

## Lecture Forty-Nine

### Introduction

Darren Staloff, Ph.D.

**Scope:** The first phase of nineteenth-century European high culture is associated with romanticism. Romantics rejected the arid rationalism and scientism of the Enlightenment. A reaction against romanticism, known as positivism, had set in by mid-century. The final phase of nineteenth-century thought witnessed the rise of existential themes and issues.

### Outline

- I. The long nineteenth century was an epoch of transformation in European and world history.
  - A. Europe and its colonies witnessed an era of growing political unrest and turmoil.
    1. The era opened with the French Revolution in 1789 and the ensuing Napoleonic world wars that involved all of Europe and briefly transformed the entire political and social order.
    2. Nationalist and parliamentary revolutions broke out in western and central Europe in 1848 and would follow in southern and eastern Europe in the following decades.
    3. The aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War saw the emergence of the Paris Commune of 1872, the first large-scale socialist insurrection.
    4. The attempt to return to dynastic monarchical government with the Concert of Europe was shattered by the rise of journals espousing radical ideologies.
  - B. The nineteenth century also witnessed a growing expansion and conflict between modern European nation states.
    1. The nineteenth century was the great age of empire.
    2. Imperial superpowers formed into alliances and struggled to maintain the much-sought-after “balance of power.”
    3. The rise of nationalism was often accompanied by violent struggles.
    4. The period really comes to a close in the early twentieth century with the “Great War,” World War I.
  - C. The nineteenth century was also characterized by dramatic economic and technological changes.
    1. This was the age of the industrial revolution with the growth of the factory system.

2. The industrial revolution, following the commercial revolution, accelerated the expansion of urbanism with its attendant crowding and alienation.
  3. Transportation was transformed as horse-drawn coaches and sailing vessels gave way to steam boats and railroads that were undermined by the development of the internal combustion engine and the automobile in the latter part of the century.
  4. Technologies and productive processes based on steam and iron were gradually replaced by those based on fossil fuels and steel, just as agriculture and pharmacology would be transformed by the development of the modern chemical industry.
- D. The nineteenth century was caught in the throes of intense cultural conflicts as Europeans grappled with their modernity.
    1. The dramatic and accelerating rate of change unleashed deep yearnings for the preservation of traditional beliefs and institutions.
    2. Religion found itself increasingly under siege from science, especially Darwinian theory.
    3. Traditional social roles were subject to criticism from utopian radicals and practical reformers: feminism, abolitionism, temperance.
- II. The first phase of nineteenth-century European high culture is associated with romanticism. Romantics rejected the arid rationalism and scientism of the Enlightenment. The most important forms of philosophical romanticism were idealism and historicism.
    - A. The essential figure in the origins of German idealism is Immanuel Kant.
      1. Kant was a transitional figure between the Enlightenment and romanticism.
      2. Kant’s idealism was achieved by his “Copernican Revolution,” the fact that our categories of the world do not align with the world itself.
      3. Based on the distinction between subject and object, Kant’s idealism gives rise to the distinction between the realm of appearances and the realm of being “in itself.”
      4. The notion of the noumenal realm of things “in themselves” was critical for his moral thought in metaphysics and religion.
      5. Kant’s categorical imperative and his principle of humanity reject the consequentialism and social Epicureanism of the Enlightenment.
    - B. Schopenhauer shared Kant’s idealism but combined it with a profoundly pessimistic posture. His work represents the rehabilitation of speculative metaphysics.
      1. Schopenhauer’s notion of the “world as representation” is an obvious reference to Kant’s realm of the phenomenal, while the

“world as will” is meant to coincide with the noumenal world of “things in themselves.”

2. The principle of sufficient reason is intensely anti-scientific and is redolent of the entire Platonic quest to find the real world behind the veil of appearances.
3. Schopenhauer’s Eastern-inspired ethic of renunciation (pessimism) is an obvious rejection of the modern cult of progress and aspiration.

C. Hegel’s thought represents the culmination of German idealism in his dialectical mode of reasoning and overarching historicism.

1. Hegel’s conservative historicism was in some ways anticipated by Vico and Burke.
2. Hegel historicized the Kantian insight by arguing that our conceptual schemes are evolving aspects of culture that vary with time and place.
3. Hegel’s philosophy of history, in particular his doctrine that “the rational is the real and the real is the rational,” was conservative, statist, nationalist, and militaristic.
4. Hegel’s idealism has relativistic implications and is anti-scientific.

III. A reaction against romanticism, known as positivism, had set in by mid-century. Positivism shared the Enlightenment’s quest for practical, rather than speculative, knowledge and its belief in progress.

A. Marx’s historical materialism sought to incorporate Hegel’s historicism in a naturalistic worldview.

1. Marx’s analysis of history is empirically grounded and begins with the biological needs of humans to supply their material wants.
2. Marx’s reductionism turns Hegelianism on its head, as philosophy, religion, and art become superstructural epiphenomena to economic forces.
3. Marx’s demand for the unity of theory and practice “radicalizes” historicism and the philosophy of history.
4. Marx’s thought still retains some romantic residues, such as his critique of alienation.

B. Mill’s utilitarianism is another “positive” philosophic perspective, though drawn from the Anglophone empiricist tradition.

1. Mill’s thought is rooted in English-speaking consequentialism.
2. Utilitarianism is empirical and claims to be a scientific theory of morality.
3. Mill’s consequentialism is thoroughly naturalistic and materialistic in its formulation.
4. The rational calculation behind utilitarianism and its consequentialism both appealed to and expressed a “middle class” ethos.

IV. The final phase of nineteenth-century thought witnessed the rise of existential themes and issues.

A. Søren Kierkegaard stressed the conflict between faith and reason to highlight the psychological transformation implicated in the former.

1. Kierkegaard’s fideism echoes that of earlier critics of rational religion, such as Bayle and Pascal.
2. His concern with the life of the individual in its alienated state harks back to Marx and prefigures the thought of Nietzsche, Sartre, and Camus.
3. The primacy of willing and deciding in overcoming angst presupposes a freedom of the will that contradicts the determinism of positivistic materialism.
4. The cool calculus of utilities seems small and petty in contrast to the dramatic “fear and trembling” of true “Abrahamic” faith.

B. Friedrich Nietzsche shared Kierkegaard’s concern with the alienation and spiritual impoverishment of modern man and stressed the same conflict between faith and reason. Nietzsche, however, was a naturalist whose perspectivism combined idealism with a historicistic pluralism.

1. The doctrine that “there are no facts, only interpretations” expresses the essential anti-realism and idealism of Nietzsche.
2. The end of the cult of objectivity is summarized in his famous aphorism “God is Dead.”
3. Nietzsche practiced a historicistic (Hegelian) and naturalistic (Marxian) critique of morality.
4. Nietzsche sought self-creation and authenticity, a project that has a powerful aesthetic dimension.
5. Nietzsche rejected Schopenhauer’s pessimism for a Promethean or Dionysian “yea saying.”
6. Nietzsche’s perspectivism is informed by his naturalism, humanism, and commitment to “evolutionary” perspectives.

#### Supplementary Reading:

Frederick, S.J. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* (New York: 1985), Book III, pp. 1–31, 421–442.

#### Questions to Consider:

1. What were the most important trends of philosophical romanticism?
2. How did positivism reflect a middle-class ethos?

## Lecture Fifty

### Kant's "Copernican Revolution"

Robert Kane, Ph.D.

**Scope:** This lecture examines the views of one of the greatest of modern philosophers, Immanuel Kant, on the limits of knowledge, reason, science, and metaphysics, as expressed in his seminal work, *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). Kant's "Copernican Revolution" in philosophy inverted the order of knowledge as Copernicus had inverted the positions of the sun and earth. Empiricists such as John Locke had held that the objective world impressed its categories on the blank slate of our minds. For Kant, however, objective experience must conform to a priori forms of intuition, such as space and time, and to basic categories of understanding, such as substance and causality, which the mind imposes on experience.

Modern science and mathematics are successful at giving us reliable objective knowledge of the physical world, Kant held, because they stay within the bounds of possible experience defined by these forms and categories. By contrast, the great questions of metaphysics or philosophy—about God, the soul, free will, and ethics—because they transcend the bounds of possible experience and concern "things in themselves," lead to insoluble puzzles and antinomies when we try to resolve them by theoretical reason alone.

### Outline

- I. Immanuel Kant is one of the most influential figures of modern Western philosophy and is regarded by many as the greatest of modern philosophers.
  - A. Kant is also an important representative of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.
    - 1. His life (1724–1804) spanned most of the eighteenth century and his thought reflected many Enlightenment ideals: the importance of reason and science, of thinking for oneself, distrust of authoritarianism, the importance of autonomy, the dignity of the individual, and human rights.
    - 2. Yet ironically, Kant's critique of pure reason, which we shall discuss in this lecture, tended to undermine Enlightenment beliefs in the power of reason and science.
  - B. Theologian Paul Tillich aptly called Kant a Shiva figure of the Enlightenment.
    - 1. The Hindu god Shiva danced, completing and destroying one cosmic epoch and bringing a new cosmic epoch into existence.

- 2. Likewise, Kant completed, yet undermined, Enlightenment ideals, then ushered in a new epoch of modern philosophy with his ethical ideas.
- 3. In this lecture, we consider Kant, the completer and destroyer of the Enlightenment, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. In the next lecture, we consider his moral philosophy and attempts to reconstruct philosophy on new foundations of practical reason.

### II. Kant's life and background.

- A. He grew up in a pietistic German home that emphasized a stern moral conscience and control of the passions.
  - 1. Kant's father was a craftsman, a harness-maker. A revealing story is told of his father's involvement with the harness-maker's guild.
  - 2. His mother, who died when her son was thirteen (perhaps the most profound event in Kant's life), encouraged his intellectual interests and taught him to feel awe at "the starry heavens above and the moral law within us."
- B. This pietistic background and belief in morality stayed with Kant throughout his life.
  - 1. Being a true representative of the Enlightenment, however, Kant also believed that religion and morality could not be based on mere external authority, as they were for his parents.
  - 2. We had to use our own autonomous reason to decide which authorities to accept and which to reject.
  - 3. Kant's short essay "What Is Enlightenment?" is discussed in this regard. The motto of the Enlightenment, he said, was "Dare to know": dare to use your reason and think for yourself.

### III. The problem was that by Kant's time, the course of modern thought had shown that human reason had its limitations.

- A. Reason had great success in science and mathematics (understanding "the starry heavens above"), but it had sown skepticism and disagreement over the questions of metaphysics, religion, and the moral law within.
  - 1. Kant was awakened to this problem by many thinkers who preceded him, especially by the empiricism and skepticism of David Hume.
  - 2. In a famous passage, Kant said Hume's writings awoke him from his "dogmatic slumber." He learned from Hume that the success of science and math was not going to be extended to other areas.
- B. As a result, Kant posed (in his famous work, *The Critique of Pure Reason* [1781]) two central questions for the modern age:
  - 1. Why are modern science and mathematics together so successful at giving us reliable objective knowledge of the physical world?

2. Why do we find it so hard to get similar knowledge and agreement about the great questions of metaphysics or philosophy—about God, the soul, free will, and ethics?
- C. Kant’s answer was equally seminal for modern thought: modern science and mathematics are successful because they deal only with the way things appear to us, not the way they really are in themselves.
1. The world studied by science is the world that can be experienced by our senses.
  2. To experience that world, we impose on it certain forms and categories that make experience possible—space and time, causality and substance, action and reaction, and so on.
  3. The questions of metaphysics take us beyond the legitimate bounds of these forms and categories of possible experience and, hence, beyond the bounds of understanding by theoretical reason and science.
- IV. Consider space and time.
- A. Is it any accident that everything science can deal with is in space and time? No, says Kant.
1. Space is not like a large box we peer into. It is a projection of our own consciousness that makes it possible to experience objects to begin with.
  2. Without time, we would have no experience either, because experience is something we “go through” or “undergo.” An idea may be timeless, but not an experience.
  3. Space and time are, thus, forms of the human mind that experiences must conform to just to be called “experiences.” Kant calls them “forms of intuition” or “forms of sensibility.”
- B. In addition, he speaks of space and time as a priori forms of intuition, by which he means that we must have them in our mental arsenal from the first—a priori—to experience a world at all.
1. This idea also explains why mathematics and geometry can have necessary truths and proofs; according to Kant, they are about these necessary forms of all experience.
  2. Geometry is about space; arithmetic and the number series are about succession in time.
- C. So it is, Kant argues, that the truths of arithmetic and Euclidean geometry can be synthetic a priori truths.
1. “A priori” means that they are necessary and universal truths, because they are about necessary forms of all experience.
  2. “Synthetic” means that they are about something real, not merely about the meanings of words (not “analytic”).
  3. Kant lived before the discovery of non-Euclidean geometries and believed Euclidean geometry was the geometry of real space. The

same could also be said of his relationship to Newtonian, as opposed to modern, physics. For Kant, mathematics was based on spatial imagination.

- V. Kant’s account of space and time provides the first clue to the meaning of what he called his “Copernican Revolution” in philosophy.
- A. Kant inverted the order of knowledge as Copernicus had inverted the positions of the sun and earth.
1. Instead of the objective world impressing its categories on the blank slate of our minds, as such empiricists as John Locke had held, our mind is anything but a passive receptor or blank slate.
  2. The objective world must conform to our a priori forms of intuition and basic categories of understanding, not the other way around.
  3. Thus, Kant rejected the empiricism of preceding thinkers, such as Locke and Hume (the view that all ideas and truths come after experience—a *posteriori*—and are derived from experience).
- B. Copernicus dispersed humans to the periphery of the physical universe; Kant put them back in the center regarding knowledge of that universe.
- VI. In addition to forms of intuition such as space and time, Kant also argued that a priori “categories of the understanding,” as he calls them, must be imposed by us on the world, if experience is to be possible.
- A. These basic categories include substance (persisting things), causality, plurality, unity, and existence, among others.
1. Kant derives the full list of his categories somewhat artificially from the possible forms of judgment in Aristotelian and medieval logic.
  2. Yet we do have reason to believe that many of these categories are involved in our experiencing the world.
- B. To show that these categories are a priori, however, Kant must prove the stronger claim that without them, experience would not even be possible.
1. Kant undertakes this proof in the longest and most difficult part of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. He calls it the “transcendental deduction of the Categories.”
  2. There has been much dispute among scholars and philosophers about whether this deduction works or, indeed, about just what it amounts to.
  3. Consider Kant’s transcendental deduction in the concrete terms of an example involving a series of pictures that tells a continuing story of a man burning down a warehouse.
- C. This explanation of the deduction throws further light on the meaning of Kant’s Copernican Revolution in philosophy. Rather than the mind conforming to the objects of experience, the objects of experience must conform to the a priori categories of our understanding.

**VII.** We are now in a position to return to the seminal questions with which Kant began the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

- A.** How is it that science and mathematics together are so successful in giving us objective knowledge of the world, while we cannot obtain similar objective knowledge and agreement in matters of philosophy or metaphysics concerning the soul, God, free will, ethics, and values?
1. Kant's answer is that science and mathematics stay within the bounds of possible experience defined by the forms of intuition and by the categories of the understanding.
  2. Yet these very strengths of science and mathematics are the sources of their limitations.
  3. They tell us only about things as they are experienced by us, hence as they appear to us (the phenomenal world), not things as they really are in themselves (the noumenal world).
  4. By contrast, the great questions of metaphysics are about things as they are in themselves and go beyond the bounds of possible experience.
- B.** To illustrate this last point, the third long part of the *Critique of Pure Reason* shows how we get into trouble when we try to press the human mind beyond possible experience into the realms of metaphysics.
1. With regard to the soul and its supposed immortality, scientific psychology can understand the phenomenal self—the one that appears to us.
  2. But science cannot understand the soul as it is in itself—the noumenal self—nor can science say whether the soul can survive bodily death. Of such matters we can have only faith.
  3. In addition, when we try to think about the cosmos as a whole, e.g., whether it was created, we encounter insoluble puzzles that Kant calls “antinomies of reason.”
  4. One of these antinomies concerns free will. Science seems to tell us that everything is governed by laws of cause and effect, yet we believe we can act freely without being determined by the laws of nature. This contradiction cannot be resolved by theoretical reason.
  5. Finally, Kant argues that attempts to prove the existence of God by reason have failed for the same reason—they try to extend the categories of the understanding to matters, such as the cause of the world as a whole, that go beyond the bounds of possible experience.

**VIII.** In summary, we see why Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* both enlightened and terrorized his time. In the next lecture, we will try to understand how Kant himself dealt with these great questions, especially about ethics and values, that were beyond the scope of science.

**Essential Reading:**

Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Norman Kemp Smith (New York: 1965), pp. 63–275.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Frederick, S.J. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* (New York: 1985), Book II, Vol. VI, pp. 211–276.

S. Korner, *Kant* (New York: 1990), chapters 1–5, pp. 13–126.

Michael Friedman. *Kant and the Exact Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: 1992).

P. F. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense* (London: Routledge, 1966).

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Explain what Kant means by his Copernican Revolution in philosophy. Is the analogy with Copernicus's revolution in cosmology an appropriate one for Kant's revolution in philosophy?
2. Explain what Kant means by his “transcendental deduction of the categories” of the understanding. Why is this deduction crucial to his project in the *Critique of Pure Reason*? Kant claims that we are capable of gaining knowledge of an objective world, even though we only know things as they appear to us. Are these claims consistent and, if so, how?

# Lecture Fifty-One

## Kant's Moral Theory

Robert Kane, Ph.D.

**Scope:** This lecture examines Kant's views about morality and value as embodied in such works as *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) and the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1789), which appeared after his *Critique of Pure Reason*. We examine Kant's derivation of his famous categorical imperative: "Act only by that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law." We will also consider the meaning and significance of alternative formulations of the categorical imperative, including Kant's "principle of humanity": "Act so that you always use humanity in your own person, as well as in the person of every other, never as a means, but at the same time as an end."

As a true representative of the Enlightenment, Kant held that belief in the moral law and ethical decisions could not be based on mere external authority, religious or otherwise, but must be based on one's own autonomous reason. Through the exercise of practical reason, human beings are capable of self-legislation, of making laws that they themselves should follow; this capacity for self-legislation not only leads to the categorical imperative, but is also the source of humans' autonomy and free will. Humans are free of determination by nature's laws because they are capable of acting in accordance with laws of our own making. Science and theoretical reason cannot grasp or prove these truths, but practical reason and morality must presuppose them.

### Outline

- I. Kant went on to write other works after the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the theme of which was that the limitations of theoretical reason and science should not lead us to despair about the possibility of addressing philosophical questions concerning how to live and what to believe.
  - A. If these philosophical questions could not be accessed by theoretical reason, they could be accessed indirectly—through practical reason.
    1. Science deals well with the starry heavens above but is limited to the way things appear to us.
    2. To penetrate beyond appearances, Kant's idea was that we must begin with that other object of awe and imagination, the moral law within us.
  - B. If we could show that practical reasoning about how to live and act necessarily presupposes a moral law, we would have reason to believe

in such a law, though it was beyond the understanding of science or theoretical reason.

1. Because belief in the moral law could be shown to require free will, we would also have reason to believe in free will as well, despite the fact that science seems to rule it out.
    2. By this indirect route through practical reason, we could vindicate Enlightenment ideals of individual dignity and universal human rights.
    3. We might also, Kant thought, get further clues about the human soul, God, and our ultimate destiny.
  - C. This was Kant's project in the major works that came after the *Critique of Pure Reason*, such as the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*.
- II. To address the big questions about morality and philosophy through practical reason, however, Kant thought we had to expand our vision beyond our own personal desires and purposes.
  - A. Practical reason is concerned with how we ought to live.
    1. The concern must not merely be with how we ought to live and act if we wanted or desired this or that, because humans have different desires and purposes.
    2. We would thereby fail to gain the desired universality of perspective that morality and metaphysics require.
  - B. Kant expressed this point by saying that the moral law cannot be concerned merely with hypothetical imperatives or hypothetical ought's—those with an "if" in them.
    1. Such hypothetical imperatives are the stuff of everyday practical reasoning—if you want to stay healthy, you ought to eat right and exercise; if you want to become a doctor, you ought to study hard; and so on.
    2. Hypothetical imperatives apply only to those who have the wants or desires in question. Human desires differ; some are even evil. (If you want to become an effective terrorist, you ought to learn to make bombs.)
  - C. Morality or ethics, for Kant—represented by the idea of duty—must be different.
    1. It concerns what everyone ought to do, period—no if's, and's, or but's.
    2. Kant calls an imperative of this sort a categorical imperative—what all persons ought to do without qualification, no matter who they are or what they desire.
    3. Such an imperative would not say, "Don't lie, if you want to be trusted," but "Don't lie, period."

**III.** Kant asks what could motivate people to accept such a categorical imperative, because doing so cannot depend, as hypothetical imperatives do, on any particular desires or on the consequences their actions might have.

- A.** Kant argues that the only inducement left to us to obey such an imperative would be “the conformity of our actions to universal law as such.”
  - 1.** That is, as he puts it, “I ought never to act except in such a way that I can will that my maxim [or ought] should become a universal law” for everyone to follow.
  - 2.** This turns out to be the initial formulation of Kant’s famous categorical imperative: “Act only according to that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law” (for everyone to follow).
- B.** Kant’s argument for this famous imperative is difficult to understand and controversial, as is the imperative itself. Scholars have disagreed about what it is and whether it works.
- C.** Keeping in mind the difficulty and controversy involved, we will attempt to understand Kant’s argument for the categorical imperative and throw light on the meaning of the imperative as well.
  - 1.** Kant’s goal is to arrive at some universal and necessary laws that apply to everyone about what is good or right.
  - 2.** To do this, Kant is suggesting, we must be willing to rise above all our particular desires and purposes just as scientists must be willing to rise above their particular biases to find the objective laws of nature.
  - 3.** We must, in other words, be willing to legislate (or make laws) universally for everyone, not just hypothetically for ourselves, like a judge or a wise King Solomon.
  - 4.** To do that, in turn, we would have to adopt principles of action we could will that everyone followed, which amounts to the requirement of the categorical imperative.
- D.** Kant further emphasizes that only rational beings are capable of legislating in this way—imaginatively placing themselves above their particular desires and purposes and rising above their physical and biological beings. Only by the exercise of human reason can we obtain such an objective.

**IV.** Having arrived at Kant’s categorical imperative or moral law, we encounter further controversy when we consider what the imperative means and how it applies to concrete questions of morality and ethics.

- A.** Kant tried to explain these matters by offering four (now-famous) examples.
  - 1.** One example concerns the immorality of breaking promises. Kant argues that the maxim “one ought to make a promise without

intending to keep it” cannot be made a universal law for everyone to follow.

- 2.** If everyone followed such a maxim, he argues, the very institution of promising would be undermined.
  - 3.** We consider common misinterpretations of Kant’s reasoning and assess various criticisms of his argument. Was Kant merely begging the question?
- B.** Another much-discussed ethical example considered by Kant concerns suicide.
    - 1.** He argues that suicide is always and everywhere wrong, without exceptions.
    - 2.** The maxim “out of love of ourselves, we should destroy ourselves” Kant regards as a practical self-contradiction, which could not be made a law for everyone to follow.
    - 3.** Consider this example in the light of cultural differences concerning the moral rightness of suicide. Consider also Kant’s view about the possibility of exceptions to moral rules, which he never seems to allow. Modern Kantians have amended his philosophy, maintaining nonetheless that his core position is very productive.
- V.** Kant defended two other related versions of his categorical imperative.
- A.** The most famous of these is the so-called principle of humanity: “Act so that you always use humanity, in your own person as well as in the person of every other, never merely as a means, but at the same time as an end.”
    - 1.** We examine what is involved in using people as a means rather than as an end, according to Kant.
    - 2.** Kant claims that this second formulation of the categorical imperative, the principle of humanity, amounts to the same as the first formulation in different words, but many subsequent thinkers have doubted this.
  - B.** What links the two formulations of the categorical imperative is the idea that human beings are capable of self-legislation, of making laws that they themselves should follow.
    - 1.** This capacity for self-legislation or autonomy (giving laws to oneself) is linked by Kant to the idea of free will.
    - 2.** We are free of determination by nature’s laws because we are capable of obeying laws of our own making.
    - 3.** Science and theoretical reason cannot understand this freedom of the will, but practical reason and morality must presuppose it.
    - 4.** This free will and autonomy is also the source of our dignity as individuals expressed by the principle of humanity: we are to be treated as ends in ourselves, because we have the power (through free will) to be the sources of our own ends.

## Lecture Fifty-Two

### Burke—The Origins of Conservatism

Jeremy Shearmur, Ph.D.

**Scope:** Edmund Burke was a politician and orator, not a professor. As a result, his political thought was developed in speeches, pamphlets, and occasional writings and in the style of a rhetorician rather than an academic. Burke himself was, through much of his life, a moderate reformer, speaking up about abuses of British colonial power in Ireland and India and arguing on the side of the Americans at the time of the break with England. And yet, he is today best known for his hard-hitting critique of the French Revolution and of the revolutionaries' appeal to issues of abstract principle and to the rights of man, ideas that have had a significant impact on conservatism. At a time when many of his colleagues were welcoming the French Revolution, Burke was raising doubts and objections and forecasting that no good would come of it. Not only were his worst predictions vindicated by what took place, but the way in which he argued has proved a source of intellectual inspiration for conservatives ever since.

In this lecture, we will examine some of the key elements in Burke's argument against the French Revolution. We will also pose the broader problem of how his support for the American Revolution can be squared with his denunciation of the French Revolution. This, in turn, leads us to conclude with the difficult problem of the overall character of Burke's views.

### Outline

- I. Background.
  - A. Burke was a fascinating, but contentious figure.
    1. Who was he? He was Irish, had legal training, and made his career as a writer and a British politician. He was a great orator and a powerful political writer, but he served very much as a spokesman for senior aristocratic figures.
    2. He developed striking ideas, much at odds with attitudes current today; he is a key source for conservatives.
    3. Yet his views were developed in an unsystematic manner, by way of reflections on particular events with which he was concerned, and he was strongly critical of those who accorded priority to philosophical abstractions.
    4. As a result, there is still ongoing debate about the underlying character of his ideas.
  - B. Is Burke a paradox?

- C. In this way, Kant feels he has vindicated the Enlightenment ideals of individual dignity and universal human rights through practical reason.
  1. These ideals are further expressed in a third formulation of the categorical imperative that is closely related to the principle of humanity.
  2. This formulation is the "Kingdom of Ends": we should act toward all other rational beings as if we were all members of a Kingdom of Ends, a society in which everyone was worthy of being treated as an end rather than a means.
- VI. Kant, in his later philosophy, tried to extend these ideas about morality and practical reason to the issues of metaphysics.
  - A. Practical reason presupposes the moral law, he reasoned, in the form of the categorical imperative.
    1. Practical reason, therefore, also presupposes belief in free will or autonomy and, hence, freedom from nature's laws.
    2. This means that as practical beings we are required to think of ourselves as something more than physical beings in space and time subject to scientific study and nature's laws.
  - B. There can be no scientific proof of these matters, of course, because they transcend the bounds of possible experience. Nonetheless, we have some reasons in our practical lives to believe them.
  - C. In such ways did Kant seek to fulfill his project of denying reason to make room for faith.

### Essential Reading:

Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Hackett, 1993).

### Supplementary Reading:

Frederick, S.J. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* (Image Books, 1985), Book II, Vol. VI, pp. 308–348.

S. Korner, *Kant* (New York: 1990), chapters 6–7, pp. 127–174.

Paul Guyer, ed., *Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals: Critical Essays* (New York: 1998.)

### Questions to Consider:

1. Explain how Kant attempts to derive his categorical imperative in its first and second formulations. Do you think his arguments for the imperative in either form work; if not, where do you think they go wrong?
2. Do you think Kant's categorical imperative is an "empty formalism," as some of its critics have claimed? Does it allow too many maxims or rules of behavior that would normally be regarded as immoral or rule out any that seem to be moral?



1. Through much of his career, Burke was known as a supporter of moderate reform.
2. He was also on the side of the underdog, notably the Irish and East Indian sufferers from colonial exploitation.
3. He favored the American case, in the revolution.
4. Yet he was passionate in his denunciation of the French Revolution, even at the point where it was championed by moderate and progressive opinion in England.

¶ Burke opposed the French Revolution and its supporters. His key work was *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790).

- A. He starts with a critique of the English radical Richard Price.
  1. Price claimed that the “Glorious Revolution” of 1688 (in which William and Mary replaced James II on the British throne) had established the following rights: to choose our own governors, to cashier them for misconduct, and to frame a government for ourselves.
  2. Burke argued that this was a misleading historical account and that the basis of claims to such rights was not—as he took Price to claim—abstract principle, but rights specific to Englishmen.
- B. What underlies Burke’s claim? A critique of natural rights.
  1. Burke claims that if people appealed to natural rights, “the commonwealth itself would, in a few generations, crumble away... into the dust and powder of individuality.” He is critical of appeals to abstractions.
  2. By way of contrast, what did Burke favor? Burke on this is difficult to sum up, but it is worth referring here to several ideas.
- C. Government should be a matter of prudential management and practical statesmanship, not rule by abstract principle.
- D. Those with political power should respect—and take into account—the opinions and patterns of behavior of the people.
- E. Above all, Burke stressed the significance of the British constitution and other constitutions and bodies of traditional law. Why?
  1. They were seen as historical achievements, the authority of which depended on their age, rather than on abstract rights.
  2. The best rulers were, in his view, aristocrats, people who had behind them a tradition and historical heritage, who had substantive property—and thus a real stake in the country--and who had specific local knowledge and attachments to particular places.
  3. At the same time, those with political power had a duty to govern in the interest of the population as a whole, not just in their own narrow interests.
  4. This—the historical heritage of the constitution and rulers’ obligations to the population—should be seen as the basis of

reform. That is, reform should be conservative, restoring what was good in the past, not calling the constitution into question; at the same time, it should be pragmatic.

- F. The constitution itself was seen as precious, yet vulnerable.
  1. It is vulnerable to plausible-sounding appeals to reason and to populist appeals.
  2. It is also vulnerable to being unbalanced, and Burke was, for many years, worried about the danger of corruption of parliament by the wealth and influence of the Crown.

III. A key interpretation of natural rights was fundamental to his critique of the revolution.

- A. The British academic Iain Hampsher-Monk has a plausible explanation: what is going on relates to a contrast between two interpretations of natural rights.
  1. In one view—which some people attribute to John Locke—people have rights in a state of nature (an imagined situation, before government was established); these rights offer the basis for an adequate life there. The rights are preserved by, and form the basis of, the powers of government. Indeed, government can be called into question if it infringes these rights.
  2. In another view, which one finds in Thomas Hobbes (and John Selden), natural rights sustain only the grimmest of forms of life—a dog-eat-dog situation in which, as Hobbes put it in a well-known phrase, “life [in the state of nature] is nasty, brutish and short.” In this view, natural rights are—and must be—given up when people move into government, which rescues them from this grim state of nature. Natural rights are destructive if appealed to against government and to do so risks getting us back into the horrors of the state of nature.
  3. In form of this second view given by Selden, to whom, as Hampsher-Monk argues, Burke refers, government rests on traditions and conventions that are internalized by the population (they form their habits and expectations; what Burke called “prejudice”).
  4. In Burke’s view, these traditions and conventions are the basis of the *real* rights of man; but they are, obviously, specific to particular countries and traditions.
  5. They are conventional, not capable of rational demonstration. They may rest on historical fictions, but for Burke, it is enough that they are believed and that they *work*.
  6. Burke claims that the alternative to such conventions and traditions is not—as its supporters claim—the rule of reason, but instead, the rule of brute force and the violence of the state of nature. In

Burke's view, we will get to this state if we try to conduct politics on the basis of an appeal to abstract principle.

7. He forecast that the French Revolution would lead to violence at a time when it was favored by all "progressive" opinion.
- B.** Burke also expressed concern about attacks on religion.
1. Burke was a sincere religious believer.
  2. He saw religion as having an important political role: religious authority keeps ordinary people in order *and* is an important check on those who have political power.
  3. Burke was shocked by open atheism in France and upset by the confiscation of Church property. These actions undermined the role of religious institutions as corporate bodies in the state—important as elements of continuity and a check on arbitrary government.
- C.** Burke was also worried about radical political reform in France.
1. He was concerned about an electoral system that undermined links between constituents and their representatives. Burke argued that MPs were representatives, not delegates with independent judgment.
  2. He was worried about the weakening of local attachments, which he felt posed a risk of atomization.
  3. He was worried that the new representatives were lawyers and doctors without *political* experience.
  4. He was concerned about the loyalty of the army if traditional allegiances were broken.

#### IV. What are Burke's underlying views?

- A.** At various points, Burke makes appeals to natural law and to utility; he also makes common cause with Adam Smith's economics.
- B.** These have been used as the basis of (conflicting) interpretations. Each interpretation seems plausible, but none is fully satisfactory.
- C.** What do we make of the following:
  1. His appeal to natural law in respect to colonial injustices in India?
  2. His approval of the American Revolution?
  3. His critique of the French Revolution?
- D.** Let me move in where angels fear to tread and offer a suggestion:
  1. In Burke's view, good government depends on traditions and conventions; ideally, for him, it is Aristocratic and Christian.
  2. One faces terrible dangers if one undermines this, by appealing to natural rights—because rights, for Burke, are matters of tradition and convention, not natural, and depend on habit and prejudice. If conventional rights are undermined, the result is likely to be the rule of violence, not of reason.

3. The American Revolution was fine, because it appealed to traditional English rights—e.g., no taxation without representation—and there was no attempt at *social* revolution.
4. In the case of India, Burke does appeal to natural law in the face of flagrant injustice. Burke is not a relativist. But natural law is general, is in many respects unspecific, and can be appealed to only in extraordinary situations.
5. Some Burke specialists have also warned us to be careful of how much we read into these appeals, to be wary of how deep his ideas about this issue go.

#### V. Burke's importance is enduring.

- A.** He has a clear and obvious appeal for conservatives. Despite the unsystematic and rhetorical character of his views, they are a mine of invaluable insights, in terms of both specific arguments and powerful images.
- B.** Burke also has an acute view of the dangers of uncritically rationalistic approaches to politics. His claims about the likely consequences of these in the French Revolution were prescient; while his argument has been echoed—consciously or unconsciously—by later critics of totalitarianism.
- C.** In my view, Burke's approach is of great value, too, to would-be reformers. His awareness of, and insistence on, the idea that people act out of prejudice points the would-be reformer toward taking a realistic view of people, toward recognizing them as socialized and as acting on the basis of their habits and understanding of the world. This is the material out of which any new social institutions must be built.
- D.** Indeed, I think that close attention to Burke's concerns has important lessons for *everyone*. This is something that I have learned myself for, as recently as 1996, I argued that "an exaggerated respect for Burke... is perhaps *the* mark of poor judgement in a political theorist," words that I think, now, I should eat!

#### Supplementary Reading:

- Iain Hampsher-Monk, *A History of Modern Political Thought* (Oxford: 1992).  
———, *The Political Philosophy of Edmund Burke* (London and New York: 1987).  
F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke, 1730–1784* (Oxford: 1998).  
Frank O'Gorman, *Edmund Burke* (London: 1973).  
C. B. Macpherson, *Burke* (Oxford: 1980).  
Peter Stanlis, *Edmund Burke and the Natural Law* (Ann Arbor: 1958).

#### Questions to Consider:

1. Can one really make sense of all the different strands in Burke's thought?
2. Is Burke as important for the would-be reformer as he is for the conservative opponent of change?

**Lecture Fifty-Three**  
**Hegel—History and Historicism**  
 Darren Staloff, Ph.D.

**Scope:** For Hegel, history represents the necessary and rational unfolding of absolute Spirit toward self-consciousness. That is, history is the world or God or the collective spirit of humanity becoming conscious of itself and discovering its own nature. It proceeds in necessary phases, an understanding of which allows us in turn to understand the artistic, scientific, and philosophical products of each phase. Hegel's historicism—the notion that the artistic products and accepted truths of a given era are relative to that era—profoundly influenced Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida.

**Outline**

- I. G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831) was one of the most important and profound thinkers about the meaning and course of history.
  - A. He is the father of modern historicism and idealism.
  - B. He saw in history a counterexample to the mechanistic materialism or naturalism of the Enlightenment. History is a developmental process.
- II. Hegel's philosophy of history can be summarized in the following four sentences. These sentences are all impenetrable, because they comprise the expression of a unique and systematic vocabulary whose terms interlock like the squares in a Rubick's cube. Our method will be to unpack each of these sentences.
  - A. *History is the dialectical process whereby spirit comes to know itself and realizes its Idea.*
    1. History simply refers to world history.
    2. Dialectic refers to the logical relation of thesis/antithesis/ synthesis, as in the case of the family, civic society, and the state.
    3. By spirit, Hegel means the World Spirit, which is the agent and subject of history and the collective mind of humanity.
    4. To *realize* is to make real or actual.
    5. For Hegel, *Idea* means something like essence.
  - B. *Freedom is the idea of the Spirit and Spirit is Reason in-and-for itself.*
    1. Reason is abstract rationality, which, for Hegel, is the philosophical expression of God.
    2. Reason's dialectical antithesis is nature, or reason out-of-itself.
    3. Spirit, or the collective mind of man, is the synthesis of the reason and nature.

4. Freedom refers to the conscious reason or Kantian autonomy—not freedom from control of the state, but self-lawmaking, or autonomy.
- C. *The means of this realization, or cunning of Reason, is the passions of the individual as both subject and object of history, and its form is the State.*
1. *Passion* is the self-interested action that seizes the human will.
  2. The *individual as subject of history* is the “Great Man,” or world historical individual (Caesar, Alexander, Napoleon, Luther), who moves the world spirit forward by sacrificing his happiness to his passions. The cunning of reason uses the Great Man to advance the spirit.
  3. The *individual as object* refers to the private individual or victim of history.
  4. By *state*, Hegel means the culture of a people and the organizing principles that allow for the integration of individual in civil society into a larger moral whole.
- D. *The national spirit is a moment in the development of the World Spirit and for each such moment as for all, the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the setting of dusk.*
1. Each stage of the growing awareness of freedom by spirit is exemplified in a particular people or nation, which at that moment is the highest expression of the world spirit.
  2. In Oriental despotisms, ONE is free: the absolute despot can legislate for himself. The Greeks and Romans learned that SOME are free: freedom was extended only to citizens, a small minority of the total population. The Germanic peoples, through Christianity, realize that ALL men are free.
  3. The *Owl of Minerva* refers to historical understanding or wisdom, which comes only when something is done.

### III. Consequences of Hegel’s philosophy.

- A. Historicism can lead to historical relativism.
- B. Hegel’s philosophy can be politically conservative, nationalistic, militaristic, and statist.
- C. Hegel implies the end of history.
- D. History and its process of dialectical development stand as a reproach to enlightened materialism and science.

### Essential Reading:

Hegel, G.W.F. *Introduction to the Philosophy of History* (trans. Leo Rauch). (Indianapolis: 1988).

### Supplementary Reading:

Russell, Bertrand. *A History of Western Philosophy*. (New York: 1972), pp. 730-746.

Copleston, Frederick. *A History of Philosophy*, Bk. III, Vol. VII. (New York: 1985), pp.189-247.

Avineri, Schlomo. *Hegel’s Theory of the Modern State*. (Cambridge: 1974).

McNeill, William. *Plagues and Peoples*. (Peter Smith, 1992).

Popper, Karl. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. (Princeton: 1966).

### Questions to Consider:

1. Compare Hegel’s linear view of history with the Christian view of history as articulated by St. Augustine.
2. What ethical views, if any, follow from Hegel’s philosophy of history?

## Lecture Fifty-Four

### Marx—Historical Materialism

Darren Staloff, Ph.D.

**Scope:** Karl Marx's historical materialism is an attempt to answer Hegel's idealist explanation of history in purely naturalistic or scientific terms. A rational reconstruction of Marx and Engels's historical materialism begins with Marx's reference to the problem of history. Marx's historical materialism posits two fundamental entities: actual historical persons and the forces of production. For Marx, real history begins only when technology has solved the problem of production.

### Outline

- I. Karl Marx's historical materialism is an attempt to answer Hegel's idealist explanation of history in purely naturalistic or scientific terms.
- II. A rational reconstruction of the historical materialism of Marx and Engels begins with Marx's reference to the problem of history. This set of three critical issues constitutes background assumptions and themes.
  - A. The first issue is one of philosophical anthropology; namely, man is the only creature that produces with cognitive forethought. This is *homo faber*, man the tool-maker.
  - B. The second issue is anthropological and natural historical. Marx observed that all organized human production includes a division of labor.
  - C. The third issue is the scarcity of goods to supply all the material and cultural wants of society's members. The result is that one part of society establishes itself as a ruling stratum to enclose a disproportionate share of the social income. This is heteronomous behavior that cannot be avoided.
- III. Marx's historical materialism posits two fundamental entities: actual historical persons and the forces of production.
  - A. The forces of production are comprised of two elements: the means of production and abstract labor power.
    1. The means of production include tools, facilities or productive spaces, and "raw materials," or the objects of labor.
    2. Abstract labor power encompasses not only musculature, but also the various techniques and skills of labor as they develop over time.
  - B. Persons and productive forces stand in various relations called "relations of production."

1. The productive relations are strongly determined by the stage of historical development of the forces of production. As technology changes, so do the relations of production.
  2. The sum total of these productive relations constitutes the economic structure of the society.
  3. The rest of the social structure Marx called the society's "superstructure," which is epiphenomenal to, or determined by, the economic base.
- C. Marx offers several laws of development of the "modes of production" based on his historical research: the slave mode, the peasant mode, and the capitalist mode.
    1. Every mode of production persists as long as it is capable of fostering the further development of the forces of production.
    2. Every new mode of production gestates in its previous society before it replaces the old mode of production. We do not find only one mode of production at any single moment.
    3. The capitalist's mode of production is the first truly dynamic economic structure.
- IV. Scarcity can be solved under the bourgeois mode of production.
    - A. Unfortunately, given disproportionate distribution of incomes, most people lack the material resources to consume the commodities industrial capitalism can produce. This results in periodic and deepening recessions and depressions.
    - B. Communism represents the solution to the problem of history. By redressing the problem of disparate incomes, the last fetter to the development of productive forces is removed and the problem of scarcity is solved on a global basis.
    - C. For Marx, real history begins only when technology has solved the problem of production.

## Lecture Fifty-Five

### Marx—On Alienation

Dennis Dalton, Ph.D.

#### Essential Reading:

Marx, Karl. *Selected Writings*. (Hackett, 1994), pp. 40-186.

#### Supplementary Reading:

Russell, Bertrand. *A History of Western Philosophy*. (New York: 1972), pp. 782-790.

Cohen, G. A. *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defense*. (Princeton: 1978), pp. 1-248.

Copleston, Frederick. *A History of Philosophy*, Bk. III, Vol. 7. (New York: 1985), pp. 305-334.

Althusser, L. *Montesquieu, Rousseau and Marx: Politics and History*. (New York: 1982).

Arineri, S. *Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*. (Cambridge: 1970).

Berlin, Isaiah. *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment*. (Oxford: 1978).

Wood, John C. *Karl Marx's Economics: Critical Assessments*, 4 vols. (Croom Helm, 1987).

#### Questions to Consider:

1. Why does Marx believe that communism is the “solution of the problem of history”?
2. How does Marxian historicism differ from Hegelian?

**Scope:** Karl Marx’s revolutionary theory forecast an inevitable collapse of capitalism and success of communism that has not occurred. Yet, this theory should not be dismissed because his prediction failed. His criticisms of modern society often ring true, especially his philosophy of alienation.

Like many political theorists, Marx’s thought is rooted in a concept of human nature or of the self in a process of historical development. The natural self, defined by its basic needs of subsistence, sex, and productive labor, leads to a state of alienation. The alienated self will become emancipated through communism, but only after human nature develops and experiences the alienation of capitalism. This is Marx’s view of historical evolution.

The hallmark of Marx’s idea of alienation is his theory of work, especially of alienated labor in the capitalist system. Marx blames this economic system for the dissatisfaction that many people find in their work. Marx contends that such unhappiness is unnecessary and demands that it be changed so that we may experience fulfillment in our various forms of work.

#### Outline

- I. Marx was a critic of capitalism and philosopher of alienation.
  - A. Marx’s life.
    1. He was born in 1818 to a relatively affluent German family. He received a Ph.D. in philosophy.
    2. In his youth, he became involved in leftist politics and was exiled to Paris from Germany in 1843.
    3. In 1849, his family joined him in exile in London, where he lived until his death in 1883. Both Marx and Freud fled to London and both are memorialized there.
  - B. Marx sought revolutionary change. His project seems to have failed, but should we conclude that his theory of alienation is invalid?
- II. Like Plato, Marx proposes a tripartite theory of the self or human personality, corresponding to a three-stage vision of social evolution.
  - A. The natural self in natural society represents man’s instinctual animal needs of food, sex, and work.

- B. The second stage of human and social evolution, where these needs are distorted, is the alienated self in alienated society.
  1. Like Plato, Marx viewed his own society as profoundly corrupt, but he went beyond Plato in arguing that the social and economic institutions of modern society alienated man from other men and from himself.
  2. According to Marx, capitalism alienates men from themselves and from one another.
  3. Capitalism—and ultimately private property—perverts human values, as human beings come to value things over each other. It encourages avarice, competition, and inequality. The cash nexus becomes the criterion of all value.
  4. Capitalism enforces patriarchy and exploits and subordinates women. It encourages domination and inequality, thereby subverting natural human relationships (e.g., of love).
- C. The third stage is the classless society of communism of which Marx appears as its messianic prophet.
  1. Marx's historical determinism can be seen in his confidence that the contradictions of capitalism will inevitably lead to communism.
  2. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx describes how the greed and avarice encouraged by capitalism will undermine and inevitably destroy the regime of private property.
  3. Communist society is characterized by equality and true justice.

### III. Marx's philosophy of work is a central tenet of his humanism.

- A. Marx argues that capitalist society distorts men's innate need to work by alienating them from their labor.
  1. Under capitalism, man denies, rather than fulfills, himself through his labor. His work becomes an imposition or an addiction rather than a voluntary labor. This is unjust; work should offer fulfillment.
  2. In contemporary society, many people are alienated from or external to their labor, which they perform only under compulsion. Alienation, defined as a sense of estrangement from the product of our work, leads to a general separation from society and our humanity and the objectification of labor in a way that distorts and corrupts our need for satisfying work. Marx says we are alienated from our "species self," the ultimate object of our social evolution.
  3. Marx's ideal society is a "species society" in which the citizens define themselves and realize their "species," or fully human needs of security, love, and creative work.
- B. Marx asserts that in communist society, individuals will be able to develop themselves freely.
  1. Under communism, "the free development of each will conduce the free development of all."

2. Communism will bring genuine human fulfillment: the need for sex will be satisfied in love, and the need for work will be satisfied in meaningful labor. "From each according to his ability to each according to his need."

### IV. Is Marx still relevant?

- A. His program has never been implemented, certainly not in the Soviet Union. Marx never advocated totalitarian or despotic rule.
- B. Although his historical determinism has been discredited, his social criticism and theory of alienation remain relevant.
- C. In the end, Marx may not provide satisfactory solutions for alienation and inequality, but he does ask the right questions.
  1. The income gap between rich and poor has expanded in the industrial world during the past thirty years.
  2. Democracies often fail to provide both liberty and equality.
  3. Marx's social critique will remain valid as long as the present trend toward inequality continues.

#### Essential Reading:

Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man* (New York:1969).

#### Supplementary Reading:

Robert Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: 1978).

Isaiah Berlin, *Karl Marx* (New York: 1996).

Bertell Ollman, *Alienation: Marx's Concept of Man in Capitalist Society* (New York: 1971), especially Parts II and III.

Robert Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: 1972).

George Lichteim, *Marxism* (New York: 1982).

R. N. Carew Hunt, *The Theory and Practice of Communism* (New York: 1957).

#### Questions to Consider:

1. What does Marx mean by alienated labor? Give examples, real or hypothetical, from your knowledge of work in society and offer your own assessment of whether work must be alienating. If not, then under what conditions is it fulfilling? Be specific.
2. Marx argues that the capitalist system, rather than human nature, is responsible for social afflictions or individual suffering. Do you agree or disagree with the blame that Marx places on capitalism?
3. What questions posed or provoked by Marx's theory are most valid and compelling? Why?

## Lecture Fifty-Six

### Mill's Utilitarianism

Robert Solomon, Ph.D.

**Scope:** John Stuart Mill was the outstanding British philosopher of the nineteenth century. He was a thoroughgoing empiricist, following in the footsteps of David Hume. He was an accomplished logician, and his book on logic dominated the study of the subject for years. He was an accomplished social thinker, an economist who followed Adam Smith and an outspoken defender of individual liberty. Mill was also an early defender of women's rights and the author of *On the Subjection of Women*. His book *On Liberty* remains one of the classic texts in defense of freedom, not only from intrusive government but also from majority rule. In moral philosophy, he has become the classic defender of one of the main theories of ethics, which is known as *utilitarianism*.

### Outline

- I. Who is John Stuart Mill, and what is utilitarianism?
  - A. John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) was a precocious genius who was pushed so hard by his father that he suffered a nervous breakdown as a young man. This convinced him of the supreme importance of individual happiness, but it also impressed on him the values of a good education.
  - B. Utilitarianism is a moral philosophy based on the principle that one ought to do what brings about the most benefits and causes the least harm (“the greatest good for the greatest number”). In the tradition of English empiricism, this belief is best and most famously defended by Mill in his pamphlet, *Utilitarianism*.
- II. The history of an idea.
  - A. The importance of “utility” had been prominent in British moral philosophy since the early eighteenth century, notably in David Hume and Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham, and James Mill, John Stuart Mill's father.
    1. Jeremy Bentham baptized the philosophy and defended a quantitative “happiness calculus” for figuring out the best course of action.
    2. Bentham's interest was spurred by his interest in penal reform.
  - B. The idea of utilitarianism has been thought to be distinctively British, although more ideological versions appeared among the French *philosophes*, for example, Voltaire.
    1. The notion of utility is eminently practical, opposed to idealistic and theistic emphases on abstract rules and God's commandments.

2. The Germans, Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche among them, however, notoriously despised the concept.
    3. Utilitarianism is perfectly suited to the increasingly commercial society of nineteenth-century Western Europe.
  - C. Bentham's utilitarianism seemed to have shortcomings.
    1. The “happiness calculus” seemed to reduce ethics to accountancy, “cost/benefit analysis.”
    2. Bentham's calculus took into account both the number of people and the amount of pleasure and pain, as well as such considerations as the “proximity” of pleasure and pain.
    3. It was not clear, however, how pleasure and pain were to be distributed, leading to the now-standard objection that utilitarianism ignores questions of fairness.
    4. One of the more interesting results of Bentham's ethics was the insistence on animal welfare (“the question is not whether they think, but whether they suffer”). The animal rights movement dates from this time.

### III. Mill's utilitarianism.

- A. Mill defended utilitarianism, but he rejected Bentham's quantitative calculus.
  1. One needs to be concerned with the *quality* of pleasures, not just their quantity.
  2. This leads to a difficulty in calculation, and the precision of cost/benefit analysis is sacrificed to qualified judgment.
  3. Bentham's calculus also poses a commensurability problem: how does one person's evaluation of pleasure compare to another's?
  4. There is some question about whether “utility” refers to happiness or pleasure and pain (Bentham had equated these), interests or preferences.
- B. Two principles emerge, the principle of utility and the principle of equality.
  1. The principle of utility says that one should act for “the greatest good for the greatest number.”
  2. The principle of equality says that each person counts for one and only for one. Peter Singer's contemporary arguments about both abortion and the distribution of wealth have to do with utilitarian principles.
  3. Questions of fairness remain: how is happiness to be distributed?
  4. Mill has a theory of justice that he believes follows from his utilitarianism. Justice ultimately serves utility.
  5. In his political pamphlet *On Liberty*, Mill attempts to protect the rights of the individual against claims of a larger utility on the part of the majority. No one should interfere with a person who is



causing no harm to others; this is an early formulation of the theory of human rights.

- C. Ultimately, Mill can best be understood as an Aristotelian, defending an ethics of virtue and social awareness. What ultimately gives pleasure, then, is the sense that one is a good person—what satisfies the conscience.
- D. Mill's utilitarianism fits awkwardly with his political liberalism and his laissez-faire economic philosophy. He was well aware of this tension and, later in life, increasingly turned toward a kind of socialism as a way to resolve it.
- E. Utilitarianism suggests a valuable corrective to many a priori ways of thinking in traditional philosophy.

#### Essential Reading:

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Indianapolis: 1978).

———, *Utilitarianism* (Indianapolis: 1978).

#### Questions to Consider:

1. Can you accept utilitarianism (the greatest good for the greatest number, everyone to count for one and only one) as a standard for *all* human behavior? Do domains of human behavior exist that do not seem to meet this standard?
2. If an entire society would prosper at the severe disadvantage of a small number of citizens (for example, if the sacrifice of one innocent child would bring a great harvest to a farming community), how would a utilitarian deal with such a situation?

## Lecture Fifty-Seven

### Kierkegaard and the Leap of Faith

Phillip Cary, Ph.D.

**Scope:** Søren Kierkegaard is the Danish Christian philosopher who became the founding figure of existentialism by thinking in a new way about how faith is possible in Christendom, in the era we now call “Victorian.” Kierkegaard was an intensely serious and an extraordinarily funny writer who saw something immensely ridiculous about people who thought they were Christians just because they had been born in a “Christian country” and accepted what their pastors or (even worse) their professors told them. Kierkegaard tried to make Christian faith possible again by making it harder: holding up the example of the faith of Abraham, who was willing to sacrifice Isaac (in *Fear and Trembling*) or analyzing the hidden despair that both motivates and blocks our deepest choices, including the decision to make “the leap of faith” and become a self before God (*The Sickness unto Death*).

#### Outline

- I. Who was Kierkegaard?
  - A. A nineteenth-century Christian philosopher and theologian living in Denmark, Kierkegaard was influenced by (and reacting against) the milieu of German philosophy, especially Hegel.
  - B. Kierkegaard was a critic of the complacency of nineteenth-century Christendom (what in England would be called “Victorianism”).
  - C. A lonely man himself, he insisted on writing for “the solitary individual,” for the purpose of deepening the individual’s inward relation to God.
  - D. Because of his use of the category of “individual existence,” he became the founding figure in the movement later called “existentialism.”
- II. The project of making faith harder.
  - A. The Danish religious setting.
    1. Like Victorian England, Denmark had an established church. To be born into Danish society was to be born into the state Lutheran church (a baptismal certificate was a birth certificate).
    2. In one sense, it was very easy to be a Christian; in Denmark, everyone is born Christian.
  - B. The German philosophical setting.
    1. Hegel’s philosophy of history had described Christianity as the highest form of religious consciousness.

2. For left-wing Hegelians, like the early Marx, this meant that the next step in the progress to freedom was to transcend or abolish Christianity.
3. For right-wing Hegelians, like Kierkegaard's teachers, this meant that Christianity had been proved (by both history and philosophy) to be the true religion.
4. Hence, in yet another way it was easy to be a Christian in nineteenth-century Denmark: the professors had done you the favor of proving that Christianity was true.
5. In effect (Kierkegaard would say, in a satirical voice), the professors who gave lectures proving that Christianity is the highest religion had made believing so easy that there was really no more need for faith.

C. Kierkegaard's "fideism."

1. The crucial lesson Kierkegaard drew from this situation was that making belief too easy makes it impossible, so he set out on the opposite task: to make belief possible by making it more difficult.
2. That means, above all, not letting "objective truth" (as taught by the professors) take the place of the task of believing.
3. Hence, Kierkegaard is a critic of people who want to prove their religion—not because he thinks faith is irrational, but because he's worried about reason usurping the place of faith.
4. Kierkegaard is often labeled a "fideist" because of his insistence on faith rather than reason, but this is somewhat misleading.
5. Fideism ("faith-ism") usually means believing without good reasons or emphasizing faith to the exclusion of reason.
6. Kierkegaard's point is not that there are no good reasons for believing, but that good reasons (of the sort you get in a professor's lecture) only get in the way of making the leap of faith for yourself.

D. The strategy of indirect communication.

1. Kierkegaard was the great analyst and poet of the inner dynamics of "the leap of faith."
2. Kierkegaard spoke in admiration of Gerthold Lessing (1729–1781), the ironic and skeptical eighteenth-century philosopher who said that there was a "broad ugly ditch" between him and faith. When urged to leap over it, Lessing complained that his legs were too old for such a leap: unlike Jacobi, the man lecturing at him, Lessing understood the *difficulty* of making the "leap of faith."
3. Hence, Kierkegaard cannot just play professor and tell us to make the leap of faith.
4. Instead, he adopts a strategy of indirect communication, writing many of his most famous books under pseudonyms, such as Johannes de Silentio, the "author" of *Fear and Trembling*.

5. Johannes is one who admires Abraham's faith but has not yet managed to find the legs for such a leap.

III. A faith like Abraham's (*Fear and Trembling*).

- A. Kierkegaard's most famous book is an appreciation of the faith of Abraham in response to God's command to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22).
- B. How to speak of the greatness of Abraham?
  1. In contrast to the great speculative (Hegelian) philosophers who "are not content to stop at faith but want to go further," Johannes is in awe of the faith of Abraham, which is beyond him.
  2. Johannes scorns the preachers who speak sentimentally and enthusiastically about the sacrificial faith of Abraham and leave out the dread (*angst*), the fear and trembling, as he took up the knife to slay his own son.
  3. Yet, he is also disgusted by the attempt "to speak inhumanly of a great deed, as though some thousands of years were a great distance"—as if the historical distance between ourselves and Abraham could be traversed only by great scholars like Hegel.
  4. He endeavors rather "to speak humanly about it, as though it had occurred yesterday, letting only the greatness (of Abraham) be the distance."
  5. In short, he wants the greatness of Abraham to be a challenge and invitation to us to have a faith like his.
- C. The knight of faith.
  1. Johannes contrasts the philosophical move of "infinite resignation" to the leap of faith.
  2. Infinite resignation means inwardly giving up all finite goods (as Abraham might give up Isaac, or Kierkegaard his fiancée).
  3. Whereas "the knight of infinite resignation" inwardly gives everything up, the knight of faith goes further: he is blithely confident that he will get it all back (as the New Testament praises Abraham's faith that he would receive Isaac back from the dead).
  4. Hence, Abraham was ready to receive Isaac back with joy, not bent out of shape by the effort of giving him up.
- D. Abraham and Christian faith.
  1. The key features of Abraham's faith in *Fear and Trembling* are the key features of Christian faith described in Kierkegaard's later work.
  2. For instance, we must not let the historical distance of thousands of years separate us from Christ any more than from Abraham. We must be contemporaneous with Christ.
  3. After all (Kierkegaard points out in his *Philosophical Fragments*), the original disciples had no easier time believing than we do: they

had Jesus himself in front of them, but that did not make it any easier to believe that this particular man was God.

4. Christian faith is a constant offense to reason, because it is not a Platonic search for the infinite and universal (as with the knight of infinite resignation). Rather, it seeks an infinite happiness in a finite being, the man Jesus (who, like Abraham, expects God will keep his promise by bringing the finite thing he loves back from the dead).

#### IV. The dialectic of existence.

##### A. Kierkegaard as dialectical thinker.

1. Hegel had proposed that history had a logical rationale, unfolding according to what he called “the dialectic.”
2. Marx insisted that the dialectic of history was driven not by ideas (as in Hegel’s idealism), but by material forces of economy and society (especially class conflict).
3. Kierkegaard adopted Hegelian dialectic to describe the stages of an individual’s existence as he or she develops inwardly toward faith.

##### B. Kierkegaard saw three basic “stages on life’s way” on the road to faith.

1. One begins in the *aesthetic* stage of pursuing immediate pleasures or a merely artistic life (e.g., the Bohemian student life described in volume 1 of *Either/Or*).
2. Through repentance and marriage, one arrives at the *ethical* stage advocated by one of Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms (Judge William) in *Either/Or*, volume 2.
3. Beyond that are two levels of the *religious* stage, corresponding to the knight of infinite resignation and the knight of faith.
4. The distinctive feature of the higher religious level (religiousness B or Christian faith) is the paradox or scandal of seeking the infinite in the finite—faith in the incarnation of God in Christ (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript* and *Training in Christianity*).

##### C. Subjectivity and becoming a self before God.

1. The crucial aspect of these stages is that passing from one to the other always requires an inward movement of decision and, hence, is preceded by anxiety (*angst*) and hindered by despair.
2. For instance, the highest level of the aesthetic stage is a form of despair (the fashionable literary despair of alienated artists), which serves to educate a young man that the merely aesthetic life is ultimately unsatisfactory.
3. The dialectics of Hegel and Marx unfold according to a rational historical necessity. Unlike them, Kierkegaard’s dialectic of existence is never necessary or predetermined, but always dependent on the individual’s decision, made in anxiety or despair or some other passion unknown to the speculative philosopher lecturing on the “objective truth.”

4. Hence, for Kierkegaard, “truth is subjectivity,” i.e., the highest truth that an “existing individual” can attain is “an objective uncertainty... held fast in passionate inwardness.” This is the definition of faith (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*).
5. The whole process means not only finding God, but also finding oneself, “becoming a self before God,” which is to become an existing self in the highest sense (*Sickness unto Death*).

#### Essential Reading:

Sören Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (New York: 1986).

———, *The Sickness unto Death* (New York: 1989).

#### Supplementary Reading:

Sören Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life* (New York: 1992).

Walter Lowrie, *A Short Life of Kierkegaard* (Princeton: 1970).

#### Questions to Consider:

1. Is it a good idea to “try to make faith harder”? (Is our situation today any different from Kierkegaard’s in that respect?)
2. Are we haunted by a kind of secret despair at the key moments of decision in our lives, or is Kierkegaard exaggerating?

## Lecture Fifty-Eight

### Schopenhauer—The World as Will and Idea

Kathleen Higgins, Ph.D.

**Scope:** Arthur Schopenhauer is most notorious for his philosophical pessimism, but he was one of the most ingenious and influential thinkers of the nineteenth century. He was an important influence on Nietzsche, Freud, Wittgenstein, and Thomas Mann. The core of his theory is that reality—the “thing-in-itself”—is not, as Kant claimed, unknowable. It is immediately known to us as Will, through our particular activities of willing. The Will is the reality behind all appearance, but the Will is full of self-conflict, so the world is not a harmonious place and human life has no hope of satisfaction. Only aesthetic experience and sainthood promise some escape from the torment of life’s sufferings.

### Outline

- I. Who was Schopenhauer?
  - A. Schopenhauer (1788–1860) was a German philosopher. He was the son of a wealthy merchant and his mother was a well-known novelist.
  - B. Although he earned a doctorate in philosophy, Schopenhauer never held a regular university post. He demonstrated his contrary character, however, when he volunteered to teach a course at the University of Berlin exactly opposite the very famous philosopher G. W. F. Hegel. (He did not get any students.)
  - C. His dissertation, *The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, demonstrated his immersion in the history of Western philosophy.
  - D. Schopenhauer’s main book, which he rewrote through three editions during his lifetime, was *The World as Will and Representation*. This book became a major influence on the German romantic movement.
  - E. He was a faithful follower of the great German philosopher Immanuel Kant, although his variations and interpretations of Kant’s philosophy would certainly have horrified his philosophical hero.
  - F. His other Western model was Plato. Steeped in the classics in his early education, Schopenhauer turned Plato, as he had Kant, into raw material for his own ideas.
  - G. The third major influence on Schopenhauer was the eastern philosophy of Buddhism.
- II. The world has two aspects, according to Schopenhauer: the world as representation and the world as will.
  - A. Schopenhauer, like most of his German contemporaries, was an idealist.
    1. He claims, “The world is my representation.”
    2. “The world hangs by a single thread, the consciousness in which it exists.”
    3. By this, he means that the world that appears to us is “phenomenon” (Kant’s term).
    4. Consciousness and matter are correlates, the framework of phenomena.
  - B. Nevertheless, Schopenhauer does not think that the world as representation is ultimately real.
    1. The only reality is the Will.
      - a. The Will is the noumenal reality that Kant called the thing-in-itself.
      - b. The entities that appear to us (the phenomenal world) are simply manifestations of the Will.
      - c. These entities relate to each other in an orderly way.
    2. Everything in the phenomenal world conforms to “the principle of sufficient reason,” which holds that the existence of every object traces back to its necessary connection with every other thing. In other words, every phenomenon can be causally explained in terms of the other phenomena, because it is related to all of them.
    3. This means that the individual existence of all objects and beings in the phenomenal world—including us—can be explained in terms of other phenomena. And most such entities are in a miserable, not joyful, condition.
  - C. According to Schopenhauer, Plato recognized that although the apparent world is not reality, the apparent world is ordered into natural kinds.
    1. Plato explained the existence of natural kinds and the orderly relationships of types of phenomena with each other (in the food chain, for example), in terms of the forms or ideas.
    2. Each kind of thing is patterned on a more perfect prototype.
    3. Although each phenomenal object falls short of perfection, our reason allows us to recognize the form or idea that served as its model.
    4. The wise person, according to Plato, turns attention away from the changing and imperfect phenomenal objects to the forms, which are eternal and perfect.

### III. Schopenhauer's pessimism has profound philosophical foundations.

- A. One of the first Europeans to do a serious study of Indian philosophy, Schopenhauer became convinced of the truth of the Buddha's insight that all of life is troubled.
  - B. Schopenhauer sees the conflict of human beings with one another to be evidence for this truth.
  - C. Schopenhauer defends his own version of the Buddha's four noble truths:
    1. Life involves suffering.
    2. Desire causes suffering.
    3. Suffering will cease only if desire ceases.
    4. The solution to suffering is renunciation of the will.
  - D. Renunciation of the will results automatically from overcoming the illusion that our individual existence is our real existence.
    1. Schopenhauer claims that the core of all religions and ethical systems is this insight that the suffering of any phenomenon is our own suffering.
    2. If we truly recognize this truth, we lose the motivation to struggle with others.
    3. Because we are fundamentally willful, being manifestations of the will, most of us continue "the pendulum swing from pain to boredom" and back.
- IV. For those who do not renounce the will entirely, the only "Sabbath from this penal servitude of willing" is aesthetic experience.
- A. When we encounter something beautiful, our souls cease clamoring for some temporary satisfaction and take joy in the simple appearance of the beautiful thing.
  - B. According to Schopenhauer, the person becomes "the pure, will-less subject of intellect," à la Kant. The object is seen, not as a particular object, but as a manifestation of a Platonic Idea.
    1. Both subject and object, accordingly, are raised from their status as mere phenomena to a more universal aspect.
    2. Schopenhauer claims that it does not matter whether the idea is recognized through a tree in front of one or through a painting of a tree that flourished thousands of years ago. As Plato argued, things around us are flawed or imperfect, a degeneration of the ideal.
  - C. The experience of beauty, whether through art or nature, brings a person close to insight into the true nature of things.
  - D. Schopenhauer gives music a unique status among the arts: it bypasses presentation of the ideas and presents the movements of the will itself. This is why it has such a powerful effect on our emotions. Music, he says at one point, is an embodiment of the world.

- E. Although aesthetic experience elevates a person's attention from everyday objects (or even one's own will) to their more universal aspect, its effect is temporary.
- F. Ultimately, only the great saints of every tradition escape the torment of the will by silencing it.
- G. From the ordinary point of view, the state of mind of the saints is merely extinction, and most people are not motivated to follow their example. But from their point of view, the saints of the world give universal testimony that their state is one of bliss.

#### Essential Reading:

Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, two volumes (Dover, 1969). An abridged version, edited by David Berman, is also available from Charles Tuttle Press, 1995.

#### Supplementary Reading:

R. Safranski, *Schopenhauer and the Wild Years of Philosophy* (Cambridge: 1990).

Patrick Gardiner, *Schopenhauer* (Penguin, 1963).

D. W. Hamlyn, *Schopenhauer* (London: 1980).

*Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer* (Cambridge: 1990).

Kathleen M. Higgins, "Schopenhauer" in *The Routledge History of Philosophy*, Volume VI (London: 1997).

#### Questions to Consider:

1. What does it mean to say that the world is "my representation"? Given Schopenhauer's rich fund of scientific knowledge and infamous worldly enjoyments, how can he seem to be denying the existence of the natural, material world? Why does he consider it a mistake to use either *subject* or *object* as the starting point for a philosophical system?
2. What is Schopenhauer's case for extending the concept of the will from our own case to the case of everything else in the phenomenal world? Why does he think that the order of nature indicates that all beings are manifestations of the same will? Does he therefore believe that individuals have free will?
3. Why does music play such a special role in Schopenhauer's hierarchy of the arts? Why does Schopenhauer claim that "a perfectly accurate and complete explanation of music" would be "the true philosophy"?
4. Why does Schopenhauer believe that it is a mistake to fear death?

## Lecture Fifty-Nine

### Nietzsche—Perspectivism and the Will to Power

Robert Solomon, Ph.D.

**Scope:** Friedrich Nietzsche marks the culmination of the increasingly empirical, experimental, skeptical, individualistic tendencies of modern thought. He is most famous, no doubt, for his outrageous proclamation that “God is dead.” But his ideas about metaphysics and the theory of knowledge (epistemology) and his views about morality are even more striking and troublesome. What was most upsetting to his early readers was his emphasis on what he called “the Will to Power,” which served as both a replacement for metaphysics and an explanatory hypothesis regarding belief and values. This lecture will focus on Nietzsche’s so-called perspectivism: the view that there is no metaphysical “thing-in-itself” and, therefore, no singular truth or truths about the world. Nevertheless, Nietzsche does present what would seem to be a singular thesis about the world, “the Will to Power.” The point of the lecture is to clarify both of these central theses.

#### Outline

- I. Who was Nietzsche?
  - A. He was a German philosopher (1844–1900), who preferred to think of himself as “a good European.”
  - B. He was trained as a classical philologist but taught as a professor for only a few years in his twenties, at the University of Basel.
  - C. He spent most of his productive life wandering alone in the more beautiful parts of northern Italy and Switzerland.
  - D. Nietzsche began his philosophical career enamored with the pessimistic writings of Schopenhauer, though he later rejected him.
  - E. He also aspired to be a musician.
    1. His formative years were spent in friendship with the great operatic composer Richard Wagner.
    2. Music provided a model for his writing and his philosophy.
- II. Nietzsche’s philosophy is experimental, skeptical, and individualistic. His “perspectivism,” not so-named by Nietzsche, is a rejection of traditional metaphysics and epistemology.
  - A. Nietzsche’s perspectivism is a critique of traditional metaphysics and epistemology that presume or imply an “external” or “objective” world of which we have knowledge.
    1. Metaphysics (the word was invented by Aristotle) is the quest for true being beneath, behind, above, or within the world of appearance.
    2. Nietzsche insists that there are no such deeper truths, that the world of appearances is the only world (or rather, worlds).
    3. But with the rejection of the “true” world, Nietzsche says, the distinction between appearance and reality breaks down, so the merely “apparent” world disappears as well.
  - B. Nietzsche insists that there is no objective world to be known apart from our perceptions, conceptions, and interpretations of it.
    1. He writes, “there are no facts, only interpretations.”
    2. Accordingly, not only is there no single truth about the world, but there is no “God’s eye view” and no privileged perspective (from philosophy, religion, metaphysics). Even science had become dogmatic and, thus, was only one perspective on the world.
  - C. This thinking can be interpreted as “deconstructive”—a rejection of traditional epistemology and metaphysics, or it can be seen as part of a larger campaign.
    1. The insistence on the multiplicity of perspectives is bound up with Nietzsche’s naturalism, his attack on the “other-worldly,” his conception of the “death of God,” and the rejection of Judeo-Christian morality.
    2. It also gives rise to a pragmatic (even Darwinian) understanding of knowledge as a tool for survival, nothing more. To Hume and Kant, Nietzsche says we believe certain things because they are practical.
    3. Nietzsche’s perspectivism, or getting rid of traditional metaphysics, thus anticipates the pragmatism of the American philosophers William James and John Dewey.
- III. The idea of the Will to Power.
  - A. The idea of the Will to Power is derived from Schopenhauer, who made the concept of the Will the centerpiece of his philosophy.
  - B. But Nietzsche rejected Schopenhauer, not only his pessimism (the idea that life is without meaning), but also his metaphysics.
    1. For Schopenhauer, the Will was the thing-in-itself, the ultimate reality. But Nietzsche does not believe in ultimate reality in this sense.
    2. Nietzsche also has deep suspicions about power. He does not mean “power over others” or political might.
    3. Nor does he mean to suggest (as Schopenhauer insisted) that there is a singular “thing” called the Will to Power. It’s not one thing, but many.

- C. What Nietzsche means by Will to Power can be read in at least two different ways:
1. As a limited thesis about the motivation of certain actions.
  2. As a grand metaphysical thesis about the workings of the universe.
  3. The latter flies in the face of both Nietzsche's perspectivism and his general attack on systematic and metaphysical philosophy.
  4. The former proves to be a valuable corrective to the usual hedonistic (pleasure-pain) explanation of human behavior, which has a long tradition from the ancient Greeks to the modern British.
- D. In a general way, however, Nietzsche's emphasis on the Will to Power can be read as a celebration of the passionate (Dionysian) life.
- E. People, in fact, generally act to gain status, not from the hedonistic motives usually ascribed to them. Theirs is, in other words, a Will to Power.
- IV. The postulation of a Will to Power has profound implications concerning the origins of morality.
- A. In other words, all of morality is an expression of the Will to Power, the will of the strong to realize one's talents and possibilities.
  - B. Nietzsche's famous thesis is that morality arose from the reactive resentment of the least empowered members of ancient society.
  - C. What we call morality (Judeo-Christian morality) is an expression of a weak and defensive Will to Power.
  - D. Nietzsche distinguishes master and slave morality; slave morality provides the "genealogical" account of our modern concept of morality.
- V. Nietzsche's emphasis on the Will to Power, combined with his distinction between master and slave morality and his celebration of strength over weakness (plus a few other themes, such as his belief in eugenics) made his thought attractive to German National Socialism.
- A. But Nietzsche was no Nazi, and he would have despised what the Nazis stood for.
  - B. Nietzsche's tortured legacy had much to do with the manipulations of his sister, who was a proto-Nazi and had some dealings with Hitler.
  - C. She promoted his works (and unpublished notes) in the early 1930s, giving his oeuvre a distinctly Nazi tint.
  - D. But Nietzsche, in fact, was a rather benign, courteous, and quiet man, an anti-anti-Semite, if anything.

#### Essential Reading:

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: 1966).

———, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, translated by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: 1967).

———, *The Will to Power*, translated by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: 1967).

R. J. Hollingdale, ed., *A Nietzsche Reader* (Harmondsworth, 1977).

Walter Kaufmann, ed., *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: 1954).

———, ed., *Basic Writings of Nietzsche* (New York: 1968).

Richard Schacht, ed., *Nietzsche: Selections* (New York: 1993).

#### Supplementary Reading:

Bernd Magnus and Kathleen M. Higgins, *Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche* (New York: 1996).

Kathleen Higgins and Robert Solomon, eds., *Reading Nietzsche* (New York: 1988).

———, *What Nietzsche Really Said* (New York: 2000).

Peter Stern, *Nietzsche*, in the Modern Masters series (New York: 1978).

Michael Tanner, *Nietzsche*, in the Past Masters series (Oxford, 1994).

Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche—Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton, 1974).

Alexander Nehamas, *Life as Literature* (Cambridge, MA: 1985).

Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins, *The Will to Power: The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche*, The Teaching Company, 1999.

#### Questions to Consider:

1. Describe Nietzsche's brand of "epistemological nihilism." Does he believe that there is ultimately no truth of the matter and that we are simply the kind of creatures who need to believe that there is? Does he believe that there is a truth of the matter, but that we simply cannot know it? Or does he believe that the whole question is simply beside the point, and that we debase ourselves by searching for it?
2. What is the Will to Power? To what extent do you think this phrase unavoidably refers to power over other people? In what sense does it refer to self-discipline and self-mastery?

## Lecture Sixty

### Nietzsche—The Death of God, Morality, and Self-Creation

Kathleen Higgins, Ph.D.

**Scope:** This lecture will focus on Nietzsche's infamous attack on Judeo-Christian religion and morality and the project of self-creation with which he seeks to replace them. Again, we see an apparent contradiction or tension in Nietzsche's thought. He is, on the one hand, very much a naturalist. He does not believe in free will. And he believes that each of us is largely determined by our biology. On the other hand, he shares with the existentialists a keen sense of responsibility for self and individuality. The solution to this paradox is contained in the phrase (borrowed from Pindar) "Become who you are!"

#### Outline

- I. The notion that "God is dead" serves as an emblem for many of Nietzsche's central theses. The theologian Ludwig Feuerbach had argued that the postulation of gods was a reflection of the people who projected them, (particularly in the case of monotheism), a position Nietzsche accepted. Nietzsche insisted, however, that the death of God did not mean that mankind's fate was one of complete unhappiness.
  - A. Such a belief embodies his perspectivism, in that there is no "God's eye view," no single viewpoint or method (from science, religion, art, and so on) that serves as the true view of things.
  - B. It also embodies his attack on the idea of a true morality, valid for everyone everywhere. Values are "relative" to a time, a place, a set of circumstances and customs.
  - C. This belief also refers to the idea (later argued by Jean-Paul Sartre) that there is no divine plan or design for what or who we are or what we can be. Although this seems discouraging, Nietzsche claims that humanity, in turn, must construct its own destiny.
  - D. Nevertheless, Nietzsche must be counted as a most "spiritual" philosopher, despite his heralded attacks on religion and his rejection of a singular, all-powerful Judeo-Christian God.
- II. Master and slave morality.
  - A. Nietzsche employs his perspectivism with regard to personal identity in his distinction between master and slave moralities.
  - B. Master morality is born of strength and self-confidence.

- C. Slave morality is born of weakness. It is a morality of resentment, of defensiveness—of reaction, not action. The slavish attitude is prevalent in Western civilization, nowhere more evident than in widespread monotheistic beliefs.
- D. Nietzsche does not tell us that one of these is the "correct" morality, but there is no question which one Nietzsche praises and prefers.

III. "Become who you are!" is an idea Nietzsche takes from the Greek poet Pindar.

- A. The development of self according to slave morality tends to be a pathetic conformity, a "herd" morality. Such conditions rob the individual of potential.
- B. The development of self according to master morality emphasizes independence and excellence, much like the ethics of the ancient Greeks.
  1. Thus, ethics collapses into aesthetics and the ideal is to be a *beautiful* person, to "give style to your character."
  2. We cannot go against our natures but should strive to discover and cultivate those virtues and talents unique to each of us.
  3. Nietzsche's famous *Übermensch* ("overman"), coined in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, is an exemplar of such self-creation, free from the influence of the "herd."
  4. The pathetic example of the slave's self-realization, by contrast, is "the last man," the ultimate couch potato, conformist, full of contentment, and (according to Nietzsche) an object of disgust.
  5. By contrast, the *Übermensch* may heroically make a virtue of his own mortality.

IV. Nietzsche does not reject all values.

- A. He is not a "nihilist." The notion that "God is dead" doesn't make life easier, but more difficult. In other words, we must make our own values.
- B. He insists that valuing is an inescapable aspect of human nature.
  1. Being judgmental, by contrast, is a habit we would just as soon get rid of.
  2. The question is always *which values* and *what kind of a person (or people)* would so value? Values are creative—we make them ourselves.
- C. What Nietzsche values above all is *life*, that is, a life filled with passion, with creativity.
  1. Saying "yes" to one's life with all its pain and sufferings, as well as its pleasures, is the highest value.
  2. The doctrine of eternal recurrence is Nietzsche's best example of such "yea-saying." He suggests we consider our lives on their own



terms instead of always looking for something beyond us for satisfaction.

3. The prospect of eternal recurrence—the idea that our lives could endlessly repeat themselves—will allow us to recognize the value and meaning of our own experience.

### Essential Reading:

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: 1974), *On the Genealogy of Morals* (New York: 1967), *Twilight of the Idols*, and *The Anti-Christ*, in *The Viking Portable Nietzsche*, Kaufmann, ed. (New York: 1954).

Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality* (Berkeley: 1994).

Alexander Nehamas, *Life as Literature* (Cambridge: 1985).

Kathleen Higgins and Robert Solomon, eds., *Reading Nietzsche* (New York: 1988).

———, *What Nietzsche Really Said* (New York: 2000).

———, *The Will to Power: The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche*, The Teaching Company, 1999.

### Questions to Consider:

1. Was Nietzsche a nihilist? If not, why did he reject conventional morality and religion? What values did he believe in?
2. Nietzsche proclaimed, “God is dead.” What did he mean by this? Do you agree with his diagnosis?
3. Nietzsche distinguishes between “good and bad” and “good and evil.” How does he understand the difference between “bad” and “evil”? Does “good” mean the same thing in the two pairs of terms? If not, how does it differ in each?

## Glossary

**Alienation:** For Marx, a sense of estrangement from the product of our work, which leads to a general separation from society and our humanity and the objectification of labor in a way that distorts and corrupts our need for satisfying work.

**Categorical imperative:** The supreme principle of morality, or moral law, according to Immanuel Kant. The first formulation: “Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law” (for everyone to follow).

**Dialectic of existence:** Borrowed from Hegelian dialectic by Kierkegaard, a method with which to describe the stages of an individual’s existence as he or she develops inwardly toward faith.

**Existentialism:** A philosophical movement concerned with problems of human existence, originated by Kierkegaard and developed by twentieth-century existentialists, such as Heidegger in *Being and Time*.

**Fideism** (from the Latin word *fides*, meaning “faith”): A religious or philosophical position that emphasizes faith to the exclusion of reason.

**Forms of intuition** (or sensibility): In Kant’s philosophy, space and time, which are forms imposed by the human mind on experiences and are necessary conditions for having experiences at all.

**Hermeneutics of suspicion:** Nietzsche’s idea that one should be skeptical about everything, especially the highly praised.

**Hypothetical imperative:** A principle stating what a person ought to do if he or she wants to fulfill a certain desire or purpose. Such imperatives play a significant role in Kant’s moral theory.

**Idealism:** The principle that reality is fundamentally mental in nature.

**Kingdom of Ends principle:** According to Kant, the principle that we should act toward all other rational beings as if we were all members of a “Kingdom of Ends” whose free actions and choices are worth respecting.

**Master morality:** According to Nietzsche, master morality is born of strength and self-confidence. The development of self according to master morality emphasizes independence and excellence, much like the ethics of the ancient Greeks.

**Noumenal world:** In Kant’s philosophy, the world of things as they are in themselves and not merely as they appear to us.

**Perspectivism:** Per Nietzsche, the truth of things emerges only when we see as many perspectives as possible.

## Biographical Notes

**Phenomenal world:** For Kant, the world of appearances.

**Positivism:** The description of sensory phenomena as the only sure foundation for knowledge.

**Practical reason:** The capacity to deliberate practically about what we ought to do and how we ought to live. The distinction between practical reason and theoretical reason (reasoning about matters of fact or about what is the case) plays a significant role in Kant's philosophy.

**Principle of equality:** Per Mill, each person should count as one and only one.

**Principle of humanity:** The second formulation of Kant's categorical imperative: "Act so that you always use humanity in your own person, as well as in the person of every other, never as a means, but at the same time as an end."

**Principle of sufficient reason:** Schopenhauer's belief that every object stands in a necessary relation to other objects.

**Principle of utility:** For Mill, the notion that one should always act for the sake of the greater good.

**Scarcity:** The Marxian idea that every society that has ever existed has been unable to produce enough goods to satisfy everyone in the society.

**Slave morality:** Per Nietzsche, slave morality is born of weakness and is a morality of resentment, of defensiveness. The development of self according to slave morality tends to be a pathetic conformity, a "herd" morality.

**Synthetic a priori truths:** In Kant's philosophy, truths are synthetic in the sense that they are about matters of fact, not merely about the meanings of words (not "analytic"), and yet are universal and necessary because they are presupposed by all experience (i.e., a priori).

**Transcendental deduction of the categories:** In Kant's philosophy, the attempt to demonstrate that categories of the understanding, such as substance and causality, are necessary presuppositions of all experiences.

**Übermensch:** Nietzsche's concept from *Thus Spake Zarathustra*; literally, the "superman," an exemplar of self-creation, free from the influence of the "herd."

**Utilitarianism:** For Mill, the greatest good for the greatest number.

**Will:** For Schopenhauer, the fundamental basis of the reality that we observe.

**Will to Power:** For Nietzsche, both a limited thesis about the motivation of certain actions and a grand metaphysical thesis about the workings of the universe. In a general way, his emphasis on the Will to Power can be read as a celebration of the passionate (Dionysian) life.

**Burke, Edmund** (1729–1797). Burke was born in Dublin to a Catholic mother and a Protestant father. He was educated at a Quaker grammar school and later studied classics at Trinity College. Having found law not to his liking, he dedicated himself to scholarship and politics. His first two books, *A Vindication of Natural Society* (1756) and *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas on the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756), were respectively a political satire and a book on aesthetics. He also worked for a time on the *Annual Register*. In 1766, Burke became a member of parliament on the side of Rockingham and the Whig party. During the American Revolution, he was heralded by the American colonists for voicing support in Commons for their efforts to win independence. Although he supported the American war for independence, he condemned the French Revolution. His best-known work, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), is an eloquent defense of tradition and an attack on the excesses committed by the French revolutionaries.

**Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich** (1770–1831). Hegel was born at Stuttgart, the son of a civil servant. In 1788, he enrolled at the University of Tübingen, where he studied philosophy and theology. For six years after college, Hegel served as a private tutor. In 1801, he accepted an appointment teaching philosophy at the University of Jena, where in 1805, he attained the rank of professor. At Jena, he and Friedrich Schelling edited the *Critical Journal of Philosophy*, and Hegel finished his *Phenomenology of Mind*. Hegel edited a newspaper during the Napoleonic occupation of Prussia and, from 1808 to 1816, he served as headmaster of an academy in Nuremberg. In 1818, he became a professor of philosophy at the University of Berlin, where he completed his architectonic philosophical system and published his *Philosophy of Right* (1821). Hegel died of cholera in 1831 at age sixty-one.

**Kant, Immanuel** (1724–1804). Kant was born in Königsberg, East Prussia, into a devoutly pietistic Christian household. In 1740, he entered the University of Königsberg, where he remained (except for several years spent tutoring in East Prussia) for the rest of his life. At Königsberg, he studied theology, philosophy, and the natural sciences and read the works of Newton and Leibniz. He taught logic and metaphysics at Königsberg for more than thirty years. Kant published a number of works between 1747 and 1781, including his *General History of Nature and Theory of the Heavens* (1755). After a ten-year hiatus in publications, Kant entered the "critical period" of his philosophical efforts in 1781 with the publication of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, which espoused his "Copernican Revolution in philosophy." He followed this with the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1787) and *Critique of Judgment* (1790). Kant presented his deontological ethics in his *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785).

**Kierkegaard, Søren** (1813–1855). Considered by many to be the founder of existentialism, Kierkegaard was born in Copenhagen, Denmark, into an austere

Lutheran family. He earned a master's degree in 1841 from the University of Copenhagen; his thesis was entitled "On the Concept of Irony." Although he gave sermons for a time in the Lutheran pulpit, he appears to have been unwilling to enter the pastorate full time. Instead, he led a heremitic and melancholy life. Among his most influential works are *Fear and Trembling* (1843) and *Either/Or* (1843). In 1844, he published his *Philosophical Fragments* and, in 1846, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Kierkegaard signed many of his books with pseudonyms, in part because he wished to attack his own work.

**Marx, Karl** (1818–1883). Marx was born in Trier. When he was six years old, his father converted from Judaism to Lutheranism. After studying law for one year at the University of Bonn, Marx transferred to the University of Berlin, where he studied philosophy. He received a Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Jena in 1841, having written his dissertation on the ancient Greek thinkers Democritus and Epicurus. He then became editor of the newspaper *Rheinische Zeitung*, but the German authorities closed down the newspaper in 1843 because of the radical views expressed in it. Marx and his wife then moved to Paris. In 1844, Marx began a lifelong friendship with Friedrich Engels, author of *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* (1845). Marx was expelled from France in 1845 because of his radicalism. He settled in Brussels, from which he was expelled following publication of *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). He and his family finally settled in London, where they depended on Engels for money while Marx conducted his research. During the 1850s, Marx wrote for *The New York Daily Tribune*. In 1864, he helped found the International Working Men's Association (subsequently known as the "First International"). Marx became a leading authority among European radicals following the publication of the first volume of *Das Capital* in 1867.

**Mill, John Stuart** (1806–1873). Mill's father, the historian and philosopher James Mill, was a disciple of the utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham. John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography* (published posthumously in 1873) recounts his extraordinary education, which took place entirely at home. At fourteen, he spent a year in France at the home of the brother of Jeremy Bentham. Back in England, Mill established the Utilitarian Society in 1822. The following year, he assumed a position in the East India Company, which he held for thirty-five years. He wrote often during the 1820s for the Benthamite *Westminster Review*, joined discussion clubs, and was active in the London Debating Society. In 1843, he published his *System of Logic* and, in 1844, his *Principles of Political Economy*. In 1831, Mill met and became an intimate friend of Harriet Taylor, the wife of a prosperous merchant. He married Mrs. Taylor in 1851 after her husband's death. Their years of marriage (she died in 1858) were joyous and inspirational for Mill. She may have collaborated with him in writing *On Liberty*. She also influenced Mill's *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861), *Utilitarianism* (1863), and *The Subjection of Women* (1869). Mill served in

parliament during the mid-1860s, then retired to France, where he continued his writing and study.

**Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm** (1844–1900). Nietzsche was born in Rocken, Germany, the son and grandson of Lutheran ministers. His father died when he was four years old and he was raised by his mother, grandmother, and two aunts. Trained in theology and classical philology as an undergraduate in Bonn, he received his Ph.D. from the University of Leipzig without writing a dissertation, based on the strength of his published writings. The University of Basel appointed him professor of classical philology and he became a Swiss citizen. There, Nietzsche befriended Richard Wagner. Nietzsche obtained leave to serve as a volunteer medical orderly in August 1870, after the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War. Within a month, he contracted dysentery and diphtheria, which ruined his health permanently. He returned to Basel to resume teaching, but his health continued to deteriorate. He resigned his professorship and, suffering from migraine headaches and partial blindness, continued to write while living in Italy, Switzerland, and Germany. In January 1889, Nietzsche suffered a complete mental breakdown, brought about by syphilis, and spent the last eleven years of his life in a state of insanity.

**Schopenhauer, Arthur** (1788–1860). Schopenhauer was born in Danzig, the only child of a talented novelist and wealthy merchant. Schopenhauer was educated in Hamburg, Austria, England, France, and Switzerland. After his father's suicide, the teenage Schopenhauer and his mother moved to Weimar, where relations between them were strained and bitter. Having gained his inheritance and independence at age twenty-one, Schopenhauer studied medicine at the University of Göttingen. He later abandoned medicine for philosophy, moving in 1811 to Berlin, the center of philosophical inquiry on the Continent. *The World as Will and Representation* (1818) established Schopenhauer's reputation as a distinguished philosopher and helped to gain him a lectureship at the University of Berlin. Schopenhauer's difficult personality expressed itself at Berlin—he never married and appears to have had no friends. Vexed by Hegel's superior popularity, he left the university after a year. Living comfortably off his inheritance, Schopenhauer dedicated himself to his writing. He published *On the Will in Nature* in 1836, *The Basis of Morality* in 1841, and *Essays from the Parerga and Paralipomena* in 1851. He died at age seventy-two, having achieved the recognition he believed he deserved.