

7. What is a professional code of ethics? How should you use a professional code of ethics to make moral decisions?
8. How does a professional code differ from an organizational code of ethics?

NOTES

1. Martin Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
2. Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).
3. Michael Slote is a virtue theorist who also sees care as a virtue. See *Morals from Motives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
4. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).
5. Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986; 2d ed., 2003).
6. Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political and Global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
7. Rita Manning, *Caring: A Feminist Perspective on Ethics* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1992).
8. Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Philosophy of Moral Development* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981).
9. Nona Lyons, "Two Perspectives on Self, Relationship, and Morality," *Harvard Educational Review* 53 (1983), 125–145.
10. For a comparison of Confucian ethics and care, see Julia Po-Wah Lai Tao, "Two Perspectives of Care: Confucian *Ren* and Feminist *Care*," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 27, no. 2 (June 2000), 215–240.
11. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999).
12. In our discussion of Rawls, we are simplifying to a certain extent in order to get the main points across. We invite you to take a look at *A Theory of Justice* for the important and interesting details.
13. For a very comprehensive list of codes of ethics, see <http://www.ethicsweb.ca/resources/professional/codes-of-ethics.html>.

CHAPTER 5

Ethics around the World

So far, we've looked at a number of moral perspectives: Utilitarianism, respect for persons (Kant, moral rights), virtue theory, Social Contract Theory, and care. Professional codes, when they can be justified, offer an additional way to think about one's moral obligations. While these views are not exclusively Western, they tend to capture much of moral theorizing in the West. But we live in an increasingly global world, and there is certainly no reason to think that the best insights come from the West. Even if you feel comfortable with this particular mix of moral perspectives, it is important to broaden your horizons so that you can work with people who share different moral orientations.

There are three things to keep in mind as we venture beyond the West to see what other cultures have to say about living a moral life. The first is that we needn't leave the West to find other moral orientations. In the West, many people have made critiques of some of the views we've looked at and offered alternatives of their own. We will return to a discussion of some of these views following our look at different traditions.

The second thing is that there are tremendous differences in moral orientation within cultures. We've already seen differences in "Western" perspectives: Utilitarianism and Kantianism have very different views of individual persons; virtue theorists may have very different ideas of the good society and consequently what virtues people should cultivate. The same multiplicity of perspectives exists around the world. In what follows, we will be painting with a broad stroke, but keep in mind that within these perspectives, there is a great deal of disagreement. There are

countless moral traditions and strategies for moral life. There will be common strands in all of them, and some important and interesting differences. This discussion will just only scratch the surface, looking briefly at just a few perspectives.

Third, when we talked about Western perspectives, we did not look at religious views, but we will be looking at some religious views when we look beyond the West. There is a pragmatic argument for looking at secular rather than religious perspectives: People with diverse religious perspectives can agree about secular ethical perspectives even when they disagree about religious commitments. The Western theories we looked at include insights from religion but in a secular fashion. When we look at other traditions, it is often not easy to separate religion and ethics. Thus, in this chapter we will sometimes be looking at ethical perspectives that are embedded in religious perspectives.

Confucianism

We've already talked a bit about Confucius. In this section we will elaborate on his ideas and introduce Mencius, another important voice in the Confucian tradition. We will begin with some quotes from Confucius recorded in the *Analects*.¹

The Morally Superior Person (chun-tzu)

The morally superior person has many characteristics, said Confucius. For example, he or she

1. has moral equals as friends (because this is beneficial to one's own virtue) (1:8, 1:14, 16:4);
2. is not concerned with fulfilling desire (appetite) but with duty, learning, and careful speech (1:14);
3. "acts before he speaks and then speaks according to his action" (2:13);
4. always acts in accord with "moral principles," but "never abandons humanity" (4:5);

5. thinks of virtue and sanctions (4:14) and seeks improvement in self but not others (15:20);
6. in establishing his or her own character, "also establishes the character of others" (6:28);
7. becomes prominent "by helping others to be prominent" (6:28).

Some of the items in this list can be stated in terms of virtues, but in addition, the morally superior person has the following virtues: broad-mindedness (2:12, 2:14); benevolence (12:16); dignity (13:26); wisdom, humanity, and courage (14:30). He or she is also "strong, resolute, simple, and slow to speak" (13:27), and, above all, has righteousness, which is the most important virtue (17:23).

The morally superior person is not perfectly virtuous, but wants to be, and the "nine wishes" keep the morally superior person on the right track. The nine wishes are to "see clearly"; "hear distinctly"; have "warm expression," "respectful appearance," and "sincere speech"; to be "serious in handling affairs"; and to be one who "asks when in doubt"; "thinks of consequences when angry"; and "thinks of righteousness" (16:10).

Central Virtues

Confucius named three central virtues: *jen* (humanity), *li* (propriety), and *hsiao* (filial piety). He also mentioned two other virtues: loyalty and justice. Let's look in more detail at *jen*, *li*, and *hsiao*.

Humanity (*jen*). *Jen* is described as "to master oneself and return to propriety" (12:1) and "to love men" (12:22). The person with *jen* is "naturally at ease with humanity" (4:2). You can come to have *jen* if you practice five things: "earnestness, liberality, truthfulness, diligence and generosity" (17:6). Confucius seems to endorse these virtues not for their own sake but because they allow one to have good relationships with others. Wisdom and *jen* are complementary, as is the mountain to the water flowing below (6:21).

Propriety (*li*). *Li* is sometimes translated as "principle." It is not defined, but it probably refers to the established rules of a society (as long as these

are the rules which are compatible with the other virtues and as long as these rules create harmony). The rules of propriety establish harmony and this is their most important function (1:12). If rulers lead with virtue and rule with li, the people "will have a sense of shame and will set themselves right" (2:3). But li must be tempered by jen (3:3).

Filial Piety (hsiao). Hsiao is described as supporting one's parents with a feeling of reverence (2:7, 4:18). Some examples of it are staying close to parents (4:19), who are both a source of joy and anxiety (4:21). Because our relationship with our parents is such a source of moral sentiment, hsiao and brotherly respect are the root of jen (1:2).

Confucius tells us that we can sort out virtues from vices in two ways. One way is to seek moderation "to go neither too far nor not far enough" (11:15, 11:21). This is very similar to Aristotle's golden mean. One other way is to follow the golden rule: "Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you" (12:2, 15:23).

Becoming Virtuous

According to Confucius, we are born upright (6:17), though through practice we can become better or worse (17:2). To become better, he said, it helps to have good parents and do what they say (1:11). But we should also have the right friends (1:8, 1:14, 16:4). We should constantly think about virtue, study virtue, and work at becoming virtuous (4:5, 4:14, 15:20, 16:10, 19:6). We should follow the rules of propriety (1:12). He described his own development (2:4). If we take this as a pattern for becoming virtuous, it involves this progression:

1. You commit yourself to learning about virtue (age fifteen).
2. Your character will be formed (age thirty).
3. You come to know what is virtuous (age forty).
4. You come to know why it is virtuous (age fifty).
5. You accept virtue and act accordingly, though perhaps with a conflict between your inclinations and your beliefs about what virtue requires (age sixty).

6. Finally, you act virtuously, and your actions and your inclinations are in harmony (age seventy).

Confucius and Mencius

Confucius was the first in a long and important tradition in China and the Far East. Mencius was another important figure in this tradition.² Mencius agreed with Confucius that we are born good, and indeed, he made much of this in his writings (*The Book of Mencius*, 7A:15). He also said we can become worse (6A:8), and we do this by not thinking about our behavior (6A:15) or by being distracted by our desire for material things (2A:6).

Mencius believed that the foundation of morality was sentiment, our feelings of sympathy for others (jen), shame and dislike, respect and reverence, and right and wrong (li) (6A:6). Virtue involved noting our relation to others and responding with the proper sentiment and/or behavior. The most important five relations were:

- father and son—affection
- ruler and minister—righteousness
- husband and wife—attention to separate functions
- old and young—proper order
- friends—faithfulness (3A:4)

In addition, he noted four basic virtues: benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom. Benevolence was for him the primary virtue and it was based on natural empathy. He saw the flourishing of this capacity in the superior person ("the sage"), and he believed that the evil person (the characters mean "small person") was stunted.

One might ask whether Confucius and Mencius were defending a genuine virtue ethic or an ethic of principle. We see Confucius defending acting from principle while never abandoning humanity. He also gave us two strategies for acting virtuously: the golden rule and moderation. The first has a Kantian ring and supports the view that principles are prior. The second is a clear virtue strategy (Aristotle adopted a similar strategy).

Confucius has been criticized for being too willing to defend conventional moral norms and practices (for instance, in regard to his discussions of propriety). But he also says that propriety needs humanity. This suggests that propriety should give way when it conflicts with humanity. His insistence that propriety creates harmony prescribes a particular sort of propriety, one that will succeed in doing so. He also broke with convention in his insistence that education should be open to everyone, no matter what class, and in his own life, he actively sought occasions to influence convention by being a teacher of rulers.

Confucianism and Western Traditions

Confucius, Mencius, and Aristotle. Virtues are the traits that enable humans to live the best kind of human life, where the best kind of human life is defined in terms of attributes not shared with other creatures. For Aristotle, the essential attribute of humans was rationality, whereas for Confucius the essential attribute was the capacity for morality where this is fleshed out in terms of relationships grounded in compassion and respect. The Chinese word for humanity, *jen*, the primary virtue for Confucius, is composed of two characters: the character for "person" and the character for "two."

For both Aristotle and Confucius:

Human happiness is to be achieved through fulfillment of uniquely human capacities.

Virtue is constitutive of the good life and not merely the means to a good life.

Virtue is not just having a good heart, but acting well.

Virtue is having right feelings and knowing how to act on them (practical wisdom).

Virtue can only be learned, hence the emphasis on moral education.

Confucianism and Christianity. Christianity defends the idea of love for all humanity. Both Confucius and Mencius denied that we should love all others equally. Rather, they stressed the obligations we have to particular

persons, including the obligation to have a particular sentiment, or at least to behave in the fashion that special relationships require.

Confucianism and the Ideal of Autonomy. There is another important way in which Confucianism differs from Western ideals. In the United States, autonomy is a cultural ideal. We populate our films and popular fiction with characters who ride off into the sunset after they set things right. Related to this is the idea that as adults we should separate from our families and define ourselves through our own separate values, activities, and relationships. We tend to see obligation to family as one-dimensional—parents have obligations to children who, as adults, will have obligations only to their own children.

In Confucianism, independence of this sort is not seen as an ideal but as a failure to be virtuous. A good parent is one who behaves appropriately in terms of the duties of holding that role, or the duties that accompany that relationship. The moral development of the individual begins by learning to love your family, and it progresses until the individual can extend this benevolence to everyone (in the proper fashion, as dictated by the relationship involved). For this reason, and because virtue can only be learned in the family, Confucius puts an emphasis on family (the virtues for children are love and respect, and for parents, nurturance).

Hinduism

Hinduism is an incredibly diverse and prolific religious tradition originating in India. No book could ever hope to encompass all of the perspectives on ethics and integrity that this tradition holds; this section, however, attempts to give the reader a taste of Hindu ethics and a distinctive perspective from the ancient text, the *Bhagavad Gita*. This text, still popular in current Hindu traditions, is a didactic dialogue inserted approximately in the middle of an immensely long Indian epic entitled the *Mahabharata*. The focus of this larger work was an epic power struggle between two factions of a warring family, the Kurus and the Pandavas. When the Pandavas and the Kurus are drawn to war, the scene is set for the conversation recounted in the *Bhagavad Gita* between Arjuna and Krishna. Arjuna begins

to question whether he should fight his own family, even if the war appears to be for a just cause. Krishna, his charioteer, counsels the mighty warrior, and the dialogue focuses on this interaction.

The *Bhagavad Gita* is a significant Hindu philosophical work because it synthetically combines many previous themes into its narrative.³ Some of these include the illusory nature of the phenomenal world, the self, and issues of *dharma* (duty) that are prevalent in Hinduism. While extending the ideas of speculation from the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita* does not emphasize personal salvation through thought alone; instead, issues of duty, metaphysics, and ethics are all intertwined around personal action and intention.⁴ The *Bhagavad Gita* itself is relatively short compared to the immense bulk of its parent text. The text is composed of short verses, arranged into eighteen chapters, that convey the dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna.

Ethical Themes in the Bhagavad Gita

Concerning the metaphysical theme of the relation between the everyday notions one has of self (the physical individual, usually) and the ultimate source of all things (*Brahman*, or ultimate Self), Krishna has much to say. While Arjuna fears the evil that lies within killing his own relations and friends, Krishna implores him to uphold his duty as a warrior. Krishna argues that the physical self is merely an illusion, and that the ultimate Self within does not die:

He who thinks that this (soul) is a slayer, and he who thinks that this (soul) is slain; both of them are ignorant. This (soul) neither slays nor is slain. It is never born, nor does it die, nor having once been, will it again cease to be. It is unborn, eternal and everlasting. This primeval one is not slain when the body is slain. He who knows that it (the soul) is indestructible and eternal, unborn and unchanging, how can that man slay, O Partha (Arjuna), or cause another to slay? (2:19–21)

Here the idea is introduced that the world and the self (or soul) that we typically think of as being “real” are ultimately illusions; the actions

that one takes in this world really do not affect one's true personality. The real meaning of one's “self” is in relation to the ultimate Self, personified by Krishna in human guise. It is this Self that is described as “the Self of all beings” (2:30).

Even the multiplicity of forms and ways of being one observes in everyday life have their basis in ultimate Self: “Non-injury, equanimity, contentment, austerity, generosity, fame and ill-fame, are the different states of being which arise from Me alone” (10:5). Worldly creatures (including humans) are all fundamentally united with the ultimate Self: “I am the Self seated in the hearts of all beings, O Gudakesha [Arjuna]; I am the beginning, the middle, and also the end of all beings” (10:20). Arjuna eventually acknowledges that Krishna as ultimate Self “penetrates all and therefore . . . art all” (11:40). Thus, the typical individuation that we intuitively sense about our existence is an illusion; Brahman, or ultimate Self, is the true reality.

The second theme in the *Bhagavad Gita* deals with how one is to act upon becoming enlightened about the true nature of ultimate Self. Since one's empirical self is an illusion, how is one to act? What is the goal of action? Initially, Krishna points out that “no one can remain, even for a moment, without performing some action” (3:5). Thus, Arjuna must act in the situation he finds himself in; retreat and inaction are not options. The true sense of being that Arjuna aims for is enlightenment, and Krishna indicates that he should “seek refuge in intelligence; pitiful are those whose motive is the fruit (of action)” (2:49). This attitude of detachment comes from the dispelling of the empirical self: “When a man abandons all the desires of his mind, O Partha (Arjuna), and is satisfied in his self by the self alone, then he is called a man of steady mind” (2:55).

The fundamental impetus for action is the recognition that action is unavoidable and that the individual self is an illusion. Given these two claims, one must try to act in such a way as to not deny the reality of ultimate Self. Krishna describes the attributes of an enlightened person to Arjuna: “His intelligence is firmly established whose senses are completely withdrawn from the objects of sense” (2:68). By equating your self with the ultimate Self in all beings, the rewards are immense: “He who abandons all desires and acts without longing, without self-interest or

egoism, he attains peace" (2:71). Finally, this peace is the ultimate liberation from personal confinement in the body: "This is the eternal state, O Partha (Arjuna); having attained it, one is no longer confused. Fixed in it even at the time of death, one attains to the bliss of Brahman" (2:72).

The overarching theme is that action (in this case, Arjuna taking part in a war) should be performed with the realization that ego is an illusion; selfless action leads to liberation from the trap of ego attachment. Arjuna is told to "perform thy allotted work . . . perform thy action free from attachment" (3:8–9), and "being free from desire and selfishness, fight freed from thy sorrow" (3:30).

Implications for Ethics and Integrity

The *Bhagavad Gita*, while telling us something about how Indian culture conceptualizes issues of action and ethical integrity, can also be used to illustrate new ways of acting for a Western audience. The first theme of the ultimate unity of all beings initially seems remote from the ethical import of the workplace and from the Western world in general. However, the goal-oriented and success-driven nature that many of us possess can be tempered by the ethical implications of this claim. In a similar fashion to Kant's Formula of Humanity, Krishna's counsel advises that all beings should be treated with compassion and respect because they are an essential extension of one's Self. Ethical concerns in medicine and general business often include issues of personal worth and value; if we do not value others as respected entities in the interaction, they will feel marginalized and react negatively. Thus, the *Bhagavad Gita* allows Western individuals to see what the metaphysical basis is for one of the perennial views of the East.

A second implication for our understanding of ethics is the unique reading on action provided in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Crispin Sartwell's analysis of the *Gita*'s conception of action illuminates the ethical significance of this text.⁵ He argued that even inaction is considered action by the *Bhagavad Gita*, pointing to Krishna's statement that "there is no one who rests for even an instant; every creature is driven to action by his own nature" (3:5). For Sartwell, Krishna was not suggesting that "we act

wholly and always without ends" because "that would make human action impossible." "Rather," he wrote, "we ought to reconstrue the *relation* of means to ends in our actions. . . . Our action should not be performed *merely* for the sake of the end; the end must not absorb or expunge the means in our deliberation."⁶ Discussing our sole focus on ends in action, Sartwell said:

If we could achieve the end by sheer force of will, if we could realize it without performing the means, we would. Kṛṣṇa [Krishna] asks us, not to renounce all desire and thus all action, but to desire the means as intrinsically valuable as *well* as valuable in service of the end. The means are not to be absorbed in the end; the time and energy devoted to the means are not wasted. Rather, this time and energy are to be *consecrated*.⁷

Human action, far from being a stranger to goal-orientation, must be seen as a holy, worthy undertaking that also gives us value. Valuing action only so far as it achieves a certain end transforms that spent time into *wasted* time if the goal is not achieved.

This text can provide an Eastern answer to the goal-oriented ethics of Western businesses. Too often, ethics becomes widespread and en vogue because it offers the chance for "better business success in the long term" and for more congenial community relations. Instead of rereading the meaning of action in the workplace or community, these two views seem to aim at maximizing the desired consequences. Both of these goals, while admirable, can be challenged by the deontological or duty-based view of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Instead of assuming that one acts in a vocational capacity simply for money or for advancement, the text seems to draw one's attention toward the relational aspects of working and the value in a job well done. One's job often involves many individuals; instead of ethics attempting to maximize the utility of either these people or your relationship with them, attention can be directed to the value that these others have intrinsically. Indeed, Eastern communicative practices generally emphasize the relational aspects over task-oriented goals.⁸

Additionally, duty and occupational demands often play a large role, according to the *Bhagavad Gita*, in what one is bound to do. Normatively,

Arjuna is compelled to fight against his own relatives in a war that has been building in force for hundreds of pages in the *Mahabharata*. Though violence is not encouraged wholesale by Krishna, the duties of the various castes are quite binding; thus, Arjuna can slay his uncle, Bhishma (who is also the commander of the opposing army), after the *Bhagavad Gita* section of text, because it is their duty to fight against each other in this war. Although they are not happy about this confrontation, both realize that their positions compel them to fight. Their feelings, however, compel them not to hate each other or revel in the bloodshed. Western individuals can see in this text this seemingly foreign notion of caste-based duty, in which one must uphold the duty of their station.

Of course, other factors influence what one's duty is in any given situation. For instance, the human demands of wealth, pleasure, life-position, religion, and so on also factor in. One's occupational demands, however, can often override personal concerns or relations to others in a more formal sense. Thus, a police officer may be morally obliged by the demands of his occupation to arrest a close friend for an offense that a stranger would also get arrested for. While one must have sympathy for all, this text espouses the view that occupational codes must override many other interpersonal obligations. The personal aspect of the self is distanced from the caste-grounded (occupational) duty inherent in one's position. It is this distancing that allows for and necessitates selfless action on the part of the occupational person. Though concerns for one's selfish desires do motivate one to work, one should hold as primary the motivation to work hard (that is, to fulfill the demands and duties of one's position) in order to sanctify the time spent in this action.

Islamic Ethics

Ethical thought in much of the Islamic world is dominated by the holy *Qur'an*, a text of approximately 6,252 Arabic verses revealed through the prophet Muhammad. This work is the heart of the Islamic tradition, a 1,300-year-old religion that shares theological affinities with Judaism and Christianity. Those familiar with the ethical milieu surrounding Judaism and Christianity, however, often misunderstand the religion of Islam and

its implications in practical ethics. This short section cannot attempt to convey the richness that Islam holds in all of its manifestations around the world. Instead, we will attempt to lay the groundwork for understanding Islam's place in business situations by looking at some of the basic tenets of the *Qur'an* itself, and then provide a summary of the thought of two important ancient Islamic philosophers—al-Fārābī (d. 950 CE) and al-Ghazzālī (1058–1111 CE).

Basics of the Qur'an

The *Qur'an* is said to have been formulated in its present form in the years 650–655 CE as revealed through the mouth of the prophet Muhammad. This text is not a unified story, but is instead composed of didactic verses that sometimes cluster around common issues. Muhammad is supposed to be the last of a long line of prophets, and as such, no following revelations are to supersede his words. What he reveals in the *Qur'an* forms the basis for Islamic ethics and also for much of Islamic philosophical speculation.⁹

It is important to realize that like Christianity and Judaism, Islam is a monotheistic religion that begins with an important separation between God (Allah) the creator, on the one hand, and the created, human beings (and the world, etc.), on the other. God is the basis for the world, and as such is the one that humans should serve and submit to—even the word "Islam" comes from the root "slm" which means "wholeness and peace."¹⁰ This submission to God leads the follower down the correct path to salvation. Such a salvation is predicated on the mercifulness of God. Most of the suras composing the *Qur'an* begin with the Basmala, "In the name of God, Most Merciful, Most Compassionate." The creation of the world, its sustenance, and maintenance are all overseen by God and are a sign of his compassion.

Free will at some level is assumed by the *Qur'an*; every human is given the ultimate choice to follow God's commands or to be an unbeliever. It is important to note that the *Qur'an* does not demand forcible conversion of nonbelievers in the pursuit of honor or power; instead, the nonbelievers are simply looked upon as those that "wander blindly" through the

world. True nobility comes from a submission to the word of God—*muslim* itself linguistically implies submission, but this submission is tempered by justice and love for one's fellow humans. Indeed, Muhammad wanted a true focus on both the afterlife and the form and function of society in the here and now. In the days of Muhammad's life, the average society (such as that of the Bedouin tribes) was violent and focused primarily on maintaining power for one's own gain. Through the *Qur'ān*, human laws and God's laws are brought together to treat all of humanity with respect, as they are all equally created by God. Thus, the ethics of Islam tend to focus on compassion for the weak and on how to form a society to best instantiate revealed law.

Indeed, in the *Hadith* (other sayings of the Prophet), Muhammad is quoted as saying that warfare conducted on behalf of Islamic societies is to be conducted humanely, as a religious act, and should not include harming women and children. Even slavery, a condition allowed by most ancient scriptures, is treated with some concern—slaves are encouraged to buy their freedom from their master, and the master is supposed to allow such an opportunity. Additionally, slaves are to be well cared for by their masters, as they are also a part of God's creation. The *Qur'ān*, the foundation of Islamic thought, is predicated on humanity's separation from an all-powerful divine being who allows redemption through belief and good deeds. It is from such a basis that later philosophers in the Islamic tradition evolved.

Al-Fārābī

Al-Fārābī was an influential Islamic philosopher, and an overview of some of his ethical thought can show one direction that Islamic ethics has taken. Al-Fārābī believed that philosophical thought should come first, followed by religious instruction. The philosopher should deduce the truths of ethics and morality from his or her own divinely granted reason, and then allow religion to use holy scriptures to disseminate these ideas to the masses. His thought was influenced by Neoplatonic and Aristotelian philosophy, which led to him to describe the world as a series of emanated levels of reality flowing forth from a perfect, necessary God. Thus, the

world is pictured as unified, but essential separations still remain. For instance, humans partake in both the activities of the nonintellectual lower world (such as plants and animals), but they also take part in the intellectual and abstract realms of the higher worlds (culminated by God).

As with preceding Neoplatonic philosophy, the higher levels of the world are correspondingly more perfect, until absolute perfection is reached in God. This notion of perfection plays an important role in al-Fārābī's ethical and political work, as the individual person and the community must act so as to increase the perfection of each. "Good" holds a dual meaning—it applies both to the creation of God (thus all things) and to that which assists in the further perfection of these creatures. "Evil" is the privation of this perfection. From the perspective of human existence, the good is that which emphasizes and develops our intellectual abilities. The Islamic society envisioned by al-Fārābī thus operates on an ethic of creating conditions to foster social virtues (such as justice, temperance, and the like) and other intellectual attributes that allow for humans to reach the highest level of perfection. This level of being will also correspond to the highest level of happiness that an individual can achieve. Similar to Aristotle, al-Fārābī found that happiness is that which is pursued for its own sake; such a pursuit requires individual and communal assistance.

Al-Fārābī said not only that the individual must use reason to attain a state such as that of the Prophet, but also that society should be arranged such that harmony is achieved. Like the rest of the universe, human society has a state in which it functions most perfectly. In one work, he divided society into five main classes—the philosophers, the interpreters, the assessors, the fighters, and the rich. In other texts, he simply pointed out that each part of society had a part to play in its maintenance and flourishing. Harmony in these situations is achieved by doing one's duty in regard to one's role in society. A harmonious society can be attained through effective, rational leadership as well as through a populace that is taught allegorical lessons by the use of religion. Either way, the end is the same—the instantiation of a harmonious social setting that allows all their due portion of happiness in this life as well as a chance for happiness in the afterlife.¹¹

Al-Ghazzālī

The Islamic thinker al-Ghazzālī is important in that he resisted the urge to demote religious thought to a place lower than human reason. And yet he made this point through reasoned argument. While al-Ghazzālī's works are too complex to summarize here, what can be emphasized is his concern with the power of reason in relation to God. Al-Ghazzālī argued that ethical thought must be permeated by theological concepts, as human reason cannot reach a level of certainty that would completely describe God and ultimate reality.

For instance, God's actions must be beyond good and evil, as God creates all things that can be judged to be good or evil. Al-Ghazzālī found that good and evil in ethical discussion are dependent upon which viewpoint is occupied. He was not advocating a shallow relativism; rather, he was arguing that God and humans occupy fundamentally different levels of reality (viewpoints), and as such, human reason cannot be said to accurately describe things as God may see them. From God's viewpoint, all actions and events are good, since they are causally necessitated by his divine will. From humanity's viewpoint, the good is that which is pleasant, useful, and beautiful, whereas the evil lacks these qualities.¹² Unlike al-Fārābī, al-Ghazzālī said that human reason is not the last word in matters of morality, as there are other realms of existence that transcend such a faculty of our thought.

Al-Ghazzālī emphasized dominant trends in Islamic ethical thought that continue up to the present day. The individual must to some extent recognize the limits of reason and submit to the revelation of God. Though he prized wisdom and intellect, al-Ghazzālī believed that the important functions of society and morality were instructed by the *Qur'ān* and religious doctrine. For him, ultimate happiness lies in the afterlife, which necessitates religious doctrines of resurrection and immortality of the body. Though such topics may seem more a concern of religion than of philosophy, it is important to realize that the line separating these two areas of thought is often murky and disputed. Al-Ghazzālī's work shows that even one arguing for the fallibility of reason concerning matters of God should be able to engage in reasoned opposi-

tion. Simple appeals to religious dogma are, for the most part, absent in his work. Instead, reason can be used to acknowledge its own limitations, by, for example, acknowledging that God's perspective transcends human vantage points.

► Exercise 5.1

Think about someone you have known who comes from a religious, ethnic, or national group different from your own. Now think of instances where you and this individual thought differently on some topic of importance. Was it because of your different backgrounds? How exactly did this difference in traditions affect your moral reasoning, if at all? Do you recognize any of the themes or traditions just discussed?

Feminism

To return to the realm of Western ethics, we find that feminists offer a number of critiques of traditional Western views. Feminists are committed to taking women's experience seriously, and they contend that many traditional ethical theories merely expound on the experiences of men. One criticism along this line is that autonomy as an ideal is not possible for most women, nor is it possible for entire societies.

In most societies, women do the bulk of caring work. They spend a great deal of their time providing both material and emotional comfort to their families and friends. Many taking a feminist view feel this is not a fair division of labor. If we are serious about autonomy, we must notice this disparity and address it in our theorizing. But even if we gave equal access to autonomy to women and men, some feminists would still reject this as an ideal. Imagine what our society would look like if everyone were focused on his or her own personal autonomy. Who would care for the sick, the very young, and the very old? Who would care for any of us, since even the strongest among us sometimes need help?

An ethic of care is in part a response to the concern that women's experience be taken seriously, since it had its beginnings in Carol Gilligan's work

on the moral voice of women.¹³ Some feminists are critical of an ethic of care because it violates the feminist goal of confronting oppression. In an ideal world, it might make sense to advocate for an ethic of care, but we live in a world where women care too much and men too little. In addition, there are other important differences between people. Some people are barely able to care for themselves, while others are able to hire a virtual army of caregivers for themselves and their families. In this world, care is all too often delegated to the poor, the female, and the disenfranchised.

This critique can be extended to ethics in general. Why should such oppressed people take ethics seriously? Some suggest that perhaps they should instead fight for their own liberation using whatever means necessary. This focus on oppression raises a number of issues for any ethical perspective. First, an adequate discussion of any issue must take oppression and its effects into consideration. Second, ethical perspectives must include overcoming oppression as a goal. Third, ethical perspectives must consider the possibility that people have different sets of obligations and entitlements based on their relative advantage or disadvantage. This focus on oppression is shared by other critiques to which we shall now turn.

Postcolonial Morality

Postcolonial Theory is an emerging interdisciplinary and global intellectual field. There are a great number of postcolonial views about morality, but we can make some generalizations. First, there is a strong focus in Postcolonial Theory on the experience of colonized peoples. Second, there is a critique of universalism as a cover for the imposition of Western ideas and interests.¹⁴ The variety and sheer number of postcolonial works is so vast that here we will only mention a few, but we encourage you to explore further on your own.

There have been a number of responses to the shared experience of colonial occupation. Martin Luther King Jr. embraced many traditional Western moral views while at the same time criticizing the West for not honoring them. Mahatma Gandhi effectively used a similar strategy. There is a story, perhaps apocryphal, about Gandhi. When asked what he thought of Western civilization, he is said to have replied, "I think it

would be a good idea." Both Gandhi and King adopted nonviolence and in so doing appealed to both Western and non-Western ideas. Gandhi, inspired by themes in his Hindu tradition, appealed to the basic principle of *ahimsa*—holding the lives of your enemies "as sacred as those of our own dear ones." King was influenced, in turn, by Gandhi and by Christian ideals of brotherly love, as well as by African ideals of community.

Franz Fanon, an important Algerian theorist and activist, in contrast, argued that civil disobedience would not liberate colonized peoples.¹⁵ Instead he advocated violent overthrow. He didn't say this because he liked violence but because he thought it was the only way to achieve important goals. He argued that decolonization (replacing those in power with those at the bottom) required violence because colonization was maintained by pure force and would only yield to violence. He also thought that colonized peoples needed to regain their sense of respect and that it was only through violent struggle that the colonized could regain their humanity, be released from despair and inaction, and have their fear transformed into fearlessness.

In Latin America, colonization was a brutal and lengthy process that introduced European and Catholic elements into the culture. It also provided the fertile ground for postcolonial opposition to these new elements. We see this blend of traditions in liberation theology, a powerful critique of inequality that draws on Christian notions of human rights. Paulo Friere's *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which describes the role education plays in both maintaining oppression and in furthering individual attainment of freedom and justice, has continued to be an influential work for more than thirty years.¹⁶

Karl Marx continues to be an important influence in many countries in the world and plays an important role in some postcolonial critiques.¹⁷ Many Marxists believe that moral values, like virtually all ideas, are inextricably linked with the economic system. A capitalist economy requires that people have a certain amount of liberty to engage in economic activity. Property relations must be recognized in order to have something to exchange with others. Contracts must be honored, and most things must have a price. Those of us who grew up in a capitalist economy take many of these things for granted, but ask yourself these questions: Are there prices in heaven? Private property? Economic activity of any kind?

These same Marxists are critical of the way values are defended in a capitalist society. Marx himself wrote about the worth of liberty to someone who lived under a bridge. Liberty may be valuable for someone with the time and money to use it productively, but virtually useless to someone who lacks either the time or the money to exercise liberty in any meaningful way. If we take this critique seriously, we will be suspicious of all moral perspectives. After all, if moral perspectives exist just to protect the status quo, and the status quo really isn't very fair to all of us, why should we take moral perspectives seriously?

There are other Marxists who interpret Marx in a different way. They focus on his discussion of human nature (which emphasizes meaningful work and happiness) and his critique of capitalism. Marx objected to capitalism because he believed it was an economic system that made people unhappy. Workers, he said, are exploited, underpaid, and alienated from their own creativity. Capitalists are alienated from their workers and from their own human nature, and even relatively secure and well-paid workers feel so alienated that they try to buy happiness by purchasing more and more consumer goods.

This second interpretation of Marx gives us a reason for objecting to capitalist exploitation. For those taking this view, one can object because humans are suffering under capitalism. If we accept the first interpretation, we have no way to critique capitalism. If values are a mere reflection of the status quo, then we can't appeal to them in criticizing the status quo. If we live in a capitalist system, we do not even have any values that would allow us to critique our social world. We think there is a middle ground here. One can agree with the first group of Marxists that much of what passes for morality is a justification of the status quo while also agreeing with the second group that some moral values are defensible.

Cultural Conflict

Now that we've had a chance to survey many different moral perspectives around the world, we turn to the important question of how to navigate among these different perspectives. In spite of all the differences, we are inclined to think that there may well be more commonality in human moral

perspectives and ways of life than it may at first appear. There are two main reasons for thinking this. First, we have a great deal in common as humans. We have similar needs, desires, and abilities; and we face similar challenges. Second, differences that seem great may often disappear on analysis.

Take the following example. In most states in the United States, marriage between first cousins is not allowed. In many other parts of the world, marriage between first cousins is perfectly acceptable. On a superficial reading, it looks like we have a conflict about incest. But on a deeper reading the conflict disappears. The conflict depends on the shared idea that incest should be discouraged. The only difference is how incest is defined. If we look even deeper, we may find another commonality. Incest is discouraged in virtually every human society because it is seen as damaging to the people involved. This suggests that we have an important shared commitment to not harming persons. We may have different understandings of what counts as harm and even what counts as a person, but the commonality is strong nonetheless.

Still, not all conflicts will disappear on closer inspection. So what do you do when you have a conflict? First, recognize that you are not really in a position to negotiate the conflict until you adequately understand the other's point of view. Be patient and respectful in trying to come to an understanding about another person's position on a moral issue. Second, decide for yourself what is negotiable and what is not. You cannot maintain your own moral integrity if all your values are up for grabs. Third, consider what is at stake and what the options for compromise are. Finally, you will either be able to compromise, walk away from the situation, or stand and fight, depending on what is at stake, what is negotiable, and what compromises are possible.

► Exercise 5.2

Now that you have been exposed to some different traditions of ethical reasoning from Western and non-Western sources, revisit the issue of cultural relativism. Do the traditions discussed in this chapter lead you to be sympathetic toward relativism? Consider again the criticisms of this position from earlier chapters. Do you think that the traditions discussed in this chapter add new reasons to object to the relativist position?

Conclusion

This chapter provided a brief look at some other perspectives, both from within and outside of the Western tradition. There are many other places to look for inspiration and insight. If you want to be an effective advocate for your moral point of view, it is important to recognize that your audience may come from a different point of view. One way to educate yourself about other points of view is simply to ask about them. Keep in mind, though, that when someone is one of the few members of their race, gender, culture, religion, sexual orientation, disability community, age, and so forth in a particular setting, they may be constantly barraged by questions about how their group thinks. Walk softly here and try to be open about gaining understanding without making someone feel that they are a spokesperson for an entire group.

► Study Questions for Chapter Five

1. What are the main characteristics of the "morally superior person" in Confucian thought?
2. According to Confucius, what are the three central virtues?
3. What are Mencius's "five relations," and why are they important to moral improvement?
4. What does the *Bhagavad Gita*, through the character of Krishna, say about the nature of the self? How should one do their duty?
5. What is the Islamic philosopher al-Fārābī's view of the relation of reason to religious insight? How does al-Ghazzālī's view differ from al-Fārābī's?
6. What are some major criticisms of traditional Western moral theory from feminist and postcolonial thought?

NOTES

1. All citations for Confucius are from *The Analects*.
2. All citations for Mencius are from *The Book of Mencius*.

3. Eliot Deutsch, *The Bhagavad Gita: Translated, with Introduction and Critical Essays* (New York: University Press of America, 1968); H. Zimmer, *Philosophies of India* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1989).
4. W. T. De Bary, *Sources of Indian Tradition*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958).
5. C. Sartwell, "Art and War: Paradox of the Bhagavad Gita," *Asian Philosophy* 3 (1993), 95–102.
6. Ibid., 97.
7. Ibid., 97–98.
8. N. C. Jain, "World View and Cultural Patterns of India," in L. A. Samovar and R. E. Porter, eds., *Intercultural Communication: A Reader* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1991), 78–86; J. C. McCroskey and V. P. Richmond, "Human Communication Theory and Research: Traditions and Models," in M. B. Salwen and D. W. Stacks, eds., *An Integrated Approach to Communication Theory and Research* (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1996), 233–242.
9. Joseph Puig Montada, "Reality and Divinity in Islamic Philosophy," in E. Deutsch and R. Bonteko, eds., *A Companion to World Philosophies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).
10. Ian P. McGreal, *Great Literature of the Eastern World* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996).
11. Harry Bone, "Al-Fārābī," in B. Carr and I. Mahalingam, eds., *Companion Encyclopedia of Asian Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1997).
12. Mourad Wahba, "The Concept of the Good in Islamic Philosophy," in E. Deutsch and R. Bonteko, eds., *A Companion to World Philosophies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).
13. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).
14. Edward Said, for example, offered a very influential critique of Western-centered views. See *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).
15. Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963).
16. Paulo Friere, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum International, 2000).
17. See *The Communist Manifesto* for a brief and accessible account of the views of Marx and Engels.