still choose.

Underdetermination lurks when judgment leaves us neutral between options. Some people we admire, some people we despise, and some people we neither admire nor despise. We are neutral about them; they leave us cold. The judgments of admirableness and despicableness are contraries, not negations, of one another. If someone is admirable, then it follows that he is not despicable. However, if someone is not admirable, then it does not follow that he is despicable. He may be neither admirable nor despicable, and our emotional judgments will not determine whether we should choose to either further or hinder his projects.

Underdetermination lurks when we legitimately have mixed emotions. Suppose we have an associate who is trustworthy, but unlikeable. How do we bring these judgments together into on overall judgment to guide our decision? Sometimes we can make a rough judgment based on intensity. Perhaps he is only slightly trustworthy, whereas he is extremely hateful. Often, though, we cannot count on things being this simple. Because evaluation is diverse, not unified, we can have no guarantee of an overall judgment to guide decision.

Because evaluative judgments are emotional judgments, we can make no all-inclusive judgment of "good" or "valuable." We can make no unified judgment, only a diversity of judgments corresponding to the particular emotions in play. The situation might have been different if the pleasure theory or the desire theory of value had been satisfactory. Each of these theories reduces all value to one standard of measurement, intensity of pleasure, or intensity of desire satisfied, respectively. We decide, on these theories, by weighing the alternatives against this unified standard. Both theories promise to make value comparisons possible. This promise, like the theoretical appeal of the theories themselves, disappears on closer scrutiny. The measuring and weighing called for is largely metaphorical; confronted with hard cases, both theories run out of determinate answers. Options frequently become incommensurable, where "incommensurable" is the analog of "underdetermined" in the measuring and weighing metaphor.

Underdetermination lurks whenever we must decide between valuable options. Suppose someone must decide between two careers, each of which is worthwhile in different ways. The choice is forced on her only because she cannot fit both careers into one life. Yet no considerations determine one as, overall, more worthwhile than the other.

Because there is no One Big Thing that is the meaning of life, there is always potential conflict between the little things that are. What can be meaningful is highly plural. The many sources of bliss, the many types of self-realization, the things that satisfy wants, the people that we love, the projects which matter to us, these are all sources of meaning. Without a God-ordained purpose to existence, we have no recipe to follow when we cannot realize all possible valuable goals in one, finite life.

Still, decide we must. If we do not, then we will suffer the fate of Buridan's ass. In the fable, Buridan's ass perished halfway between two equal-sized piles of hay, unable to see any grounds for deciding which pile to eat first.

Nevertheless, our judgment that a choice is underdetermined is itself an evaluative judgment. Before we choose for no reason at all, we must examine every bit of evidence that points to an answer. Before we choose, we must think carefully about which options true emotional judgments rule out. Paradoxically, the judgment that a choice is underdetermined requires as much deliberation as the judgment that one or other answer is true. We need the same degree of care, imagination, and critical reflection in both cases.

Self-invention

Existentialists see the human situation differently. Jean-Paul Sartre explains the famous existentialist slogan, "Existence precedes essence," in the following way. (Sartre 1948: 26-29) Consider a human creation like a pottery table lamp. The potter designs such an artifact to light a room. Lighting a room is the purpose or function of the lamp; lighting a room is a lamp's essential quality, its essence. The potter had this purpose in mind when she planned the lamp. She had this plan in mind when she produced the lamp. The lamp's essential quality of lighting a room guided her as she brought the lamp into existence. For a table lamp, its essence comes before its existence.

To the God-fearing, human beings are God's artifacts. God creates human beings with a purpose in mind just as the artisan creates the artifact. In the God-fearing picture of human beings, their essence comes before their existence.

The Godless, says Sartre, cannot accept this picture. Human beings do not come into existence with a purpose preplanned by God. Nor do humans have a fixed nature discoverable by scientific investigation. They find themselves, abandoned and alone, with no purpose given. In the Existentialist picture of human beings, their existence comes before their essence. First, people find themselves existing, and, second, they create their own purposes.

Since human beings have no pre-existing natures or preordained purposes, they must create their own goals and lives. Sartre sees a dichotomy here; purposes are either given or invented. Since purposes are not given, then they must be inventions. In counseling a student facing a difficult choice in his life, Sartre reports his advice as this:

> You are free, therefore choose – that is to say, invent. No rule of general morality can show you what you ought to do; no signs are vouchsafed in this world. (Sartre 1948:38)

The idea of freedom in Sartre's existentialism is very radical. Decisions create values. They do not merely choose between values. Freedom is the freedom to invent what is good, not just the freedom to choose between good and evil. Those who decide between courses of action in difficult situations know that:

> . . . the action presupposes that there is a plurality of possibilities, and that in choosing one of these, they realise that it has value only because it is chosen. (Sartre 1948:32)

Thus living, of necessity, brings anguish. For choice is unavoidable and radical. In choosing, one creates the values that determine the person that one becomes.

Sartre, however, exaggerates the role of radical choice in leading a life and constructing an identity. Radical choice, the sort of choice that Sartre thinks of as creating value, comes into play only within the boundaries set by emotional judgments. Only after thoughtful deliberation and judgment have ruled out

potential courses of action does a person make a choice between the remaining options.

To see this, consider Sartre's philosophical counseling example. (Sartre 1948:35-38) During the Nazi occupation of France, a young man sought Sartre's advice. He was the sole emotional support of his mother, who would suffer grievously if he goes away. He faced the choice of staying with her or leaving France to join the resistance against the Nazis. Yet he could find no basis for making a choice. Christian charity could not tell him, for both his mother and his cause were worthy of his love and duty. He could not treat his mother as an end-in-herself without treating the resistance as just a means to his liberation. His feelings of love for his mother are not comparable to his feelings of solidarity with the resistance fighters. In picking his counselor he picks the advice he gets. Sartre's advice was to make a radical choice and to realize that in that choice he was creating the person that he would become. By his choice, he invents himself.

Sartre's example, however, puts the spotlight on these two options, while neglecting a whole background of deliberation. The young man has already rejected as false a whole range of other options. He could have collaborated with the Nazis. He could have ignored both his mother and his comrades and lived a life of mindlessly seeking pleasure. He could have become a drunkard. He could have fathered a child and created a third set of duties that outweighed the two he faced. All these options, and others, he judged unworthy and rightly so. Only after this deliberation could he rightly face the underdetermination involved in choosing between his mother and the resistance.

Self-construction

We should replace the romantic Existentialist metaphor of invention with the more prosaic metaphor of construction. Invention carries the connotation of creation out of nothing. Invention, though, is not the way to lead a life or build a self. We are not free always to give value to an option simply by our choice. Instead we start with a host of emotional judgments that we have discovered by fitting them to the evidence and to one another. From these judgments we build a life, taking guidance from them whenever possible. When deliberation runs out, then, and only then, do we invent.

Self-construction is like house-construction. We are not free to start anywhere; we need a solid foundation. We cannot create a house on a cloud. We must respect our materials; each material will only bear a certain load. We cannot build a castle using only twigs. Yet house design still permits a great deal of freedom. The walls must support the roof, and the roof cannot be more than the walls will bear. Nevertheless, many roof designs are still possible. At each stage, design is limited both by the nature of materials and by earlier choices, but it is not totally determined. We may create freely only after we have correctly judged what our materials permit. It is not architectural bad faith to build a house out of materials other than loose straw. It is bad faith, however, to pretend that we had no choice but to paint it pink.

Evaluative judgments underdetermine choice. The underdetermination of choice by judgment is what allows for the particularity of meaning. No universal meaning of life exists that is the same for all human beings. We will not find one, true way of living a meaningful life. With the materials of true emotional judgments, many ways of constructing a meaningful life are still open. With some exaggeration, Victor Frankl wrote:

> . . . the meaning of life differs from man to man, from day to day and from hour to hour. What matters, therefore, is not the meaning of life in general but rather the specific meaning of a person's life at a given moment. To put the question in general terms would be comparable to the question posed to a chess champion: "Tell me, Master, what is the best move in the world?" There simply is no such thing as the best or even a good move apart from a particular situation in a game and particular personality of one's opponent. The same holds for human existence. One should not search for an abstract meaning of life. (Frankl 1959:130-131)

The exaggeration is due to Frankl's existentialist outlook; the idea of meaning changing from hour to hour suggests continual self-invention rather than the constrained process of self-construction. Still, Frankl is surely right that we should not look for an abstract meaning of life true for all people universally. Instead we should construct our own particular lives within the limits of what does and does not truly matter.

Thus, people can lead meaningful lives in many ways. The truth or falsity of judgment limits, but does not legislate, people's choices. Underdetermination licenses people to make different choices and to build different lives.

In building ourselves a life, our judgments about what matters must guide us. When, after careful deliberation, we have eliminated those options that we judge unworthy, then we must choose outside reason. And we must choose in the full realization that we are strictly liable for our choices. We must bear the consequences of our choices.

Luck

For the Godless, no supreme lawgiver or judge exists. The Godless live with no appeal. We cannot deny responsibility for our choices by denying either that we intended the consequences, or that we could not have foreseen what happened. It does not matter that we tried our best. No judge exists to accept our excuses and no afterlife exists to balance evil with good. The world is not fair. Humans can only try to make life fairer through schemes of justice that compensate for disadvantage. All the wisdom in the world, however, cannot remove the part of luck in how we judge our lives. (Nagel 1979:28-37)

Luck intersects our lives regarding our starting points. Each of us is born with a certain temperament, and each of us acquires a certain personality as a child. Both affect how easy it is for us to become the sort of person whom we would judge worthy of our esteem and respect. A child who grows up in a violent and abusive family may react by acquiring either abusive or submissive traits as an adult. The adult will, rightly, esteem neither an abusive nor a submissive character. Still, avoiding such a character will take more effort for this person than for another person brought up in a loving and respectful home.

Luck intersects our lives regarding how our acts turn out. We cannot always foresee the outcome of our choices. Nor can we avoid the occasional carelessness. Human beings are not perfect. Most often we get away with our little failures of concentration. For years on end someone backs out of her driveway after a quick glance in the mirror. One day her neighbor's child is playing behind her car. In an instant her life

becomes unliveable. Yet she was no more careless that day than on any other. Bad luck intervened.

Luck intersects our lives regarding the choices we will face. Sartre's friend faced a choice that few people ever face in peace time. During that war, Nagel points out, the Nazi regime put ordinary Germans in a position that made it hard for them to choose well.

> Ordinary citizens of Nazi Germany had an opportunity to behave heroically by opposing the regime. They also had an opportunity to behave badly, and most of them are culpable for having failed this test. But it is a test to which the citizens of other countries were not subjected, with the result that even if they, or some of them, would have behaved as badly as the Germans in like circumstances, they simply did not and therefore are not similarly culpable. Here again one is morally at the mercy of fate . . . . (Nagel 1979:34)

Our luck affects the difficulty of the decisions that we will face, and the corresponding judgments that we will make on our lives.

Our goal is to lead lives that we judge truly meaningful. We must lead lives that are worthy of life-affirming emotional judgments. We must merit our own respect and esteem and not deserve our own shame or contempt. To lead meaningful lives, we need both wisdom and luck.

We need wisdom to make true emotional judgments to guide our lives. Wisdom is not just a matter of cleverness; wisdom is a matter of both the head and the heart. We need wisdom, too, in judging when truth has run out and choices are underdetermined.

As well, we need luck. We need luck in the choices that we will face, in the resources that we bring to those choices, and in the way that our choices turn out.

Chapter 16

COMMITMENT

> "Here I stand, I can do no other."
> Martin Luther (1483-1546), Speech at the Diet of Worms, 1521

We each find meaning in life by finding that which truly matters for ourselves. We discover people who are truly honorable, places that are truly marvelous, experiences that are truly joyful, projects that are truly fascinating, and relationships that are truly loving and happy. Out of these emotional truths we build meaningful lives. Our quest is to become persons, and to build lives, that are worthy of our own respect and esteem. The requirements for a meaningful life are not just the *feelings* of self-esteem, self-respect and self-worth. The requirements for a meaningful life are the *truth* of certain self-regarding emotional judgments. We must believe ourselves and our lives to be truly worthy of these life-affirming, self-regarding emotions. And our beliefs must be true.

The things that truly matter do not determine the life we should construct for ourselves, but they do define a perimeter within which we must work. When deliberation runs out and judgment is indeterminate, then we must choose. By these choices, choices made within the limits of judgment, we construct our particular lives. Indeterminacy encourages particularity and allows many paths to meaning. No one path is *the* meaningful life. By our choices, we build our individual identities.

The world contains many people, some loveable, some not. Judgment discovers those who are loveable, but choice turns some of them into your friends and lovers. The world offers many things to create, tasks to accomplish, causes to further, and careers to follow. Judgment discovers which are worthy accomplishments, but choice turns some of them into your projects. The world offers many places to live. Judgment discovers the liveable places, but choice turns one of them into your home.

Choice and Commitment

Human lives extend through time. We do not live just in the moment; instead we have both histories and futures. This abstract fact is important to our individual quests for meaning. For a choice, to be any sort of choice at all, projects us into the future. To be meaningful, a choice made now must bind our actions in the future. In making a choice, we commit ourselves to a future course of action. (Anderson 1996:542) If we do not commit ourselves into the future, then we have not really chosen.

To see this, recall the choice made by the young man who came to Sartre for counsel. During the Nazi occupation of France, the young man had to choose between joining the Resistance and supporting his mother. Sartre counseled the young man that reasons had run out and that he had to invent himself by making a radical choice. Suppose that he chose to join the Resistance. Then on the way to the train station, he returned to his mother. Then he headed for the next train, then he returned, and so on. Choice without steadfastness in a course of action becomes silly. A choice has to bind a person into the future. No real choice exists without commitment.

The future is continually becoming the present, and the present is continually becoming the past. If a choice, now, binds us in the future, then our choices in the past must bind our decisions in the present. So choices we have made in the past must guide the decisions we make in the present. In other words, our decisions must be backward-looking. (Anderson 1996:541) A past commitment is always a reason to be considered in a present decision.

Think again of Sartre's example. Leaving Sartre's office, the young man, we will suppose, chooses to join the Resistance. He commits himself to the Resistance. He becomes a person who has made this choice and not the other, a different person from the one he could have been if he had stayed with his mother. When he gets home to his mother, the commitment he has made is a reason for him to pack his bags, buy his ticket, and catch the train south toward Portugal. Judgment ruled out collaboration, ruled out self-indulgence, and presented him with two options. In choosing the Resistance, he furthered the construction of his own life. Constructed within the limits of true judgments, his self is

still worthy of his own respect and esteem. His choice is tragic, for he has no way to avoid sadness and regret. His respect for himself, the self who has chosen the path of the Resistance, is now a reason that must operate in his decisions. To go back on his commitment is to betray his self-respect.

Recall the house construction analogy from the last chapter. Judgment determines which materials are appropriate and assesses their strength, but it still leaves many options open at each stage of construction. Choice at each stage commits us to one of these options, and thus guides what we do in later stages. When we go to build our roof, we have to look back at what choice we have made about the walls. Our choice of roof design is limited not only by the strength of our materials, but also by our previous commitment to a particular shape of wall and foundation.

Commitment allows reevaluation. Making mistakes in constructing a life is easier than making mistakes in constructing a house. Yet, reevaluation is difficult. Reevaluation always involves tearing down and rebuilding, and reevaluation always finds itself in tension with commitment.

Another metaphor for self-construction is story-construction. As a writer tells a story, her choices of situations, events, and characters constrain, but do not fully determine how her story can go on. It is important that her scenes are consistent, her events follow a plausible time-line, and that the people in her story do not act out of character. As we live our lives, we are writing our own history. We are the authors of our own narratives, and our lives should exhibit what philosophers have called "narrative unity."

Elizabeth Anderson gives a helpful example. She tells the story of a couple who have worked for years to build a distinctive family restaurant, and who then receive an offer for their business. The potential buyer is a large company that wants to take over their restaurant and copy it in dozens of franchise operations.

> The couple might think of their choice as follows: Selling the restaurant would offer them important financial security, but it would also undermine the point of their lives' personal investments and struggles, which were aimed not just at making money but at creating an alternative to the humdrum, homogenized, and predictable chain restaurants

> taking over the area. Dropping their life projects for this reason would leave them with life stories as "successful" sell-outs, rather than as people who had made something of their early struggles and fulfilled the dream of a lifetime. They did not work all those years to make millions for some brand-x corporation. A concern for the narrative unity of their lives, for what meaning their present choices make of their past actions, could rationally motivate them to turn down the offer. (Anderson 1993:34-35)

Contrast this case with that of a second couple who inherit an identical restaurant. The first couple, in the past, committed themselves to creating a family restaurant from among all the worthwhile projects they could have undertaken in their lives. The second couple did not. The first couple, in the present, have backward-looking reasons to preserve the business, reasons that involve their ability to make binding choices. The second couple do not. The first couple have a commitment to themselves that involves their self-respect. The second couple did not build the business, have no history with it, and have no commitment to themselves to preserve it. It is not a part of the second couple's lives, and they sell it without a qualm.

Commitment and Emotion

Choice requires commitment, and commitment requires emotion. Commitment may arise from intellectual deliberation, but commitment involves more than just the intellect. We can see this most easily in our personal relationships. Commitment requires emotional involvement with the persons who become our friends, lovers, family, and community. Commitment also requires our feelings to be engaged with the places that becomes our homes, the animals that become our pets, and the courses of action that become our projects. Our emotions bind us to our choices, make them into our commitments. Emotions make our choices operative over time.

Not all choices are made in full realization of indeterminacy. Sometimes we find that our emotions have made choices for us. We meet a beloved and suddenly we are blind to the attractions of anyone else. Our passion brings our search for love to an end. We feel like our choice has been made for us. Yet, it would be bad faith to suppose that we have not actually made a choice.

Commitments have a felt quality akin to that of love. Our degree of commitment can vary from lukewarm to passionate. Conversely, when our commitments are in danger, we feel anxious and threatened. When people question our commitments, we feel tense or defensive. The emotions involved in commitment focus and direct our attention. Recall this feature of emotion, and its importance in human decision making, from earlier chapters. Human beings process information slowly and use emotion to select only some portion of their available information as relevant to a decision. This selection of information makes decisions possible in finite times, but at the cost of ignoring, denying, minimizing, and distorting other information. So infatuation ends our search for love, but infatuation maintains itself by idealizing our beloved and blinding us to our beloved's imperfections.

Similarly, commitment maintains itself by making salient certain features of a person, situation, or ideal, and by removing other features from consideration. Commitment silences the latter in your deliberations. Bernard Williams gives a good example. He tells the story of a man who sees two people in danger, but can only rescue one. If one of the two is his wife, how should he decide whom to rescue? Any sort of deliberation here is inappropriate. As Williams says, the two thoughts that ". . . [1] it was his wife, and [2] in situations of this kind it is permissible to save one's wife" are "one thought too many." (Williams 1981:18) The wife might hope that the man's commitment to her will silence any deliberation on his part. She might legitimately hope that he should have only one thought, just the thought that it is she, his wife, who is in danger. She might hope that he would simply save her without thinking about it. His emotional commitment to her would lead him to focus only on her plight and not think about, or even see, any other consideration.

The involvement of emotion in commitment is a wonderful thing, not an irrationality caused by our own partialities. Emotional commitment makes what is meaningful feel meaningful. Hepburn writes:

> To give life meaning cannot be just a matter of pursuing worthy projects, for that account fails to cope with phenomena like Tolstoi's arrest of life -- or John Stuart

> Mill's during his mental crisis of 1826. More generally, it is quite possible to make various value-judgements in cold blood, while yet suffering from a sense of meaninglessness. One may fill one's day with honest, useful and charitable deeds, not doubting them to be of value, but without feeling that these give one's life meaning or purpose. It may be profoundly boring. To seek meaning is not just a matter of seeking justification for one's policies, but of trying to discover how to organise one's vital resources and energies around these policies. To find meaning is not a matter of judging these to be worthy, but of seeing their pursuit as in some sense a fulfilment, as involving self-realization as opposed to self-violation, and as no less opposed to the performance of a dreary task. (Hepburn 1981:212-213)

The meaningful life is a committed life, a life that we take seriously. Life is not a game that we play at, going through the motions while holding ourselves in reserve. We should not take an ironic stance toward our lives, pretending to commitment while remaining inwardly dubious. People cannot lead meaningful lives as what Richard Rorty calls "ironists," people who are "never quite able to take themselves seriously because always aware that the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change, always aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies." (Rorty 1989:73-74) If, on reflection, a judgment is contingent and fragile, then it is likely indeterminate. Indeterminacy is an opportunity for creative self-construction. Choose, commit, and become.

Character and Identity

Emotion takes judgments for which we have reasoned evidence and turns them into our convictions. Emotion takes our choices and binds us to them, making them our projects, causes, and deepest personal relationships. Out of judgment and commitment we build our lives. Out of judgment and commitment we build our selves, our characters, our identities.

Our characters are the sets of traits that determine who we are. Character provides a stable backdrop to our choices and actions. Character includes our temperaments and personalities, it includes our stable, enduring emotions, and it includes our judgments, commitments, and plans of life.

A good character is a character worthy of our own respect, esteem and admiration. Such a character is one founded on correct emotional judgments. It is a character founded on emotional truth, when such truth is available, and it is a character founded on choice and commitment when no emotional truth or falsity is to be found.

Character is stable over time because emotional truth is timeless and commitments are enduring. Emotion fixes character, like it does both belief and commitment. The emotional fixation of character is most evident when something threatens identity. At such times, we feel anxious, defensive, and fearful of change. The emotional fixation of character is also evident in the way patterns of selective attention preserve character. When a choice confronts a person of strong character with a choice, her decision is inflexible. It is not that she sees competing alternatives, and then her will overrides them. Instead, she is unable to see the alternatives. Discussing virtuous character traits, John McDowell writes:

> If a situation in which virtue imposes a requirement is genuinely conceived as such, according to this view, then considerations which, in the absence of the requirement, would have been reasons for acting otherwise are silenced altogether – not overridden – by the requirement. (McDowell 1978:26)

A truly generous person simply does not call to mind the selfish alternatives. It does not occur to the truly courageous person to run from the danger. Such alternatives are "silenced" instead of considered and rejected.

Patterns of attention protect character, and character is emotionally charged. In these ways, character is very similar to personality. A person with a personality disorder usually does not recognize that he has one. The sufferer typically consults a psychotherapist for other reasons, perhaps complaining of loneliness or depression or anxiety. The therapist's questions reveal problems in interpersonal behavior that are due to childish, judgmental, absolutist core beliefs. These core beliefs, as described in an earlier chapter, are fixed and maintained by schemas. Schemas are pervasive analogs of emotions, emotions with no names. They are stable patterns of selective attention that

differ from person to person. (Beck 1979:12) Schemas protect core beliefs from falsification through patterns of faulty inference, and selective attention to evidence. Schemas involve denial, personalization, hasty generalization, and minimization of the significance of contrary evidence. Personality, as realized in a set of dysfunctional core beliefs, is protected by schemas, and is difficult to change. The sufferer finds the prospect of change very scary.

The fixation of character by emotion makes self-evaluation and self-transformation very difficult tasks. Evaluating oneself is difficult because of selective attention; we simply do not see anything wrong with ourselves. Our own self-respect, the emotion most closely tied to finding our lives meaningful, ties us to our existing evaluations. We struggle to maintain our self-esteem. Self-esteem protects our favorable self-evaluations by the same means that schemas protect the beliefs producing personality disorders.

Even if we can see through our systematic self-deceptions to the necessity for change, self-transformation is still difficult. It is a scary undertaking because it involves the tearing down and rebuilding of our very identities. Change is scary because, if the change is extensive, it is like our old self dying and a new self being born. We must, as the Christians say, be born again.

This, now, is the task to which our quest has lead. To have a meaningful life, we must build a character and lead a life, that is worthy of our own love, respect, and esteem. This is no easy task; the way of the philosopher is no effortless route to meaningfulness. Losing one's way is easy, as is misjudging what matters, or choosing a path where truth points in the other direction. Getting back on the path involves self-reflection and self-transformation.

We must travel a narrow path between the continual reevaluation that prevents commitment and the complacent commitment that prevents self-reflection. When feeling of meaninglessness force reevaluation on us, we must have the courage to face the rebirth of our own identities. We need the wisdom that leads to emotional truth, the love that leads to commitment, and the courage that leads to change.

Chapter 17

CULTURE

> "It is clearly rational for men to secure their self-respect. A sense of their own worth is necessary if they are to pursue their conception of the good with zest and to delight in its fulfillment. Self-respect is not so much a part of any rational plan of life as the sense that one's plan is worth carrying out. Now our self-respect normally depends upon the respect of others. Unless we feel that our endeavors are honored by them, it is difficult if not impossible for us to maintain the conviction that our ends are worth advancing."
> John Rawls (1921-2002), *A Theory of Justice* (Rawls 1971:178)

The quest for meaning is a quest to build a self that is truly worthy of esteem, respect, love, and a cluster of other life-affirming emotions. This involves more than the psychological task of cultivating a sense of self-esteem. It involves the philosophical tasks of leading a life that is truly estimable in our own eyes, and of constructing an identity that is truly worthy of our own respect. The feeling of self-esteem is not enough; we must truly deserve our self-esteem.

We build a meaningful life on a foundation of judgment and choice. Judgment discovers where emotional truth is to be found, and where it is not. Self-construction proceeds within the limits set by the truth and falsity of emotional judgments. Where neither truth nor falsity is to be found, self-construction becomes a matter of choice.

Both judgment and choice involve emotional commitment. Emotion fixes belief and turns judgments into convictions and ideals. Emotion binds choice and turns choices into intentions, goals, and plans of life. Emotion solidifies a history of judgments and choices into a character and an identity. Emotional commitment turns a truly worthwhile life into a life that feels meaningful. The path to meaning winds between critical

reflection and emotional commitment. Emotional commitment firms ideals, deepens relationships, and strengthens character. Yet it does so by patterning attention and distorting reflection and by making self-deception easier than self-evaluation. Even when critical reflection does succeed, commitment still makes self-transformation difficult. Emotional commitment to our past decisions – exemplified in pride, vanity, and fear of regret – makes tearing down and rebuilding ourselves an arduous task.

To discover truth, emotional judgments must be responsive to both reasons and evidence. The holism of judgment requires that judgments cohere with each another. One judgment can be a reason for another, and this network of reasons must be mutually supportive like the rows and columns of a crossword puzzle. Nevertheless, this mutual support is not enough; just as we need clues in solving a crossword puzzle, so too we need evidence in the search for emotional truth.

The Evidence of Others

One source of evidence in the search for emotional truth is our own emotional responses to our lived experience. Our fear of something is evidence that it is dangerous, though it is hardly conclusive evidence. A second source of evidence in the search for emotional truth is the emotional responses and emotional judgments of others. When we see another person responding to a situation with fear, we have evidence that it is dangerous. When someone tells us that a situation is dangerous, again we have evidence that it is dangerous. Though the evidence of others is hardly conclusive, it is still evidence that we must either take into account or dismiss only with good reason.

In eschewing the relativism of truth, we commit ourselves to taking seriously the responses and opinions of others. We must use the responses and opinions as evidence in making emotional judgments. We must do this even when the judgments concern what matters for us in particular. True emotional judgments are the ones we would make under the best possible circumstances of inquiry. Mistake-free circumstances would incorporate the free articulation of responses and the free exchange of views between different cultures and perspectives. In making judgements about what truly matters for us, we should ideally hear from a multicultural melange of poets, psychologists, historians, artists,

writers, scientists, sociologists, and philosophers. The search for truth is a conversation, and agreement is possible. If we consulted everyone, and if everyone were open-minded, then, over time we should expect convergence of both response and judgment regarding our particular case.

The evidence of others is all about us. It forms the cultural environment in which we judge, choose, and evaluate ourselves. Our cultural environment continually exposes us to the responses and opinions of others as they talk to us, as we hear them talk to others, as we see them respond, and as we see, read, or hear about them in the various communications media. Some of this expression is sincere, and some of it – advertising, for example – is openly manipulative. Our cultural environment contains an enormous amount of expression, all of which is potentially relevant to the evaluative judgments that we make.

Our cultural environment is unavoidable, and we are indebted to it for much of the emotional education that makes judgment possible. Nonetheless, our cultural environment is potentially dangerous to our evaluative beliefs, for false and misleading evidence can pollute it. When the responses of others are mistaken and misguided, and when we rely on their responses in making our own judgments, then we are liable to fail in our quest for truth.

Self-respect

We make emotional judgments at two levels. First, we make judgments about whether and how things and people matter: So-and-so is admirable, honest, fascinating, or such-and-such is shocking, revolting, disgusting. Second, we make judgments about the meaningfulness of our own lives and persons: We are worthy of our own esteem and respect, or we should be ashamed of ourselves, and must make amends to recover our self-respect. The latter judgments depend on the former; we must build our lives within the parameters set by what is meaningful.

At both these levels, we employ the responses of others as evidence for our own judgments. At both these levels, therefore, our cultural environment can mislead us. We most easily see this at the second level, judgments about our selves and our own worth. John Rawls, in the chapter motto, stresses the importance of self-respect to leading a life. He also stresses the dependence

of self-respect on the responses of others. If others fail to recognize us as worthy of respect, then we will take this as evidence that we are unworthy. At the very least, we must deal with this evidence and dismiss it if it is false. If it is false and we fail to dismiss it, then we may make false judgments on our own lives. Charles Taylor makes this point in a discussion of recognition by society.

> . . . our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *mis*recognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being. Thus some feminists have argued that women in patriarchal societies have been induced to adopt a depreciatory image of themselves. They have internalized a picture of their own inferiority, so that even when some of the objective obstacles to their advancement fall away, they may be incapable of taking advantage of the new opportunities. And beyond this, they are condemned to suffer the pain of low self-esteem. (Taylor 1992:25-26)

The failure to respect the dignity of others is widespread in racist, sexist, and homophobic cultural environments. The harm done by a failure to recognize the dignity of others is cumulative. Such harms to self-respect are not caused by the actions of a determinate individual. If only one man failed to respect women, then that would not harm any woman's self-respect. When such attitudes are widespread, however, then society-as-a-whole confronts women with a great deal of evidence that they are not worthy of respect.

Beliefs respond to evidence, and evidence is cumulative. The more confirming instances we have for a hypothesis, the more we are likely to believe it. Advertisers know this; it is why they spend huge amounts of money setting up connections between their brand and an emotionally favored image. We respond emotionally to the image that contains the branded product, and these emotional responses become evidence that the

branded product is worthy of that response. Repeated over and over again, such evidence starts to confirm this judgment.

Of course, no amount of bad evidence adds up to good evidence. We can protect ourselves from bad evidence by looking to see if our responses cohere with our other judgments. For example, if someone's past gives her plenty of confirmation for her self-respect, then she can probably dismiss the disrespect displayed in her present cultural environment. Yet the cumulative effect of false cultural evidence is hazardous to the truth of our judgments. The emotional responses of others continually confront us with evidence that we are wrong, and so wear us down psychologically.

The responses of others can convince a person she is *less* worthy of respect than she really is. In the same way, the responses of others can convince a person that he is *more* worthy of respect than he really is. The cultural environment can give false confirmation of certain ways of living, and it can lead to a false sense of self-respect. Earlier, for example, we investigated finding meaning through satisfying wants and desires. We found general, philosophical reasons why the satisfied-desire theory is false. Yet favorable emotional responses to people getting what they want permeate our cultural environment. Our cultural environment glorifies costly consumption and turns the wealthy into heroes. This glorification accords many people more respect than they truly deserve. It leads them to judge themselves and the lives they live to be more worthy of respect than is truly the case.

False self-respect feels just as good as does true self-respect. Yet, no matter how good false self-esteem may feel, it is still a dangerous trap. Imagine a well-paid professional person, well-thought of by his peers and by society generally, and satisfied with himself and his life. His good view of himself will seem natural to him. All the evidence that he receives from his cultural environment confirms his positive view of himself. His emotional commitment to his view of himself will make it difficult for him to see any alternative. Because his view is uncontested, he will have no reason to begin the critical reflection and self-examination that will advance him on his quest.

Self-transformation and Cultural Reform

Escape from the traps set by our cultural environment is very difficult. The cultural evidence is just too pervasive, and our human reasoning skills just too finite. We can, it is true, carefully and critically examine any particular judgment that we have made, and discount or dismiss the responses of others. Still, it does not follow that we can do this for every judgment that we make. (Kernohan 1998:22-23) Consider this analogy. Imagine a skilled and well-equipped geologist. It is true that, presented with any rock on the surface of this planet, she could identify and label it. Yet it is not true that she could identify and label all the rocks on the surface of this planet. Her life is simply not long enough to examine all the rocks on the Earth.

Consequently the quest for meaning is a collective project. In this, the search for emotional truth is just like the search for scientific truth. No scientist can form a true perspective on the universe without using the work of scientists who came before her. Nor can she gain this perspective without the aid of her contemporaries. The volume of information to be learned about the universe is just too large, and the powers of the human intellect are too small.

As individuals we can only go so far. Our judgments will always depend on the responses and opinions of others in our cultural environment. This surrounding background of evidence will always influence our judgments. Individually, we can transcend our cultural milieu only partially. To fully gain the wisdom we require, we would need to collectively reform that cultural milieu, ridding it of false judgments and inappropriate responses. Full self-transformation can only come after cultural reform.

Chapter 18

HAPPINESS

> "But we must add 'in a complete life'. For one swallow does not make a summer, nor does one day; and so too one day, or a short time, does not make a man blessed and happy."
> - Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E), *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle 1953:I.7)

At this point in the quest for meaning, our individual paths diverge. We have traveled as far together as the guidance of abstract philosophy can take us. From philosophy, we have produced a sketch of that for which we are searching. No one way of life now summons us; instead we must each construct our own way of life from the materials of emotional truth. Investigating the way of the philosopher was the easy task. Now we each face the much harder tasks of critically reflecting on our own lives and of transforming ourselves in response to this reflection.

Many people think that the pursuit of happiness, not the quest for meaning, is the preeminent project of human beings. What is the relation between a happy life and a meaningful life? Should we pursue happiness instead of meaning in our lives? The answers to these questions depend, as we might expect, on how we understand happiness. We will investigate different understandings of happiness to see if one of them ought to be the preeminent human project.

Happiness, Emotion, and Judgment

Happiness, in one sense, is a judgment of good fortune. The word "happy" comes from the Middle English word "hap" meaning luck or fortune. The word "hap" is now archaic, though the original meaning survives in the word "hapless" meaning luckless or unfortunate. A related meaning survives, however, when we talk of happy circumstances and mean to talk of fortunate or lucky circumstances. So a happy life, in this sense, is a lucky one. Nevertheless, this is not the sense of happiness whose pursuit we would think the highest end of human life.

Happiness, in another sense, is an emotion. We can be happy about an event – a promotion, a celebration, a friend's success – or we can be happy about a relationship. Sometimes emotional happiness is not directed on anything in particular. Then, happiness is a mood, the opposite of sadness and depression. Such happiness has the characteristics of an emotion: It has a feeling tone; there is something it is like to feel happy. It is based on beliefs and evaluations concerning our selves, the world, and the future. It concentrates our attention on everything that is favorable in ways that support our moods. In a happy mood, we see only the beautiful weather, our prospects of success, or the love of our intimates. We do not dwell on things that we lack. We do not think of jobs undone or of wants unsatisfied. Happiness brings a measure of peace.

Happiness, though, is just one strong emotion among many. (Nozick 1989) It is a more intense emotion than gratification, enjoyment, or being pleased. Yet it is a less intense emotion than elation, delight, joy, euphoria, bliss, rapture, and ecstasy. If we think of happiness as only an emotion, then why should we think that the pursuit of this one emotion is the proper end of life? Why not pursue something stronger, yet from the same family, like joy or bliss? Why should we pick only from this family of emotions? Other strong, affirmative emotions are worth experiencing: Enthusiasm, wonder, reverence, pride, amazement, and awe, for example. These strong emotions help make a life feel meaningful. Why should they not be emotions worth experiencing in the same way as is happiness?

We can also understand happiness, finally, as a judgment that we make on our lives as a whole. In this sense, it is an evaluation or affirmation of our life. The quest for meaning led to emotional judgments on our selves and the lives we commit to living. So also, the pursuit of happiness leads to making a judgment on our lives. What kind of judgment? Wayne Sumner suggests the following:

> Being happy in this sense means having a certain kind of positive attitude toward your life, which in its fullest form has both a cognitive and affective component. The cognitive aspect of happiness consists in a positive evaluation of the conditions of your life, a judgement that,

> at least on balance, it measures up favourably against your standards or expectations. . . . The affective side of happiness consists in what we commonly call a sense of well-being: finding your life enriching or rewarding, or feeling satisfied or fulfilled by it. (Sumner 1996:145-146)

Being happy with our lives is more than just having an emotional response to our life. It is also more than just a thin, abstract judgment such as judging that a life is a long one, a lucky one, or even a good one. As Sumner says, happiness has both an emotional and a cognitive side to it. In our terms, being happy is an emotional judgment about our lives.

Emotional judgments have the feature that they involve both cognition and emotion. A rational, evidential relationship exists between an emotion and the corresponding judgment. Someone's admiration for his friend, for example, is evidence that his friend is worthy of admiration. Yet it is not conclusive evidence. He may have other reasons for not admiring his friend, other judgments that he has made about her or the reports and reactions of mutual friends. Over time, and perhaps through discussion with friends, he can bring his emotions and evaluative beliefs into harmony, changing either emotion or belief as his understanding increases. Emotional judgments, in this senses, have both an affective and a cognitive side.

What kind of emotional judgment is being happy? The obvious answer is that being happy is to judge that your life is worthy of the emotion of happiness. This simple answer does not really advance our understanding of happiness very far. As well, it fails to respond to Nozick's point that the emotion of happiness is just one fairly strong emotion among many, all of which matter in life. What about enjoyment, wonder, contentment, respect, esteem, or even humor? Are they not also important emotional attitudes to have toward life? Nor can a life be happy if a person is afraid of it, ashamed of it, or if he resents ever being born. Is it not also important to avoid certain emotional attitudes toward your life? Why should we want to pursue just one emotion toward our lives as a whole? Do we not want our lives to engage all our emotions? Is happiness just a one-dimensional judgment or is it, instead, multidimensional?

Happiness as Multidimensional

Often philosophers define happiness in terms of life-satisfaction, judging that we should be satisfied with our lives. For example, Mark Kingwell writes that happiness is ". . . the self-applied criterion of rational satisfaction; am I living a life that I can judge worth living?" (Kingwell 1998:305) And again, "Happiness is not about feeling good all the time. It is, rather, about the ability to reflect on one's life and find it worthwhile – to see it as satisfactory." (306) This definition makes happiness a one-dimensional judgment that life as a whole is satisfactory, but it immediately raises the question of how we are to understand "satisfaction."

"Satisfaction" could mean either desire-satisfaction or emotional satisfaction. Running these two meanings together can mislead us into thinking that a one-dimensional definition of happiness is possible. The satisfied-desire theory is deeply embedded in our cultural environment, and to avoid thinking in its terms is difficult. This theory of value underlies the system of economic markets inside which we live our lives. Because of its cultural hegemony, we slip into seeing the world in its terms. It leads us to think that satisfaction has only one dimension – getting what we want. If the satisfied-desire theory were a true one, we could use it to make one-dimensional judgments on our lives as a whole. Recall, however, the problems with the desire theory. Desires are always directed on the future, and they are, at best, fallible guides to happiness. Desire-satisfaction is not sufficient for happiness because sometimes we can misjudge what we want and be disappointed. Desire-satisfaction is not necessary for happiness because we sometimes, by happenstance, get what we did not want and find that it makes us happy.

So the sort of satisfaction with life as a whole that constitutes philosophical happiness must be a judgment of emotional satisfaction. Yet it cannot be a judgment concerning just one emotion because, as we have seen, the likely candidate would be the emotion of happiness, and that is an inadequate candidate. Many emotional judgments are involved in determining whether we are philosophically happy. So we see that happiness is multidimensional; we do not judge our lives along just one dimension. Happiness is a multifaceted thing.

Now we can start to see the relation between the pursuit of happiness and the quest for meaning. The philosophical quest for meaning has taught us the way to understand a meaningful life. Let us review this one last time, but in a way that makes a comparison to happiness easier.

Meaning as Multidimensional

The quest for meaning advanced in two stages. First, we investigated whether anything could truly matter. Second, we investigated how our lives as a whole could be truly meaningful.

In the first part, we concluded that the search for what truly matters involves both the heart and the head. We take what appears to matter, as shown by our individual and collective emotional responses, as evidence for what truly matters, for what is truly worthy of these responses. We found that things, people, and events matter in many different ways, not all of them positive. They can be admirable, amazing, delightful, enjoyable, fascinating, honorable, loveable, surprising, and wonderful. Also, they can be annoying, contemptible, disappointing, embarrassing, horrible, infuriating, regrettable, sad, shameful, and worrisome. All these are ways of mattering.

The important point to see here is this. Because mattering is so diverse, we cannot put the various dimensions of mattering together into one overall judgment. When we took the path of the emotions, we abandoned any hope of making global assessments of how much things matter. We cannot put together three judgments of someone as admirable, amazing, and annoying, into one overall judgment. Our friend is just admirable, amazing, and annoying. When we say our friend matters to us, we are being imprecise and making only a vague summary of our evaluations.

The various dimensions of mattering are not measurable on the same scale, and we cannot combine them into one judgment. Consider this analogy. Suppose something happened three meters to my right and four meters above my head. We can combine these two spatial dimensions (away and up) into one measure of how far away it happened; the answer is five meters away from my head. Suppose also that it happened six minutes ago. We have no way (outside Einstein's theory of special relativity) of combining the dimensions of space and time (five meters in space and six minutes in time) into one overall "distance." It just

happened six minutes ago and five meters away. That is the best we can do. Similarly we cannot combine our emotional judgments of our friend. The best we can do is to judge that our friend is admirable, amazing, and annoying.

The situation would have been different, as we noted above, had the satisfied-desire theory been right. Then mattering would have had only one dimension – how much events satisfied our desires. Then we could have made judgements of overall mattering.

However, it did not turn out that way. Satisfied desire leads to a dead end. So we cannot make overall judgments about what matters. In fact it can be misleading to say that the quest for meaning is a quest for what truly matters, unless we understand "mattering" as merely summarizing a whole range of emotional judgments. Things do not matter in just one way.

In the second part of our investigation of meaningfulness, we examined emotional judgments regarding our lives as a whole. We saw that our task was to become persons truly worthy of a range of life-affirming emotional judgments. Our task is to become persons worthy of admiration, esteem, love, and respect and to lead lives worthy of admiration, enjoyment, and pride. Our task is to avoid lives that are contemptible, frustrating, humiliating, regrettable, sad, and shameful.

Notice that, again, we have no one dimension of meaningfulness or meaninglessness. We make no one overall, global judgement. We make only particular judgments regarding esteem, respect, shame, and so on. We do not make a single, thin, abstract judgment on our lives. Instead, we make an assortment of thick, concrete, emotional judgments. Again, the term "meaningful" does no more than summarize this assortment of particular judgments. Meaning has no essence; the term "meaningful" does not have a definition.

The term "meaningful" is analogous to a term like "winner." We know what it means to win a game of chess, win a game of football, or win a game of solitaire. Each individual game has a definite criterion for winning, but the criterion is different in each game. Winning a football game is very different form winning a solitaire game. Being a winner has no essence; the term "winner" is a vague and imprecise way of summarizing what happens in

individual games. It is not important that we do not have a criterion for winning in general if we have a criterion for winning each game.

We have not been investigating just one sort of emotional judgment, that of being meaningful. We can find no single emotion that we might describe as feeling meaningful. Feeling meaningful is not just one emotion among many, nor is it one emotion that is somehow more important than the others.

Happiness, Meaning, and Truth

Now we can see how the quest for meaning and the pursuit of happiness converge and diverge. They converge because judging a life either happy or unhappy involves the same emotional judgments as judging a life either meaningful or meaningless. No one judgment – neither satisfaction nor meaningfulness – decides the issue. Properly conceived, each involves the whole domain of our emotional life, and the judgments that we form on it.

Happiness and meaning diverge, though, in the following way. Meaning requires, as happiness does not, that our emotional judgments be true. We can still be happy with our lives even when our judgments are false. Sumner writes:

> Consider the woman who for months or years has believed in, and relied on, the devotion of a faithless and self-serving partner. Her belief concerning a crucial condition of her life – a state of the world – was false. . . . If you asked her during this period whether she is happy, she will say that she is; if you ask her if her life is going well for her she will say that it is. If you ask her how she sees the same period after the delusion has been exposed, she will probably say that it now seems to her a cruel hoax and a waste of that part of her life. . . . She may resent the fact that her happiness was bought at the price of an elaborate deception, but happy she was all the same. Wasn't she? (Sumner 1996:157)

Yes. During her relationship she made all the emotional judgments that amount to judging her life a happy one. In each case, she predicted that if she had a true understanding of her life, then she would feel these emotions. She might have been justified in these predictions, given the evidence available to her. Yet her predictions were false, and because they were false, her

life lacked meaning. If she had known the truth about the conditions of her life, then she would have judged it wasted, and she would have resented, not loved, her partner.

The quest for meaning is both more rigorous and more risky than the pursuit of happiness. Meaning requires not only that we rationally judge our lives to be worthy ones, but also that we be right in these judgments. The quest for meaning requires that we reflect critically on our selves and the lives we lead. Then it requires that we reconstruct our lives to be compatible with true emotional judgments. A meaningful life, a life transformed in accord with emotional truth, will be a happy one, but the converse will not always be true. Where happiness is based on falsity, it fails to construct meaning. Meaning, in rough summary, is true happiness.

Meaningfulness is radically diverse. Life has no one meaning for all human beings. Meaningfulness is not universal; instead, it is *particular* to an individual. Within an individual life, no One Big Thing is the source of meaning in that life; instead meaning is highly *diverse*. Nor are things and lives meaningful in just one, unitary, way; meaning is as *plural* as the emotions through which we form our judgments.

Full appreciation of the last point, the plurality of meaning, has important consequences. First, no standard exists outside our emotional judgments by which we can divide their objects into favorable/unfavorable, life-affirming/ life-demeaning, valuable/valueless, worthwhile/worthless, or meaningful/meaningless. These are all just rough characterizations without explanatory value. It does not add anything to the judgment that a life is shameful to say that it is worthless or meaningless. The direction of explanation is the other way around. We understand that something is meaningless because it is shameful, contemptible, or disgusting; our emotional judgments are themselves the standards for being meaningful or meaningless.

Finally, the quest for meaning is now itself transformed. We no longer have just one thing – meaning – for which to search. We must replace the abstract task of finding meaning with a host of more particular tasks. We must find that which is truly worthy of astonishment, awe, and reverence. We must find

people who are truly worthy of love and admiration, and events that truly occasion joy and delight. We must construct characters and lead lives that are truly worthy of respect and esteem. Only in these particular tasks will we succeed in our quest for meaning.

REFERENCES

Anderson, Elizabeth. 1993. *Value in Ethics and Economics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Anderson, Elizabeth. 1996. "Reasons, Attitudes, and Values: Replies to Sturgeon and Piper". *Ethics* 106:538-554.

Aquinas, St. Thomas. 1993. "That All Things Are Directed to One End, Which is God". In *Life and Death*, edited by J. Westphal. Indianapolis: Hackett.

Aristotle. 1953. *The Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by David Ross. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Beck, Aaron, John Rush, Brian Shaw, and Gary Emery. 1979. *Cognitive Therapy of Depression*. New York: Guilford Press.

Blackburn, Simon. 1984. *Spreading the Word*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Blackburn, Simon. 1998. *Ruling Passions*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Blackburn, Simon and Simmons, Keith, ed. 1999. *Truth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Brandt, Richard. 1979. *A Theory of the Good and the Right*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Buckman, Robert. 2000. *Can We Be Good Without God? Behaviour, Belonging and the Need to Believe*. Toronto: Viking.

Campbell, Joseph. 1991. *Reflections on the Art of LIving: A Joseph Campbell Companion*. Edited by D. K. Osbon. New York: HarperCollins.

Camus, Albert. 1955. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. Translated by Justin O'Brien. New York: Vintage Books.

Damasio, Antonio. 1994. *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*. New York: Putnam.

Damasio, Antonio. 2003. *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain*. Orlando: Harcourt.

Dante. 1954. *The Inferno*. Trans. John Ciardi. New York: Mentor.

Dawkins, Richard. 1995. "God's Utility Function". *Scientific American* 273 (5):80-85.

de Sousa, Ronald. 1987. *The Rationality of Emotion*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Edwards, Paul. 1981. "The Meaning and Value of Life". In *The Meaning of Life*, edited by E. D. Klemke. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Elgin, Catherine. 1996. *Considered Judgment*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Epicurus. 1940. "The Extant Writings of Epicurus". In *The Stoic and Epicurean Philosophers*, edited by W. J. Oates. New York: Random House.

Frankl, Victor E. 1959. *Man's Search for Meaning*. New York: Washington Square Press.

Freud, Sigmund. 1958. "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning". In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, edited by J. Strachey. London: The Hogarth Press.

Gauthier, David. 1986. *Morals by Agreement*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Gaus, Gerald, 1990. *Value and Justification: The Foundations of Liberal Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gibbard, Allan. 1990. *Wise Choice, Apt Feelings*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Goleman, Daniel. 1995. *Emotional Intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books.

Greenberger, Dennis and Padesky, Christine A. 1995. *Mind Over Mood*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Griffin, James. 1986. *Well-Being: Its Meaning, Measurement, and Moral Importance*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Haack, Susan. 1993. *Evidence and Inquiry*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Hardin, C.L. 1988. *Color for Philosophers: Unweaving the Rainbow*. 2nd. ed. Indianapolis: Hackett.

Hepburn, R. W. 1981. "Questions About the Meaning of Life". In *The Meaning of Life*, edited by E. D. Klemke. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Horwich, Paul. 1998. *Truth*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hume, David. 1888. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge. Oxford: CLarendon Press.

Hume, David. 1998. *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. Edited by T. Beauchamp. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hurka, Thomas. 1993. *Perfectionism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Jones, Ernest. 1964. *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*. Harmondsworth: Penguin books.

Kernohan, Andrew. 1998. *Liberalism, Equality, and Cultural Oppression*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kingwell, Mark. 1998. *Better Living: In Pursuit of Happiness from Plato to Prozac*. Toronto: Viking.

Ledoux, Joseph. 1996. *The Emotional Brain*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Lewis, David. 1973. *Counterfactuals*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Lucretius. 1940. "On the Nature of Things". In *The Stoic and Epicurean Philosophers*, edited by W. J. Oates. NewYork: Random House.

Mackie, J.L. 1977. *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*. London: Penguin Books.

McDowell, John. 1978. "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?". *Proceedings of the Aristotoelian Society* 52 (suppl. vol.):13-29.

McDowell, John. 1997. "Projection and Truth in Ethics". In *Moral Discourse and Practice*, edited by S. Darwall, A. Gibbard, and P. Railton. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McKinnon, Christine. 1999. *Character, Virtue Theory, and the Vices*. Peterborough: Broadview Press.

Mill, John Stuart. 1972. *Utilitarianism, On Liberty, and Considerations on Representative Government*. Edited by H. B. Acton. London: J. M. Dent & Sons.

Misak, Cheryl. 2000. *Truth, Politics, Morality: Pragmatism and Deliberation*. London: Routledge.

Moore, G. E. 1903. *Principia Ethica*. 1971 ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Myers, David G. 1992. *The Pursuit of Happiness: Who is Happy -- and Why*. New York: William Morrow.

Nagel, Thomas. 1979. *Mortal Questions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nagel, Thomas. 1987. *What Does It All Mean? A Very Short Introduction to Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Nozick, Robert. 1981. *Philosophical Explanations*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Nozick, Robert. 1989. *The Examined Life*. New York: Simon and Shuster.

Plato. 1941. *The Republic of Plato*. Translated by F. M. Cornford. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Quine, Willard van Orman. 1953. *From a Logical Point of View*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Railton, Peter. 1986. "Facts and Values". *Philosophical Topics* 14 (2):5-31.

Ramachandran, V.S. 1998. *Phantoms in the Brain*. New York: William Morrow.

Rawls, John. 1971. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Rorty, Richard. 1989. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Russell, Bertrand. 1981. "A Free Man's Worship". In *The Meaning of Life*, edited by E. D.Klemke. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1948. *Existentialism and Humanism*. Translated by Philip Mairet. London: Eyre Methuen.

Sidgwick, Henry. 1962. *The Methods of Ethics*. 7th ed. London: Macmillan.

Smith, Michael. 1994. *The Moral Problem*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Solomon, Robert. 1993. *The Passions: Emotions and the Meaning of Life*. Indianapolis: Hackett.

Sumner, Wayne. 1996. *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Taylor, Charles. 1992. *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition"*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Taylor, Richard. 1970. *Good and Evil: A New Direction*. London: Collier Macmillan.

Tolstoy, Leo. 1929. *My Confession, My Religion, The Gospel in Brief*. New York: Charles Scribner.

Tolstoy, Leo. 1960. *The Death of Ivan Ilyich and Other Stories*. New York: Signet Classics.

Williams, Bernard. 1981. *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Yalom, Irvin. 1980. *Existential Psychotherapy*. New York: Basic Books.

Young, Jeffery. 1999. *Cognitive Therapy for Personality Disorders: A Schema-Focused Approach*. Third ed. Sarasota: Professional Resource Press.

INDEX