

## Chapter 5

In the preceding chapters I've tried to draw you a general picture of the basics of philosophical ethics. We started off seeing that ethics' overall aim is simply to evaluate how much an action maximizes human good or happiness. We talked about what it means to use human good as an ethical yardstick. And then we looked at the two most basic approaches to measuring human good--results-oriented (teleological) and action-oriented (deontological). The former examines the consequences of actions and tries to find out how much human good is produced by the action in question. The latter scrutinizes only the action itself, looking to see how well the deed under examination fits or is appropriate to a basic standard of humanity.

In a handbook of this size I obviously can't talk about everything important in ethics. But there is one more major topic that needs to be discussed, especially for those of you who remain hard-nosed skeptics about all of this. After all, some of you might be thinking, "This is all fine if you believe you should live your life doing what will make things better for other people, but only wimps think like that. The `real' world can be pretty rough with everybody looking out just for themselves. You've got to take care of yourself first. Furthermore, sometimes you're probably going to have to do some unethical things to protect yourself or to succeed in life. So the bottom line is, What's in it for me? Will worrying about ethics really make life any better for me?"

In fact, the ethical life promises rewards for everyone involved. Your friends and associates will obviously feel better about life and about you if you treat them decently. And they'll probably reciprocate, treating you the same way, which will make your life better. However, even if they don't, you'll still be better off. Because when it comes down to it, the phrase "virtue is its own reward" is actually true.

Now when I say that moral virtue is its own reward, you may think I'm going to defend that by appealing to some ethereal notion of "Goodness" and say that moral excellence is just valuable in itself and that it's the most important thing you need in life. I might even claim that this is one of those things you can't really put into words and so there's no explanation possible beyond that. But then I would be asking you to adopt a belief for no good reason, and that's an awfully unphilosophical way of going about things. And I'm not about to do that.

No, the best way to make the idea that "virtue is its own reward" plausible is to show the connections between being a good and decent person and the overall health, development or maturity of the human personality. In short, the "good" person is healthier, more advanced and more mature than the "evil" person. And who in his right mind would choose "disease" or "illness" over "health"?

In this chapter we're going to explore the connection between moral virtue and the healthy human personality. We'll start with how it's talked about in ethics' earliest days in ancient Greece. But we'll also see that it's an important topic for some contemporary psychologists. And if you've never thought about things in this way, it should let you see that your own interests can't help but be on the line with every ethical decision you make and that ultimately the most important way to truly "look out for #1" is to do the "right" thing as often as possible.

The idea that one's own good is the ultimate justification for ethical behavior has been with us as long as ethics has. Not surprisingly, the first recorded advocate of it is Socrates, the ancient Greek philosopher I mentioned

in an earlier chapter.

In case you don't know the story of Socrates, let me fill you in briefly. Socrates spent his adult life going around Athens trying to prod his fellow Athenians into examining their lives to see that they were living properly. Socrates was the enemy of immorality, hypocrisy, ignorance, sham and deceit, and he would regularly engage individual Athenians in philosophical dialogue to test their beliefs and encourage them to virtue. Not surprisingly, when you do this in public, as everything important was done in Greek life, you're likely to offend some people. I'm not going to go into all of the details because it's a complicated story, but suffice it to say that after Athens lost a long war with its arch rival Sparta, some conservatives thought that Socrates' incessant questioning undermined the traditions of Athens and contributed to her defeat. Socrates was indicted on the capital charges of impiety and corrupting the young, found guilty and sentenced to death. His example will last forever as the classic case of the good man being executed by his fellows because his virtue and honesty only underscore their own weaknesses. In short, Socrates did nothing that really deserved the death penalty.

The best example of Socrates' idea that moral goodness is like health comes in a discussion between Socrates and his friend Crito in which Crito is trying to persuade Socrates to break out of jail and escape execution. Crito can arrange it, but for Socrates the question isn't "Can we pull it off?" but "Is it right?" In the course of trying to explain to Crito why acting ethically is the most important issue, Socrates says that doing wrong "will harm and corrupt that part of ourselves that is improved by just actions and destroyed by unjust actions."

Socrates' expression is pretty vague and unusual. Today we don't hear people talking about "that part of me that's improved by doing right and harmed by doing wrong." However, Socrates is actually referring to what we might call our "character" or perhaps our "personality." He claims that a central part of what makes us who we are is improved or destroyed depending on how morally justifiable our behavior is.

Socrates says it's like the body and health--only more important. We've got to do certain things if we want our bodies to be healthy, and if we ignore them we risk being in bad shape or getting sick. "And is life worth living with a body that is corrupted and in bad condition?" asks Socrates. "In no way," replies Crito. And then making the connection with this "other part" of us, Socrates asks, "And is life worth living for us with that part of us corrupted that unjust action harms and just action benefits? Or do we think that part of us, whatever it is, that is concerned with justice and injustice, is inferior to the body?" Crito: "Not at all." Socrates: "Is it more valuable?" Crito: "Much more." So Socrates believes that moral excellence is necessary for the "health" of a part of us that's more important than our bodies--our character.

But what does this mean in common sense terms? First of all, let's see what a "healthy" character looks like. It seems to me that the most important aspects of someone with a "healthy" character can accurately see the ethical aspects of what she's doing and can control her actions. Someone with a healthy and mature personality is sensitive enough to other people to know when he's thinking of doing something questionable, and he has full power to act the way he chooses to. This way of looking at things believes that if you've got a strong, healthy character, you've got a pretty solid sense of right and wrong and you're strong enough to act according to it. An "unhealthy" or weak character lacks this moral vision and strength of will.

And this makes sense. Think of someone you admire as a really solid, decent person. I bet that part of what you admire is that individual's clear sense of right and wrong. When deciding what to do in his own life, he doesn't say, "I know I promised to help you, but I found something better to do. And since I'd expect you to do the same in my shoes, I really don't see anything wrong with it." There'd be no question in his mind that it's wrong

to break a promise for such a paltry reason. And if that person gets angry at being treated unfairly or at someone else's being treated badly, you know that's the real reason. It's not sour grapes or blind loyalty to a friend. It's seeing that there's really something wrong going on.

Or picture someone you really trust or know you can count on in hard times. You're thinking of a really strong person who isn't swayed by the crowd but acts according to an inner commitment to right and wrong. If you trust this person with some secret, you're positive she'll keep it to herself. If you depend on him to do something important for you, it's because you know he won't let anything get in the way of keeping his word to you. If you take an unpopular stand on something, she won't turn her back on you, thinking that staying in the good graces of others is more important than sticking by you. There's real clarity of moral vision and strength of character here.

Now picture someone just the opposite. Someone undependable and without a conscience. Someone you wouldn't trust or confide in. Someone who would dump you in a minute for somebody who could do more for them. This person might get more of what he wants for himself than you do because he's so incredibly selfish. But you'd have to be crazy to call this "strength."

In fact, people like this guy are really weak. They're so weak that they can't really control what they do. They're led around by the nose by their insatiable desires--whether it be for money, sex, power, a good time, popularity or whatever. They have as much control over their behavior as the Muppet's "cookie monster." And they have absolutely no moral "vision." They literally can't see beyond the nose on their face. All they know is how something affects them. They can't see how it affects other people. Other people don't really exist for them. That's why they don't care. Other people's interests just aren't part of their world. These people are morally blind.

So that's what Socrates is talking about--strength and vision. That's what's at stake.

But what does he mean when he says that our ability to differentiate between right and wrong and our capacity to be in full control of what we do is strengthened or weakened by how we act? What does it mean that the "health" of my character depends on whether or not I'm honest and treat other people fairly?

Let's go at it this way. Imagine that you have this friend who's basically a good and decent person, very bright and talented, but also really ambitious for money and power. She goes to work for a big company and after a few months is taken under the wing of an unscrupulous vice president who sees your friend as a natural for the 'fast track.' The VP offers the following advice, "Look, kid. This is the way it is. If you want to make it big, you play hard ball. You've got to be aggressive but politically savvy. You've got to use people and you'll have to step on people now and then to get ahead of them. Show no mercy. Be ruthless. Remember, you can't make an omelet without breaking some eggs. Every great city is built on the ruins of what came before it. You've got real talent and promise, but you're going to have to do some stuff your mother might not be too happy about. But then she didn't get to be a vice president by 35, did she? I'm just telling you the rules of the game. This is business, not Sunday School. Take my advice and you'll do o.k."

Your friend has mixed feelings hearing this. She likes the part about getting to be a vice president by 35. But she's uncomfortable about the rest of it. She's basically idealistic and wants to believe that all you really need to do to succeed is to work hard. But if there are enough people like this VP around, hard work alone isn't going to be enough to make it really big.

Her dilemma intensifies when the VP shortly approaches her saying, "I've

got a problem I could use your help with. A month ago you got a report from Smith's department. I want you to call my assistant and complain that you haven't gotten it yet. Trust me. By the way, something may be opening up that I think you'd like." She's troubled by the request, because she's being asked to lie and she still is bothered about what the VP said in their last conversation. But let's say she figures that one lie can't hurt anybody that much while she decides how to handle things, and so she goes ahead and does it. When she learns, however, that the VP used her lie as a pretext to fire Smith, your friend feels very guilty. Although when she's offered Smith's job, the guilt starts to fade.

Now let's say that her ambition is so strong that she continues cooperating with her boss's conniving. She gets to be very good at it herself and she rises quickly in the company. What do you think she'll feel? Probably considerable pride at her accomplishments and her abilities. And what about her initial reservations? I suspect that she'll dismiss them as childish, idealistic and naive, wondering why she ever seriously thought that way. She'd probably see these ideas as weaknesses that would have held her back from reaching her true potential. She thinks that people who object to her tactics confuse morality with "vigorous gameplay." "The only people who cry 'Foul!' are those who lose," she says to herself. She sees nothing wrong with what she does. Her opponents just look at it from the wrong perspective. She sees herself as having become stronger--having "grown up" and learned how to handle the "real" world.

But is her appraisal accurate? No. Is she stronger? No. Did she "overcome weaknesses"? No. What really happened? She's been corrupted. Her initial reservations were accurate, but her actions since then did two things--they blinded her and they weakened her. They made her unable to understand the legitimacy of an ethical perspective any more. She sees less, not more. They took away her power to act from any principle more high minded than self-interest. She's grown weaker, not stronger. Instead of "growing up," she's actually regressed to a more childish stage. After all, who is more self-centered than small children? And what's more childish than the attitude that "good" means "good for me"?

The most important point to see is that your friend changed because of what she did. She lost her awareness that there was something wrong about lying and manipulating people because she got used to conniving. The first time was difficult. The second time a little easier. But the more she did it, the less it bothered her. The more she did it, the more likely she'd do it again. The more she did it, the less she could see anything wrong with it.

Her actions produced a kind of tunnel vision. The more her ambition governed her behavior, the less she could see any ethical considerations. When she looked at a situation, what jumped out was how she could advance her own interests. Other people's concerns became invisible to her. That's what I mean by saying that she became blind.

In the same way, the more her selfishness controlled her actions, the more she lost the power to act differently. We might say that the stronger her ambition became, the weaker she herself became. Ultimately, it just became second nature for her to act aggressively and selfishly. She stopped struggling and feeling guilty because she lost the power to resist. She lost the power to choose.

In sum, acting like she did caused her to "forget" what she once knew about the importance of human, ethical matters and it also took away from her the ability to choose what was right over what would fulfill her ambitions.

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The experience described in this imaginary story is actually fairly common. Whether you look at business, academics, politics or any profession, it's not hard to find people who have forgotten their early idealism and now

treat everyone around them as pawns to their own ends. They are probably very successful (although I'm certainly not saying that every successful person is like this) and they think they're doing the world a service. After all, people who have been corrupted are convinced that their point of view is much more accurate than all of those naive people who just remind them of their younger selves before they "saw the light."

Socrates, however, would say that no matter how successful they've become, they've also gotten worse in the bargain. The part of them "that is strengthened by just actions and weakened by unjust ones" has been impaired. They've lost something. They've become more interested in themselves and less sensitive to others. They're more willing to do some unethical things. In fact, they probably can't tell the difference between right and wrong as well as before. (They're more likely to say, "Cheating's not wrong. Everyone does it." Or, "Double billing isn't dishonest. It's just the way you've got to do business to make a profit." Or, "Nobody really expects you to keep campaign promises anyway.") And how could you say that someone who used to have a conscience but lost it has become a better human being?

But the worst part of this is that Socrates believes that once you start being corrupted, you don't know that's what's happening. In fact, you think just the opposite--that you're getting stronger and wiser. That's why he thinks it's so important not to do something deliberately that you know is wrong. You'll start changing for the worse and not have any interest in stopping yourself. In a sense, you'll lose yourself.

And this is why Socrates died. He didn't die to show the citizen's duty to the state or to testify to the sincerity of his beliefs. He died because he believed he had only two options--death of his body or corruption of his character (a kind of death of the core of his being)--and he thought that the latter was worse. Socrates believed for a variety of reasons that escaping from jail would harm innocent people. (I'm not going into the reasons here because all that really counts is that there were plausible grounds for his considering escaping to be morally wrong.) And he knew that if he did something he knew to be wrong, he'd stop being the person he was and become someone different--and worse. He was in a no-win situation. Death or corruption? No wonder he chose not to escape. Think about it. What would you do if you had to choose between dying or becoming someone who might deliberately hurt people without any regret?

I said in the first chapter of this book that for the sake of your learning about philosophical ethics, I wasn't going to talk about religion and ethics. But I also said that sometimes ideas of religious thinkers would fit in a philosophical discussion, that is, when they add something rational and secular. This is one of those times. One of the great saints of the Christian church, Saint Augustine, was an incredibly perceptive student of the human personality. He thought a lot about sin and evil and made some interesting remarks very much along Socrates' lines about what acting unethically does to us.

Saint Augustine (Aurelius Augustinus) was born in northern Africa in 354 A.D. to a pagan father and Christian mother. He was raised as a Christian, although in keeping with the customs of the times, he was not baptized. As a young man he studied rhetoric at Carthage, where he rejected Christianity in favor of Manicheanism (which taught that the world is ruled by two principles: one good [light], the other evil [darkness]). After teaching rhetoric in Carthage, Rome and Milan, he abandoned Manicheanism, began studying neoplatonic philosophy, and was thereby led back to Christianity. After a powerful conversion experience he was baptized, returned to Africa, founded a religious community and was subsequently ordained priest and then appointed bishop of Hippo in 396. He carried out his duties as bishop for more than 30 years and wrote voluminously, frequently against what he saw as his time's heresies. Although he died in 430, his influence in Christian thought has been enormous. Called by Saint Jerome the "second founder" of Christianity,

Augustine's ideas have effected virtually every branch of the religion.

Augustine has a special interest in sin and evil. He believed that before his conversion he had lead a terribly sinful life. And while we would surely judge him less harshly than he judged himself, Augustine nonetheless had pondered deeply on sin and its effects. What's interesting from our point of view is that although Augustine's thinking takes a very different path than Socrates, he comes to a remarkably similar conclusion--in effect, that sin contains its own punishment.

Now as an orthodox Christian, Augustine believed that people would be rewarded or punished after death for how they they lived their lives. At the same time, however, he talks about how doing evil leads us to be punished in the here and now. In his book, *On Free Choice of the Will*, Augustine describes the consequences of sin as follows:

Lust dominates the mind, despoils it of the wealth of its virtue, and drags it, poor and needy, now this way and now that; now approving and even defending what is false as though it were true, now disapproving what it previously defended, and rushing on to other falsities; now refusing assent and fearing clear reasoning; now despairing of fully discovering the truth and clinging to the deep obscurities of stupidity; now struggling into the light of understanding and falling back again from weariness. Meanwhile the reign of lust rages tyrannically and distracts the life and whole spirit of man with many conflicting storms of terror, desire, anxiety, empty and false happiness, torture because of the loss of something that he used to love, eagerness to possess what he does not have, grievances for injuries received, and fires of vengeance. Wherever he turns, greed amasses, extravagance wastes, ambition entices, pride bloats, envy twists, sloth buries, obstinacy goads, submissiveness harasses, and all the other innumerable things that throng and busy themselves in the kingdom of lust.

First of all, notice that Augustine is painting a picture of an unhappy, tortured and unsatisfied life in this life. More importantly, however, is that all the details he gives can be boiled down to two things. Our minds don't work as well as before (defending what's false as though it were true), and we lose control over our own lives (our desires drag us now this way and now that).

Elsewhere in the same work, Augustine labels these two results of sin ignorance and difficulty. He writes, "It is an absolutely just punishment for sin that each man loses what he is unwilling to use rightly, when he could without any difficulty use it if he willed. Thus the man who does not act rightly although he knows what he ought to do, loses the power to know what is right; and whoever is unwilling to do right when he can, loses the power to do it when he wills to. In fact, two penalties--ignorance and difficulty--beset every sinful soul."

When you read Augustine's words you should be hearing echoes of what I was talking about above. Augustine believes that the result in human beings of acting unethically is that we lose the power to tell the difference; we become ignorant of the difference. Similarly, by choosing what we know is wrong, we lose the power to choose rightly in the future; it becomes more difficult to do the right thing. Augustine doesn't claim that God is doing this to us. He describes it as a natural process that holds for all of us.

Saint Augustine and Socrates don't see eye to eye about religious beliefs, but they're unquestionably of the same mind about the effects of unethical behavior on the human personality. We lose something. It makes us worse.

Now one of the most interesting things about the ideas of Socrates and Augustine I've been describing to you is that although they're more than two thousand years old, we can still find very similar ones alive today. And we

find them expressed in a number of places--not only in philosophy, but contemporary psychology and even science fiction movies!

For example, the idea about the connection between moral excellence and a strong character is actually a major theme in George Lucas' Star Wars saga. Remember "the Force"? (Obi-Wan [Ben] Kenobi describes it as "an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us and penetrates us. It binds the galaxy together.") Remember that the Force has a "dark side" and that Obi-Wan explains that the reason that arch villain Darth Vader is evil is that he was "seduced by the dark side of the Force." Also recall that Vader is intent on trying to turn his son Luke Skywalker to the dark side.

Well, all of that is really just a different way of putting what we've just been talking about--that is, that moral corruption is a matter of losing both clear moral vision and control over your actions.

What is most relevant here is what's involved in being taken over by the dark side of the Force. Yoda, the Jedi master, warns Luke, "Anger, anger, fear, aggression! The dark side of the Force are they. . . . Beware, beware, beware of them. A heavy price is paid for the power they bring. . . . The dark side beckons. But if once start you down the dark path, forever it will dominate your destiny. Consume you it will . . . as it did [Vader]." Ben warns in the same vein, "Don't give in to hate and anger. They lead the way to the dark side."

And all of this is confirmed in the exchanges between Luke, Darth Vader and the evil Emperor. When the young man tries to persuade Vader to give up the dark side, Vader answers, "You don't know the power of the dark side. I must obey my master [the Emperor]. . . . It's too late for me, Son." Taunting Luke, the Emperor says, "I can feel your anger. I am defenseless--take your weapon. Strike me down with all of your hatred, and your journey toward the dark side will be complete." And egging Luke on in his duel with Vader, the Emperor shouts, "Use your aggressive feelings, boy! Yes! Let the hate flow through you! Become one with it, let it nourish you!"

Although Luke is severely tempted to give in to his hatred and aggression, he successfully resists them and refuses to kill his father. However, had he given in to the hatred, he would have lost his ability to resist it any further or even to entertain that as an option. He would have become like Vader--enslaved to the evil Emperor. For all of his dark power, Darth Vader is ultimately subservient, not free. He does not have total control over his actions.

In short, this tale argues that we know in advance that if we do certain deeds and give in to particular feelings, our future perception and our ability to control our actions will be affected. If we give in to hostile feelings like anger and aggression, and if we start acting according to them and hurting other people, then in a sense we lose ourselves and get taken over by the dark side of the Force. The tale warns us before we take our first step in that direction that if we start down the path to the dark side of the Force, there will be no turning back. And there's no turning back because it won't occur to us that there'll be any reason to. It's as though we forget forever that there is a good side. If we have to choose what to do, we don't really see all of the options.

The idea that the dark side changes how we perceive the world and produces a kind of blindness might seem far fetched to you. But think for a minute about the fact that this is called the "dark" side of the Force. Physiologically, what happens to your eyes when the light starts getting dim? Remember about "cones" and "rods" from your high school biology class? When there's plenty of light around us, our visual images are processed through the retinal receptors called "cones." And a special feature of the cones is that they allow us to see colors. However, as it starts getting darker, the way our eyes work changes. Light is processed through the "rods." (When you go into a dark movie theatre and can't see for a few minutes, your eyes are shifting over from the cones to the rods.) Now the rods are a lot like life--

to get something we have to give something up. In this case, we get to see in dim light, but we lose good color vision. The colors are there, but because of the darkness, we can't see them. And if we lived on a planet where the light were very dim, colors would be only invisible, theoretical entities. To be taken over by the "dark" side of the Force is to enter a world where our perception of reality is altered as irrevocably as it would be if our sun became no brighter than the moon.

But as Ben and Yoda have pointed out, the other reason there's no turning back once you start down the "dark path" is the power of the dark side. That is, even if we think about the good side of the Force every now and then, its power will seem insignificant to the power of the dark side.

This too might seem unlikely to you. But if so, it means only that you've never faced a situation where you started really giving in to your anger and aggressive impulses. You haven't experienced how your anger takes control of you and how you become someone else--as happened to me.

Now I'm not especially inclined to go into much about my private life in a book like this, but suffice it to say that there was a stretch of time when I felt attacked, harassed, deceived and really taken advantage of by someone I'd trusted. And as though that weren't bad enough, this whole thing ended up as a law suit. My attorney was reasonable and sought a negotiated settlement; she claimed that the case shouldn't take more than a couple of weeks to settle. However, my opponent's lawyer was one of these aggressive, hard nosed types whose approach to life seems to be "win or die." Through delays and technicalities he prolonged and expanded the agony--two weeks stretched into two years and the original lawsuit mushroomed into three. In the end, I decided to cut my losses and settle on terms I considered to be unfair. Why did I do such a seemingly self-defeating thing rather than "tough it out" to the end? Because the process and my reaction to it was changing who I was. And that's what I want to talk about.

You see, what happened was that my "dark side" started getting control of me. Not surprisingly through all of this, I was frustrated and resentful that the whole matter couldn't be settled fairly and quickly. Furthermore, I offered reasonable compromises that took account of the fact that each of us had legitimate interests. But as each compromise was rejected, as the other side refused to put forward any positive solution, and as I saw that my opponent was doing little more than trying to dictate terms of surrender, my frustration grew and my resentment became anger. (There are few things that I find more upsetting than that my trust has been betrayed and my good will and sincerity has been taken advantage of.) And since legal matters are long and involved and proceed according to their own pace, I had a lot of time to brood about what I felt as the unfairness and one-sidedness of the situation.

And as I brooded, my anger grew still more and began taking over. I started becoming obsessed with the situation and feeling really hostile towards my opponent. First I channeled that hostility into fantasies--initially relatively harmless ones, but later fairly destructive scenarios with my adversary as the target. But that wasn't enough. As the case was prolonged by the other side, as my further attempts at a compromise were rebuffed and my frustration and anger grew, I found that in my private moments I started seriously considering whether I could get away with a couple of things that were clearly aggressive and quite illegal, even if non-violent. My aim was to get some leverage with the other side and hope that they would then be willing to negotiate.

Now one of the disadvantages of being fairly bright is that I was convinced that I could get away with what I was considering. (And to this day I think that if I had really put my mind to it, I could have.) However, one day I saw what was happening. My anger and resentment had become the most powerful forces inside me--so strong that I was seriously considering doing things that violated some deeply held beliefs of mine. My "dark" side was on

the verge of getting the upper hand. In short, I was becoming someone else. My name might have remained the same, but I would have become a different person. In fact, the metamorphosis would have been so thorough that I'm sure even my appearance would have changed. If nothing else, my face would have had that closed and agitated look you see in angry people and my body language would have matched it.

Fortunately, before it was too late I finally saw who I was becoming. More importantly, I saw that I didn't like that person. So I cut my losses and agreed to unreasonable terms. I lost a good deal of money in the process, but I preserved the core of who I am.

So the point of this story is simply that I know first hand the power of the "dark side of the Force." It will overwhelm you, if you let it. And if it takes over, it will change you for the worse. Remember, Luke is told in Star Wars that his father, Anakin Skywalker, was killed by Darth Vader. And in a sense this is true. Anakin Skywalker and Darth Vader are two different people. The resemblances between the two of them are purely superficial.

You're probably saying, "That's all very well a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away, but what does it have to do with ethics?" Well, it's a way of approaching this question of why any of us should bother doing what is morally right, or, to put it the other way, "Why shouldn't we simply do what will advance our own interests even if it involves some moral compromises?" And we find in the Star Wars saga essentially the same answer that we got from Socrates and Augustine. The Greek philosopher, the medieval Christian thinker and George Lucas describe the same aspect of the human character. If we do things that produce human harm--if we are selfish, cruel, manipulative, or deceitful, or if we lie, cheat or steal--then we change ourselves for the worse.

Although we may feel that we're being strong, powerful and resourceful at being able to assert our own interests, in reality we're becoming weaker. We are losing capacities, abilities and strengths rather than gaining them. We may think that we've learned how to lie effectively; in fact, we've lost our ability to limit what we say to what's true and any very strong sense of why we ought to. It may feel like we have a new ability to manipulate and deceive; in reality, we've lost a capacity to really see other people's interests or a desire to respect them.

Don't be fooled by the fact that you may get more of what you want by cheating or stealing. That's only because you're using your wiles on people who trust you. In effect, you're "winning" not because you're playing better than other people but because you're playing by a different set of rules. (Think of it this way. Which team plays better basketball: one that can foul so skillfully as to get away with it most of the time or one that has a bunch of great shooters? Even if the "foulers" consistently beat the "shooters," would you say that they played basketball better?) Furthermore, you'd find out that you hadn't really become any stronger or more capable than other people if everyone else played by your rules. In fact, since being unethical is relatively easy, you'd probably find yourself up against some really stiff competition and you might not fare as well as you think you would.

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Once we start down this road and do things that are ethically dubious, it gets harder to resist and we start losing any sense that there's anything questionable about what we do. As I said earlier in this chapter, we lose power or control over our actions and we start losing vision or contracting a kind of moral blindness. In short, if you ask "What's in it for me?," the answer is "Whoever that me is."

As interesting as it may be to find this echo of ancient ethics in contemporary science fiction, it's more important to see that modern

psychologists also suggest a connection between moral virtue and a healthy human personality. The best example of this that I know of is the work of the contemporary American psychologist, Abraham Maslow (1908-70).

If you've studied Maslow's work at all, you've learned about his "hierarchy of needs." Maslow posits a series of five needs: physiological, safety, belongingness and love, esteem and self-actualization. All of us have them. The lower in the hierarchy, the greater the needs' strength, potency and priority. For instance, physiological and safety needs must be satisfied before worrying about meeting needs for love and esteem. The object of life is to fulfill them all--or at least as many of them as possible. Those who do are psychologically most happy and healthy.

What's of interest for our purposes, however, is the last need--self-actualization--because this is where we find Maslow talking about morality and the human character. In Maslow's theory, self-actualizers are the most healthy and most fully developed people you can find. They share the following characteristics. First, self-actualizers see life more accurately than the rest of us. (They are more objective and accurate in their judgments. Their perception is less distorted by their own fears, hopes or desires. And they are very perceptive about others). Second, they have a clearer notion of right and wrong. (They can recognize good and bad fairly easily, and they choose the good consistently and easily.) Third, an awareness of their own limitations produces a lack of arrogance and a sincere willingness to listen to and learn from others. Fourth, self-actualized people are committed to some work or cause they consider to be important. (They have a strong social interest and are concerned with finding solutions for society's problems.) Fifth, in a broad sense of the term, they are creative. Sixth, they are spontaneous, emotionally open and courageous. Seventh, self-actualizers have healthy, well-integrated personalities. (There is a minimum of internal conflict.) Eighth, they are highly independent and private people, but at the same time enjoy others and form deep, healthy and powerful relationships. Ninth, they are comfortable resisting popular opinion or the ideas of their culture when either goes against their own point of view. Tenth, self-actualizers generally accept a spiritual or mystical side of life. (They are not religious in the conventional sense, but Maslow claims that they accept the values taught by most great religions, "the transcendence of self, the fusion of the true, the good and the beautiful, contribution to others, wisdom, honesty, and naturalness, the transcendence of selfish and personal motivations, the giving up of 'lower' desires in favor of 'higher' ones, . . . the decrease of hostility, cruelty, and destructiveness and the increase of friendliness, kindness, etc.")\* \*A. H. Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, second edition (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1968); Frank G. Goble, *The Third Force* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1970).

(For more about self-actualized people, see Figure 3.)

The self-actualized person is obviously quite something. Not surprisingly, Maslow thinks that no more than 1% of the human population is self-actualized. Still, he believes that they represent the best that the human species can attain. Maslow calls self-actualizers the "growing tip" of humanity.

What's important about Maslow's concept of the self-actualized person for our purposes is that moral virtue is such a conspicuous part of it. Self-actualized people have a clear sense of right and wrong. They are highly principled and motivated by social good. Furthermore, Maslow claims that they tend to agree about matters of right and wrong. In fact, he suggests that because of this agreement, their "value judgments" seem to be more objective than subjective. He writes that "at least in the group I studied they tended to agree about what was right and wrong, as if they were perceiving something real and extrahuman rather than comparing tastes that might be relative to the individual person."

Maslow suggests that this agreement on values actually proceeds from their superior ability to perceive reality. The difference between them and us is that they see the world more accurately and therefore know more about

what is appropriate to do. Simply stated, because of what they know about the world (what is the case), they know what things ought to be done. Maslow observes, "This is where knowledge brings certainty of decision, action, choice and what to do, and therefore, strength of arm. This is very much like the situation with a surgeon or dentist. The surgeon opening up the abdomen and finding an inflamed appendix knows that it had better be cut out because if it bursts it will kill the person. This is an example of truth dictating what must be done, of the is dictating the ought." Elsewhere he puts it this way, "[This kind of] cognition can lead to moral sureness and decisiveness, in just about the same sense that the high IQ can lead to a clear perception of a complicated set of facts, or in about the same sense that a constitutionally sensitive aesthetic perceiver tends to see very clearly what color-blind people cannot see or what other people do not see. It makes no difference that one million color-blind people cannot see that the rug is colored green. They may think it is colored gray, but this will make no difference to the person who clearly, vividly, and unmistakably perceives the truth of the matter. . . . I believe that the average person can then be described as is-perceptive but ought-blind. The healthy person is more ought-perceptive."

Maslow gives us some important ideas to mull over. First he says that all of the things that we consider to be a part of someone with a strong moral character are characteristics of the healthy human personality. (The other side of this is obviously that people who regularly manipulate others, cheat or otherwise increase human harm are doing things that are in some sense "unhealthy" or at least signs of a weak or less developed personality.) Next he says that these people tend to agree on "value" judgments. And then he suggests that for self-actualized individuals, these "value judgments" are pretty objective and tied in to simply how well they can see the world. Their sense of right and wrong results from how well they perceive reality.

Let's take the idea about morality and the healthy personality first because this is virtually identical with Socrates' ideas. Both men think that ethical behavior is consistent with the strong, healthy human personality. And both imply that unethical behavior is unhealthy. It's especially significant that Maslow uses the concept of health because this isn't something a practicing psychologist of his training would use lightly. There are a couple of points here. First of all, because Maslow uses the idea of health, he's offering an objective basis to his arguments. Second, Maslow's theory suggests that ethically appropriate behavior benefits and that unethical behavior harms the doer. The ultimate justification of morality, then, is the well-being of the individual involved. All of which means that over the long haul, it makes about as much sense to be habitually self-interested and manipulative as it does to get addicted to heroin.

Next let's consider Maslow's idea that the self-actualizers tend to agree on their judgments about right and wrong and that this is the result of their superior perception of reality. Maslow's color blindness analogy that I just quoted is fascinating, especially when you consider it's made by a psychologist who was scientifically studying self-actualizers for years. The most developed humans, he claims, can probably "see" and identify the ethical dimensions and implications of actions or policies as clearly as you and I can see and identify the colors in flowers.

But what is it that these people see as they look at reality? What does Maslow mean when he says that self-actualized people are "ought-perceptive"? No doubt, this includes everything we've been talking about in the preceding four chapters. Self-actualizers "see" the intangible human dimension of problems. They "see" the human cost of different actions or policies. They "see" the consequences of actions (how much and what kind of human good or harm is produced by different deeds). They "see" the ethical character of actions themselves (how appropriate certain actions are for humans to do or experience, how well particular actions "fit" with human nature). And on the basis of what these people "see" about the world, they make judgments about what ought to happen. Furthermore, as a group, they generally agree. That

is, their perception leads them to roughly the same conclusions about what will maximize human good and minimize human harm.

One of the most important implications of this is that ethical judgments are basically objective. Maslow suggests that when self-actualized humans make ethical judgments, they use a standard of human good that is universal, not relative to either an individual or culture. And this is something that you should think long and hard about if you believe that ethical judgments are all relative, subjective or arbitrary.

When it comes down to it, Maslow doesn't really offer us ideas that we don't already find in Socrates. The two thinkers state things differently, but both assert an ultimate connection between moral goodness and a healthy, advanced, and well developed human personality. What Maslow does that Socrates doesn't do, however, is to base his findings on research. If you don't like what Socrates says, you can dismiss it with a remark like "What does he know about the real world, he's just a philosopher spinning out his own ideas." But you can't do that with Maslow's work. There may be ways of questioning it, but you can't argue with the fact that he's got a body of research which convinces him that there is this ethical dimension to the self-actualized human being.

On the basis of all of this, then, I hope you realize that you've got some problems if you want to argue that ethics is a totally personal, subjective or relative matter or, worse still, that it's a sign of strength to be able to be firmly committed to advance your own interest no matter whom you have to step on. According to Maslow, that would be like a color-blind person trying to convince the rest of us that colors are figments of our imagination or that his way of seeing the world is superior than ours because it didn't have all of the distractions we have. And that should really give you pause.

(By the way, I almost forgot. Maslow also says that self-actualizers enjoy sex more than average people do. So if a healthy, advanced personality isn't enough to make you take ethics seriously, then maybe a good sex life is.)

I hope that those of you out there who are more scientifically minded find what Maslow says to be significant. If so, you'll also be interested hearing that in contemporary American psychology, interest is rapidly growing in what's come to be called "moral development theory." Maslow isn't the only psychologist to propound the idea that a sense of morality is a fixture of the healthy human personality. What's really interesting about moral development theorists, however, is that they claim to be able to identify the characteristics of a fully developed moral sense and to chart the stages that people go through in achieving it. In fact, one of the most intriguing aspects of moral development theory is the claim that there may be fundamental differences in the way men and women perceive moral choices and make ethical decisions. I'm going to conclude this chapter with a brief look at the work of the two most important American psychologists working in this field: Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan, both of Harvard University.

Inspired by Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget's attempt to apply a structural approach to moral development, Lawrence Kohlberg has been working in this field for decades. Kohlberg claims that there are three levels of moral reasoning (preconventional, conventional and postconventional) and that each level has two stages. Accordingly, we can identify what level of moral development someone is at. We can see how far along someone's come and how far they still have to go.

At the preconventional level, good and bad is understood in terms of reward, punishment and power. (Children from 4 to 10 are usually at this level.) In stage 1, all that counts is power. "Good" is what the person with

the most power says is "good." Stage 2 advances on this slightly, with "good" being seen as something that will bring about some benefit to the individual.

People at the conventional level take as their moral standard the expectations and rules of their family or society. At stage 3, "good" behavior is seen as pleasing or helping others or at least trying to. At stage 4 social order is most important; doing one's duty, respecting authority and maintaining the status quo are seen as good in themselves.

At the postconventional level, people make moral decisions according to autonomous moral principles. Stage 5 has a social contract and utilitarian orientation; right and wrong depend on free agreement or standards adopted by the whole society. At stage 6 right and wrong is determined according to individually chosen universal ethical principles--justice, fairness, equality and the like, but primarily justice.

Thus, Kohlberg claims that people at each stage act for quite different reasons. For example, he shows how individuals can differ when it comes to "obeying rules": "The six stages look like this: 1. Obey rules to avoid punishment; 2. Conform to obtain rewards, have favors returned, and so on; 3. Conform to avoid disapproval, dislike by others; 4. Conform to avoid censure by legitimate authorities and resultant guilt; 5. Conform to maintain the respect of the impartial spectator judgment in terms of community welfare; 6. Conform to avoid self-condemnation."

According to Kohlberg, the most fully developed or "advanced" way to behave is very Kantian--assessing our behavior according to universal, abstract moral principles. This is very "act-oriented" (deontological). If you're thinking of stealing something from your college bookstore, Kohlberg would say that the best answer you could give would be, "Stealing violates basic moral principles which I have a deep allegiance to." (The worst would be, "I'm not going to steal because I'll probably be caught and punished.")

Human moral development, according to Kohlberg, means going through these six stages in this order. Full development means getting at least to stage 5. Furthermore, Kohlberg claims that his research shows that these stages are valid across cultures. There may be surface differences in the way different cultures manifest each stage and people may go through them at different rates in different cultures, but the sequence itself holds firm.

Echoing Maslow, then, Kohlberg contends that making decisions according to universal principles of justice isn't just different but better than deciding according to self-interest or considerations of power. A commitment to ethical principles is characteristic of full human development. "Preconventional" and "conventional" moral reasoning are in a very real sense more or less "primitive."

Carol Gilligan basically agrees with Kohlberg that there are specific stages of moral development that characterize the healthy, fully developed human personality. However, she takes sharp issue with the stages themselves and introduces the fascinating thesis that they differ between men and women.

Taking her cue from the fact that Kohlberg's initial studies did not include any women or girls, Gilligan saw that women generally fared badly when their moral reasoning was charted by Kohlberg's system. Women's responses to cases both real and hypothetical generally focussed on how much actual harm or good was done. And Kohlberg's system sees this as a "conventional" response, indicating that the woman was at stage 3 or 4.

As a result, Gilligan posited that most women actually employ a quite different ethical approach than the one most men use. This led her to claim that there are two distinct ethics at work--an ethic of justice (measured by Kohlberg and used by most men) and an ethic of care (used by most women).

The ethic of care focuses on our responsibility to help others and minimize actual harm. This account of moral development also suggests stages or "perspectives," but different ones from Kohlberg's. The first stage is characterized by caring only for the self in order to ensure survival. This is followed by a transitional phase in which this attitude is criticized as selfish and in which the individual begins to see connections between the self and others. The second stage then is characterized by a sense of responsibility, and "good" is equated with caring for others. Devotion to others' interests to the exclusion of one's own ultimately takes its toll, however. This leads to a second transition in which the tensions between the responsibility to care for others and the need to have one's own needs met are resolved. The third and final stage is then defined by the acceptance of the principle of care as an individually chosen universal ethical principle which condemns exploitation and hurt in the lives of others and ourselves.

As Gilligan explains it, the ethic of care rests on the idea that no one should be hurt. This differs from Kohlberg's ethic of justice which is built on the idea that everyone should be treated the same. The central moral command of the ethic of care is to "discern and alleviate the 'real and recognizable trouble' of this world." By contrast, the prime moral imperative of the ethic of justice is "to respect the rights of others and thus to protect from interference the rights to life and self-fulfillment." Gilligan calls the ethic of justice a morality of rights and the ethic of care a morality of responsibility.

Gilligan sees fairness and equality as the main ideas undergirding the former, whereas the latter's premise is a concept of equity. "Fairness" and "equality" call for strict "impartiality" and "blind justice" with everyone being treated identically. The world of law is big on equality. "Equity," however, isn't blind at all. It looks very carefully at the particulars of a situation and allows for people to be treated differently if they have different needs. People who make exceptions to policies because of extenuating circumstances decide according to a principle of equity.

Take this example. Your teacher in this course announces a firm policy about missing exams. If you don't show up, you may take a make-up exam, but your grade will be lowered a full step. Her reason is that everyone in the class is in the same boat with about the same demands on their time. If you miss the exam, even if you're sick, you're ending up with more time at your disposal than the rest of the class. Since you have more time, you should be more familiar with the material and should do better on the test than your classmates. The penalty is just a way to make things fair and equal for everyone.

Now imagine that three people miss the next exam. Ken overslept. Barbie came down with whatever flu is going around in the dormitories. And Rehan had spent the entire night before the test and most of the morning talking to his friend Mark who was so despondent that he said he'd even thought of killing himself. This was the first time in Rehan's life someone had told you that. He'd had no idea Mark was so depressed because Mark kept all of his feelings to himself. Rehan was stunned by the experience and totally at a loss about what to do. He's trying to get Mark to go to a psychologist, but Mark is resisting. Rehan was too upset to think, never mind take an examination.

Strictly speaking, according to a principle of justice, fairness and equality, Rehan should be penalized on the make-up exam. The rule was clear, he understood and broke it. If his professor lets him off the hook, isn't that unfair to the rest of the class? If she doesn't penalize him and still penalizes the other two students who missed the test, wouldn't she be really unfair to them? All three students did the same thing. Shouldn't all be treated equally?

Yet maybe such a legalistic approach isn't appropriate. And this is where equity comes in. A principle of equity lets you look at the

circumstances and in effect treat similar cases differently. We might say that your teacher's policy is designed to handle only "ordinary" episodes of missing an exam--like Ken and Barbie's cases. "Equity" lets your professor say that the rule simply doesn't cover Rehan's special circumstances. Equity allows a solution to be devised that will fit. Equity doesn't require identical treatment; it requires that people be treated appropriately to the circumstances.

So what does this case look like from the perspective of the "ethic of care"? Remembering that the central moral command of the ethic of care is to "discern and alleviate the `real and recognizable trouble' of this world," we can first of all appreciate that by helping Mark, Rehan was attending to a higher responsibility than to fulfill his obligations to be in class. It then wouldn't seem right to punish him for doing what he had a moral responsibility to do. Also, considering how serious this matter is and how deeply it's affecting Rehan, he's not going to be getting any practical advantage from having more time to prepare for the exam. When we incorporate the principle of equity, which lets us mould our response to the situation, we can see that the appropriate thing to do is to let Rehan take the make-up without any penalty, but enforcing the announced policy for Ken and Barbie.

If Gilligan is right (and I'm persuaded that by and large she is), this means that there are fundamental differences in the way people work through moral dilemmas from start to finish. These differences would encompass how people think about: what counts as an ethical issue in the first place, how serious it actually is, how to resolve it, and how to evaluate one's final decision. As Gilligan puts it, "two moral voices--one that speaks of equality, reciprocity, justice and rights, one that speaks of connections, not hurting, care and response--can be distinguished in the way people frame and resolve moral problems and in their evaluations of the choices they make."

The obvious question to ask is whether one of these two ethics is better than the other. Gilligan argues, however, that they are actually complementary--that both of them should be part of our moral reasoning. Accordingly, she encourages "justice" people to make the effort to see what a "care" perspective would tell them about a moral dilemma, and vice versa. We have, then, two perspectives that are simply different.

Before closing this discussion, let me point out that Gilligan claims that most people actually have both of these "voices," so to call these "male" and "female" approaches to moral reasoning is somewhat misleading. Nonetheless, most people use the approach or "moral style" which is characteristic of their sex. In addition, the question of the source of this difference is at this point irrelevant, that is, whether it is simply socialization into traditional sex roles, the result of the greater use by women of the right hemisphere of their brain or some other reason. The point of this discussion is simply to let you know that there are these different approaches. After all, by understanding them better, you can accept, understand and work more effectively with the people you find using them.

Actually, it seems to me that there is a rough parallel between these two ethics and the two approaches I talked about earlier. In lots of ways, the ethic of care's concern with preventing harm and its focus on the context in which actions take place is like a results-oriented approach. In the same way, the ethic of justice's concern with equal respect for people's rights is similar to an act-oriented approach. Nonetheless, there are dimensions of the difference Gilligan talks about that are not covered by reducing it to this. So try to consider this on its own merits.

As interesting as the differences are between Kohlberg and Gilligan, however, they shouldn't obscure the fact that the two psychologists agree that there is indeed such a thing as moral development and that it is grounded in the human personality. That means that while the two of them might disagree about how they evaluate certain types of moral reasoning, they are both

committed to the idea that certain ways of thinking about and resolving ethical dilemmas are mature and well developed and others come up short. And as with Maslow you have to remember that these people have spent years doing empirical research on this issue. Idle speculation it isn't.

I'm sure you're relieved to see the end of such a long chapter. Actually, for all the discussion, this chapter contains only two pretty simple and straightforward claims--that ethical behavior is one of the traits of the mature, strong, healthy and fully developed human personality, and that unethical behavior ultimately has a negative effect on us. We've looked at dimensions of these theses through a whole range of sources--Greek philosophy, medieval Christian thought, modern science fiction and contemporary psychology--and while there are important differences among them, they all back up the heart of these ideas. Now while it's true that a lot of mistaken ideas have gotten pretty wide backing, I'd like to think that the range of evidence I've just run through is hard to beat.

1. What's your reaction to the two main claims of this chapter:

--that ethical behavior is one of the traits of the mature, strong, healthy and fully developed human personality; and

--that unethical behavior ultimately has a negative effect on us.

2. Have you found it true in your own life that once you started doing something you used to think is wrong (cheating, lying, stealing), it got easier and you did it more often? Or did you find the exact opposite--that you did it once and were so upset with yourself that you stopped? If the latter is the case, does that prove that Socrates is wrong?

3. To some extent, what people like Socrates and Maslow claim about morality and the healthy, fully developed personality doesn't square with some pretty basic ideas in our society. We're told that aggressively competing and trying to advance our own interests is a sign of strength. Someone "who doesn't have the stomach to play hard ball" is seen as a wimp. What's your reaction to this?

4. Consider the following example. You work at a record store. On Monday night your boss has to leave early and asks you to lock up for her. At closing time you put everything away, lock the back door and look around to make sure everything's o.k. You know there's a window in the back room but you don't check it because nobody ever opens it. In the morning you come in and find out that someone came in through the window and made off with half of the store's inventory. You remember that you never checked the window. You have two options: a) tell your boss the truth and see what happens, or b) swear to her that you locked the window and convince her that the thieves must have found some other way to get in (your boss trusts you and the circumstances of the theft are such that you could probably get away with it). Which of these is the stronger thing to do? Telling the truth may require honesty and a willingness to accept some unpleasant consequences, but if you do that you aren't looking after your own interests very well. Besides insurance will cover the loss and you figure you've learned your lesson about checking every detail, no matter how small. On the other hand, telling the story will take a little imagination and discipline. You know that you're basically a good worker but that your boss may feel compelled to fire you no

matter what. If you lie (you tell yourself), you're showing that you know how to protect yourself in the "real" world.

5. Do you see any differences in how men and women identify and resolve ethical dilemmas?