

A Reader in

Philosophical Dilemmas

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for Pathways Schools (Australia)
a project of the International Society for Philosophers

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Ch.2. *Philosophical Dilemmas: A Pro and Con Introduction to the Major Questions*. Second Edition. Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, 2001.

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Social Philosophy: Liberty, Equality, Justice

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1 Is society based on a contract?

Contractor or Organicist?

Society is a fascinating thing. Like everyone else, philosophers think about society and try to understand it. They try to look at it as a whole. But what kind of thing is a society? A society is a kind of abstraction. You cannot see it or touch it. It is made up of many individuals, who are not abstractions. Should we think of a society as simply a large number of individuals? Or is it something more?

Sociologists who study society never observe anything but particular individuals. Based on their surveys, they make generalizations about society. For example, some sociologists may say that Australia is becoming a more religious society. But what they actually observe is individuals going to church, or people saying that they are religious. They cannot observe a whole society.

On the other hand, societies seem to be more than just collections of individuals. We say that Australian society is a democracy, it is divided into economic classes, it is growing, it is finding its role in the Asia-Pacific region and the world. But an individual is not a democracy, he or she is not divided into classes, and may not be violent. It seems that a society as a whole can have characteristics that individuals do not.

Furthermore, many people believe that society influences the individuals in it. The form of government, the educational institutions, the predominant religion, the economic activity and opportunities, the traditions, and many other aspects of society shape and mould the individuals who grow up and live in that society. If society can cause changes in individuals, it must exist and be a real thing. How can an abstraction exist and cause changes in people?

Philosophers have tried to understand society as a whole, and have divided into two main camps. Some believe that society is a real entity, existing in its own right. Societies have properties of their own, just as an animal has properties different from the properties of the individual cells in its body. Others claim that the basic reality is individuals, and the word "society" simply describes groups of individuals who live and work together. If we want to understand a society, they say, we must look at some particular individuals and their behaviours, thoughts, and feelings. Words like "class," "social role," and "collective consciousness" attempt to give reality to mental constructs that do not objectively exist.

The first essay represents the second view. It claims that society is based on a social contract, and it explains that idea. Since it emphasizes the social contract, we can call any one with this point of view a contractor. The second essay argues that society has real properties, different from the properties of the individuals who compose it. It suggests that society is like an organism and individuals are like the cells in it. A person with this point of view is an organicist.

YES: CONTRACTOR

"The Social Contract"

In the history of political philosophy, the social contract tradition holds a prominent place. The great founders of the modern outlook, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, were all contract theorists. Today the most widely discussed work in political philosophy, John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*, employs the idea of a social contract. The theory of the social contract maintains that individuals create society when they agree among themselves to give up certain rights in return for security. The idea of a contract explains how society originated (we all agreed to form one), and why we ought to obey the laws (we all promised).

But a long tradition does not prove that a theory is true. Is this another emperor with no clothes? Another big abstraction that philosophers quarrel over, but that has no relevance to the real world? It is naive to think that primitive societies suddenly sprang up when some Neanderthals met together in a clearing and agreed to live together. Historically the contract very probably never happened. At the present time the theory may seem to be no more applicable. An Australian citizen does not enter into a contract with all the other citizens or with the government. I am a citizen, but I never signed a contract. How could I make an agreement with all the millions of other citizens?

All of these points, about the past and the present, are well taken. But the theory of a social contract is still useful and valid. The key is to see that it is not a description of actual events at all, past or present, but is a model of society. What is a model? A model is a simplified structure, with just a few parts, that is like some other thing, complex and baffling, that we are trying to understand. For example, Neils Bohr said that the solar system could serve as a model of an atom. That is, we can understand an atom if we think of it as a sort of tiny solar system. The nucleus is like the sun, and the electrons are like the planets whirling around it. Everyone understood the solar system and how it worked. Bohr proposed that an atom, which people did not understand, has similar parts, related in similar ways.

The social contract is supposed to be a model of society. Its proponents say we can understand the essential features of society if we think of it as if people had entered a contract. A contract is a simplified structure that everyone understands. If Bob and Sue have a contract, then both agree to do something, and expect to get something in return. Bob agrees to work, and Sue agrees to pay him. Or if they are getting a divorce, Bob may agree to give up the house but keep the car, if Sue agrees to give up the car and keep the house.

But how is society like a contract? According to the social contract theorists, the most fundamental feature of society is compromise. Society is essentially a matter of give and take, an exchange, or rather many exchanges. Every citizen knows that he must make some sacrifices, and cannot do whatever he wants. He must respect the people around him. But he also knows that he benefits from the others. They build, farm, heal, teach, protect, and do all the things he cannot do for himself. His relationship to them is like a contract, since he gives up something, and expects to get something in return. That compromise is the foundation of society, although no one ever actually makes a contract.

The social contract theory tells us what is important about the relations among people in a society. But it does more. It tells us what is important about those people who are related. It tells us about human nature. Think about a person who enters a contract. What kind of a person must he be? Well, first he must be rational, in the sense that he thinks about what is good for himself in the long term and not just the short term. He can control his impulses, and therefore

make sacrifices now for future gains. And he can think abstractly about benefits that are intangible and won't occur until later, like security and help in a crisis.

The second trait he must have is sociability. He must be cooperative, in the sense that he wants to get along with others. He feels that his life is better with other people than without. He is willing to trust others, and willing to keep his side of a bargain. A person who enters a contract must be sociable in this sense.

The social contract theory is surely correct in saying that people have these attitudes--they are rational, sociable, and willing to compromise. And it is correct in singling out these attitudes as crucial for understanding the nature of society. It is certainly an improvement over other models of society. For example, in the Middle Ages apologists for monarchs defended a "father and children" model. They wanted to emphasize the authority of the king over his subjects. Later, others offered an "organic" model, according to which society is like a living organism, and individuals are like the head, hands, eyes, and so on. They wanted to emphasize that everyone has his proper role to play, and that individuals should serve the whole society. Individuals exist for the sake of society, as arms and legs exist to serve the whole person. Today we recognize the importance of individuals, and their rationality, sociability, and willingness to compromise.

The real strength of the social contract theory lies in its ability to explain two important points. In highlighting the attitudes involved in making a contract, the theory explains the origin of society. It is these attitudes that create society and sustain it. Society grew up gradually, as humans became more rational and sociable, and capable of making contracts. Thus the contract theory explains the origins of society by uncovering its foundations in human nature, not by hypothesizing some historical agreement.

The theory also provides a convincing answer to the most important question in political philosophy: Why should citizens obey the law? What makes a government legitimate? The theory says that living in a society and abiding by its laws is like entering a contract. And there are two reasons that people should keep their contracts. First, they have a basic, moral obligation to do what they promise to do. And second, they benefit from the contract. It would be self-defeating to break it.

In a society, a citizen should obey the law because he has agreed to give up some of his liberty. He has agreed to accept the restraint of the law. And he benefits from living in a society with stable laws. He makes the sacrifice in order to win this prize in return. So it is in his long-term interest to obey the law.

In other words, we have a self-regarding reason to obey the law, and a purely moral reason. This is a powerful justification of government. When we combine it with the other explanations the social contract theory gives us, we can see why the theory has had such a long, respected career.

Key Concepts

social contract	rational	origin of society
model	sociable	obligation
compromise		

Critical Questions

1. What objections to the contract theory does the contractor mention at the beginning of the essay?
2. The contractor says the social contract is a model of society. Can you give another example of a model of something?
3. What is the most fundamental feature of society, according to the contractor?
4. How does the social contract theory explain the origin of society?
5. The social contract theory says we have two reasons to obey the law. What are they?
6. In your opinion, does our rationality and sociability create society, or does society create our rationality and sociability?

NO: ORGANICIST **"The Social Organism"**

Staying with my cousin in the United States last holiday they took me to an American Football game and it opened my eyes to a whole new way of seeing people. The game was fun, but it was the whole experience, especially the crowd, that appeared in a new light. Sitting high in the stadium, I could see thousands of people. They all jumped to their feet together, cheered or booed at the same time, did the wave, and encouraged the team. The spectacle made me realize that the crowd was real. It existed, like a huge, dim-witted animal, with joys, angers, fears, and desires of its own. It was more than just a collection of people. It was just as real as the individuals, but different from them. I could see the thing move and change moods with my own eyes, as clearly as I could see my friends sitting beside me.

I first began looking at groups differently when the marching band came out on the field and lined up to spell the words "Go Bears." I had seen bands do this before in Hollywood movies, but I had never thought about it. But then it occurred to me that the members of the band could not see the words. They might not even know what words they were making. From the point of view of an individual in the band, he was simply marching from one yard line to another, watching the person in front of him, turning left and right, following instructions. The difference in perspectives was astounding. To me, the band as a whole had definite, observable properties. It had a meaningful shape, the shape of the words "Go Bears." But the properties were not visible to the individuals in the band.

"Is it possible that a whole society is like a marching band," I wondered. Is a society more than the individuals in it? Does a society have meaningful properties distinct from the properties of its members, properties that are only visible "from a distance"? If it does, they would be difficult to see, because we cannot "rise above" our own society, the way I could rise above the band by sitting in the stadium. And individuals are so much easier to see that they distract us from larger patterns. But I was intrigued.

After watching the marching band for a while, I began observing the crowd more carefully. The first thing I saw was the wave moving around the stadium. But I could only see it

from a distance. If I looked at the individuals near me, all I saw was a person stand up and then sit down. So the crowd was like the band. It had physical properties as a whole, different from the properties of the individuals in it.

Besides shape, the crowd also had more interesting emotional properties. When our team made a long run or a pass, the crowd was thrilled and anxious for the team to do more. When we scored a touchdown, the crowd was almost delirious with joy. And it was proud, confident of winning, and a little contemptuous of the opposing team. But the game went back and forth. When the other side made a gain or a score, the crowd was dejected, confused, and a little angry. I'm not saying that I felt these emotions. I'm saying the crowd as a whole felt them. The crowd's emotions were just as real as the words formed by the band. They weren't as easy to see as the words, and it took a little practice to recognize them. In fact, it was the sounds more than the movements that revealed the crowd's feelings. The sounds it made when our team gained yardage were slightly different from the sounds it made when we scored. The difference was subtle, but once I began listening for it, I could hear it. It was just a matter of looking beyond the particular individuals to the properties of the whole group.

In the past I had always seen the crowd as nothing more than a collection of fans, all different from each other. But now I saw that the crowd had a life of its own, a unity, a direction, an identity, beyond the thoughts or emotions of any particular fan or group of fans. The crowd was not the same thing as the individual fans, because the crowd influenced the fans. When the crowd was excited I became excited, too. When the crowd felt confident and happy about the prospects of a victory, then I began feeling that way as well. The crowd had an effect on me; it imparted its emotion to me, as it did to everyone else. The energy and optimism were all around me, like smoke in the air I was breathing. It was impossible not to absorb the emotions. Watching the game in the stadium was much more intense and emotional than watching it at home on TV. The game itself was interesting, but it didn't affect me the way the crowd did.

I'm not sure exactly how the crowd was able to influence people's feelings. The combination of dramatic sights and sounds, the fact that each person was completely surrounded, and the feeling of overwhelming power from such a massive beast, all probably contributed to its effectiveness. I also saw another factor. When a couple near us cheered for the opposition, a lot of fans whistled, booed, and yelled things like "Shut up, ya bums," and "Get outa here!" The crowd enforced conformity.

Reflecting on the experience later, I realized that the crowd was a real thing, distinct from the individuals composing it. The crowd's mood was not just the sum of the fans' moods. It was made up of the individual fans' emotions, but it was something more, because it could influence the fans. The crowd had a causal power of its own, which could change the feelings of the individuals sitting in the stadium. It wasn't just an abstraction in my mind, or a generalization, or the totality of the fans. It was a real, different thing. It was created when the fans came together, but it was more than the sum of its parts.

Since the game I have been thinking about this experience, and I decided that there is an important lesson here. I have been reading about sociology, "the science of society," and I am beginning to understand what sociologists say. They say that society is a real thing, with its own character, and that it is not reducible to the individuals in it. Societies have "group properties," just as the marching band and the crowd do. It is a distinct entity, in the sense that it can influence and shape its members. Because of the patterns in a society and its organization, it imparts certain values and ways of thinking to its members. For example, most societies have a

hierarchical structure, like a pyramid. Some people are ranked "above" others, based on their economic power, political power, military power, age, religious devotion, or something else. If we could sit in a stadium high above a society, and if we could see status relationships as easily as we can see spatial relationships, then the pyramid would be as visible as the words "Go Bears." What's more, the hierarchical pattern of a society strongly influences individuals' goals, their assumptions about other individuals, and their basic beliefs about human nature. It determines what we believe is "natural" and "right."

I hadn't understood the nature of society before now. I "couldn't see the forest for the trees." I couldn't see whole groups and their properties, but could see only individuals and their properties. I was blind because we all have an atomistic bias, in my opinion. We assume that the way to understand something is to take it apart and see how it works, see what it's made of, and reduce it to its fundamental atoms. But that tendency is short-sighted. It prevents us from seeing important aspects of the world, the aspects that only occur when parts come together to form larger wholes. The atomistic bias is partly the result of the prestige of physics and chemistry, which have been very successful in breaking things down into atoms. But it is probably even more the result of the political bias in favour of individualism in our society. People are discouraged from looking at groups and their properties because the individual is sacred in our society. But the political bias doesn't make groups any less real.

There are many examples of systems which have important properties that are not reducible to the properties of their parts. One is language. What kind of thing is a language, such as English? The atomistic bias makes us think that individual speakers and their statements at particular times are the ultimate reality. And that when a linguist says "English usually forms the plural of nouns by adding s," he is simply making a generalisation about what English speakers do. But that would be a misperception of language. A language is not just the totality of the statements that individual speakers make. It exists on a different level from the particular persons who speak it. It is distinct from them in the same way that a society is distinct from its members: it influences and shapes the speakers' behaviour. People speak as they do because the language requires them to. They have no choice. If someone says "The farmer owns six cow," his error sounds so strange that people laugh, or at least correct him immediately. Something is applying tremendous pressure on the individual, and everyone else, since a violation of the grammatical rules sounds so absurd and unacceptable. That something is the language. The language is a real thing, over and above individual speakers and statements. It guides the speakers.

A language is distinct from individual speakers in another sense as well. It existed before any speakers alive today. English speakers do not create the language. The language came first; individual speakers learn to use it and have to conform to it. It will continue to exist after everyone living today is dead. Latin exists even though no one speaks it. Of course a language is not a physical object. We cannot touch it, as we can touch a person. But it is still real, and not the same as the person or his statements.

Societies are like languages. They consist of patterns, organization, structure, and rules. Individuals embody the structure, or implement it, but the structure is not the same as the individuals. Take another aspect of society. Every society has some form of government. The government is the decision-making mechanism for the society as a whole. Sometimes whole societies must act (to defend themselves, for example), and they need to decide how and when to act. The government makes the decisions. What is a government? It is not a group of people. The people come and go but the government remains the same. In Australia, the Parliament has

certain powers and duties, and they remain the same even though the individuals exercising those powers change every few years. The office of the Prime Minister remains the same even though the individual holding that office changes. A government is a group of people, but it has its own properties and structure, beyond the individuals who personify it.

A government is only one small part of a society. Societies consist of traditions, customs, unspoken rules, ways of behaving and thinking, and many other structures that are embodied by individuals. Think of all the obvious and subtle ways, internal and external, that Australians are different from Americans and English are different from the French and Italians and Germans. These differences are reflected in Australian society. The structure makes individuals the way they are. Australian society makes a person an Australian, not the other way around. And the whole complex structure remains as individuals come and go.

It's true that if the individuals didn't exist, then their society wouldn't exist either. The society must be embodied in some persons. But it is also true that if the society didn't exist, then the individuals wouldn't exist. If there were no customs, traditions, rules, methods of thinking, moral values, or other social structures, then there would be no individuals. No human beings, that is. Physical organisms might exist in isolation, biologically identical to us, but they would not be human. They would have no language, no morality, no culture, no technology, no human qualities. Individuals depend on society for their existence, and societies depend on individuals. Both are equally real. But for purposes of understanding, the properties of societies are more important.

The best example of a system with group properties is a living organism. In fact the best way to understand the nature of society is to think of it as an organism. An organism, such as a fish or a bird, is made up of many smaller parts: head, tail, stomach, heart, etc. These parts can be divided into even smaller parts, until we get to individual cells. So from one point of view, a bird is a collection of cells. But obviously the bird has important--in fact, absolutely vital--properties that no single cell or group of cells has. The bird is nurturing, skilful, sometimes fearful; it flies, it forages for food, migrates in the winter, and sings to signal its territory. Stomach cells don't hunt, skin cells don't fly, and muscle cells don't sing. If we humans were the size of single cells, and if we lived inside the bird, we might never discover these important truths. We would look at other individual cells, and perhaps observe some common features ("blood cells are either red or white," "muscle cells sometimes contract"), without seeing the true reality.

But when it comes to society, we are like individual cells living in a larger organism. Society is the organism, and it has vital properties that affect us all. A society can be nurturing or aggressive, healthy or sick, confident or fearful. That is not to say that some individuals have these properties. The society as a whole can have them, and society is a different thing. It is much more difficult to see the properties of whole societies than it is to see the properties of an individual, especially if we are biased in favour of individuals. But they are certainly real and certainly important.

Key Concepts

society	distinct existence	atomistic bias
group properties	causal influence	organism

Critical Questions

1. What examples of group properties does the organicist give? Can you think of any other examples?
2. Why does the organicist say that the football crowd is distinct from the particular fans in the stadium? Would the organicist say that the crowd is "independent" of the fans?
3. What is the atomistic bias?
4. Do you think the Latin language exists? Is it a real part of the world? If it were no longer taught in schools and colleges, would it still exist?
5. Do you think individuals and societies are equally dependent on each other? Don't individuals invent and change their societies?
6. In what ways are societies like organisms, according to the organicist? Can you think of any important differences between societies and organisms?

Methods and Techniques: models

The first essay describes the contract theory as a model of society. The second proposes an organism as the best model of society. Philosophers and scientists--including social scientists--often use models to try to understand things, so it will be useful to examine the idea of a model in more detail.

A model is a simpler, usually smaller, representation of something else. We are all familiar with children's models. Some children assemble wooden or plastic models of ships and planes, or play with models of cars and trucks. Other children play with dolls, which are models of people. Or they play with small representations of tea sets, kitchen utensils, or houses and furniture. Traditionally boys played with one kind of model and girls played with other kinds, but the rigid roles seem to be softening a bit. Actually almost all children's toys are models of one kind or another because children can learn a lot about the real world by practicing with these models. Playing with models is part of the long process of preparing for adulthood.

Philosophers and scientists do exactly the same thing. They build models of various things to try to learn how those things work. For example, engineers want to understand how an airplane flies, so they can make it fly better. An airplane is a very complicated machine, so engineers study different parts of it at different times. One group of engineers may study a part of one wing. They will build a model of the wing (or part of it), and a model of the atmosphere. The model of the atmosphere is called a wind tunnel, and it blows air through the tunnel like the air passing over an airplane when it is flying. They put their wing in the tunnel and study how it behaves in different conditions. It is much easier than trying to study a real airplane in flight.

The purpose of a model is to make a very complex situation simpler. The transportation departments of large cities have models of their public transportation systems. For example, each one has a model of its subway system. The model represents the lines, their intersections, the terminals, and the trains on the lines. They might also represent the passengers as well. The

model is much simpler than the real subway system, with its thousands of passengers, hundreds of trains, its stops and starts, its noise and confusion, its electric currents, transit police, vagrants, and so on. The model allows the engineers to see the main elements and study those. The engineers must ignore much of the system if they are to understand the basic workings.

A child might have a model train, and could even have a model of the subway system. But it would look very different from the transportation department's model. The department's model would probably consist of lines and electric lights to indicate positions of trains, and perhaps other markers to show speed, number of passengers, and other information. The engineers would not have small trains and cars on little tracks moving from place to place (at least not on duty, but who knows what they do at home?). Why are the two models so different? Because the engineers and the child are interested in different aspects of the world. The child is interested in the way a train looks. The engineer is interested in the ways many trains move over the whole system relative to each other. This difference illustrates the fact that we can make different models of the same thing, and they might be equally useful.

When we think of models we usually think of physical replicas. But models can be abstract, too. For example, meteorologists make computer models of hurricanes and other weather patterns. A computer model of a storm is not physical. When a computer models a storm, you might see an image on the computer screen, or you might see only numbers. But the model is not an image. To make a model of a storm, the scientist makes a list of the main factors in the storm, like wind velocity, wind direction, humidity, barometric pressure, temperature, and so on. He also sets down certain rules regulating the relations among the factors. For example, one rule might say that when the temperature increases, the humidity also increases. Or if the barometric pressure increases, then the wind direction tends to be away from the increase. Once the scientist has noted all the factors and all the relations among them, he can manipulate the model to see how it behaves. He can tell the computer to increase the wind velocity by 50%, and then see what will happen to all the other factors.

Creating models is exciting and fun, but that is not why scientists do it. They want to understand what they are modelling. So the meteorologist compares the behaviour of his model with real storms, to see how accurate his model is. If it is very similar to past storms, then it will allow him to predict the behaviour of future storms. And that is a valuable scientific accomplishment. Moreover, by manipulating the model, he may also discover new relationships and new factors that scientists had overlooked before. Thus the real purpose of models is to enable us to understand complex phenomena in ways that we had not understood before.

The weather is a notoriously difficult phenomenon to model and predict. But societies are undoubtedly even more complex than the weather. We need a model of society to make it comprehensible. Or perhaps we need several models of the different parts of a society. Models reduce complex systems to simpler replicas. The contractor suggests that we can understand society in its essence by thinking of it as a contract among people. A contract is something that we all understand, and it is relatively simple. A contractor claims it lays bare the essential structure of society, beneath all the distracting details of individual lives, such as different styles of clothing, different types of work, different ways of relaxing, different beliefs and different residences.

Is he right? Every model is both similar to and different from the thing modelled. How similar, and is it similar in the right ways? Is an organism a better model of society? In evaluating a model you should ask two questions: are the similarities explanatory and predictive? Are the differences unimportant or irrelevant to the behaviour of the thing modelled? You might

try to imagine a model of some social situation yourself. How would you model a date? A family meal? A typical class? Can you think of some physical analogue of these situations? (Some people have said two people on a date are like two magnets: the closer they get, the stronger the attraction between them.) Or can you create an abstract model of them? What are the key factors, and what rules govern the relations among the factors? You can test your model by asking the two questions I mentioned about similarities and differences.

Understanding the Dilemma

Contractor or Organicist?

Human beings live in groups. We form societies and we are formed by societies. The nature of a society, and the relation between an individual and her society, are fundamental, difficult questions. Your perspective on these questions is naturally an important part of your worldview.

The contractor sees society as an artificial structure, created by individuals for their benefit. Individuals come first. It is basic human nature to be rational and cooperative, according to the contractor. All people are similar in this basic respect. These traits then give rise to society. Individuals think about their own interests, and they come together to exchange goods, defend each other, assist each other in producing food, and so on. These interactions are like contracts, although they may not be explicit or even conscious. Beginning with rational individuals, the contractor arrives at a conception of society as a set of cooperative agreements. The agreements are provisional and temporary. Individuals could change them if they wish.

The organicist claims that society is much more important than the contractor allows. In the first place, society is real in a way that the contractor ignores. Societies have properties that individuals do not have. If we make the effort to step outside of our society and look at it as a whole, then we can see features that are not just generalizations about many individuals. The organicist claims that societies are like marching bands or sports crowds, which have their own distinct properties, moods, desires, and tendencies.

But contractors have a different view. They say that organicists have projected an abstract idea in their minds onto the real world. It's true that a society can be aggressive and interventionist, for example, but that just means that many individuals in that society are aggressive and interventionist. The social property is only a generalization in the observer's mind. It is not a distinct reality.

This disagreement cuts across many philosophical issues. The contractor has a strict standard of what is real, while the organicist has a more inclusive, flexible standard. The contractor believes that reality is made up of individual entities--human beings, trees, words--which have a shape and are located in space, that is, things one can see and touch. The organicist believes reality is more complicated. It includes things that we cannot see or touch. For example, gravitational force. Gravity is not an object located at a particular point in space. It is a different kind of thing. In fact, some philosophers say that if scientific laws exist, then reality

includes more than just individual entities. It includes laws, which are not just generalizations in scientists' minds. The organicist also believes that societies exist, over and above the individuals who compose them. If we agree that organisms are real, and have their own distinct properties different from properties of cells, then we can say the same about societies.

The organicist claims that societies are important in a second way. Not only are they as real as individuals, but they also influence and shape individuals. The properties of an individual--including his rationality and sociability--depend on the society into which he is born. The society comes first; it existed before the individuals who now compose it. And it moulds people into the type of individuals who can fit into that society. For example, the society determines the language they speak and think with. It determines what is "rational" and "sociable." One's social class determines one's manners, goals, sense of humour, and so on.

A contractor, in contrast, believes that individuals agree among themselves to form groups. The only interactions are among individuals, not between an individual and a class or society. A contractor would say that he learns a language, of course, but he learned it from his parents, schoolmates, and teachers, not from some abstraction called a "society." He acquired goals and values, but he acquired them from his mother and father, and perhaps a few other authority figures. And when he gained maturity, he began choosing his values for himself. As for rationality and sociability, they are the same everywhere.

This second disagreement, then, is about causation. Should we say that a society can influence a person, or that only other individuals can influence a person? Contractors and organicists answer this question differently.

You should also consider one last difference. The contractor wants to explain why people should obey the law. He says it is because they have promised, and because it is in their interest to obey. The organicist represented here doesn't consider that question, but he would probably have a different answer. He says a society is real, and has its own tendencies and interests, just as an organism has interests different from the interests of any particular cells in its body. A society expresses its interests in laws. Therefore, he would probably say that an individual is obligated to obey the law because it expresses something that is greater and more important than himself. It expresses the will of the society as a whole, made up of many individuals, not just himself. The goals and needs of a whole society are obviously much more important, more valuable, than the wishes of any single individual. That is why an individual should obey the law.

Contractor

1. The idea of a contract provides a model for understanding the foundations and structure of society.
2. People and their natural traits--rationality, friendliness--are basic; they create a society.
3. Individuals consider their interests and make agreements with other individuals; that web of agreements is what we call "society."
4. People are obligated to obey the laws of their society because they have implicitly promised to do so, and because it is in their interest to do so.

Organicist

5. Groups have their own properties distinct from the individuals in those groups.
6. Groups are clearly distinct from individuals because groups can influence the individuals within them.
7. Virtually everything about a person is the result of living in his or her society.
8. A society exerts a moral claim on an individual because a whole society is vastly more important than a single individual.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Historical Examples

Contractor: John Locke. *Second Treatise on Civil Government*. Many editions. Originally published in 1689. In Locke's version of the contract, rational, independent people enter into an agreement for their convenience, and can suspend the contract if they wish.

Organicist: Emile Durkheim. *The Rules of Sociological Method*. The Free Press, 1964. Originally published in 1895. In chap. 1, "What is a Social Fact?" Durkheim presents his view that social facts are not reducible to individual facts.

Other Sources

Tom Campbell. *Seven Theories of Human Society*. Oxford U.P., 1981. In each chapter Campbell describes the writer's method, assumptions about human nature, and concept of society, and he adds his own assessment. David Frisby and Derek Sayer. *Society*. Tavistock, 1986. Chap. 1 is a survey of various conceptions of society. Michael Lessnoff. *Social Contract*. Humanities, 1986. A historical study of the idea of a social contract. Ernest Barker. *Social Contract: Essays by Locke, Hume, and Rousseau*. Oxford U.P., 1960. Selections from writings of three famous philosophers who discuss the contract theory. Thomas Hobbes. *Leviathan*. Macmillan, 1957. Originally published in 1651. Hobbes bases his contract theory on a strictly materialistic, egoistic theory of human nature and morality. George Sabine. *A History of Political Theory*. Revised by Thomas Thorson. Dryden Press, 1973. The standard historical survey, with chapters on Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, Marx, and others.

Vernon Pratt. *The Philosophy of the Social Sciences*. Methuen, 1978. A clear discussion of several issues, including the organic conception of society. Colin Bird. *The Myth of Liberal Individualism*. Cambridge University Press, 1999. A critique of various forms of individualism, which is part of contract theory.

2 Is liberty the highest social value?

Libertarian or Paternalist?

America is an important place in the history of democracy. There is a fiery speech by Patrick Henry, a prominent figure in the Eighteenth Century in America, before the American Revolution, which he concluded by saying "I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!" It was an inspiring moment. Other American revolutionaries actually did sacrifice their lives for the cause of liberty, as have many Australians in the Armed Forces since then. Australians, like their American compatriots certainly place a great value on liberty.

Western societies like ours value other things, too. For example, in America the people are well-known for the way they value religion. The words "In God we trust" are prominently displayed on their money and in their courts. Like here, many parents in the United States send their children to religious schools, and others believe public schools should have regular prayers. We also value knowledge and education, as is demonstrated by the fact that a growing percentage of our population enters tertiary education. We value democracy and equal participation in our government.

The existence of these different political values raises a vital question: which value is the most important? What is the highest political value? Which value do people care about most, or which value *should* people care about most? Perhaps we can say they are all equally important; none takes precedence over any others. But that easy answer probably won't work in the long run. At some time the different values are going to come into conflict. When they do, we will have to decide which one is more important.

Your own political values are a significant part of your worldview. But how do you decide what you care about most? Is it just a matter of measuring your own feelings? Is it just a statement of preferences, like your taste in music? Philosophers want a more rational basis for their political values. They want to explain what they value most highly, and why it is more important than other values. They want to have reasons for their views, reasons that might persuade another open-minded person who initially disagrees.

The following essay argues that liberty is indeed the highest political value. In defending the libertarian view, it is not merely expressing a personal feeling, but presenting points that should persuade you to agree. The second essay digs down to a deeper level. He asks what we all mean by "liberty" in the first place, and he says the answer is not very satisfying. He also claims that Australians value government control more than they admit. If you agree with the second essay we call you a paternalist.

YES: LIBERTARIAN

"Liberty, the Supreme Social Value"

As members of society, we all have certain social values. We all value security, prosperity, equality, justice, liberty, and perhaps other things. We want our society to have those

qualities. Social values are not exactly the same as individual values. Each person wants certain things for herself, but she also wants to live in a society of a certain kind. Social values are goals that can be achieved by *groups* rather than single individuals. For example equality can only exist among a group of people. It is not something a person can possess entirely by herself. Justice is a social value because it concerns relations among people. Liberty can be social or individual. A person may value her individual freedom, and, perhaps as a corollary, she may value social arrangements that make people in her society free (whether or not she personally benefits).

We all value a variety of social goods, but we believe that the highest social good is *liberty*. That is, we libertarians value liberty more than the other social goods. It is relatively easy to see the priority of liberty over other values, like justice and equality. We can simply imagine a situation in which we must *choose* between liberty and equality, or liberty and justice, or liberty and some other social value, and ask what choice we would make. In each case, we would choose liberty. So liberty is the highest social value. In addition, there are some social values, such as prosperity, which upon examination turn out to be identical with liberty. There is no conflict between liberty and these "other" values.

Before comparing liberty with each of the other social values, we must clarify our concept of liberty. When we say we value liberty, what exactly are we saying? I think we all mean the same thing: liberty is the ability to make choices and act on them. If a person can choose among three different places in which to live, and can then act on his choice, that is, go and live in the place he prefers, then he possesses liberty. He is free with respect to places to live. (Freedom and liberty are identical.) The more choices he has, the freer he is. A person who can choose among six colleges to attend has more liberty than a person who has only three options. A person who can choose between attending one particular college or not attending any college has a small degree of freedom. A person who has only one option, that is, who must work rather than attend college, is not free at all with respect to attending college. To say that liberty is a social value is to say that we want to live in a society where the citizens have many choices, and nothing prevents us from acting on our choices.

Do we value liberty, so defined, more highly than other aspects of society? Let's consider them one by one. Take prosperity. Prosperity, for an individual, means wealth. A prosperous person is a person who has a considerable amount of money. As a characteristic of a society, prosperity means many of the citizens of the society have a considerable amount of money.

Which is more important to the well-being of the society, prosperity or liberty? When we put the question this way, we see that it is a false choice. There is no conflict, because prosperity just is liberty. More precisely, prosperity is a *means* of achieving liberty. People want to be prosperous only because prosperity leads to liberty. In other words, having money gives a person many options. A person with money can choose among places to live, schools to attend, various entertainments, and other goods. That is why people want money. If money did not give people greater liberty (choices), they wouldn't value it. (That actually happened in the old Soviet Union. The shops were empty. There was nothing to buy, so people did not work to earn money.) Thus the value of money is *derived* from the value of liberty. Therefore liberty is higher on the scale of values than money.

Another social value is security. People want to feel safe. They want to live in a society with as little crime as possible. On the other hand, the absence of security means fear. If people are insecure they must try to protect themselves with heavy locks (or weapons), or must stay at home and never take any risks. So security is certainly a social value. But is it more valuable

than liberty? Here again we have a false choice. Security is just a means of achieving liberty. It is like money. If a person feels secure, she is free to walk in the park at night, accept a ride from a stranger, or make other choices. If she feels insecure, her range of options is limited. She cannot go out alone at night, she cannot go into certain neighbourhoods, she cannot leave her car unlocked. Insecurity is nothing more than the *loss* of liberty. That is why it is a terrible thing. Thus security is like prosperity. It is valuable, but its value depends on the value of liberty. Security and liberty are like the moon and the sun. The moon is a bright satellite, but its light is reflected from the sun.

The next social value we should consider is equality. The idea of equality is more complex than the idea of prosperity or security. People mean different things when they talk about equality. The two main senses of equality are equality of opportunity and equality of condition. People have equal opportunities if none of them is excluded or held back in any way. For example, the children of a town have equal opportunities to attend school because there are no arbitrary restrictions excluding some. People have equal opportunities to shop in all the stores so long as stores welcome all customers. But when we analyse the idea of equality of opportunity, we are led to the same conclusion we reached with security. Equality of opportunity just means liberty. It means no one prevents a person from doing what he wants to do. There are no arbitrary restrictions placed on people because of their race, religion, gender, political beliefs, or other personal traits. Just as security is the *absence* of threats, so equality of opportunity is the *absence* of arbitrary barriers. Thus each person is free to take advantage of the opportunities society offers. Equality of opportunity is not more or less valuable than liberty, because it is the same thing as liberty.

Equality of opportunity does not ensure equality of success. For example, in a school the students may all have an equal opportunity to play basketball. All are permitted to try out for the team, and no one is denied a chance because of irrelevant factors like hair colour or musical ability. With regard to opportunity, all are equally free. But a student who is over six feet tall will have better chances to succeed than a student who is only five feet tall. The taller student has options (playing basketball) that the short student does not have. On the other hand, the short student may have talents that give her options the tall student does not have. Their *success* in different areas will not be the same. But it is still true that they have equal *opportunities*, so long as neither is restricted by irrelevant rules.

Equality of condition is different from equality of opportunity. We can imagine a society in which everyone has the same income. For example, Parliament could calculate the average income of all Australians, and pass a law saying that every citizen shall receive that amount in wages. No matter what work a person does, she will receive the average salary, say, thirty thousand dollars per year. Unemployed people would be hired by the government, and other adjustments would be made. Then people's living conditions would all be equal. People would have the same amount to spend on housing, transportation, vacations, and so on. I am not saying this would ever work in practice. I am only saying we can imagine a society where people have equal living conditions.

But how many people would want to live in such a society? In particular, how many people value such equality of conditions more than liberty? I think very few. Australians, in common with citizens of other democratic countries, value the freedom to get ahead, to make a better life for themselves. While a society of equal conditions may be comfortable, and may not have the poverty of our society, still Australians, on the whole, are confident that they can improve their condition, with a little luck and a lot of hard work. If the government proposed to

deprive us of that liberty, and impose a strict equality of condition on us, I think it would have a revolution on its hands. Thus when we compare equality and liberty, we see that people place a higher value on liberty.

This is not to say equality is worthless. In fact, Australians pay taxes to support social programs to help the needy. The government provides housing, social security, Medicare, and other services to the poor, to raise their living conditions closer to the level of the middle class. They are not equal to the middle class, but they are more equal. But taxes restrict a person's liberty. A person who pays taxes has less disposable income, and therefore fewer choices, than he would if he did not pay taxes. So we voluntarily restrict our liberty to promote equality of condition. This seems to show that we value equality *more* than we value liberty.

This conclusion would be mistaken, however, because of the *degrees* of liberty and equality involved. We give up a very small degree of liberty to get a substantial degree of equality. Paying taxes does limit a person's liberty, but not very much. If a person did not pay taxes, his lifestyle would not change very much. But social programs for the poor change their lifestyle completely. Without low-income housing, many people would be homeless. And a person living in public housing is much closer (more equal) to the middle class than a person living on the street. In other words, we get a large amount of equality in return for only a small sacrifice of liberty. Thus taxation for social programs shows that we place a greater value on liberty than on equality.

Next let's consider justice, a very important social value. Justice means giving people what they deserve. The paradigm case of justice is apprehending a criminal, trying her in a court of law, and imposing an appropriate punishment. Or, if the person is determined to be innocent, setting her free. This is the function of the criminal *justice* system, and the concern of the Federal court system. Now is liberty a higher social value than justice in this sense?

From an individual point of view, it will seem obvious that the answer is yes. If a person commits a crime, she will prefer her liberty over her just punishment. How many criminals turn themselves in to the police and request that they be sent to jail? Given a choice between liberty and justice (jail), any criminal would choose liberty. This seems to show that people value liberty over justice. But in this case, the individual is only considering herself, not society as a whole. She values her individual liberty over her just treatment. However, we are investigating social values. What kind of society do most people want?

If we think about society as a whole, rather than an individual's preference for herself, it seems at first that we all value justice more than liberty. We take away people's liberty so that justice can be served. That is, we put some people in jail because that is what they deserve. We say that if anyone commits a serious crime, we will take away his liberty, because justice demands it. Hence, in general, justice outweighs liberty in our society.

But I believe this is only one side of the criminal justice system. The other side is its benefits for the majority. Only a small percentage of people are deprived of their liberty. And the result is that the great majority of people have *more* freedom. Taking criminals off the streets, and deterring others from committing crimes, increase the liberty of the other citizens. In fact, that benefit is at least as important as imposing justice on the criminal. Looking at justice from this point of view, it seems that liberty is more important than justice, because we impose justice on a few *for the sake of* greater liberty for the many. Justice serves liberty, so liberty is a higher value. At the very least, they are of equal value as qualities of a society.

But another fact shows that we value liberty over justice. Judges are expected to temper justice with mercy. If a person is a first offender, or if other circumstances warrant it, a judge

can set aside strict justice and extend mercy to a defendant. Perhaps a suspended sentence will reform this particular criminal, whereas the just sentence would embitter him. The same is true of parents. Judges and parents use their common sense, and we often admire a merciful judge, even though she may be acting contrary to the demands of strict justice. A society where judges are sometimes merciful is a better society, we feel, than one where judges always exact the last ounce of justice from an offender. Now if we favour mercy in some cases, then we are actually advocating *injustice* over justice. Merciful treatment is, technically speaking, unjust, and yet there are times when a judge or a parent should be merciful.

But compare this tolerance of injustice with our attitude toward liberty. We never admire coercion. We never say that constraint is better than freedom. Of course we are speaking about a policy for average citizens. Constraint *is* better for criminals, because constraining criminals increases other people's freedom. But as a general policy for society, we never think that taking away a person's liberty is a good thing. Liberty is always better than coercion. Justice, however, is not always better than injustice, since we sometimes favour mercy. Therefore, on our scale of values liberty ranks higher than justice.

We can sum up the argument with a rhetorical question. Are we prepared to give up our liberties for the sake of X? Whatever we put in the place of X--equality, justice, prosperity, etc.--the answer is always no. Liberty is more important than anything.

Key Concepts

liberty	equality of opportunity	justice
prosperity	equality of condition	mercy
security		

Critical Questions

1. Is the libertarian definition of liberty adequate? By his definition, are you free to live on the smart side of town? Are you free to play cricket or netball for Australia? Are you free to be a Senator, or a TV star?
2. Do you agree that money is a means to achieve liberty? Is it valuable *only* because it increases liberty?
3. The libertarian says opportunity means liberty and liberty means options. A tall person and a short person do not have the same options with respect to basketball. Yet the libertarian says they have equal opportunities. Isn't this a contradiction?
4. Citizens are forced to pay taxes (i.e. their liberty is restricted) to help the poorer people to be more equal to the middle class. Why doesn't this show that our society values equality more than liberty, according to the essay?
5. Some citizens are deprived of their liberty completely (i.e. put in jail), because justice demands it. Why doesn't this show that our society values justice more than liberty, according to the essay?

6. Has the essay convinced you that you value liberty more than anything? If you had the power, would you sacrifice Australians' liberty for the sake of greater equality? For the sake of justice?

NO: PATERNALIST

"Empty Phrases"

A cliché is an expression that has been used so often that it has become a formula, or signal, rather than a meaningful, informative description. Examples are "as quiet as a mouse," "so hungry I could eat a horse," "he blew his top," "her heart soared," "in the national interest." Clichés are a lazy person's substitutes for observation or thought.

Some ideas are like clichés. They perform the same function in people's thinking as clichés perform in their writing. They are flattened, simplified ideas that everyone accepts automatically, but no one really examines. I would like to call your attention to one such platitude, and ask you to step back and think about it carefully and critically. I was forced to think about it myself on my recent visit to America.

The idea is this: "In a free country, a person should be allowed to do anything he (or she) wants, so long as he doesn't hurt anyone." This is known as "the harm principle." I would wager that most Americans *say* they accept this idea, as do many others around the world. You probably subscribe to it yourself. But I doubt very much that anyone could explain what the idea means in any detail. And while Americans universally praise the principle, their practice is quite different.

In particular, what does that ordinary little word "hurt" mean in this statement? When does one person hurt another? Is it when one physically damages another? Certainly one person hurts another if he gives the other a black eye, or knocks him down. If that is what "hurt" means, then the harm principle states that a person should be allowed to do anything he wants, so long as he doesn't physically damage another person.

But surely no one believes such a thing, because it would allow a person to imprison others, to force them to do things by threatening them, to steal their property, to burn down buildings, and to do other terrible things. Stealing and imprisoning do not physically damage the victims, but they should be outlawed. Therefore, this explanation of the idea allows far too much freedom.

Instead of saying "hurt" means physically damage, perhaps one can say it means *psychologically* damage. To damage someone psychologically is to cause mental pain, or emotional discomfort, or to make someone feel miserable. Now the idea is that a person should be allowed to do anything he wants, so long as he doesn't cause someone to feel miserable.

But this explanation makes the principle too restrictive. It doesn't allow enough freedom. It says a person should be forcibly prevented from making someone feel miserable. If a love affair goes sour, and the woman feels miserable, then the man could be put in jail! He was free up to the point that he hurt his lover, in the sense that he psychologically damaged her. Society may legitimately prevent him from causing emotional distress, and put him in jail as punishment for doing it. At least according to this interpretation of the idea, it may.

But this is absurd. One person's political or religious opinions may be very upsetting to other people. A person's outlandish behaviour or revealing, sexy clothes may cause psychological pain in others. Bad grades may make a student miserable. But the Americans who accept the harm principle say they do not want to regulate the opinions people may have or the clothes they may wear. Whereas the physical explanation of "hurt" allowed too much freedom, this psychological explanation does not allow enough.

You may think that we are embroiled in semantics. Perhaps a society can find some way to implement the principle, without finally deciding on a strict definition of harm. But how can the principle be implemented? Who decides when someone has been harmed? Does the alleged victim decide? If the principle is implemented that way, anyone with any complaint can claim he has been harmed and demand legal redress. Does the alleged perpetrator decide? Then no one would ever harm anyone else. No one would decide that he was guilty.

The most obvious solution is to allow the *majority* in the society to decide when someone has been harmed and when he hasn't. But notice that this "solution" is completely empty. The whole purpose of the harm principle is to extend liberty to *minorities*, to allow unusual people, unorthodox people, eccentric people, to do or say whatever they wish. The idea is to allow any behaviour, including strange, bizarre, even upsetting behaviour, so long as it doesn't hurt anyone. If the comfortable majority decides who has been harmed, it will suppress the people that the principle is intended to protect.

What other explanation of the idea can its supporters offer? Probably none. I doubt that it can be explained in any useful way. It is too nebulous and vague. The problem is not that the principle is *wrong*. Rather, the problem is that it doesn't really say anything, but only seems to. It provides no real guidelines on what people should and should not be allowed to do. It is merely a mental cliché.

Not only is the harm principle empty, but most Americans are not willing to support it, however it is interpreted. They only *think* they are. Americans think that they value liberty, but actually they do not. Actually they feel much more comfortable with conformity, strict rules, moralism and public piety, a sheep-like docility. The harm principle says a person should be free to do anything he wishes, so long as he doesn't hurt anyone else. But Americans insist on imposing the majority's moral views on everyone. In America, am I free to buy and take heroin? Cocaine? No, I am not, even though taking drugs harms only myself. It is argued that someone addicted to drugs is likely to steal to support his habit. But that is certainly not always true. If I am rich, then I do not need to steal. Why not allow rich people to buy drugs?

Even if someone steals, the state can punish a person for that. Stealing does harm other people, so it should not be allowed. But buying drugs is not equivalent to stealing. If we begin to outlaw behaviours that may *lead* to crime, then we will outlaw advertising, walking by oneself at night, wearing jewellery in public, handling large amounts of money in a bank, and any number of other innocent activities.

Why do Americans forbid anyone to take recreational drugs? Because Americans, at heart, are Puritans and cannot tolerate what they regard as immorality in other people. In every state but one, prostitution is illegal. But no one is harmed by prostitution. Some say prostitution is "degrading" to the woman, but that is a moral judgment. The prostitute voluntarily sells herself. The customer voluntarily buys her services. The risk of disease is high, it is true, but that is because society will not allow prostitutes to set up an ordinary business, with health insurance, regular examinations, and so on. The real objection to prostitution is a moral

objection. Americans ignore the harm principle when it interferes with the majority's moral opinions.

If you believe these kinds of laws are exceptions, just consider the latest example of official moralism. Many colleges and universities have adopted "speech codes" regulating what students may and may not say. A student may not utter anything deemed to be "offensive" to anyone else. In particular, a student may not say anything that might upset a member of some minority, such as blacks, Native Americans, Latinos, immigrants, homosexuals, handicapped people (the "physically challenged"), overweight people, women (women are included among minorities), Moslems, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, or any other group. If a student tells a crude joke about one of these groups, he or she can be expelled from the school. No one can seriously claim that the joke actually *harms* anyone in the minority. In reality, the authorities are trying to legislate morality. They believe they can force students to conform to their own moral rules, even in speech and thought.

One can easily find many other examples of legally enforced morality. Communities decide what is obscene, and usually decide that a bare-breasted waitress is obscene. Even private clubs--a hallowed British institution--are sources of controversy in America. Apparently the official endorsement of equality is so strong that associating with one's friends in a private, relaxed setting is a grievous assault on those who cannot afford membership or those whom the club wishes to avoid. If a private club refuses to admit women or others, it is sure to be sued.

Americans have a long history of attempting to enforce moral standards upon every member of society. Prohibition is only the most famous episode. The curious thing is that they insist that they really value freedom and tolerance and the harm principle.

Key Concepts

cliché	physically damage	victimless crime
psychologically damage	victimless crime	paternalism

Critical Questions

1. What is a cliché, and what are some additional examples of clichés?
2. What two interpretations of "hurt" does the essay consider?
3. Do you accept the harm principle? Can you explain when it applies and when it doesn't (i.e., when one person hurts another)? If you cannot, then can you still say you accept the principle?
4. Do you agree that taking someone's property, or threatening him, or imprisoning him, does not cause physical damage?
5. Consider this: One person hurts another when he makes the other miserable, *except* in those cases in which the victim voluntarily does something (e.g. fall in love) knowing that it might make him miserable. In those cases, the first person cannot be punished. Does this save the psychological interpretation?
6. Do you think all drugs should be legal? Prostitution? Available to people under age 18?

7. It is illegal in many states to drive without a seat belt. Is this law designed to prevent one person from harming another, or to prevent a person from harming himself? In your opinion, should the government force citizens to do what is good for themselves?

Methods and Techniques: GOALS

The two essays in this section illustrate an important problem-solving technique. Everyone, including doctors, engineers, business people, and housewives, tries to solve problems. Effective people--people who get things done--think in terms of problems and solutions, whatever their occupation. Philosophers are no different. The specific problems philosophers face may be different, but they try to define problems and find solutions for them. Furthermore, the standard techniques for solving problems are similar in all fields.

One of the first things problem solvers do is make a list of their goals. A doctor's goals may be to learn all the symptoms or complaints that a patient has, learn about the patient's life style and diet, and then find the most likely cause of his symptoms. A business woman's goals for one month may be to keep her customers satisfied, to find two new clients, and to train her new employee. Or a person may simply look in the kitchen and decide he needs groceries. His goals then are to go to the store and buy milk, bread, cheese, fish, and bananas. Setting goals is an important first step of problem-solving, whatever you are doing.

Philosophers use this technique in trying to understand society. Societies set goals just as individuals do. Usually the government states a society's goals for the long term and the short term. For example, the Prime Minister may make a promise in Parliament that the nation should be committed to improving Australian schools, reducing unemployment, and helping the millions of people battling with the rising cost of living. In the long term, he may say that the main goal is to preserve people's freedom from a stifling, intrusive government (if he is a Liberal).

But obviously people disagree about the goals their society should have. For example, a Labour spokesman may respond that the foremost goal of our society should be to ensure that all citizens, regardless of race, gender, social class, or other factors, have opportunities to develop their fullest potential. Sometimes the disagreements over goals are basic and irreconcilable. Philosophers try to uncover and describe the basic goals of a society, and to decide which goals are better. What *should* our long term goals be?

But more often the disagreements are not basic. Instead, people disagree over *priorities*. That is, they disagree over which goal is most important. For example, both Liberals and Labour agree that government should not intrude into our private lives, and that all people should have opportunities. But they disagree over which goal is more important. Which goal demands more of our resources, or which should we try to achieve first? This leads to the second step in this problem-solving technique. After a problem-solver has made a list of goals, he or she must *rank* the goals in order of priority. Which goal comes first, which second, which third, and so on? Priority can mean first in time (i.e. the goal one should work on first), or it can mean first in importance (i.e. the goal one wants to achieve more than any of the others). For example, a

grocery shopper who has a list of five items to buy (five goals) but only three dollars to spend, must decide which item is most important, which second, and so on.

The first essay is an example of both steps. First it lists the goals our society has. But the main purpose of the essay is to rank the goals, and in particular, to show that liberty is the most important. And it offers a technique for ranking goals. It goes through the list two by two, comparing two goals and asking which of these two is more important. It argues that every time we compare liberty with another goal on the list, we see that liberty is more important. This technique could work with any list of goals.

The second essay is an example of a third step in this problem-solving technique. In trying to choose goals and rank them, it is very important to have a clear idea of exactly what the goal is. One should try to describe the goal as concretely as possible. One cannot reach a goal, or even pursue it, if one isn't sure what the goal is. For example, the goal of buying milk may seem perfectly clear. But if you send your daughter to the store to buy milk, and she sees Lite milk, whole milk, 99% Fat Free milk, and other choices, she will be confused. If such a simple goal can be confusing, then society's goals will be extremely difficult to describe adequately. The second essay shows just how difficult it is to explain what "liberty" means.

Understanding the Dilemma

Libertarian or Paternalist?

The issues of political philosophy are probably more confusing and difficult than issues in other areas of philosophy. One reason is that the terms are not standardized; different people mean different things by the terms "liberty," "equality," "justice," and so on. Another reason is that there is less agreement about the facts in political philosophy. For example, what are the actual consequences of social programs like welfare? People disagree. And the issues are more interconnected than in other areas. Your beliefs about liberty are inseparable from your beliefs about equality, about justice, and about other questions.

Nevertheless, you should try to sort out your own beliefs about society and the way it should be organized. The topic of this section is liberty. Is it the most valuable benefit of living in a society? Or are other things even more valuable than liberty? A libertarian believes that nothing is more important than liberty. The first essay, representing the libertarian point of view, compares liberty with other social goods, and tries to show in each case that they do not outweigh liberty. It claims that several goods, like security, prosperity, and equality of opportunity, are actually the same thing as liberty.

Not everyone agrees that liberty is the highest social value. Some people think that the members of society should be compelled to do some things, such as fight in a war, even if that means they must give up some of their liberty. Others (like Plato) have argued that the majority should obey an enlightened, superior minority. They are better off following their leaders than exercising their own free judgment. A paternalist is a person who believes that the government should care for people like a wise father. (The word "paternalist" comes from the Latin word for father.) Thus Plato was a paternalist.

The second essay, representing the paternalist point of view, claims that Western societies in general and America in particular has a tendency to give lip service to liberty, but they are actually paternalists themselves. He gives some examples of laws that suggest that the government knows what is best for an individual better than the individual himself or herself. You must wear a helmet on a motorcycle, wear your seat belt in your car, swim only when a lifeguard is present, contribute to social security to provide for your old age, and maintain life support systems even when you are terminally ill and would like to die. In all these cases, the government restricts people's freedom "for their own good," because people are not capable of choosing what is best for themselves. It also describes cases where the government restricts people's liberty because citizens are immoral, even though the government admits that the immoral activities do not harm anyone. For example, prostitution is a crime because it is immoral, not because it harms people. Should the government protect ordinary people from themselves? Should the government promote the majority's moral values? A paternalist says yes and a libertarian says no.

Liberty is a very complex idea, and it leads to many controversies. One of the difficulties in deciding between the libertarian and the paternalist is that they cannot agree on what liberty means. The second essay shows how difficult it is to determine exactly when people are exercising their liberty, and when they are harming someone else. The most adamant libertarian does not believe people should be free to harm others against their will. But when does a person harm others? It isn't easy to say.

Disputes about liberty frequently arise over its *extent*. That is, who should be free? If everyone should be free, then should everyone have the same *degree* of freedom? If you believe that everyone should be equally free, then you must favour a large role for government, to provide people with the means to make choices--in housing, in occupations, in lifestyle, and so on. In other words, a strong belief in liberty for all may seem to lead to a belief in government regulation of people's lives. In particular, many people believe that the free market actually makes only a few people free, and restricts many others. If liberty really is valuable, then the government must restrain some people's economic activities (with taxes) to extend liberty to more people.

Neither essay in this section discusses the question of how we can promote liberty. Both address the deeper question "What is liberty," and "Is liberty more valuable than anything else?" The disputes about how to promote liberty depend on these deeper questions. We cannot promote liberty until we know what it is, and we should not promote it until we are sure that it is more valuable than other social goods.

So this section boils down to two main questions: can a libertarian define liberty, and explain the limits on it (i.e. when a person harms another); and is individual liberty really more valuable than security and morality? A libertarian answers both questions "yes," and a paternalist answers both questions "no."

Libertarian

1. Liberty means having options, having real choices that one can act on, without interference from others.
2. A life of servitude, a life without liberty, is not worth living.
3. Almost all the other social goods, like security, prosperity, and equality of opportunity, are actually the same things as liberty.
4. Government can increase some people's liberty by reducing other people's liberty, but it cannot increase everyone's liberty.

Paternalist

5. We will never agree on how much freedom people should have, because we cannot know when a person has abused his liberty by harming someone else.
6. Most people do not want much liberty; they would rather let experts, supervisors, and bureaucrats make important decisions about their lives.
7. People prefer the stability and security of a boring job to the freedom of changing jobs and places of residence.
8. Government makes people's lives better in many ways they aren't even aware of.

* * * * *

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Historical Examples

Libertarian: John Stuart Mill. *On Liberty*. Many editions. Originally published in 1859. Mill defends the famous "harm principle," and argues for complete freedom of thought and speech.

Paternalist: Edmund Burke. *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Many editions. Originally published in 1792. Burke criticizes the ideals of the French Revolution, including individual liberty, equality, and innovation in politics. He believes people should rely on custom and tradition.

Other Sources

Burton M. Leiser. *Liberty, Justice, and Morals: Contemporary Value Conflicts*. Second Edition. Macmillan, 1979. Clear survey of many issues, easier to read than most other accounts. Joel Feinberg. *Social Philosophy*. Prentice-Hall, 1973. Careful analysis of many social issues, including Mill's position on liberty. Colin Bird. *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press, 2006. Careful discussion of the major concepts, including the social contract, property, economic justice, liberty, authority, and others.

Milton Friedman, Rose Friedman. *Free to Choose*. Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1980. A defence of maximum individual freedom and minimal government in American society. John Kleinig. *Paternalism*. Rowman and Allenheld, 1983. A cautious defence of paternalism in some areas of social life. Rolf Sartorius, ed. *Paternalism*. U. of Minnesota, 1983. Advanced articles analysing different aspects of paternalism. D.D. Raphael. *Problems of Political Philosophy*. Second Edition. Humanities, 1990. Chap. 3 is a discussion on an abstract level of liberty and its limits.

3 Is equality the highest social value?

Egalitarian or Elitist?

In thinking about equality, we can ask a number of questions. Perhaps the most basic one is this: Are all people equal? Some say yes, some say no. Obviously the answer depends on what we mean by "equal." In many ways people in Western societies clearly are not equal. And that leads to another basic question: *Should* all people be equal? Some say equality is the most important political value.

Equality, like liberty, was an idea of key political importance in the American Revolution. Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence to explain and justify the Revolution, and he listed the principles that guided the colonists. It is noteworthy that he placed equality first. He wrote "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Jefferson not only states that people are in fact equal, but he also puts equality before liberty and other basic rights.

Even if Jefferson is right, and people are equal in some sense, he would have to admit that in other ways people in America are not equal. For example, some people have large amounts of money and others have much less money. So we still must ask ourselves, "Should all people be equal?" Jefferson is talking about human nature. Perhaps all human beings have the same basic nature, and we are all equal in that sense. But in political philosophy, the more pertinent question is, "Should people be equal", because that is a question about how we organize society. We have no control over human nature, but it is up to us to decide how much social equality people should have.

Both of the following essays discuss equality in their essays. The first argues that making people more equal would bring about tremendous benefits in our society. The second claims that we would all be better off if we recognized the differences among people.

YES: EGALITARIAN

"Society and Property"

Sir Thomas More was the Lord Chancellor of England for several years during the reign of Henry VIII (1509-1547). He was a devout Catholic, and refused to sign a declaration stating that Henry, not the Pope, was the head of the Church of England. For this stand on principle, he had his head chopped off. But More is also famous because of a book he wrote in 1513 describing his vision of the ideal society. The book is called *Utopia*--"No Place"--and the society is ideal because it does not contain the source of most of the troubles in the world, namely, private property.¹

I would like to describe the main features of this ideal society, and then consider some of the reasons people give for saying it could never work. I do not think any of the reasons are

Thomas More, *Utopia* (Penguin Classics, 1965) p.80.

conclusive, and so, as far as I can see, More is right. We ought to organize society communistically.

In More's book a character named Raphael describes the island society of Utopia, which he visited on his voyages in the South Seas. The government is a representative democracy. But the really distinctive feature of the society is that no one owns any private property. All the goods that people produce are stored in shops distributed around the island. "When the head of a household needs anything for himself or his family, he just goes to one of these shops and asks for it," writes More.¹ Food, clothing, tools, and other items are freely available to everyone. There is no need for money. Housing is free. "The houses themselves are allocated by lot, and changed round every ten years." (p. 73)

The standard objection to this system is that if goods are freely available, no one will work. But in Utopia, everyone is required to work. "The chief business of the Stywards [elected representatives]--in fact, practically their only business--is to see that nobody sits around doing nothing, but that everyone gets on with his job." (pp. 75-76) So people are legally required to work. But each person works less in Utopia than his counterpart in other societies.

And you'll understand why it is, if you reckon up how large a proportion of the population in other countries is totally unemployed. First you have practically all the women--that gives you nearly fifty percent for a start....Then there are all the priests....Add all the rich....Finally throw in all the beggars who are perfectly hale and hearty. (p. 77)

Furthermore, in Utopia, people produce only necessary, useful goods. They waste no time on frivolous luxuries like jewellery, furs, or sports cars. Eliminating these costly and useless items reduces the workload for everyone.

By instituting these simple rules--no private property, everyone works, no expensive status symbols--the Utopians produced some marvellous consequences, according to More. First, there is no poverty, homelessness, or unemployment in their society. Obviously no one is poor because basic necessities are provided free of charge. No one is unemployed because everyone must work. Second, if there is no private property, then there will be very little crime. No one would have any reason to steal, because he can easily get whatever he needs. Third, people would not be as anxious, tense, and fearful as they are now. Ask yourself this: what is your greatest fear? What do you worry about more than anything else? For most people, the answer is money and their job. But in Utopia economic insecurity does not exist. Everyone is guaranteed that his basic needs will be met. This is also relevant to crime. In our society it is people who live under the constant strain and pressure of poverty that commit "crimes of passion." Their anger boils over. But the pressure is removed in Utopia, so those kinds of crimes would occur far less often.

Fourth, the conflicts and anger between the rich and the poor, the haves and the have-nots, would disappear. People would not blame each other for society's problems. We could all live much more harmoniously with each other. Finally, each person could develop all of her potential, and develop all sides of her personality, since people would have more free time. A person would spend less time working to produce consumer goods, and so she would have more time to devote to her interests--games, sports, hobbies, learning, socializing, or just relaxing. At least More believes these five results would follow from the abolition of private property. And he may be right.

People have been proposing ideal communistic societies since the invention of writing in ancient Egypt, and other people have always said it will never work. The critics point to five main problems. But it seems to me that More has a reasonable answer for each criticism.

Problem 1. "People are lazy. If they know they can get whatever they need, they will not work."

Answer: More says that, if necessary, people will be forced to work. However, he does not think that will be necessary, because people are naturally active; they prefer to work rather than do nothing all day. Try to imagine what you would do. Suppose you won the lottery. You now have plenty of money. What would you do? Would you sit on a beach for twelve hours at a stretch? Stay in bed all day? No, you would find some meaningful, challenging work to do.

In Utopia people are not competing against each other for jobs. They are not jealous of someone's possessions. Instead, they all realize that they are working together for everyone's benefit. So they want to work for their neighbours and friends, because they care about each other.

Problem 2. "Without private property, people would all be alike. No one would develop any individuality."

Answer: In Utopia people actually have *more* free time, and less worry about making money. They are free to develop their individuality. It is actually in our society that people spend all their time trying to make money and have no time to express their unique differences, or even to find out who they are. In addition, the Utopians realize that true individuality does not mean buying a blue car rather than a red car. True individuality does not depend on the particular clothes one buys. Individuality depends on a person's ideas, the unusual experiences she seeks out, and her ability to express herself. It depends on imagination and the courage to follow your dreams, not the jewellery you wear. In fact, it is in our society that people have lost their individuality. Just go to an average business meeting. Businessmen and women all look (and think) exactly alike. Or look at suburbia. People all buy the same gadgets and all watch the same shallow entertainment on TV. Where is the individuality in our society?

Problem 3. "Utopia is too restrictive. In order to provide everyone with everything he needs, people will have to work when they don't want to work, and will have to accept the goods society provides."

Answer: But if people learn to relate to each other as fellow citizens, instead of competitors, then they will want to work, since that benefits everybody. The sacrifices in liberty and variety of goods available are worth making, because the benefits are so great. What is the point of having leisure time if the society we live in is wrecked and dangerous? What is the point of having a gold chain if you are afraid to wear it?

Problem 4. "People do not want equality. People buy expensive jewellery, designer clothing, or fancy cars, not because they think those things are more durable, reliable, or useful, but because those things make them feel superior to other people."

Answer: That might be true in most societies, but it does not *have* to be true. People do not have an inborn need to feel superior to others; they can learn to regard others as equals, with equal possessions. People can be different, as they are in Utopia, but still equal. People can feel proud of their accomplishments, without feeling that another person is a failure. In fact, I can feel that I did a better job than my neighbour, without feeling that I am a better person than she.

Problem 5. "Equality might be possible. The problem with equality is not that it is difficult to achieve, but that we *ought not* to achieve it. It would be unjust, because different

people make different contributions to society, and they ought to be rewarded in proportion to their contribution."

Answer: But in Utopia all jobs are essential. No one is doing unnecessary, useless things. Since everyone's work is essential, everyone's work is equally valuable and respectable. Everyone is entitled to the same rewards.

Why do lawyers or doctors make ten or twenty times as much as garbage men? Do doctors work harder? I don't think so. Lifting garbage all day is hard work. Are doctors' services more essential? No. We would not last long without garbage collection. Do doctors earn so much because they went to medical school for four years beyond college? But they wanted to go to school, and enjoyed learning. Why does doing what they wanted to do, and getting extra education, entitle them to so much money? It doesn't. Doctors' work is essential to society, but so is garbage collectors' work, and nurses' and teachers' and cooks'. People who are equally necessary for society should get equal pay. People whose work is not necessary should do something that is necessary.

These are the main criticisms of communism, and one can see that More has persuasive replies to each criticism. So why don't we set up a communistic society? There are two answers. One is that we ought to. The elimination of poverty, crime, worry, and class conflict, and the growth of individuality, are all desirable. If we were rational we would adopt More's program. But we are not rational. The second answer is that we do not adopt it because of our insane desire to feel superior to our neighbour, and our even more insane method of achieving this feeling by trying to buy more goods than our neighbour. Perhaps if more people learn about the alternatives to this insanity, society will change. Let's hope so.

Key Concepts

utopia	communism	individuality
equality	social problems	essential to society

Critical Questions

1. Why would people work less in Utopia than in other societies?
2. Do you think that the main problems in modern society are poverty, crime, conflict between social classes, and anxiety? Has More overlooked any serious social problem? Are all these problems caused by private property?
3. In Utopia there are no luxuries. What does More mean by "luxury"? How would you define the term?
4. If people had fewer choices in the clothes, furniture, and food they could buy, but had more free time, would that increase or decrease individuality, in your opinion?
5. Do you think most people want to feel superior to their neighbours? If so, is the desire innate and ineradicable, or is it learned?
6. Do you think a sanitation worker should earn as much as a lawyer? Should a doctor earn ten or twenty times as much as a school teacher? If everyone's work is essential, then should everyone receive the same rewards.

NO: ELITIST

"What Elitists Believe"

For some people the word "elitist" is a dirty word. If someone is an elitist, then, automatically, he or she is not welcome in polite society. But many people who use the word as a term of abuse probably could not explain exactly what it means. Unfortunately, this situation is common in political philosophy. People hurl words at each other without taking the time to define their terms and principles calmly and rationally. I would like to try to explain what the word "elitist" means. And I will explain why I am an elitist.

An elitist has three beliefs that make him or her an elitist. First, an elitist believes that there is such a thing as excellence. For any job, there is a good way to do it and a poor way to do it. There is also the very best way to do it, and that is excellence. For example, an automobile salesperson's job is to sell cars. An excellent salesperson sells more cars than most other sales people. A secretary's job is to type, file documents, make appointments, and help an office run smoothly. An excellent secretary performs all these tasks very well: he types quickly with few errors, files efficiently, and always avoids scheduling conflicts.

Being a secretary and selling cars are occupations, but excellence exists in almost all activities. There are excellent poker players, excellent swimmers, excellent public speakers, and excellent gardeners. In fact, any time that people have some goal which they are trying to reach, excellence exists. There is an efficient way to reach the goal and an inefficient way, whether the goal is running an office, repairing a machine, replacing a kidney, teaching a class, or something else. Excellence means reaching the goal in the highest degree--for example, growing the most and the best vegetables--or reaching the goal with the least effort, or at the lowest cost, or in the shortest time, or in another efficient way.

Sometimes people do things just to relax, and then excellence doesn't apply. For example, a person may enjoy whistling. He doesn't care if anyone recognizes the tune or not. His only goal is to enjoy himself, and as long as he does that, his whistling is fine. Excellence doesn't apply. In other cases people do not agree on a goal. In dining, for example, one person may like spicy food and another may like bland food. When they go to restaurants they have different goals. Therefore, they will not be able to agree on an excellent cook. Literary critics may not agree on the excellence of an author because they have different, personal standards.

But most of the time, when we pursue a goal it is an objective goal about which many people agree. A doctor's goal is to cure her patients, and everyone knows when she has cured a patient's pneumonia and when she hasn't. As for reaching the goal most efficiently, or in the highest degree, in the least time, at the lowest cost and so on, we rely on other experts. Her fellow doctors can judge her performance and can recognize excellence. The same applies to other activities.

Elitists believe that excellence exists and is important. We also hold a second belief. We believe that for almost any job, some people will be better at it than others. Some people will be better secretaries than others. Some will be better mathematicians than others, some will be better swimmers, better marriage counsellors, better auto mechanics. To say one person is better at a job than another is to say that one person achieves a higher degree of excellence than the other.

Let me state this belief more precisely. Obviously a professional auto mechanic with ten years of experience will be better at repairing cars than a novice. Elitists believe that even when a group of people have the same training for a job, some will be better at it than others. For example, if a group of high school seniors take a course in auto mechanics, at the end of the course some will be better mechanics than others. If a group of college freshmen take a lab course in chemistry, at the end of the course some will be better chemists than others. The training need not be formal education. If some grandchildren spend the summer with their grandparents on the farm, at the end of the summer some children will be better gardeners than others.

People are different. Some people are interested in auto mechanics and some aren't. Some people enjoy working with chemicals, beakers, and formulas, and others don't. Interest and enjoyment probably depend on ability. Some people learn certain things faster than others learn them, and continue to make progress at a faster rate. For example, when the grandparents tell their grandchildren how to distinguish weeds from vegetables, some kids catch on faster than others. They are ready to learn new things, while the others are still trying to recognize weeds.

Elitists believe that some people will be better at a task than others because we see it happening around us all the time, in the classroom, at the work place, and on the playground. When people try things, some achieve excellence and others do not. Of course not everyone can recognize excellence in every field. I would not be able to distinguish an excellent chemist from an average chemist. But people with experience in chemistry can. They can even spot youngsters who have the potential to be excellent chemists. They can see the attention to detail, the extreme precision, the careful record keeping, the curiosity, and the understanding of the principles behind the messy experiments in the lab. Professional sports teams rely on scouts to spot potentially excellent ball players, and the scouts' predictions are very reliable. Differences in abilities are a fact of life.

Thus when elitists say that excellence exists, and that some people will be better at a job than others, we are being realistic. We are recognizing facts. The third belief that elitists have is not about facts but about policy. What should we as a society *do* about these facts? Elitists believe that our society should *encourage* people to do what they can do well. Society should offer incentives to channel people into careers and activities for which they have talent.

Our goal should be to find talent and to nourish it. As a first step, we should make a great effort to help people discover what they can do well and what they can't. For example, beginning in the early grades and continuing through high school, students should be encouraged to try all sorts of activities, in science, in writing, in the arts, in sports, in mechanical activities, clerical work, student government, debate, peer counselling, and so on. Good teachers can evaluate students' performances in these areas. A writing teacher can recognize an excellent writer and an experienced advisor can recognize a student's leadership skills in student government.

As a second step, we should offer incentives to guide people into the activities where they can excel. The most obvious kind of incentive is a scholarship for more training. If a student demonstrates talent in chemistry, for example, she should receive an award from the government to help her pursue her studies in college. If she is an excellent debater, she should receive a scholarship to encourage her to develop her talent, in law, or teaching, or journalism. Another kind of incentive is an internship. Students should be allowed to acquire on-the-job experience, in a bank, in a hospital, in an office and elsewhere to discover their abilities.

If we adopted the policy of channelling people into jobs they can do well, everyone would benefit. A society in which the essential jobs are performed by people who can do them *well* is clearly more productive and better organized than a society in which the jobs are performed by people who cannot excel at their job, but who are better at something else. For any job or activity, there is an "elite" group of people who can excel at that job. Consequently, people like me are called "elitists," not because we believe we are better than anyone, but because we believe it is common sense to try to match people with the jobs they can do well, and try to avoid having people in jobs that cannot do well.

Not only would society as a whole benefit tremendously from this policy, but individuals would be happier as well. A person who does what he is good at is happier than a person who tries to do something he cannot do well. For example, suppose a young man decides that he has to be a doctor, although what he really enjoys and excels in is business. This individual will have to struggle, he will be frustrated, and he will feel inferior to his peers and colleagues who can excel in science and medicine. He would have been happier doing what he can do well.

It is not difficult to discover what people can do well and what they can't. The difficulty is admitting the facts when we see them. Parents, mainly, refuse to admit that their child is average in most areas, and has a talent for something like clerical work or mechanical activities. Many parents want their children to be something like a brain surgeon or a famous musician. Our society cannot accept failure. If the child fails in some area, parents and others insist that schools provide more training and more "opportunities," over and over again. They assume that everyone can be excellent at every job, and if a person fails it must be due to the training and not the trainee. Elitists are more realistic. We recognize the fact that people are different.

Moreover, encouraging people to do what they do well does not limit anyone's freedom. Of course people are free to choose any occupation or any activity they wish. Elitists simply believe that we should devote our limited resources to helping people find out what they do well, and helping them develop their demonstrated talent. We waste far too much time and money striving for the false goal of complete equality. But nurturing talent does not infringe on anyone's freedom.

Elitism will never be a popular doctrine. People prefer to believe that they and their children could really be excellent in many fields, if only they had the chance. But they are deceiving themselves. In the long run, the elitist policy would actually lead to greater fulfilment and satisfaction for everyone, if only we could face the facts.

Key Concepts

elitist

better performance

training

excellence

basic abilities

incentives

Critical Questions

1. What are the three beliefs that define elitism?
2. Does excellence in teaching exist, in your opinion? Does excellence in politics exist? Don't different people have different goals and standards for evaluating *any* occupation?
3. The essay discusses differences among people with the same training. Would you say that people who take the same course (e.g. chemistry), but at different schools, have the same training or different training?
4. Doesn't our society already offer incentives (e.g. scholarships) to people with talent? Is the essay proposing anything new? Do we live in an elitist society?
5. In your opinion, would a person find greater satisfaction in a job she can do very well for an average salary, or in a job she cannot do very well, but which pays a high salary?
6. Do our schools let people know what they can do well and what they can't? Should high school students be told that they are failures in some areas?

Methods and Techniques: MEANS AND ENDS

In political philosophy many of the debates concern the *means* of achieving certain ends. For example, both the essays in this section talk about the means of achieving equality in a society. It is useful, therefore, to step back and think about the general idea of means and ends.

Normally the distinction between means and ends is clear. The "end" is the same thing as the goal we are trying to reach. The "means" are the things we do, or the tools we need, to get to that goal. For example, if your goal is Perth, you might use a plane, train, or automobile to get there. If your goal is to be financially secure, you might get a law degree and practice law. That is a means of achieving the end of financial security.

In political philosophy people can agree on the end, but disagree about the means. For example, everyone wants to reduce violent crime. That is an end, or goal. But some people say the best means of doing that is to impose more severe punishments on convicted criminals, while others say the best means is to provide government-funded jobs to people in poor neighbourhoods. Another example is health care. Most people agree that citizens should have access to good doctors, hospitals, and treatment. But some people say competition and market mechanisms are the best means to reach that goal. Others say a universal health care program administered by the Federal government is the best means. The disagreement is over means, not ends.

The disagreements about means take a variety of forms. Sometimes one group will say that a particular means simply will not produce the desired result. In the crime example, some people say severe punishments will not reduce crime; others say more jobs will not reduce crime. Here the disagreement is about causes and effects, i.e. about the consequences of implementing a certain policy. Sometimes people disagree about the costs. Some say we cannot afford to build more prisons and keep people in jail; others say we cannot afford to hire all the unemployed in poor neighbourhoods. The idea is that the proposed means are just not practical, or that they are actually impossible.

Sometimes people raise moral objections to the means. For example, if "severe punishment" includes execution, then some people say these means of reducing crime are morally unacceptable. On the other side, critics say that providing government jobs destroys people's initiative and makes them dependant, and that is immoral. Various proposals of means to achieve social ends leave a lot of room for disagreements, based on consequences, costs, or morality.

The distinction between means and ends can become complicated. The terms "means" and "ends" are relative. What counts as a means in one context can be an end in another context. Take the idea of providing government-funded jobs to people in poor neighbourhoods. In the example above, that was a means to reduce violent crime. But suppose we decide that it is a good idea and we want to implement it. How do we do it? That is, if our *goal* is to provide jobs, what *means* do we use to reach that goal? Does the government provide funds to local industry to hire people, or does the local Congressman set up an office to hire people directly, or does the state government relocate people to places that need workers? Or is there some other means? What was the means has now become an end, and we must examine new, more specific means to achieve it.

Both the essays in this section discuss means to achieve goals. The issues are complex. But one of the best ways to keep track of the various questions, proposals, and objections--about equality or other topics in political philosophy--is to try to organize them within a framework of means and ends. Applying the concepts of means and ends will usually help you unravel the tangled disputes.

Understanding the Dilemma

Egalitarian or Elitist?

An egalitarian is a person who believes people are equal, and should be treated as equals. An elitist is a person who believes people are not equal, and should not be treated equally.

This is the basic issue in this section. Egalitarians disagree with elitists on the facts, and on the ideal social policies. But we can be more specific. People might be equal or unequal in certain respects, and should be treated equally or unequally in certain respects. Do egalitarians believe people are equal in every way, and that they should be treated equally in every way? And do elitists claim that people are unequal in every way? Virtually everyone today believes everyone should have the same *legal* rights and privileges. All Americans enjoy the rights laid out in the Bill of Rights in the Constitution. These rights are based on our common human nature; we are all equally human (although not too long ago many Americans believed that blacks, Native Americans, Asians, and women were not fully human).

Should every American have the same *political* rights? Egalitarians say yes, elitists say no. Of course no elitist would restrict the legal right to vote or hold office. But elitists favour placing some obstacles in people's paths. They believe that voting is a very important privilege, and that a citizen should be required to make some effort to vote. Those who are not willing to make any effort (e.g. go and register) are probably not willing to inform themselves about the

candidates and their platforms, and so their vote is actually harmful. It is based on irrelevant factors like the candidate's appearance. Society is best served by having informed, thoughtful voters. Unfortunately not every citizen is informed and thoughtful, so society is not served well by having everyone vote. The same applies to holding public office. If we were really egalitarian (the elitist says), we would choose our political leaders by drawing lots. But instead we put huge obstacles in the way of anyone who wants to hold office. A politician must campaign from early to late for months, must build a large organization, work with the established party, raise large amounts of money, learn to communicate effectively, defend his or her views to the press, and so on. We assume that only the most energetic, talented, committed people will be able to surmount the obstacles.

Is this system elitist? Or is it egalitarian? After all, anyone can *try* to win public office. This shows that the terms "egalitarian" and "elitist" are hard to pin down. We have tried to clarify them on questions of legal rights and political rights. They also disagree on economic rights. One way to distinguish the two views is to think about conditions and opportunities. An egalitarian wants equality of condition. We can see that value in the first essay's discussion of More's *Utopia*. More believed that if people were equal in their material conditions--similar living conditions, similar clothes, housing, transportation, food, etc.--society would blossom in wonderful ways. Favouring equality of opportunity by itself is not enough. Equality of opportunity can exist only if people have equality of condition. The second essay argues that equality of opportunity and equality of condition would not make any difference. Many people today have equal opportunities, but some achieve excellence and others do not.

An elitist opposes equality of condition. He or she believes that some people are more talented than others, some are more intelligent than others, some are more industrious, creative, determined, or persistent than others. These individuals are extremely important and valuable to society, and therefore society must encourage and reward these people if it wants to benefit from their skills and talents. Equality of condition would harm society as a whole by reducing these people's initiative. An elitist thinks equality of opportunity is harmless, so long as it is defined narrowly. If it means that no one is prohibited from competing (for a job, a place in school, a political office, a share of the market, or a research grant) by laws or rules based on irrelevant qualities like race or gender, then it is a good thing. It is good, the elitist believes, because the more talented people will win out anyway.

What do you believe? Are people equal? Should they be treated equally? Should people be more equal than they are now, or has government gone too far in trying to enforce equality? Are you an egalitarian or an elitist?

Egalitarian

1. People are equal in the most important respects, and should be treated equally.
2. If people had equal property, all the major problems in society--crime, poverty, class conflict, insecurity--would disappear.
3. Real equality of opportunity requires much greater equality of condition than we have now.
4. The question isn't "Is equality popular," but "Is equality just and right?"

Elitist

5. Some people have the ability and the drive to achieve excellence in some field, and others do not.
6. We should be realistic enough to tell people when they are talented and when they are not.
7. If the government channelled people into the jobs they can do well, everyone would benefit tremendously.
8. People who are blessed with talent or intelligence will always be outnumbered by people who are average, and therefore elitism will always be an unpopular point of view.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Historical Examples

Egalitarian: Thomas More. *Utopia*. Penguin, 1965. Originally published in 1516. A great classic in political philosophy, surprisingly contemporary, and full of fascinating ideas.

Elitist: Plato. *The Republic*. Many editions. Fourth century B.C. Another cornerstone of Western Civilization; Plato defends an elitism of the talented, who should be carefully chosen for their merits, thoroughly educated, and given responsibility for guiding society.

Other Sources

William Ryan. *Equality*. Pantheon, 1981. A defence of social policies promoting greater equality in an easy-to-read, journalistic style. Peter Singer. *How Are We to Live: Ethics in an Age of Self-Interest*. Prometheus, 1995.

Defends the objective stance, in which no person's interests are more important than any other's, including one's own. Engaging and articulate. Russell Kirk. *The Conservative Mind, from Burke to Eliot*. Gateway, 1978. Clear, sympathetic survey of conservative, anti-egalitarian thinking over the past 200 years. John Rees. *Equality*. Praeger, 1971. A survey of the issues, attempting to define and make precise the ideas of "equality," "equal opportunity," "rights," and so on. R.H. Tawney. *Equality*. Third Edition. Allen and Unwin, 1938. A defence of British-style socialism and equality. William Letwin, ed. *Against Equality*. Macmillan, 1983.

Critiques of various aspects of egalitarianism, by economists and social scientists. Jonathan Wolff. *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*. Oxford University Press, 1996. Chap. 5 is a discussion of the distribution of property.

4 Is capitalism just? Capitalist or Socialist?

People who have read some books about philosophy, or listened to philosophers talk, often decide that philosophy is too abstract and theoretical. The terms and concepts philosophers use are irrelevant to practical, real-life problems, they say. Take justice, for example. If you go to a library and look up books and articles by philosophers on the topic of justice, you will probably find some very difficult, subtle discussions. And you will wonder how all those distinctions can help you decide whether capital punishment is just, or whether raising taxes on the wealthy is just, or whether cutting aid to welfare mothers who have more children is just.

Many people would like to hear some answers to these questions about the justice or injustice of specific policies and actions. And yet, the abstract theories are necessary, too. If someone told you that capital punishment is just, and so we should execute even more criminals, you would want to know why it is just. Or if a philosopher said much higher tax rates on the wealthy are just, you would want to know why. You would want to hear a general explanation of the idea of justice that leads to these answers. In other words, we all want answers to specific questions, but the answers are convincing only if they are backed up by some general principles and reasons that are also convincing.

The essays by in this section try to meet both these demands. They are both about specific practices in society. Whatever flaws they may have, they are not irrelevant to our ordinary lives. The first argues that our daily activities of buying and selling, earning a living, and the resulting distribution of income, meet the requirements of justice. In fact, it would be unjust to try to eliminate the inequalities that result. The second claims that many of our economic activities are a travesty of justice. So both essays are applicable to practical problems.

And yet both essays also try to support their answers with general principles that they believe we all accept. Both try to back up their specific recommendations with theoretical arguments. It is up to you to decide whose answers are better. The capitalist's point of view, represented in the first essay, is based on the idea that justice depends on one's contribution to society, and that capitalism recognizes this contribution. The socialist, represented in the second essay, claims that capitalism forces people to behave in immoral ways.

YES: CAPITALIST

"Capitalism, Democracy, and Justice"

A perennial question of philosophy is "What is justice?" At the beginning of western philosophy Plato wrote his greatest work, *The Republic*, attempting to answer that question. The issue isn't merely theoretical. Everyone is interested in justice. If people believe their society is unjust, they will press for change. Perceived injustice creates instability. So the question is a practical one.

Philosophers have debated theories of justice since Plato's time, but ordinary people, in

their remarkable wisdom, have worked out a practical solution. Citizens of western democracies have put into place a system that satisfies our basic, intuitive idea of what is just and what isn't. The system is political and economic democracy, which is another way of saying "capitalism." Average citizens may not be able to explain why capitalism is just, but they know justice when they see it, and they see it in capitalism. Capitalism is a practical, not a theoretical, solution to the problem of justice. This essay is an attempt to fill in a small piece of the theory behind capitalism, and to explain why capitalism promotes justice.

First we must make sure we agree on the characteristics of capitalism. Capitalism is a complex set of institutions; it cannot be reduced to a simple formula. But several practices are essential. Probably the most basic element is private property. In a capitalistic system, people are free to buy and sell property. People are motivated to make profits, and they compete with each other in their trade. People are free to succeed, and free to fail. They are independent, and responsible for themselves.

These economic practices are closely connected with certain political practices, which also support independence and responsibility. In a capitalist system the government does not interfere with the economy. To preserve people's freedom to own property, government regulation is minimized. The government provides some services, like national defense, police and courts, large-scale transportation (roads and bridges), but only to promote free trade, not to interfere with it. Furthermore, the economic self-determination is mirrored by political self-determination. Capitalist government is democratic. Each voting citizen has a voice in the government, helps elect his representative, and in that sense governs himself.

Thus capitalism is a movement toward independence and self-reliance. It moves on two tracks, the economic track and the political track. Freedom and personal responsibility are the characteristics of each track. And neither track interferes with the other. The government does not exercise power over the economy, and economic power does not attempt to control the government. Every person has one vote, regardless of income, and bribery of elected officials is severely punished.

The popularity of capitalism around the world has grown over the past two centuries for obvious reasons. People want to be free and independent. However, freedom is not the same thing as justice. Even critics of capitalism probably agree that it gives some people some kind of freedom. But is capitalism just? Does it promote social justice? I believe that it does. To see this we must shift our attention from the idea of capitalism to the idea of justice.

On a superficial level, the question "What is justice?" is easy to answer. The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines justice as "fair handling, due reward or treatment." It says something is just if it is "properly due or merited." On this superficial level everyone can agree. Justice is being fair. It is giving people what is due to them, or what they have earned or merited. Injustice is treating people unfairly, giving some people special, unearned privileges, or unmerited punishments. In general, justice means treating people as they deserve to be treated, no better, no worse; giving them rewards if they deserve rewards, and punishments if they deserve punishments. All this is uncontroversial. The controversy begins when we ask what is due to a specific person. What is fair in a particular, complex case? What exactly does John Doe deserve? That is the difficult question.

Capitalism embodies a definite idea of justice. The moral basis of capitalism is the belief that justice depends on a person's contribution to society. If a person contributes a lot to society, in the form of building houses, or teaching kids, or healing the sick, then he or she should be rewarded. But if a person makes a negative contribution by assaulting people or robbing them or

harming society in other ways, then he or she should be punished. And the rewards or punishments should be commensurate with the positive or negative contribution. Thus justice has a positive and a negative side. Philosophers call the first "distributive justice," because it concerns the distribution of goods like income and status. And they call the second "retributive justice," because it involves retribution, or punishment, for wrongdoing. The moral principle of capitalism is that both sides of justice depend on a person's contribution to society, whether it is a helpful or harmful contribution.

I think the capitalist principle agrees with our basic concept and feeling about justice. That is another reason capitalism is spreading. It not only fulfils people's desires for freedom, but it also conforms to their most basic moral feelings. But the contribution principle still doesn't answer the specific question of justice. What has a particular individual, such as John Doe or Jane Roe, contributed to society? Who decides what a specific individual deserves in capitalism?

Capitalism has created a way of answering the tough question, not with a general theory, but in the practical treatment of individuals. The ingenious solution of capitalism is to say that *no one knows* what John Doe deserves. Every individual and every case is different. No one is wise enough to understand all the details of a particular case, or impartial enough to decide in a perfectly fair way. Since there are no God-like experts to administer justice, we will allow society as a whole to decide what John Doe, Jane Roe, and everyone else deserves. That promotes justice in a surprisingly clear way.

In capitalism the whole society determines both rewards and punishments in specific cases. First consider punishments, or retributive justice. We must have some way to decide whether or not John Doe has harmed society, and if he has, what degree of punishment he deserves. In capitalism, a jury decides who has harmed society. When a suspect is arrested, a prosecutor and a defender present their cases. A judge oversees the trial. But it is the jury that decides guilt or innocence, not the lawyer and not the judge. Now, a jury is a sort of microcosm of the whole society. It is a cross-section of the community, representing society as a whole.

Once society has decided that it has been harmed by an individual, who determines the punishment? Who determines whether the harm is serious or minor? Society again decides, in the form of elected representatives in the legislature. Elected officials make the laws. They decide that some actions deserve one year in jail, while others deserve only a fine. Elected representatives are acting the way citizens want them to act, so the citizens indirectly decide what the guilty person deserves. Capitalism rests on the assumption that no single person is wise enough to decide justly. No theory is accurate enough to determine justice in each particular case. So it allows society as a whole--represented by the jury and the legislature--to decide.

Punishment is only one side of justice. The other side is rewards and benefits. Capitalism says that people who contribute positively to society deserve to be rewarded, and different contributions deserve different rewards. But who contributes, and how much do they contribute? Those are the difficult questions. And again, capitalism allows society as a whole to answer them. In capitalism people are free to buy and sell as they please. Each individual helps determine justice by spending his money. Thus if one person offers something that many people want to buy, that person earns a great deal of money. Earning money is society's way of saying that a person contributes to society. Consumers themselves decide who deserves to be rewarded. They decide with their pocketbook. Their votes are dollars. For example, doctors offer a service, and earn a lot of money for it. Capitalism says that doctors contribute more than receptionists, because citizens freely pay more for the service doctors offer. No experts or

politicians or social workers weigh an individual's contribution to society. Society itself--innumerable people making purchases--decides how much a person contributes by paying the person for his contribution. Society rewards the person according to his contribution.

In capitalism some people make enormous amounts of money by offering surprising services. Sports stars like Michael Jordan make millions of dollars every year. What does he contribute to society? It might seem that an ordinary nurse or school teacher contributes more or improves society more than Michael Jordan. But the genius of capitalism is to shift the question. The question is not "What does Michael Jordan contribute?" The question is "Who decides?" Capitalism's answer is "Let the people decide." Who is better qualified to judge contributions to society than society itself, i.e. ordinary people making purchases? If people are free to buy and sell, they reward Jordan for the service he offers. It is only fair that society itself decides whether or not something benefits society, and only fair that society itself pay the reward for that contribution. Single individuals and groups are excluded from the decision, since individuals are often biased in some way.

Capitalism is radically democratic. It allows the people to determine rewards and punishments. Some intellectuals find it difficult to accept this aspect of capitalism. They assume that *they* are better qualified to decide what an individual has contributed to society. They do not believe such an important decision should be left to the uneducated masses. But this outlook is the source of all forms of totalitarianism. It is the assumption that I understand justice better than you, and better than most people, and I will force you and everyone else to be just according to my perception of justice. Capitalism is completely opposed to such an outlook, because it has faith in ordinary people.

An obvious objection to capitalist justice is that some people, through no fault of their own, cannot offer any product or service or labour that people want to buy. Some people are too old and frail. Some people are blind or paralysed or ill. If they have nothing to offer to society, then they will receive no income at all. Is that right? Do we want these people to be completely indigent? Of course not. They should receive help. But it is compassion and kindness that demands that we help them, not justice. If it is true that they make no contribution to society, and if rewards should be proportionate to contributions, then pure justice by itself does not require that we help them. But we all have other moral feelings besides justice. We also feel compassion. Helping people who make no contribution (measured by society's willingness to pay for what they offer) is an act of compassion. Thus we can all agree that handicapped people should receive aid. But this fact is no objection to the capitalist practice of justice. It simply means that capitalism includes other values besides justice.

By making rewards and punishments depend on a person's contribution to society, capitalism conforms to our basic concept of justice and fairness. And by allowing society as a whole to decide individual cases, capitalism conforms to our desire for democratic equality and even-handedness. It is not surprising, therefore, that capitalism is becoming more popular all over the world.

Key Concepts

contribution

political capitalism

retributive justice

economic capitalism

distributive justice

compassion

Critical Questions

1. How is capitalism in the economy similar to capitalism in government?
2. Does the capitalist think the question "What is justice" is easy or difficult to answer?
3. Do you agree that in capitalism society as a whole decides who has committed a crime and how a criminal should be punished?
4. Do you think that it is just to base a person's rewards, income, and benefits on his or her contribution to society?
5. Do you believe that in the U.S. the amount of money a person makes is an accurate measure of his or her contribution to society? Does a professional basketball star contribute two hundred times as much to society as a social worker?
6. Why should society as a whole decide who contributes to society and who doesn't, according to the essay? Why shouldn't social scientists, or politicians, or religious leaders decide?
7. Does the capitalist think that it is unjust for the government to give financial aid to helpless or unproductive people, such as the elderly?

NO: SOCIALIST "Capitalist Society"

The seventh century, from 600 to 700 AD, was one of the lowest points of European history. It was the middle of the Dark Ages, when petty barons fought for territory, constant violence was the rule, famine was common, and most people's minds were stupefied by ridiculous superstitions. But it is only in retrospect that we realize how horrible conditions were. Most of the people living at that time did not think of their epoch as a Dark Age. They thought their way of life was normal, since the decline was gradual, and they were not aware of other times or places.

I fear that the world may be sinking into a new Dark Age. The growing problems are not the same as the problems of the seventh century, but they are no less severe and depressing. The discouraging trend is the worldwide spread of capitalism. The Revolutions of 1989 have spread the capitalist virus like the Black Plague. But most people today are just as unaware of the threat as people in the earlier Dark Age.

Capitalism is simply immoral. It forces people to behave in callous, selfish ways, and capitalist society inevitably degenerates into an immoral war of all against all. The bedrock foundation of capitalism is the free market. People buy and sell goods and services, and negotiate the prices. Everyone's goal is to make a favourable deal. For example, if I deal in real estate, I try to buy land or buildings for one price, and then sell them for a higher price. If I manage a shoe store, I try to buy shoes from a supplier at one price, and then sell them to customers at a higher price. The difference in price is profit for me. Manufacturers have the same goal, although the process is slightly more complicated. If I manufacture automobiles, I must buy a factory, machinery and parts, and the labour of my employees. They assemble the

parts, and then I must sell the automobiles for more than I spent to make them. The pursuit of profits is the heart of capitalism.

But the process is necessarily dishonest. The essence of capitalism is cheating. To make a profit, I must find someone who will pay more for an item than I paid for it myself. That is how the free market works. Capitalism is a continuous search for a sucker. It is a search for someone who will pay more for something than the seller knows it is worth. And the bigger the lie, the more "successful" the seller will be. The only skill required to get rich in real estate is the skill of manipulating someone to pay more for a property than you paid.

Dishonesty governs the relation between employers and employees, too. Employers buy people's labour, which they use to make a product or offer a service that they can sell for more than the labour costs. Employers try to squeeze more work out of their employees and pay them as little as possible. If they can cut wages or benefits they have more profit for themselves. If they can produce the same goods with part-time workers, who are paid far less than full-time workers, they will do that.

On the other side, employees sell their labour. They do not buy something at one price and sell it at a higher price. But in capitalism employees are forced to try to get more and more for their labour. They take longer breaks, use sick days for vacation, slack off on the job, and in other ways try to cheat their employer. They strike for higher wages. It is part of the climate of capitalism, where the pursuit of profits is the only goal. Dishonesty is the means. A person cannot make profits and remain honest at the same time. Capitalism turns people into liars. And it makes them think lying is normal and respectable. They don't even realize that they are lying.

Where the free market is the basis of society, everything is for sale. In capitalism medical care must be purchased. If you are hurt in an auto accident, and you go to an emergency room at a hospital, the officials will demand to see your insurance card before they treat you. Injured people without health insurance have been turned away, and if they are allowed to stay, they will very probably not receive the same treatment as paying customers. Where medical care is for sale, the providers will naturally try to make the greatest profit they can. Medical costs will rise and rise. People will enter the medical profession with the goal of making profits. They will demand a large return on their "investment" of compassion. They will look for ways to gouge more money out of their "customers." Where medical care is for sale, providers cannot maintain their natural desire to help people for the sake of helping. They must do it for the sake of money. Capitalism destroys the basic respect and concern people have for each other.

Where the free market is the basis of society, political power is for sale. In capitalism, elections are determined by money. The candidate who spends the most on advertising, transportation, and publicity will win the election. Politicians understand this. They devote most of their time to raising funds for the next campaign, not to studying problems or looking for solutions. Special interest groups--unions, professional associations, industry representatives, the elderly, etc., etc.--are the best source of money. So in effect, politicians sell their services to the groups that pay the highest price. A politician who says that money plays no part in his or her decisions is like a car salesman who says, "just for you," he will sell you a car for less than he paid for it.

In capitalism, justice is a commodity like everything else. "Justice" in capitalism means favourable court decisions. Lawyers want the most favourable deal (the most profits) they can get. They make money by winning legal cases. Some are more skilful or unscrupulous than others, and the skilful ones will charge more for their services. Therefore, rich people who can hire the most cunning and devious lawyers will win their cases. Average or poor people, with

mediocre or honest lawyers, will lose their cases. Real justice has nothing to do with it. In capitalism, justice is irrelevant.

The free market corrupts everyone and destroys all human relationships. Where everything is for sale, people are for sale, too. When a capitalist hires a worker, he purchases the right to use that person for his own benefit, like a tool. He has bought the right to order him about, regulate his behaviour, tell him when to stand, when to sit, when to eat, when to talk. The whole purpose of this degrading relationship is to wring as much profit as possible out of the worker. Of course the worker aims at the same goal; he wants to exploit the capitalist. People cannot be expected to respect each other, or see each other as free, dignified human beings, in such a situation.

Women have suffered the most under capitalism. Where everything is for sale, everything must be purchased. Medical care, political representation, justice, and of course necessities like food and clothing must be bought. But women have been deprived of the means whereby they could earn money to purchase these things. Until recently, capitalism excluded women from most jobs. Even today there is strong pressure on women to stay at home to provide full-time child care. (There is no comparable pressure on men to give up their careers to raise children.) If a woman cannot work, she has no way to earn money. But in capitalism money is a life or death issue. The only way a woman excluded from the market can survive is to marry a man and become dependent on him for money. In other words, women must sell their bodies to men. They provide sex in return for the basic necessities of life. The situation is so humiliating and dehumanizing that most women cannot admit it to themselves. They delude themselves with romantic dreams because the reality is too painful to accept. But some women are quite open about it. They freely admit that a man's income plays a large part in their attraction to him and their willingness to consider marriage. Such is the effect of capitalism on women's values and self-respect.

Women are certainly not to blame for their choices. They must survive. But most men are not to blame either. Men are trapped in the system as firmly as women. People who grow up in capitalism are bombarded with carefully selected images and messages from the day they are born. Their values are shaped by capitalism. Everywhere they look, they learn that happiness means buying things. The purpose of life is to accumulate clothes, cars, radios, houses, or other gadgets. TV, movies, parents, books, history lessons in school, all teach children to value private property and money. Even mainstream religion defends the "sanctity" of private property. Human relationships, developing one's personal potential, and cooperative work are less important. Children see the message in people's actions, if not their words. As children grow up and see what happens to people without money, how could they fail to make money their goal in life? As they see how buying and selling for a profit work, how could they value honesty? As they see how employers lay off workers, how could they learn that everyone deserves respect?

One important aspect of capitalist indoctrination is its disguise. People must not realize that they are being indoctrinated or else it will not work. Therefore capitalism loudly trumpets the value of "freedom." People are told that they are free (meaning free to buy and sell). Anyone who points to the immorality of capitalism is branded as an enemy of "freedom." But the only freedom capitalists care about is the freedom of a small minority to become fabulously wealthy. Most people in a capitalist society are enslaved to their jobs. They must work long hours, with almost no vacation, to try to make more money. In many families, both parents work, leaving children to be raised by the television. Some people hold two jobs because they believe in "freedom." What a cruel irony it is. No medieval peasant worked as many hours, or

was as terrified of poverty and destitution, as a modern worker.

The oil that keeps the capitalist machine running is greed. In a free market, people must buy things. The more people buy, the faster the machine runs. Therefore everyone caught up in the system wants everyone else to buy more things. The system encourages greed. An essential part of selling is persuading someone to buy. Psychological manipulation is as important to capitalism as production of goods. People are manipulated to want more and more things. They are convinced that they need the latest fad, and that they will be miserable without it.

Capitalism must keep demand and consumption at a fever pitch. It must make people feel that they need more and more. But a person can wear only so many dresses or drive so many cars. To overcome this limitation, capitalism has transformed basic needs into relative needs. People are taught to change the definition of "need" from survival to superiority. People feel that they must be superior to their neighbours. They need to have more things and better things than other people. Otherwise they will be unhappy. They do not have a basic need for a fancy car or designer jeans or an expensive vacation. They will not starve or even be uncomfortable without these things. But they will feel inferior (or merely equal) to other people. They need the fashionable things to feel superior, so people buy more and more. This kind of relative need is boundless. Unlike hunger or fatigue, it can never be satisfied. There is no end to the pursuit of social superiority. If you rise above the people in your neighbourhood, you will then compare yourself to a higher stratum of society. And then you will want to rise above them.

The psychological transformation of needs from real and basic to artificial and relative is perhaps the most pernicious and damaging aspect of capitalism. It creates economic classes in society as some people are driven to accumulate more and more superfluous goods and others are left behind. The result is envy and jealousy on one side, arrogance and contempt on the other, and hatred and resentment all around. Capitalism is a perversion of human relationships. It subverts the natural neighbourliness of people and puts suspicion and conflict in its place.

It is true that capitalism produces dazzling toys for people to play with (by threatening them with homelessness if they do not work like slaves). But those consumer goods have blinded people to the more important effects. Capitalism destroys morality. It forces people to make dishonesty a way of life, it reduces all human relations to buying and selling, it reduces all aspirations to insatiable greed for material objects, and it turns people against each other. As capitalism spreads, humanity declines into materialistic selfishness, a new Dark Age. The only consolation is that the wheel of history continues to turn.

Key Concepts

capitalism	greed	relative needs
immoral	indoctrination	class divisions
dishonest		

Critical Questions

1. Do businessmen and women always charge more for their product than they paid? Do you agree with the essay that making profits is based on dishonesty?
2. What is the essay's main criticism of the capitalist health care system?
3. The essay claims that politics, the courts, and the workplace are all corrupted by capitalism. Do these three institutions all exhibit the same problem, or different problems?
4. Do you think a man's income influences a woman's desire to marry him? If so, does that make her a prostitute, in your opinion?
5. According to the essay, how does capitalism indoctrinate people?
6. How would you define "need"? Is it something one must have in order to stay alive? (Are our only needs oxygen, food, and water?) Or is it something one must have in order to be happy? (Then are the socialist's relative needs actually basic needs?)
7. How does capitalism create social classes, in the socialist's view?

Methods and Techniques: THINKING AND EMOTION

These two essays about justice are likely to stir up people's emotions, both positive and negative. As you read them, you may have found yourself feeling angry, or proud, or embarrassed. Why? Why would these essays generate strong feelings, while other articles or discussions leave people cold?

One reason is that these essays cover topics that people care about very much, like justice. We all react strongly if we think we have been treated unfairly, for example, if something was stolen from us. Most people react strongly if they see someone else treated unfairly. (Hollywood and TV understand this, and use people's sense of justice when they want to create villains.) People also care about money, and both essays are about money. Anything about having money, or getting money, or being deprived of money, automatically raises a person's emotional temperature. Both essays discuss democracy, especially the first, and people care about democracy.

Another reason for the emotional reaction is that most people feel personally involved in the topics. Most people feel that the free market directly affects their lives--their income, their rent, their entertainment budget, and their prospects for the future. Capitalism is not an irrelevant abstraction to most people but a specific set of facts in their lives. For some, the organization of society has been good, and they feel the current arrangement should be preserved. For others, the current situation is frustrating or unsatisfying or offensive. They feel that the basic organization of society should be changed.

That division points to another reason people get emotional about these topics. Both essays are implicitly accusatory. That is, the socialist says, in effect, that anyone who practices capitalism or willingly participates in the system is immoral. The capitalist says anyone who is poor deserves to be poor, and anyone who challenges the system is promoting injustice. Those are strong claims. No one likes to be called immoral or unfair. People become highly defensive and anxious when such charges are thrown around.

In reading these essays, it is tempting to go with the emotion. Some students respond with the equivalent of "So's your mother!" or a dialogue of the "Are too--Am not--Are too--Am not" variety. The normal response to being attacked is to attack back. But strong emotions are counter-productive when you are trying to understand political philosophy. They only get in the way of careful analysis. It would be futile to say one should not have emotions at all. People are going to feel strongly about these issues. But you should try to allow the other parts of your mind to work, too. You are more than just a bundle of emotions.

One way to defuse the strong feelings is to step back and be less involved. Try to think of the problem the way a scientist would. What are the facts, what are the recommendations, where are the conflicts? Another strategy is to try to isolate exactly the points that upset you. Does an author say anything that you can agree with? After you find those parts, then focus on precisely the statements or suggestions that you find disturbing. (Maybe it isn't the statements themselves that upset you, but the underlying, unwritten assumptions, or the consequences.) Once you have pinpointed the troublesome ideas, ask yourself why you find them troubling. Why do they elicit strong feelings? By using your analytical thinking, you will temporarily set aside your emotions.

This sort of analysis will help you see the reasons for a person's point of view, the pro and con, and the hidden assumptions. It is good practice, too, because most philosophical questions are like these political issues. They are questions that people care about--concerning God, right and wrong, human nature, and objective knowledge. And many people feel that they have a personal stake in the answers (in the way they lead their lives, their image of themselves, their confidence in their beliefs, and their life after death). But putting aside strong feelings so you can think clearly will help you in any task.

Understanding the Dilemma

Capitalist or Socialist?

When people think about justice, they might ask themselves "What is a just society," or "What is a just person?" Or they might ask "What is a just procedure, that is, a just way of resolving disputes between people, or a just way of administering punishments and rewards?" Actually the third question, about rules and procedures, is probably the most fundamental. A just society is simply one that is based on just procedures, in the courts, in institutions like education and medical care, and in the economy. A just individual is one who acts justly, that is, who follows just procedures.

The first essay focuses on the procedure by which capitalism administers punishments and rewards. It claims the procedure is democratic, and that it leads to a just society. The second essay argues that capitalism and the free market do not produce justice, and in fact, systematically destroy people's moral sense, including their sense of justice. Which is right? Is capitalist society just, or unjust?

A capitalist believes that everyone agrees about what justice is on an abstract level: it is giving a person what he or she deserves. It is treating people fairly, in the sense of giving them

what they deserve without considering irrelevant factors. But people do not agree on what a particular person deserves. Does a suspect deserve to go to jail? Does a high school graduate deserve a secure job? People have different opinions. So a society needs a way to determine what each individual deserves. It needs a procedure for administering punishments and rewards, and people must believe the procedure is just. The capitalist claims that in capitalism the procedure is to allow the people as a whole to administer punishments and rewards. That is the only fair way. All experts or authorities will be biased. The people as a whole decide what one individual's contribution to society is worth. They decide by paying him a salary, or buying his product. The free market allows the people as a whole to spend their money where they want, and their spending indicates their judgment of an individual's contribution. Thus administering rewards and punishments through the free market is a just procedure for deciding what each person deserves. It produces a just society, according to the capitalist.

Socialists do not propose a different concept of justice, but only criticize the capitalist concept. They point out the harmful and even immoral aspects of capitalism. They say that by making everything depend on money, capitalism undermines the judicial system, the political system, and the health care system. In a capitalist society, people cannot think about what someone deserves, but can think only about how much money he or she has. People cannot think about whether or not a person deserves to be elected, or deserves to be convicted, or deserves decent health care, but substitute money and profits for justice. The amount of money a person has is not necessarily connected with what a person deserves, in any of these areas. Capitalism has little to do with justice, socialists say. In capitalism people have become consumed with greed, and now they are trying to justify their scramble for money by calling it justice.

Capitalists favour competition; they think competition brings out the best in people, and produces benefits for everyone. Socialists think competition is not always good. It leads to aggression and hostility between competitors. It means a lot of people are unhappy because they are losers. There is no reason for competition; people can accomplish more by working together. Generally socialists favour community, cooperation, and mutual help, whereas capitalists favour individualism, personal achievement, and self-reliance.

Another difference is in the attitude toward the less successful people. A capitalist thinks they are less successful because of their own limitations. A socialist thinks that their circumstances, their educational opportunities, and the social system in general, are to blame.

The capitalist's essay raises some other fundamental questions. Should a person's income and standard of living depend on his or her contribution to society? Is it just to give greater rewards to people who contribute more to society? What does "contribution to society" mean? Should a person's contribution be determined by his or her "marketability," that is, what others are willing to pay that person? A capitalist says yes, and a socialist says no.

In trying to decide whether you are a capitalist or a socialist, you should also keep in mind an idea that socialists emphasize. They say that most people will make up their minds on the basis of what serves their own economic class. In other words, a person who is prospering in capitalism and belongs to the upper class will believe that capitalism is a superb way to organize society. But a person who is unsuccessful and belongs to the lower class will say the system ought to be changed. Our position in society determines our beliefs and judgments about society, socialists say. Are they right? Can you look at our society objectively, without simply advocating policies that will improve your own individual prospects?

Capitalist

1. Justice means getting what one deserves.
2. A person who contributes more to society deserves more rewards than a person who contributes less to society.
3. The only fair way to determine how much a person has contributed to society is to let the people as a whole decide, through the free market.
4. Justice is not the same thing as compassion, but if people believe society is just, they will behave compassionately.

Socialist

5. In capitalism decisions are made on the basis of monetary self-interest, not justice.
6. In capitalism the emotion of greed gradually overwhelms all other emotions, until the basic institutions of society are corrupted.
7. It is essential to capitalism that it disguise its true nature, and so it works hard to make people believe it is morally neutral, or even just.
8. People in capitalism want to be better than their neighbours, without any regard for justice.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Historical Examples

Capitalist: Adam Smith. *The Wealth of Nations*. Random, 1977. Book 1, chapter 10, "Of Wages and Profit in the different Employments of Labour and Stock." Originally published in 1776. Smith explains why people in different occupations earn different amounts of money in capitalism.

Socialist: Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. Many editions. Originally published in 1848. Marx and Engels raise historical and "scientific" objections to capitalism, but their main critique is moral. Like Figueroa, they claim that capitalism is dehumanizing, unjust, and immoral.

Other sources

Irving Kristol. *Two Cheers for Capitalism*. Basic Books, 1978. See Part 3, "What is 'social justice'?" Paul Bowles. *Capitalism*. Pearson Longman, 2007. Readable, short history; balanced assessment of the pros and cons of globalization. Michael Harrington. *Socialism*. Saturday Review Press, 1972. A broad-ranging defense by

a famous socialist. Robert Heilbroner. *Between Capitalism and Socialism*. Random House, 1970. Essays explaining and promoting socialism by an excellent writer. Ayn Rand. *Capitalism, The Unknown Ideal*. NAL, 1967. A collection of essays defending capitalism, mostly by Rand, a novelist. Karen Lebacqz. *Six Theories of Justice*. Augsburg Publishing House, 1986. J.S. Mill, Rawls, Nozick, Catholic Bishops' Conference, Niebuhr (Protestantism), and Liberation Theology. Bernard Cullen, "Philosophical Theories of Justice." In Klaus R. Scherer, ed. *Justice: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Cambridge U.P., 1992. Extensive survey and classification of contemporary theories of justice. Robert C. Solomon, Mark C. Murphy, eds. *What is Justice? Classic and Contemporary Readings*. Oxford U.P., 1990. Contains a wide variety of selections, including some from the two most important books on political philosophy in the past thirty years: John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*, and Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. Plato. *The Republic*. Penguin, 1974. Probably the most influential book in philosophy ever written. Plato set out to answer the question "What is justice," and he ended up discussing virtually every philosophical question, including justice. Jean Hampton. *Political Philosophy*. Westview Press, 1996. Chap. 4 is an examination of utilitarian, libertarian, egalitarian, and Rawls' theories of justice.

5 Should we establish a world government?

Internationalist or Localist?

A worldview is called "worldview" because it is a perspective on the entire world. In this book the "world" includes everything: human nature, body and mind, values, God, and any other part of human experience. Building a worldview means deciding what you should believe about these basic topics. But if you asked someone "What is your view of the world," he would probably think you were asking about current affairs, particularly international relations. An interesting and important part of your worldview is your beliefs about other countries in the world and America's relation to them.

Political scientists study international relations, and they try to do it scientifically. There is no sharp line between political scientists' questions and philosophers' questions. Philosophers simply try to understand the most general features of this part of human experience. For example, philosophers might ask "Are there any laws that determine the behaviours of states toward each other?" Survival of the fittest? Increasing progress toward peace and cooperation? Or is it true that there are no natural laws, no inevitable tendencies, and we are completely free to decide what kind of international relations nations will have?

Philosophers also try to understand central concepts in international relations, such as "sovereignty," "force," and "government." What exactly do these terms mean? Do they mean different things for different people? How are these important ideas related to other concepts we have, such as our concept of right and wrong, justice, and equality?

Philosophers also ask questions about policies and goals, whereas political scientists usually try to confine themselves to factual questions. In other words, philosophers ask "Should our country be the leader of the world, or should all countries treat each other as equals?" "Are there any moral rules that all people should obey?" "When is war justified, if ever?"

An important concept in international relations is the concept of world government. What does it mean? Is it possible? Is it desirable? Your answers to these questions depends partly on your beliefs about two other topics. First, do you think that the current situation in the world is new and unique, or that it is basically no different from all past eras, when attempts to form a world government failed? Second, do you think all the people in the world are basically similar and can work together, or are people in different countries so different from each other that they could not work together in one government?

The first essay in this section argues that a world government is possible and desirable. It represents the internationalist position. The second essay explains why a world government is not possible, and would not be a good thing even if it were possible. It claims that local government is better, so it represents the localist position.

YES: INTERNATIONALIST

"Choosing a Peaceful Future"

It is the business of citizens in a democracy to make choices. Some choices affect a few people in a local district. Others are more significant. Citizens of Western nations now face a choice that has the greatest consequences imaginable. The phrase "turning point in history" is used too often, but there is no other way to describe the present situation. Citizens of Western nations have an opportunity to improve dramatically the future of humanity. We can choose to create a functioning world government, or we can choose to continue the international anarchy and war that has plagued mankind for millennia.

The idea of a world government is not new. But the remarkable conditions of the present age *are* new. After the Second World War came the Cold War that had America with Capitalism in the blue corner and Russia with Communism in the red corner, both wielding the threat of nuclear action. The Cold War is over and the democratic West won. The world is no longer divided into two hostile blocs, each trying to exploit the weaknesses of the other. The Western powers, particularly the United States, are now supreme. Formerly Communist countries and non-aligned countries are trying to imitate the West as rapidly as possible. Every country in Latin America, with the exception of Cuba, now has a democratic government. As recently as ten years ago no one would have predicted it. The opportunity for further progress exists.

In trade and economics, nations have embraced open borders, free movements, and internationalism. The Europeans have been moving closer and closer to economic integration--common standards, common laws, even a common currency--for decades. Canada, the U.S., and Mexico are following their lead with the North American Free Trade Agreement. Large corporations are completely international. Their headquarters may be located in one country, but their suppliers, factories, distribution centres, customers, and investors are spread all over the globe.

The third new development is communications. The Internet and World Wide Web are only the most visible symbols of a broad, rapid change in modern society. International telephone connections are easy, reliable, and cheap. People today are instantly aware of major events that occur anywhere on the globe, thanks to news organizations linked by satellite. Often people can watch dramatic events as they unfold. We are living in a smaller and smaller "global village," as philosopher Marshall McLuhan said.

These political, economic, and social developments probably make some sort of world government inevitable. But we now have an opportunity to hasten the process and avoid unnecessary problems. We should proceed deliberately and gradually through several stages. The first stage is to create a Federation of nations, like the United Nations, but with complete control over nuclear power and nuclear weapons. The monopoly on nuclear weapons would give the Federation real power.

Nuclear disarmament is not an entirely new idea. In 1946 the United States volunteered to destroy its own nuclear weapons--the only ones in existence at that time--and to participate in an international commission to oversee all nuclear power production, so no other nation would develop nuclear weapons. The plan failed because the Soviet government would not allow

international inspectors to monitor their nuclear power stations.² But conditions are different now.

The first stage in the creation of a world government is different from the American plan in one respect. The world Federation must have teeth--military power--because its first and most important goal is to preserve the peace. If the Federation, representing the will of mankind, had monopoly control of a few small nuclear weapons, no dictator or rogue state could challenge it. People would have to obey international law and settle their differences through negotiation.

The essential prerequisite for such a Federation is democracy. Nations must have proportional representation, they must have a voice in the decision-making of the Federation. Then the Federation could operate like any democratic body. If serious conflicts arose, and the Federation decided to try to end the violence, then nations would feel that it was acting on their behalf, since they helped make the decision. Majority rule is the only principle by which people can live together peacefully, and we all live together on planet Earth. Representation must be based on population, but since different countries have reached very different levels of development, it must also take into account the financial and technological contributions each nation can make to the Federation.

Once the Federation established peace among nations, it could perhaps move on to stages two and three. It could begin to address global environmental problems. The environment is vitally important to everyone. But no single nation can protect the earth's air and water, although a single nation can pollute them. Preserving a clean, healthy environment requires international cooperation. The high seas, Antarctica, the ozone layer, the moon, orbital space--these are areas that affect everyone. No single nation can take the whole responsibility for protecting them.

Global thinking would lead to a third role for the Federation. It could help promote economic development among poor nations. By organizing agriculture, building infrastructure, establishing schools, and helping small industry, the Federation could begin to reduce the starvation and disease that afflicts millions of people today. Of course it could make progress only in a democratic country, where the benefits would go to the people and not the power elites. But the promise of such aid might help transform remaining corrupt governments into democracies.

The benefits of establishing such a world government are obvious: universal peace, resources devoted to development rather than war, increased democracy, greater respect for the natural world, and an end to mass poverty and starvation. The possibilities are staggering. If all the human capital that is now wasted in conflict and poverty were employed in creative work, who can imagine the scientific and cultural advances that might occur? Humanity could very well rise to a new level of civilization.

Why, then, aren't people demanding a world government? Because some sceptics are more attuned to the past than the future. Their reservations are of two types. First, some say a world government is impractical. It will never work, because the world is too big and people are too different. They cannot agree on anything. Second, some people say a world government would deprive their own nation of its sovereignty. Americans, for example, would lose their independence and have to obey a committee of "foreigners." The French would have to admit the supremacy of English, given that this is the most natural Global language.

The first objection is easy to answer. A Federation of nations is just like the Union of States in America - or the federated States and Territories of Australia. The Australian

Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Oxford History of the American People*, vol. 3 (New American Library, 1972), 422.

federation of States and Territories was constituted as such, on the model of the American federation. After the American Revolution in the last part of the Eighteenth century, the separate states, such as New York and Pennsylvania, were reluctant to give up their independence. In fact, they tried living under a weak "Articles of Confederation" for eight years, but it didn't work. In 1789, they adopted the Constitution we have now, creating a stronger central government. Each state agreed to support a national army, which was stronger than its own state militia. The result has been a secure, prosperous nation.

The United States is the best model we have for a world government. The United States government implements the Constitution, even though people in America are very different. America includes people who practice different religions, who have different family customs, and speak different languages. People from all over the world live in the United States, even though their cultural backgrounds are completely different. In spite of these differences, they all agree that they want to be safe, and they want to be represented in the government. The motto of the United States is "E Pluribus Unum": from many, one. The system works because the central government only demands tolerance of others and peaceful resolution of conflicts. It does not demand uniformity, moral values, ideology, or any changes in one's personal affairs. If the diverse people of America can accept a central government, then so can the people of the world. All the practical objections to a world government can be answered by pointing to the United States government. It *can* work.

But other people are afraid of a world government. It might be all too possible, but it is very dangerous. They do not want to put so much power in a few people's hands who are not Americans. This fear can take several forms. Political philosopher, Barbara Ward says that the opposition to world government is based on emotion, whereas rationality argues for it.³ Emotional opposition is difficult to formulate precisely. Some might say that the Federation could turn into a dictatorship. Since it alone would control nuclear weapons, it could force member states to do whatever it wanted. But the parallel with the United States applies again. The American Founding Fathers were aware of the dangers of concentrated power, so they divided it into three branches, they limited the terms of office, and they made it answerable to the people through elections and recall. Similar checks and balances could apply to a world government.

Another objection is more subtle. Some people fear that their own country will lose its sovereignty (its independence or self-determination), not because of dictatorship, but because of majority rule. The Federation will abide by the will of the majority. But the majority of people in the world are not Western or democratic by nature or instinct; they do not understand Western liberal democratic interests, and they do not think like in the same human terms as we do (e.g. human rights). It is no coincidence that Amnesty International was founded in the U.K or that Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) was founded in France. Non-democratic, non-Western countries with scant humanist or Christian traditions will vote for some policy that harms these interests and traditions; thereby sawing off the branch upon which they are perched.

This fear seems to rest on several false beliefs. One is that the Federation will legislate matters of individual behaviour or interfere in the lives of citizens of nations. But the only concern of the Federation will be to prevent war. If necessary, it will act to prevent one government from invading, attacking, or harassing the government or people of another nation. All other matters will still be the responsibilities of the national governments.

Instead of seeing other people in the world as "them," an alien majority, why can't we think of forming a Federation as *joining* a majority of reasonable, peaceful people, *against* a minority of aggressive, intolerant, arrogant militarists? We will be on the majority's side, not in the minority.

Another misconception at the root of the fear of the majority is the belief that people around the world are utterly different from us, so different that they are unpredictable, or likely to favour bizarre, tyrannical policies. But while people are different in superficial ways, they are fundamentally similar. People everywhere live in families, they love their children, and they talk to their neighbours. They want the freedom to work, to play, to worship, and to learn, as we do. We aren't dealing with Martians, but with human beings like us.

Not all countries in the world today have evolved into democracies yet. And only democratic national governments could participate in a world Federation. The participants must represent their people, but an authoritarian, undemocratic government would not represent its people. China, Iran, North Korea, and a few others would not be eligible. In fact, a country need not take part in the Federation at all, so long as it did not threaten the Federation with nuclear weapons or the means to produce them. But these dictatorships are dinosaurs from a bygone era. Their governments will change within a few years. We should welcome these changes, and build on them. The choice is ours.

Key Concepts

communications	environment	dictatorship
nuclear weapons	development	sovereignty
majority rule	cultural differences	

Critical Questions

1. How is the present age different from previous eras, according to the internationalist?
2. What is the internationalist's proposal? What kind of world government does the internationalist want? What is its function or purpose?
3. How does an internationalist answer the objection that people around the world are too different from each other to work together?
4. How does an internationalist answer the objection that the free nations would lose their independence to a foreign majority if we joined a world federation?
5. Why does an internationalist insist that all the member states must be democracies? Doesn't that mean that the Federation will never be established?
6. Do you think Australia has more to gain, or more to lose, by turning over all its nuclear weapons to an international organisation?

NO: LOCALIST

"The Politics of World Government"

A perennial dream of the human race is to create a perfect society where people will all love one another and live in harmony. The Stoics, Christians, enlightenment *philosophes*, socialists, and other less influential dreamers believed in a universal kinship of people, based upon reason and the inherent dignity of each human being. One version of this dream is internationalism. All these groups proposed the formation of some type of world government, whether it was the Roman Empire, the City of God, Enlightened Despotism, or the Classless Society. The political Left today change the details, but many still favour the creation of a political body with authority over all the people of the world.

The dream has a kind of charm, like a fairy tale remembered from childhood. But to realistic men and women with experience in politics, the practical proposal of a world government is a horrible idea. It is based on a completely false image of human beings, and if it were somehow put into operation, it would gradually undermine our most precious human qualities.

The world government is never described in detail, and it isn't based on real facts. When idealistic lefties get together to try to implement their vision, they soon discover that they all have different visions! Some propose a far-reaching, energetic organization to actually make every person in the world feel like a member of one community. The world government would transform education, economics, and political activity to make every person a "citizen of the world." At the other end of the spectrum is a vision of a much more limited world government, whose only function would be to prevent war. And there are variations in between.

But these different types of world governments have at least one factor in common. They are *governments*. They have some mechanism for making decisions, and they have real power to enforce their decisions. Without overwhelming power, these groups would be no different from the international organizations we have today, which any state can ignore whenever it likes. But a world government's decisions would have a real impact on people and nations.

What the idealists have failed to understand is that the world government would be a political organization. They have not understood how politics works. They seem to think that politics is a perfectly rational activity, and that it is a matter of finding the best solution to a problem. But that is engineering, not politics. Politics is not rational, it is emotional. It depends on other parts of our nature besides pure reason.

Any government must inspire loyalty and devotion among its citizens. The function of a government is to influence people to do things that they may be reluctant to do. It must call forth the people's efforts. Thus an essential element in government is leadership. Some talented individuals must be able to generate enough respect and enthusiasm among citizens that the citizens will do the difficult things that need to be done. Inspiring people and being a leader are not rational matters. The technocrat who can produce the best plan for improving the economy is not the best leader. Leadership depends on touching people's emotions. Some politicians understand people and have the common touch, others know how to run a fiscally tight economy. The Howard-Costello duo in Australia held office for so long because – while they lasted - they combined both crucial qualities.

Governments must also make decisions, usually involving a number of people. Even monarchs and dictators have advisors and councils. In democratic governments like ours,

elected representatives make decisions. But that process is far from rational. Anyone who knows anything about politics knows that politicians operate on a personal level. They make deals with other politicians, compromise, do favours, call in IOU's, form coalitions, and protect each other. They try to persuade each other, but not with cold, logical arguments. They plead, cajole, threaten, make promises, and tell jokes. They appeal to their colleagues' patriotism, honour, and love of country.

Probably the most powerful technique that any politician can use on another politician is flattery. Politicians want to be regarded as Very Important Persons. In Australia we see this technique at work when the Prime Minister invites Premiers of State Government to Canberra for 'talks'. Besides the "horse trading" that goes on, the representatives enjoy being part of the higher power that is held at the Capital. Hosting a big reception for State premiers in Canberra is one of the most effective techniques a Prime Minister can use to promote his policies. The effectiveness of such cajoling depends upon a whole set of emotions, not upon intellect and reason. Politics is personal.

How could this political process be employed in a world government? How could people from Nigeria, Russia, Honduras, and Japan get together and hammer out a policy? People from radically different cultures often cannot even communicate with each other clearly; misunderstandings are all too common. But political wheeling and dealing is far more complex and subtle than simple communication. People around the world today are simply too different to work together politically. They respond emotionally to different things. They do not know each other's cultural rituals. Should one ask about the family back home, offer a colleague a drink, offer to make a deal? Will it be perceived as a bribe? Can one confidentially criticize another representative? Different cultures have different feelings and expectations on matters like these.

On a strictly technical problem, such as scientific investigation, people from different cultures can work together (although it is difficult). But politics is not a technical problem. The decisions aren't based on mathematical calculations, and the stakes are too high.

Politics involves values more than it involves reason or intellect. A world government would inevitably run into conflicts over values. For example, what policy would a world government have toward women? Will women hold offices and supervise men? We will say that men and women are equal, women should have the same opportunities as men, and that both sexes should do the same jobs. But to many other people around the world--probably the majority--such an attitude is very disturbing. To some it is shocking and offensive.

What policy will the world government have toward religion? We say live and let live. The government should not take any actions affecting religion. But we are in the minority again. Most people around the world could not even imagine banning religion from public schools. They want their children to learn their religion in school. Many feel it is more important than anything else they learn. If the world government had any educational function--and how could it fail to--would it adopt our liberal 'live and let live' attitude or the majority's attitude?

Who would participate in the world government? Who gets a vote? Many countries contain substantial minorities who feel that they are not represented by their official government. Gypsies in Romania, Tamils in Sri Lanka, Turks in Germany, and Basques in Spain all protest against the official government, sometimes violently. In Africa tribal loyalties are far stronger than national loyalties. The Kurds regard themselves as a legitimate nation, with their own history, traditions, culture, and language, although they live in several different countries. Which version of history will the world government adopt? Apart from who votes, where would the

world government draw the boundaries between states? Violent disputes have recently occurred between Ecuador and Peru, Greece and Turkey, India and Pakistan, and Morocco and Mauritania. Governments and citizens feel very strongly about their land and borders.

People in different countries have different *basic* values. And people's values are very important to them, by definition. They are motivated to achieve and protect their values. An appeal to their values will inspire them to make sacrifices, or to fight. But reason, rational argument, and intellect do not move people. Efficient solutions are not what people care about. The idealists' mistake is to think that rationality is a larger part of human nature than emotion and tradition. But it isn't. People are influenced more by feelings than by understanding.

The idealists may be right when they say that people are all similar in being rational. And that similarity is important for scientific cooperation. But politics is not science. Politics and government involve values, personal relationships, negotiations, and emotions. When it comes to politics, the differences among people completely overshadow the similarities.

If politicians were somehow to establish a world government, that would be a disaster. It would be an expansion of big government beyond the level of national governments we have now. In America, the world's biggest economy and the most powerful nation in the world, the American federal government has grown tremendously since the Second World War, and the main effect has been creeping dependency. Would we really like this on a global scale? Many commentators are saying Americans are losing the energy, inventiveness, initiative, and asking where is that Yankee ingenuity that made America a great country? It isn't only the poor who have become dependent (and therefore doomed to remain poor). It is also big corporations, who have come to expect their "corporate welfare," their tax breaks and subsidies, and have lost the incentive to be competitive. The middle class saves almost nothing because they expect the government to care for them in their old age. Everyone calls in lawyers and goes to court over trivial, perceived slights. A world government would eventually make the member states dependent, complacent, and spiritless.

The most harmful effect of big government is to destroy personal responsibility. People should help their neighbour. Understood rightly this isn't about their metaphorical "neighbour," some distant abstraction. It is about their real, live neighbour, who lives near them. If people had the moral will to take care of their real neighbours, the world would have fewer problems. But when Australians today see someone in trouble, many of them think "the government should do something." It is much easier to put a check in the mail, write a letter to a newspaper, or serve on a committee than it is to deal with needy people face to face. Big government has undermined people's compassion and sense of responsibility, and world government would have the same effect on member states.

"That government is best which governs the least," said Thomas Jefferson, father of Republicanism, the third President of the United States and the author of the Declaration of Independence (1776). Government's natural tendency is to grow and grasp more power. That is the tendency of people who want to tell others how to live. Therefore reasonable people will restrain and check government wherever possible. Working together with neighbours and fellow citizens is useful and good. But the larger government becomes, the more removed it is from the people it affects. And relying on distant, impersonal government undermines people's best qualities. A world government would be the biggest and worst government of all.

The idealists who propose a world government are often academics and intellectuals. That might explain how they could have such an unbalanced picture of human nature. To them, reason and rational argument are wonderful, exciting activities, and the crown of human nature.

But most people are not intellectuals. Most people guide their lives by love, honour, ambition, joy, and other emotions, not by rationality. That is certainly true in politics, where decisions depend on emotions and personal relationships more than rational analysis. A world government might work in a world of academics. But in the real world, with real people, it is a childish dream.

Key Concepts

government	emotion	dependency
politics	rationality	responsibility
human nature	cultural values	

Critical Questions

1. The essay says that different people have proposed different types of world governments. Which type is it criticizing?
2. Do you think egotism and vanity are important factors in the national government? Would they ever lead our Australian Parliament and Prime Minister to adopt a national policy that they know is second best?
3. According to localists, why couldn't representatives from different countries work together in a world government?
4. Does a localist think all people are rational? What mistake is the supporter of world government making, in the localist's opinion?
5. What effects has the expansion of government had on people, according to the essay? Do you agree or disagree?
6. Do you think the localist's criticisms apply to the type of Federation that the internationalist proposed? If the Federation has only one goal--to keep the peace--then couldn't it avoid the kind of politics the localist describes?

Methods and Techniques: COMPARING

One of the most basic thinking skills we use is comparing things. Both of the essays in this section compare several things in their essays. The first compares the past with the present, when it says we are living in a new age. The main conclusion of the first essay largely depends on comparing a Federation of nations with the United States. And it compares people in Western nations with people in other countries. The second essay compares different types of world governments, science and politics, and--like the first — citizens of Western nations and other peoples around the world.

Comparing two things means finding similarities and differences between them. To compare things effectively, keep two guidelines in mind. First, you must be systematic. Observe or think about every aspect of the two items being compared: colour, shape, motion, effect on people, composition, function, cost, danger, and any other feature you can imagine. It might be helpful to organize features in some way: physical, inside, outside, emotional, functional, past and future, (i.e. what is the origin of the two things, and what will their future be?), relation to other things, and so on. Being systematic will help you find similarities and differences you wouldn't otherwise find. The most interesting comparisons are the unusual, surprising ones.

To keep track of all the similarities and differences, make three columns, left, right, and centre. The left column lists the characteristics of one item, and the right column lists the different characteristics of the other item. The centre column lists characteristics they share, i.e. similarities. For example, in comparing apples and oranges the two outer columns might begin with differences in colour: "red" on the left for apple, and "orange" on the right for orange. In the centre, one might put "sweet." By using columns a person organizes and directs her thinking more effectively.

Sometimes people will argue over similarities and differences because they are looking at different *levels* of characteristics. One person is looking at a very specific feature, and the other is looking at a general feature. For example, one person might say apples and oranges are *similar* because they both have skins, or peels. But another person might say they are *different* because an apple has a thin skin while an orange has a thick skin. Both are right, of course. The disagreement arises because one person is looking at peels in general (as compared with no peel), while the other person is looking at the specific type of peel. One person might say apples and oranges are similar because they are both sweet, while another might say they are different because an apple is tart while an orange is tangy (two ways of being sweet). These two people are looking at different levels of properties, general and specific. It is best to think about both general and specific characteristics, and things will often be similar on a general level but different on a more specific level.

Besides being systematic and methodical, we should ask the *purpose* of the comparison. Any two things can be compared, and a person can find many similarities and differences between any two things. In fact, we can find too many. We need some purpose to limit the search. The purpose will help us decide which properties are relevant or important, and which ones aren't. For example, I might compare apples and oranges because I am a grocer and I need to decide which to sell. On the other hand, my purpose could be to grow them, and I need to decide which to grow. In that case, I will be interested in a different set of similarities and differences from the grocer. Or my purpose might be to eat them, or draw them, or peel them, or to persuade my children to eat more fruit, or anything else. People with different purposes will be interested in different properties. So before we begin listing similarities and differences between two things, we should think about our purpose in comparing them. If the purpose is simply to find something interesting, then anything might be relevant.

The second essay makes a point about purpose. Both essays compare citizens of Western nations and other people in the world. Both agree that there are some similarities and differences; in particular, both agree that people everywhere are similar in being rational. But the second says that if the purpose is to evaluate the idea of world government, then that similarity is irrelevant. World government is a form of politics. And in politics the differences

among people--differences in their values, their manners, their emotional reactions to things--are more relevant than their similarities.

Understanding the Dilemma

Internationalist or Localist

Many people believe that citizens of one country should learn about life in another country, that countries should exchange students, and that they should cooperate on international projects. But an internationalist (as the term is used here) goes farther. He or she believes that nations should be willing to give up some of their independence. They should join a world government, in which they have a voice, but in which they do not make the final decisions. The majority in the world government makes the final decisions, and it has the power to enforce its decisions.

A localist, in contrast, believes that such a world government is not possible, because political negotiation depends on personal, emotional considerations, and people from different cultures cannot engage in that kind of give and take. They do not understand each other well enough to make the world government work.

An internationalist begins with the assumption that war is the greatest threat to every nation, and nuclear war is the worst kind of war because it could annihilate the whole country, and even destroy all life on the planet. The first essay does not mention nuclear terrorism, but an internationalist would probably say that it provides another reason to put nuclear materials under international control. Nuclear war is an obvious threat. World government is an obvious solution. People around the world can understand large, pressing problems like this, and can understand the logical means to deal with them. They can agree on the facts, the consequences of the facts, the possible actions to take, and the best course of action. Differences in diet, clothing, marriage customs, and so on do not affect people's intelligence or ability to think. Therefore people can agree to form a world government once they begin to think about the new opportunity we now have.

But a localist has a different view of people. He or she says that emotions play a much larger role than reason in determining what people decide to do. This is true in general, but it is especially true in politics. Political leadership and decision-making are very complicated. What one person calls a "problem," another might not regard as a problem. What a person regards as the "best" solution will depend on her goals and values, which will be different from another person's goals and values. The differences among people around the world are not just in superficial things like clothes, but in the rules for communicating and interacting. We Americans all follow the same subtle, unspoken rules, but other people have different rules. People from different countries can negotiate on relatively minor, technical issues, but not on grave, life-or-death issues.

It is clear, then, that a fundamental disagreement between the internationalist and the localist is in their views of human nature. Are people rational, and do they make decisions based on clear perceptions and logical reasoning? Or are people swayed more by emotions, and do

they make decisions based on feelings, intuition, and personal loyalties? Are they rational about some things, but emotional about other things? Your answer will help you decide whether you are an internationalist or a localist.

Internationalists and localists also have different views of government. An internationalist believes that government can exercise tremendous power wisely, for the good of all. A world government, like our national government, will be made up of representatives of the people, so it will carry out the people's wishes. There are many problems that cannot be solved by individuals, but can only be solved by governments. If a world government made every nation secure, people could devote their time and energy to productive pursuits, and create a whole new civilization.

A localist says we should look at the facts about what has actually happened, not dreams of what might happen. The fact is that growing government has made people more and more dependent on its services, a localist believes. As government takes on more responsibilities, individuals give up their own personal responsibilities and expect the government to do everything. They become more like children. Some kind of government--working together with friends and neighbours--is necessary, but the less the better, a localist believes.

Where do you stand? Are people rational? Are we all fundamentally alike? Are governments expressions of greater cooperation, or are they dangerous threats to our autonomy? Are you an internationalist or a localist?

Internationalist

1. Current political, economic, and cultural conditions are unique in history, and make a world government possible.
2. People will accept a world government because it will have a very limited agenda, which is to keep the peace, not to interfere in people's personal lives.
3. If all the diverse people of Australia, Canada and the U.S.A can work together in their Federal government, then the diverse people of the world can work together in a world Federation.
4. There is no need to fear majority rule in a world Federation because all people want the same things as the West: peace and freedom.

Localist

5. People act primarily on the basis of emotions, values, and traditions, not rational calculation.
6. Since traditions are different around the world, and the things that arouse emotions are different, it follows that people are fundamentally different.
7. Government is personal and emotional; it operates through individual relationships based on trust, bargaining, and non-verbal communication.
8. As government grows, it makes individuals more and more dependent on it.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Historical Examples

Internationalist: Immanuel Kant. *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*. Hackett, 1983.

Originally published in 1795. Kant proposes a limited world government, and says that its member states must be constitutional democracies.

Localist: Niccolo Machiavelli. *The Prince*. Many editions. Originally written in 1512.

Machiavelli, the supreme realist, says that politics is a struggle for power, and devious princes must use any means they can to maintain power.

Other Sources

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Littlefield, 2006. Three short essays, arguing for more international cooperation and a more cosmopolitan world. Paul Kennedy. *The Parliament of Man: The Past, Present, and Future of the United Nations*.

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Organization. Fourth Edition. Random House, 1971. Comprehensive discussion of many types of problems facing internationalists. James Bohman, Matthias

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Cosmopolitan Ideal. MIT University Press, 1997. Positive and negative views. John T. Rourke, ed. *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in World Politics*.

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Current Controversy

6 Is ETHNICITY ESSENTIAL TO IDENTITY?

Essentialist or non-essentialist?

The fact that different ethnic groups live in Australia leads to some interesting philosophical questions. In political philosophy, one can ask if democracy is fair. Ethnic minorities will always have fewer votes than the majority, and so will almost always be outvoted. How can they elect a candidate who represents them, or how can they promote their interests?

In ethics, the history of injustice makes people wonder about the right policy today. Do some people enjoy wealth and opportunities today because their ancestors benefitted from exploitation? Are some people disadvantaged today, not because of their own limitations, but because their ancestors were victimised and oppressed? If so, do middle-class people owe compensation to poor people, as a way of returning what was stolen in the past? Should ethnic minorities or indigenous peoples receive preferential treatment to make up for past injustices?

In the theory of knowledge, one can ask if people in different groups—ethnic groups, ethnic or linguistic groups, men and women—perceive the world in different ways. How is a black student's experience in a mostly white school with white teachers different from a white student's experience in the same school? If knowledge depends on experience, and the two students' experiences are different, will the students acquire different knowledge? To what degree will they be able to understand each other?

Philosophers have begun to think analytically about the concept of ethnicity itself. What is ethnic identity? If I have one parent from China and one parent from England, what does that make me?

Ethnic identity is a complex phenomenon that raises many questions. The two essays in this section are about ethnic identity. The fact of ethnic differences leads people to ask how important those different characteristics are. Is a person's ethnicity an important part of the person's identity? Some say ethnic background is vitally important. Being black or Asian in Australia is not at all like being white. Therefore the first step in understanding another person is to recognise the person's ethnic identity. Indeed, the first step in understanding oneself is to accept one's own ethnic identity and all that it involves, some say.

But others say ethnic identity is not important for identity. The type of person I am doesn't depend on my ethnic identity. I can be black or white or yellow or red, and also intelligent or artistic, or greedy, or generous. Knowing a person's ethnic identity doesn't tell us anything about the person's real nature. In fact, assuming that it does is a major problem.

The first essay below argues that ethnic identity is important in understanding people. History and society play a big part in determining one's identity, and the histories of ethnic groups are different. We can call this the "essentialist" point of view. The second essay takes the position that ethnicity is a physical phenomenon and not part of one's identity. Ethnic differences are not important. It represents the "non-essentialist" perspective.

YES: ESSENTIALIST

In America the issues of race relations and racism have been huge and are ongoing. We in Australia have much to learn about our own attitudes to ethnicity from the American experience. How does the American experience compare with our own? What have we to learn from this? What could they learn from us?

"The Meaning of Being Black"

What is black authenticity? Who is really black? First, blackness has no meaning outside of a system of race-conscious people and practices. After centuries of racist degradation, exploitation, and oppression in America, being black means being minimally subject to white supremacist abuse and being part of a rich culture and community that has struggled against such abuse. Hence, all black Americans have some interest in resisting racism—even if this interest is confined solely to themselves as individuals rather than to larger black communities.

This quotation is from a relatively recent book called *Race Matters* (Vintage Press, 1994, p. 39) by Cornel West, a professor of philosophy at Princeton and an African American. It is an amazing passage. In eighty-six words West describes the multiple dimensions of black identity, and also isolates the essential core. He weaves together society, history, emotion, and refuge, concluding with an emphasis on moral commitment. By reflecting on each part of the passage, as I propose to do here, one can gain a deeper understanding of what it means to be black in America. West may not agree with my comments on his statement, but I believe he has distilled the essence of black identity. The political leaders who urge African Americans to assimilate, join the white middle class, and pretend that ethnic identity does not matter, should study this passage.

"What is black authenticity? Who is really black?" West begins with questions. Before we can understand ethnic identity in America, we have to step back and take a critical stance. We have to decide exactly what questions we want to ask. West's questions reveal two of his assumptions. He assumes that black authenticity is not the same as white authenticity. Being black is not like being white. One might think that point is too obvious to mention, but there are those who say that America is a colour-blind society and that we have moved beyond the segregation and racism of the past. West disagrees. Ethnicity still matters.

The second assumption behind these questions is more controversial. West assumes that being black is not simple or automatic. One isn't born being black. It's possible that some black people are authentically black and some aren't; some are "really black" and some aren't. West assumes that being black is not a matter of colour, but is more. What else is involved in being black besides colour? Are some people closer to this "authentic blackness" than others?

"First, blackness has no meaning outside a system of race-conscious people and practices." The important word here is "system." It is essential to understand that ethnicity is not a biological or physical issue but a social issue. A person can be black only within a certain kind of society. If some people are more black than others, of course that does not mean some have

darker skin than others. Being black depends upon one's position within a social system.

It may be difficult to separate ethnicity from skin colour and appearance. But consider the following examples. In the 1890s Adolph Plessy, a black man living in Louisiana, sat in the white section of a train. He violated the segregation laws so he could challenge them in the Supreme Court. He lost. The Court ruled that "separate but equal" facilities for blacks and whites were constitutional. Ironically, in appearance Plessy was indistinguishable from whites, since he was seven-eighths white. But his one black ancestor meant that, in the eyes of the law—in the system—he was black. Another example shows that ethnicity doesn't depend on appearance. In the 1920s, many Jews in Germany thought of themselves as good Germans, and certainly didn't look or behave any differently from Germans. But when the Nazis instituted "a system of race-conscious people and practices," some good Germans were reclassified as Jews.

"After centuries of racist degradation, exploitation, and oppression in America. . . ." We cannot escape from the past. Being black means carrying the burden of history within oneself. We all live in the shadow of America's shameful history. History influences all of us, because it influences the society we live in now. For example, black people have rarely been able to get loans from white banks to start businesses, so it has been more difficult for them to climb the economic ladder. Black colleges made heroic efforts to educate young people, but without contributions from wealthy alumni, or income from high tuition, they could not offer the best educations. When black people began moving to cities in search of opportunity in the 1940s and 1950s, white people fled to the suburbs, perpetuating American segregation.

All these historical trends influence black and white people today. Decades of poverty, lack of education, and exclusion from white society shape children's aspirations. How could a black child plan to be a doctor or scientist or MBA, when everything she sees around her tells her it's impossible? How could white people welcome blacks into their neighbourhood when they have never lived with blacks before, and the movies and press portray blacks as poor, uneducated, and prone to crime?

History influences people even more directly through parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles. Black children hear stories of racist hatred, insults, jeering mobs, and everyday humiliation from parents and grandparents, who pass along even worse stories that they heard when they were growing up. Lived, oral history affects black children today. Individuals are part of groups, and the groups' history is part of an individual. Even if a black person has never personally been denied service in a restaurant or accused of shoplifting or insulted by white people, the person carries the group's experiences within herself. Some conservatives say that since discrimination is illegal, and colleges accept minorities now, black people are just as free as whites and have the same opportunities. They naively believe that every individual creates herself out of nothing, independently of the past. But West recognizes that no one is immune to his or her ethnic group's misfortunes or privileges. Every black person is infected by the social system, and feels the hard tumour of history within herself or himself.

"Being black means being minimally subject to white supremacist abuse. . . ." West begins his book with a story about waiting for a taxi on Park Avenue in New York City. Many empty taxis passed; none would stop for him. After a half hour, he gave up. Blacks encounter such minor abuses and discrimination all the time. Their significance is not economic or political, but psychological. They are constant reminders. Being minimally subject to white supremacist abuse means that black people are never allowed to forget that they are a small minority, not like the mainstream, and potentially victims of much greater oppression. As a result, blacks can never completely escape from fear, anger, depression, and indignation. Ethnic

anxiety is a bigger part of being black than skin colour. It's no wonder that black people suffer from hypertension and high blood pressure at much higher rates than white people.

White supremacist abuse does not only mean Klansmen in robes and hoods in the deep south. It means indirect messages of inferiority. Dominant majorities feel that they are superior to conquered or enslaved minorities, and so the dominant culture— newspapers, movies, education, politics—expresses the belief. The message may be subtle, disguised, or even denied. But when black people look at schools and colleges; professional associations of doctors, lawyers, and scientists; or Fortune 500 companies, they get the message: "You are inferior, you are incompetent, you are incapable." It is a crushing assault on one's self-image, inescapable and unendurable.

Being black means being accompanied by some degree of fear and anxiety all the time. One can try to ignore these feelings, but they are always there. But beneath the constant frustrations and self-doubts is an even more painful emotion that is part of black identity. Black people feel a particular kind of powerlessness. Most black people are relatively poor and economically powerless, but being black is not a matter of class. Some white people are poor, and some black people are not. Black people are not adequately represented in government, and so lack political power. But political power would not overcome the permanent potential for supremacist abuse.

That potential leads to a special kind of powerlessness. As minorities living in a white culture, black people are powerless to define themselves. They are powerless to choose their own identity. Instead, their identity is imposed on them by the pervasive, insistent institutions of the white majority. The majority naturally takes itself as average, or the norm, and regards anything else as different, strange, or abnormal. The most insidious and crippling kind of control over people is control over their ways of defining themselves. By cutting off certain possibilities, and constantly repeating certain images, the culture drives assumptions into black people's minds and fixes their perceptions. Some black people may not even realize what has happened.

"... part of a rich culture and community that has struggled against such abuse." People who face some hardship, such as a hurricane or famine or shipwreck, feel a bond with each other. Shared suffering brings people together. Black people form such a community. In their struggle to survive, they have created a rich culture that expresses their suffering. The themes of gospel music are travail in this life, hope for a better world, and profound sadness. The blues give voice to the everyday heartache and conflicts among oppressed people. And jazz goes beyond words to convey the black experience. Black culture includes poetry, fiction, dance, visual art, clothing, cooking, design, and every form of aesthetic expression.

By sharing this rich heritage black people may find an alternative identity to the "black identity" created by the dominant culture. The meaning of being black can be different for white people and black people, since they have such different positions and pasts. The group experience portrayed in the culture of the black community is vital; it recaptures some dignity and some self-determination for black people. Being an accepted, knowledgeable member of the black community is essential to having an authentic identity, in contrast with an artificial, imposed identity. For oppressed minorities, the group's experiences are more important than the individual's experiences, because minorities are accepted by fellow minorities but never fully accepted by the majority.

"Hence all black Americans have some interest in resisting racism—even if the interest is confined solely to themselves as individuals rather than to larger black communities." Being black means many things, based on the social system, the past, the potential for supremacist

abuse, and the sense of self discovered among similar selves. But identity for anyone is mainly a matter of values and commitments. If you want to discover a person's identity, find out what he or she truly loves. Or hates and fears. Some people truly love money, and organize their lives around it. Some people truly love their children. Some people tell themselves they love their children, but actually put their career first. Some people say they love justice and equality, but send their children to exclusive, private schools. It isn't easy to be sure about one's real values.

Given the stressful, complex situation of black people in America, it is probably more difficult for them to find their true identity than white people. West concludes his incisive analysis by turning to values and interests. He suggests that all the other elements of black authenticity should give black people a purpose—to resist racism. Having suffered for centuries from racist prejudice themselves, and having survived and responded with a vibrant culture, black people are in a position to attack the disease and educate others. The tragic black experience leads naturally to a desire to eradicate racism, and therefore the deepest core of black authenticity is the commitment to justice for all. Having felt the effects of racism first hand, blacks know how terrible it is. The true meaning of being black is to love justice and hate racism.

All the pain and fear and anger in the black experience may make it difficult for black people to find their true identity. And the dominant white culture gives misleading advice. But the black spirit has endured unimaginable horrors because the moral passion at its centre cannot be suppressed and cannot be denied.

Key Concepts

social phenomenon

history

white supremacist

powerlessness

community

racism

Critical Questions

1. According to the essentialist, could a society exist where some people looked black, others looked white, yellow, and red, but no ethnic groups existed? Why or why not? Do you agree?
2. How does history influence people today, according to the essay? If people chose to ignore the past, could they escape from its influence?
3. If a black person is highly educated and financially successful, is he or she subject to white supremacist abuse, according to the essentialist? Why or why not?
4. Why are black people powerless to determine their own identity? If society influences everyone, then is a white person also powerless to form his or her own identity?
5. The essentialist claims that when a person belongs to a minority group, the group's collective experience is more important for that individual's identity than the individual's own particular experiences. Why?
6. Can a person say that ethnicity is essential to one's own identity, and also hate racism? Is it self-contradictory to say that an individual's ethnic identity is a very important part of his or her identity, and that racism is wrong?

NO: NONESSENTIALIST

"Ethnicity and Identity"

The United States does not have a good record on race relations. The early settlers from Europe were generally suspicious and hostile toward Native Americans, and eventually killed them in large numbers and displaced the survivors from their homes. In the nineteenth century, Asian immigrants were mistreated. During the Second World War, American-born citizens of Japanese ancestry were simply assumed to be security risks, solely because of their ethnic background, and were confined to internment camps. And African Americans were enslaved, exploited, disenfranchised, segregated, and abused throughout most of America's history. Other ethnic groups were persecuted as well.

In light of this depressing history, many people today try to be more aware of ethnic identity and ethnic differences. Most want to avoid the prejudice and intolerance of the past and celebrate the benefits of diversity. But people disagree on just what it means to recognize someone's ethnicity. Granted that the attitudes of the past were wrong, what attitudes and beliefs about ethnic identity should we have now and in the future? The issue is so important that every person should clarify his or her beliefs at the deepest level. I want to ask what role ethnic background plays in a person's identity.

Some say that ethnic background is vital to identity and that anyone who wants to understand himself or herself must begin by understanding his or her own ethnic background. I disagree. I believe that ethnicity is irrelevant to identity. The very attempt to avoid the mistakes of the past has led some to repeat those same mistakes.

What Is Ethnicity?

Ethnicity is a set of physical traits used by scientists to classify people. A particular ethnicity is a group of people who share certain physical traits. Physical anthropologists look at hair, skin colour, facial features, the shape of the skull, blood type, resistance to some diseases, and other features. For example, some people have straight, dark hair; light skin; high cheekbones; a fold of skin over the eye (the epicanthic fold); and a round skull. Other people have curly hair; dark skin; a broad nose; and a long skull. And others have other traits.

In the nineteenth century scientists distinguished three main races: Negroid, Mongoloid, and Caucasian. But some groups did not fit any of the three categories very well, nor did they seem to be a blend of two or even three races. So now anthropologists distinguish nine or more distinct races. Moreover, some people are blends and do not belong definitively to one race or another. The boundaries among different races are like the boundaries among the colours of the spectrum: one shades gradually into the other.

Despite the vague boundaries, the concept of race helps us understand evolution and the influence of geography. People who live in a certain area, such as the aborigines, intermarry. Over many generations they become more similar to each other. If contact with people in other areas is limited, then differences in appearance between the separate groups may increase over time. Thus ethnicity is a function of geography.

Most of the features anthropologists study are adaptations to climate and environment.

The straight hair and short limbs of the Mongoloid race are adaptations to cold. The straight hair serves to retain heat in the head, and the short limbs allow better circulation to prevent chill and frostbite. On the other hand, the curly hair and dark skin of the Negroid race are adaptations to heat. Curly hair allows air to circulate and cool the head, and dark skin gives protection from the sun.

But evolution is not perfect. In Africa, malaria is a common disease, and over the centuries Africans adapted and evolved a relative immunity to it. The adaptation involves red blood cells. Humans have two genes controlling red blood cells (like the two genes controlling eye colour). Among Africans, one gene produces round red blood cells, like the other races' genes, but one produces cells shaped like a crescent, or a sickle. That gives Africans partial immunity to malaria. A problem arises, however, when a child inherits sickle genes from both parents, but no round gene. That child will have sickle cell anaemia, which can be fatal. But since 50 percent of children will have immunity and only 25 percent will have sickle cell anaemia, the adaptation saves more lives (from malaria) than it costs (in anaemia). The details of genetics and anaemia are complicated, but this simplified account illustrates how scientists can use the concept of race to help explain how people in different places evolved in different ways.

Unfortunately, some people use the concept of race for hateful purposes. Racism is an outlook based on the assumption that physical traits such as skin colour are associated with psychological or moral traits, such as intelligence or greed. A racist is a person who believes that all or most people with certain types of hair or facial features also have certain talents or psychological tendencies or moral weaknesses. Of course there is abundant evidence to the contrary. Among all ethnic groups we can find the whole range of human capacities and dispositions. Hair, skin, or shapes of noses do not help us predict anything about a child's potential. Character traits like cruelty, ambition, and empathy are learned from parents and cultural traditions.

Racists make two simple errors. First, they think that if you know a person's physical appearance, then you can know that person's mental abilities and moral character. They are like astrologers, who think that if you know a person's birthday, then you can know the person's psychological make-up, and even his or her future as well! But there is no connection. The date of people's birth doesn't determine personality or destiny. Similarly, a person's physical appearance doesn't determine his or her abilities or preferences.

The second error is different but just as silly. Racists think that if an individual belongs to a certain group, then the individual has the same qualities as other members of the group. For example, if John is Irish, and Irish people are musically gifted, then John must be musically gifted. This is stereotypical thinking. It is failing to recognize a person's individuality, but rather seeing only the qualities a person shares with other members of a group. Even if John is Irish, he may not be musical at all. In addition, it is almost always a mistake to make generalizations about large groups. Many people from Ireland are excellent musicians, but that doesn't support the statement "Irish people are musically gifted." Some are and some aren't, as with any other nation. So the racist's second error is twofold: overgeneralising about groups, and ignoring particular individuals' uniqueness.

What Is Identity?

Identity is a complex concept, and people might disagree about its meaning. As a start, we can note that the word "identity" is related to the words "identify," "identification," and "identical." The identity of something is whatever allows people to identify it, recognize it, or pick it out of its surroundings. Thus identity is the set of properties something has that distinguish it from everything else. If two things have exactly the same properties, we say they are "identical."

Government agencies and businesses use various techniques to identify people. The FBI relies on fingerprints, since an individual's fingerprints distinguish him or her from every other person. A passport includes a photograph, and a driver's license may mention eye colour. We all use Social Security numbers and personal passwords.

But when people apply the concept of identity to themselves, they are thinking of more than these procedures. My fingerprints and Social Security number distinguish me from everyone else, but I can still wonder about my identity. Physical identity is not the same as psychological identity. Psychological identity is the set of psychological traits I have that make me the particular person I am. A person might be an introvert or an extrovert, spontaneous or cautious, romantic or practical, people oriented or task oriented, intuitive or analytical. Every person has many traits, or ways of feeling, thinking, and acting. And while two people may both be cautious and analytical, no two people will have all the same traits, in the same degree, expressed in the same ways. So the particular combination of curiosity, courage, determination, introspection, and so on, makes each person the unique individual he or she is.

But there is more to personal identity than this. Some of my psychological traits are important and some aren't. My tastes in breakfast cereals are a part of me, but I could change them without changing my identity. Perhaps I enjoy watching hockey, but my interest could disappear and it wouldn't matter to anyone. On the other hand, some changes would matter. They would make me "a different person." If I am a dedicated lawyer who works long hours and loves discussing cases with colleagues, and then I switch careers and become a security guard on the night shift at the mall, people will say I've changed. Someone might say "You are not the same person you were." Physically I am the same, but psychologically I am not. Some psychological traits are important, in the sense that if they change, my identity changes. Some traits are essential to me. They define me.

In fact, when people try to find their own identity, they are not trying to find the particular combination of traits that makes them unique. They are trying to find the psychological traits that are important to them. When you get to know someone well, you do not know all the person's tendencies and responses to things. Instead you learn the person's priorities, what the person cares about most deeply, what he or she could not change without becoming a different person. My identity is not only whatever makes me unique. It is whatever is most important to me about me. Identity is not a matter of uniqueness, but of value. That is why we feel so strongly about discovering our identity and having an identity. It is discovering what is valuable to us.

Is Ethnic Background a Part of Identity?

If one's ethnicity were changed, would one be a different person? Is people's ethnic identity or indigeneity a fundamental value for them? I think some do make their ethnic identity or indigeneity central to their identity. Their ethnic background is extremely important to them. But if the present analysis of ethnic identity is correct, ethnicity should not be a part of identity. To make one's ethnic background a defining property of oneself is to misunderstand both ethnicity and identity.

Ethnicity is a set of physical properties, whereas identity is a set of psychological properties. Now some people are wholly preoccupied with their bodies and appearances. Judging from public interviews, some fashion models and celebrities, male and female, apparently think of little else but their appearance, and define themselves by their straight nose, their long legs, their "innocent waif" look, or whatever. Body builders look at themselves in a mirror for hours at a time, and work very hard to shape different muscles in just the right way. But models and body builders have personalities. Getting to know a model does not mean studying her portfolio. It means learning how she relates to people, how she deals with adversity, or how she imagines her future. Physical appearance changes quickly, but a person's basic personality does not change so easily. Some people may think that their body is the core of their identity, but they simply haven't found their true identity yet.

The same applies to ethnicity. A person's ethnic characteristics are physical, and therefore not a part of his or her personality. It is very tempting to think that physical traits are reliably connected with psychological traits, and that fat people are jolly, or redheads have fiery tempers. Physical traits are easy to see, but character is difficult to perceive. Since identity is so important to us, we sometimes slide from appearance to personality without realizing it, even when we think about ourselves. But this is racism. It is assuming that certain physical traits are associated with certain psychological or moral properties. People who feel that their ethnicity is part of their identity are unconsciously making the same mistake that racists make. What that shows, I think, is that racism is a subtle and widespread way of thinking, and will not be easy to eradicate.

Other people make ethnicity a part of their identity in a different way. All of us seem to have a basic need to belong, to be members of a group. Our first club is our family. Soon we all join a circle of friends as well. And if our group of friends rejects us or excludes us, the experience is extremely painful. We also join other groups such as sports teams, and many people feel great pride in being citizens of our country. People even define themselves by the groups they belong to. Some people might feel that being a member of an ethnic group is an essential part of their identity. It isn't their physical appearance in itself that is important, but the fact that they are part of a larger group—white, black, Asian, etc.—and therefore related to many others like themselves.

But this way of thinking about identity is just as misguided as the focus on physical traits. Everyone needs friends and associates, and so the desire to belong to a group is natural. Moreover, we all choose to associate with people who are similar to us. But it is a mistake to assume that if another person is of the same ethnic group as I, then she is probably similar to me in her outlook or beliefs or values. If I attend a PTA meeting of diverse parents, should I hesitate to make friends with the black parents or Asian parents, on the grounds that I probably have more in common with the white people? If I think that way, I am thinking in stereotypes. I am discounting people's individuality and treating blacks and Asians as if they are all alike. I am assuming that a person who happens to be black is similar to all other black people.

There is a terrible irony here. If I think my ethnicity is part of my identity because I am

probably similar to all the other members of my ethnic group, then I am stereotyping myself. I am failing to recognize my own individuality. In fact, I am making the second mistake that racists make, because I am assuming that if a person is a member of a group, he or she has the characteristics of other members of the group. But I am making the racist mistake about myself. The ease with which people make this error, and even its attraction for many, shows how insidious and dangerous racist thinking is. Even the victims of racism adopt their oppressors' way of thinking.

Thinking clearly about ethnicity and identity is not easy. The ideas have been abused and distorted for centuries. Even in more enlightened times, the concept of identity is still complex and imprecise. Moreover, because of its tortured past, and its connection with our feelings about what is important, the concept of identity is charged with strong emotions. These factors make it difficult to understand. All the more reason, therefore, to approach the problem with an open mind, patience, and logic.

Key Concepts

ethnic	geography	racist
identity	personal values	stereotype

Critical Questions

1. How do scientists explain the origin of ethnicity? How is it a useful concept?
2. What two main mistakes do racists make, according to the non-essentialist?
3. In your opinion, is psychological identity independent of physical identity? Does a person's body type—size, appearance, agility—influence his or her psychological traits?
4. Can people decide what is important to them, or is that determined by earliest experiences and unchangeable? Are little habits and beliefs I'm unaware of, such as my cruel sense of humour, or chewing my food with my mouth open, or my belief that clothing style reveals character, part of my identity?
5. The non-essentialist seems to make the following three statements:
 - a. identity depends on what is really important to a person, not on all traits;
 - b. a person's ethnic identity can be very important to him or her;
 - c. identity does not depend on ethnicity.Are these three statements inconsistent? Has the non-essentialist contradicted himself or herself?
6. I belong to many groups, such as my neighbours, Yankee fans, commuters, and teachers. There are others groups I do not belong to, such as out-of-towners, Cubs fans, self-employed people, and physicians. Am I stereotyping myself if I associate with people who are similar to me rather than with people who are in different groups?

Methods and Techniques

IDENTITY

Who am I? Where do I belong in the scheme of things? What makes me different from everything else? These are all questions about identity. The search for identity is one of the most powerful motives for studying philosophy. It is one of the central questions philosophers think about.

Being philosophers, they realize they cannot find any answers until they first understand the question. When people search for their identity, what is it that they are looking for? What are they asking? What would satisfy them? The Department of Motor Vehicles is satisfied with a person's name, place and date of birth, eye colour, or handicaps. That is enough for a driver's license. But philosophers and others want more. What more do they want?

Perhaps we can get a clue from teenagers. Teenagers are very much concerned with identity (not to say obsessed with it). They are at a stage of life where the question "Who am I?" takes on a real urgency. They are beginning to make important decisions that will determine their whole future. And they realize that they cannot remain at home much longer, completely within the confines of their families, but must think about leaving their parents and starting their own families. So the question of identity is important to them.

If we look at teenagers we see two contradictory tendencies. On the one hand, many try to be different from everyone else, especially their parents. They wear unusual clothes; listen to new, different music; and pursue interests or hobbies that they feel set them apart from the majority of people. They seem to think that finding one's identity means finding the ways in which one is different from other people, ideally different from every other person. Then one is absolutely unique.

On the other hand, they also exhibit exactly the opposite tendency. They want to belong. They want to be part of the group. They want to be one of the gang, and the idea of being different, "weird," and alone is terrifying. So while they think they are choosing strange clothes and hair styles, and expressing their own unique personalities, in fact they end up looking exactly like most other teenagers, down to the precise holes in the jeans or strands of bleached hair.

We shouldn't laugh at teenagers. They are victims of logic. They are only acting out in a more pronounced way what everyone must do. Everyone must find ways in which he or she is different, and everyone must find ways in which he or she is similar to others, part of the group. Both sides are logically required to have a sense of identity, because that is what it means to identify anything.

When a person asks "Who am I?," he can answer the question in a very general way, a very specific way, or an in-between way. Some philosophers answer the question in a very general way by saying "I am a human being," and then explaining what that means. A person could also say "I am an American." That is more specific than human being. To explain what it means to be an American, she would have to say what all Americans have in common, and what sets Americans apart from non-Americans. Or she could be even more specific and say "I am a Democrat," "I am a college professor," "I am a philosophy teacher in California," and so on, with smaller and smaller categories. But in each case, she must explain what makes her a Democrat or college professor. And that means she must explain how she is similar to other Democrats, and how she is different from people who are not Democrats.

This duality seems to be a logical feature of identifying anything, and a necessary part of

one's identity. If so, it leads to an interesting consequence. Part of one's identity consists of being a member of certain groups, some large and some small—males, the elderly, sky divers, horse lovers, people with long noses, etc. But an equally important part of one's identity consists of "the Other," of seeing the differences between oneself and others. This analysis suggests that one defines oneself in part by recognizing a group or groups who are different, who are outsiders, not like oneself. If I am male, that means there are others who are not male, different from me, set apart. If I am American, that means there must be others who are not like us Americans. If I am a human being, then there are other things that are nonhuman.

If this is true, then it is an interesting fact about human nature. In itself, it is neither good nor bad. Like atomic energy, it might be used to benefit people or to harm people. Perhaps it explains things, perhaps it is alterable. Like many conclusions in philosophy, it opens up several new questions to think about.

Understanding the Dilemma

ESSENTIALIST OR NON-ESSENTIALIST?

Is a person's ethnicity an essential part of his or her identity? The non-essentialist in the second essay says no. Ethnicity is a useful concept for understanding evolution and the geographical distribution of people, but it is useless for understanding identity. It tells us nothing about a person's character. Identity depends on an individual's psychological traits, especially his or her core values.

An essentialist, on the other hand, claims that ethnicity is an important part of a person's identity. Being a member of a minority group shapes one's thoughts and feelings. Even if minorities have not personally felt the effects of discrimination, they know it is always possible. They learn from their families and fellow minorities about past abuses, and present institutions remind them of their relatively powerless status. A person's ethnic background shapes the cognitive, emotional, and moral dimensions of his or her character.

Essentialists and non-essentialists disagree on several points. One difference concerns the impact of the past and social relations on one's identity. To what degree is one's identity created by one's social environment, and to what degree can one choose one's own identity independently of social influences? The essentialist believes that everyone lives in a society, and certain features of the society influence a person's identity, particularly minorities' identities. For example, black people in the United States see the distribution of wealth, the numbers of blacks in the professions, and images of blacks in movies and TV, and they may feel excluded or even powerless. The surrounding society influences blacks' self-image.

Current social realities are results of past practices, and therefore identity is shaped by history as well. Minorities learn about the prejudices and abuses of the past. The stories people hear from parents and grandparents are especially important in forming their sense of themselves, and minorities hear stories about unjust treatment of people like themselves. In addition, the essentialist argues that minorities have created distinctive subcultures and communities within the larger society, and individuals can win more respect and dignity within those communities of fellow minorities than within the society at large. The majority culture, minority culture, and history all shape people's identities in decisive ways.

The non-essentialist claims that identity depends on "what is important to you about

yourself," and that people can decide for themselves what is important. It isn't easy to discover what you think is important. People sometimes say they value one thing—honesty, for example—but actually behave in a different way to get something they want. They haven't discovered, or can't admit, what they really believe is important. But the non-essentialist suggests that people can choose their values and their identity. The author doesn't explicitly address the question of what determines identity, although he argues that ethnic background does not determine it. So one difference between an essentialist and a non-essentialist is on the issue of social influences: the essentialist believes they are very strong, and the non-essentialist believes in greater self-determination.

This first disagreement rests on a deeper one. For a non-essentialist, ethnicity is a biological phenomenon. It is a set of physical characteristics that evolved over the centuries. But for an essentialist, ethnicity is a social phenomenon. It is having a minority status in a society, which means having less power—economic, political, cultural—than people in the majority.

The essentialist and non-essentialist disagree not only about the nature of ethnicity and identity, but also about attitudes or policies we should have about ethnic issues. Specifically, the non-essentialist claims that emphasising ethnic differences and ethnicity as part of identity is very dangerous. Doing so encourages the same kind of thinking that leads to racism. Racists make two false assumptions, namely that a person's abilities and qualities depend in part on his or her ethnic background, and that all the members of an ethnic group are similar to each other in important ways. But if we decide that a person's ethnicity is a key part of her identity and a good indicator of what she is really like, then we are moving back toward the first racist assumption. And if we believe that each of us has more in common with people of our own ethnic background; that we will be more comfortable and at home with fellow whites, blacks, Asians, or whatever; and that we should form ethnic communities, then we are moving back toward the second racist assumption.

The whole problem with ethnicity, according to the non-essentialist, comes from emphasizing differences among people instead of seeing the commonalities or universal humanity of all people. The worst thing we can do about ethnicity is to teach people that they are fundamentally different from others because of their ethnic background, and fundamentally similar to people of the same ethnic background as themselves.

The essentialist might respond to this appeal with two points. First, minorities have been treated differently for centuries. It's impossible to ignore the numerous differences in status and power among ethnic groups that existed for centuries and still exist now. In fact, it would be unrealistic and lead to a false identity. Moreover, minorities do gain certain benefits in their interactions with fellow minorities in their own community. It is wrong to deny them that refuge and fulfilment.

Second, the problem with ethnicity is not difference, but hierarchy. In other words, people can recognize differences without denigrating or oppressing one group or another. We can admit differences among people and also respect those differences and even value them. Racism does not mean thinking people are different; it means thinking some people are inferior. If we teach respect and fairness, then there is no danger in recognizing differences among people.

So, how important is history and social status to your identity? What is ethnicity and racism? Are you an essentialist or a non-essentialist?

ESSENTIALIST

1. Ethnicity is not physical but social; it isn't appearances, but other people's reactions to appearances that are important.
2. Everyone is decisively shaped by history and by present social arrangements.
3. The basic experience of being black is feeling the permanent threat of oppression.
4. Being black is ultimately positive, because it leads to a concern for the oppressed and a desire for justice for all.

NONESSENTIALIST

5. Ethnicity is a set of physical features that evolved in different areas, mostly as adaptations to climate.
6. It is a terrible mistake to believe that ethnicity indicates anything about a person's personality, aptitudes, or character.
7. A person's identity consists of those aspects of himself or herself that are important to himself or herself.
8. A person's ethnicity should not be important to himself or herself, since physical features are irrelevant to personality, values, or talents.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Historical Sources

ESSENTIALIST: W.E.B. Du Bois. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Terri Hume Oliver. Norton, 1999. Originally published in 1903. Du Bois argues for a distinctive black identity: "One ever feels his twoness— an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body."

NONESSENTIALIST: Booker T. Washington. *Up from Slavery*. Edited by William L. Anderson. Norton, 1995. Originally published in 1901. Washington promoted very gradual assimilation of blacks into white society until, eventually, there would be no ethnic division.

OTHER SOURCES

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7 CONNECTIONS

Individualist or relationalist?

If you decide that you are an egalitarian, does that mean that you should be a libertarian or a paternalist? A capitalist or a socialist? Or can an egalitarian agree with any of these positions? What connections can we find among the positions in the various Sections?

We can look for connections among opposed positions. There is nearly always a hidden logic that binds the opposite opinions to one another. For instance, between the theist who believes in God and the atheist who does not believe in God, it is the same 'theistic' view of God that both are affirming or denying. Or for instance, those who are committed to the belief in a supernatural level of reality and those who are committed to the belief that reality is unified and accessible to observation and ordinary experience; both share a concept of the 'natural', the supernaturalist believes in a 'beyond' of some kind and the naturalist doesn't. We could say that both sides of these disagreements share the same paradigm.

There is a fundamental disagreement in every Section. Consider Section 2, "Is Liberty the Highest Social Value?" You remember that a libertarian says yes and a paternalist says no. The libertarian in this section argues that many of the goals or values we have in our society seem to be different from liberty. For example, we value money, security, and equal opportunity. But actually these values are the same as liberty. So when we pursue money, for example, we are actually valuing liberty. And when we have values that really are different from liberty, such as equality of condition and justice, they are not as important to us as liberty itself. But a paternalist disagrees. He or she says that we cannot explain what liberty is, so we cannot value it. Moreover, when it comes to drugs, prostitution, wearing seat belts, saving for old age, and many other areas, we do not allow people the liberty to do whatever they want, even though they would harm no one but themselves. We value morality or security more highly than liberty.

There are several important differences between these two positions. But one difference is in the attitude toward society, or the group as a whole. The paternalist places a high value on the group and what is good for the group. The libertarian does not trust the group as much, and values the individual more than the group. That is why a libertarian claims that the most important social value is liberty (of the individual), and a paternalist claims that the group as a whole should sometimes guide an individual to do what is best (for the group and for himself or herself), even if he or she disagrees. So the question is "How much sacrifice should an individual make for the society?"

Of course the difference is a matter of emphasis; everyone values individuals and everyone values groups. But some emphasize one, and some emphasize the other. Let's call people who emphasize the group "relationists," and people who mistrust the group "individualists." These labels are merely conveniences. The word "relationist" is a made-up word, a "neologism." We can use it to talk about the similarities among some of the positions in the various Sections. The word "individualist" has various connotations for everyone, but I am proposing that we give it a special, limited meaning here. Our goal is to find connections among the positions in the Sections, and we need some sort of label to attach to those similarities. "Relationist" and "individualist" can serve, but you can use different labels if you like. The important thing is the general themes running through the different positions, not the labels we use.

So, we can say that a libertarian is an individualist, because libertarians value individual liberty more than they value the moral views of the majority, and they mistrust the judgment of the group as a whole. A paternalist, on the other hand, is a relationist because paternalists think that the larger group should force an individual to do the right thing, even in cases where no one else is involved. Are any of the other positions similar to these two?

Consider Section 3, "Is Equality the Highest Social Value?" The two positions in this section were egalitarianism and elitism. An egalitarian believes that people in our society should be more equal. If they were, we could eliminate poverty, crime, homelessness, stress, class conflict, and conformity. In fact, if we eliminated private property, and made people equal in material standards of living, we could create a virtual Utopia. We could create a society with far fewer problems than our society has today. But an elitist claims that the policy would never work. People are different, the elitist says. We might try to enforce some sort of equality among citizens, but natural talents and determination will inevitably reintroduce inequalities in a short time. Instead of denying differences, we should take advantage of them, and help people find what they can do best. Everyone would benefit in such a society.

An egalitarian is similar to a paternalist. Both trust government to improve society as a whole. Both emphasize a uniform policy applied to the whole society. An egalitarian places a great value on equality. That is similar to a paternalist insofar as a paternalist thinks that some moral rules ("don't take drugs") apply to everyone equally. And government rules designed to help people apply to everyone equally. For example, paternalists force everyone to save for their old age (through Social Security taxes), although some people have the foresight to take care of themselves.

On the other side is the elitist, who is similar to a libertarian. An elitist opposes the group's attempt to make people more equal because it would infringe on individuals' freedom to strive for excellence and surpass others. Both an elitist and a libertarian believe that people are fundamentally different and unequal. An elitist says people have different talents and abilities, and a libertarian says people have different interests and goals. The government or the group should not try to deny or suppress these individual differences. Elitists and libertarians therefore share what we are calling the individualist attitude. They do not trust society as a whole, and emphasize differences among people. In contrast, egalitarians and paternalists have the relationist attitude. They believe the whole society is more important than any individual, and they believe inequalities are the source of many of the worst problems facing us.

Section 5, "Should We Establish a World Government?," provides good examples of a relationist and an individualist. If you believe in a world government, then you are an internationalist. An internationalist believes that the time is ripe for nations to transfer their nuclear weapons and other military assets to an international body, which would then enforce peace. We can be confident that such a world government will work because the American government works, and America includes millions of people with very different outlooks and ethnic backgrounds. Moreover people everywhere are rational enough to do what is in their interest.

These ideas put an internationalist in the broad category of relationist. He or she clearly trusts the largest group possible—the whole world, or all nations' representatives—with absolute power. He says each nation should sacrifice some of its own independence for the sake of security that will help everyone.

On the other hand, if you are opposed to a world government, then you are a localist. A localist argues that a world government is not possible because people are not as reasonable and

cooperative as an internationalist thinks. The operation of a world government would be a political process, and politics is a messy, personal business that depends on a deep understanding and sympathy between people. Representatives from different cultures could not reach that level of understanding. Their values, manners, and feelings about things are too different. The localist is suspicious of large groups and large government in general. He or she says large government is dangerous because it undermines personal responsibility. Therefore a localist is a good example of an individualist.

Where do capitalists and socialists fit in? In Section 4, "Is Capitalism Just?," you first read a defence of capitalism and then an attack on capitalism. A capitalist believes that it is just to reward people or punish people on the basis of their contributions to society. Some contribute positively and some contribute negatively. Capitalism embodies this moral truth. In capitalism, consumers in a free market, not the government, decide how much a person has contributed, and so determine a person's reward. But a socialist argues that capitalism is unjust because it makes people immoral. Greed corrupts the health care system, the judicial system, and the political system. Capitalism psychologically conditions people until they make money the centre of their lives, and put it ahead of compassion and justice.

The socialist's essay in Section 4 presents a primarily negative view. It explains what socialists are against—capitalism. Socialists oppose capitalism because it destroys human relationships, in their view. But that opposition also reveals what socialists value: they value human relationships, such as compassion, generosity, and cooperation. They value these more than the free market, where individuals compete for the best profit they can get. Thus socialists are relationists because they value a harmonious society more than individual liberty. (Or they try to define "liberty" in terms of harmonious relations with others.) They want to replace the free market, so they must favour more government direction of the economy.

Capitalists are individualists because they favour an individual's self-reliance and personal responsibility. They oppose government intervention in the market, and the government's decision about what rewards (income) people should receive. Capitalists are also similar to elitists. Both believe people are different: they have different abilities, and they make different contributions to society. On the other hand, socialists oppose the inequality created by wealth in capitalism; they favour greater equality.

Section 1 was "Is Society Based on a Contract?" The two positions were contractor, who says yes, and organicist, who says no. The organicist says no because he or she believes that society exists before any individuals living today. Everyone is born into a society that already exists. We do not make an agreement to create a society. Our ability and willingness to make agreements is created by society, not the other way around. The organicist says that society is like language. We do not create our language; it already exists, and it provides us with the tools and methods of living. Or society is like an organism, and we are like the individual cells that briefly come and go as the organism lives on.

An organicist is clearly a relationist. Like other relationists, an organicist emphasizes the whole group. He or she believes that a society as a whole has its own reality and its own character, apart from the individuals who compose it. If we only think about individuals, we will miss these important aspects of the world.

Since he emphasizes the society as a whole, an organicist places relatively less emphasis on individuals. He doesn't ignore individuals. But in attempting to understand our social existence, and therefore social policies, an organicist believes we must try to see the whole and its properties rather than focusing narrowly on individuals and their properties. From this bird's

eye point of view, observing society as a whole, individuals appear more equal than from the ground level perspective. The things we all have in common and that make us similar seem more important than the things that make us different. In this respect an organicist agrees with an egalitarian, and rejects the elitist's view.

The organicist would probably be more sympathetic to the socialist's position than to the capitalist's position. An organicist believes in a common good, a goal or outcome that benefits the whole society, not just part of it. One of the most important properties of a whole society is its morality. Every society enforces certain rules, and gives them great weight. These moral rules help maintain the health and stability of the society as a whole. They promote the common good. The belief in a society-wide morality, binding on individuals, makes an organicist similar to a socialist, who criticizes capitalism for its antisocial, excessive individualism. It also creates an alliance with paternalists, who believe that by enforcing its moral rules a society can help an individual in ways the individual cannot help himself or herself.

A contractor is similar to other individualists, but the connection is not as close as the connection of an organicist with other relationists. A contractor proposes a model as a way to understand society. He or she says the model of a contract helps us see what is really fundamental in society. Two people who enter into a contract are behaving rationally and cooperatively. And those human traits — rationality and sociability — are the fundamental basis of society. They explain why society exists at all. The contract model also explains why we are all morally obligated to obey the laws. We have implicitly promised to do so when we entered the social contract.

The social contract theory is an individualistic theory. It puts individuals before society. Individuals exist first and they create society. They could exist without society. Moreover, in agreeing to help form a society, an individual is acting in his or her own interests. She is not considering the common good but her own particular good. This egoistic aspect of a contractor's view makes it similar to a capitalist's view. Both approve of capitalism, free markets, entering and keeping contracts, seeking profits for oneself. Capitalism depends on freedom as well, and a contractor believes that each person freely enters society, and could, if necessary, freely leave a society. Society rests upon free choice, not indoctrination, conditioning, or social manipulation. The social contract theory provides a foundation for the libertarian view.

So there are connections between a contractor's point of view and the other individualist positions. But, as always, the relationships are complicated. A contractor emphasizes cooperation rather than competition, and that is different from capitalism. The emphasis moves a contractor closer to socialism and relationists. Furthermore, a contractor claims that virtually everyone is rational and sociable; everyone participates in society. That moves a contractor closer to egalitarianism—another relationist position—and away from elitism. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the ties between a contractor's view and the other individualist positions are more numerous and more important than his or her ties to the relationist position.

The current controversy in the last Section is the debate over ethnicity and identity. An essentialist says that your ethnic background is an important part of who you really are, your identity. The reason is that your identity depends on history and social conditions, and social conditions are strongly influenced by relations among ethnic groupings. In other words, a person's position in society, her chances of being exploited or abused, and her participation in minority communities, all depend to a large extent on her ethnic background. The white majority's experience is generally different from minorities' experiences. And these social experiences determine her self-image and her sense of self. Thus ethnicity is crucial to one's

identity.

The non-essentialist claims that ethnicity is a set of physical traits, such as skin colour, eye or nose shape, type of hair, and so on. And your physical appearance is not an essential part of your identity. Your identity is whatever you decide is important about yourself. Being white or black or brown or yellow has no impact on important qualities like honesty, ambition, creativity, and so on. What is important is your dreams for the future, your memories, your talents and abilities, your likes and dislikes. A person's skin colour is irrelevant to her potential, or her decisions about what she feels is important in life.

Since the essentialist emphasizes the influence of society and history on a person's identity, he or she is a relationist. A non-essentialist emphasizes personal choices and autonomy in creating one's identity, and that means he or she is closer to other individualists. But the relationships are debatable. These are just a few connections you might see among the positions in Chapter 2. There are certainly others, both similarities and differences. But this preliminary sketch gives us the following chart:

Individualist

libertarian
elitist
capitalist
contractor
localist
non-essentialist

Relationist

paternalist
egalitarian
socialist
organicist
internationalist
essentialist

INDIVIDUALIST

1. People are biologically similar, but in the most important matters—such as maturity, initiative, creativity, and drive—people are very different.
2. At the most basic level, people are self-centred and competitive.
3. Given our human nature, we all value liberty and independence, and resent restrictions on our actions.
4. The only stable society, and therefore the best society, is one that allows us freedom to work and create, and rewards those who contribute to society.

RELATIONIST

5. People are basically similar (the differences are relatively superficial compared with the similarities), and our social arrangements should recognize that fact.
6. People are normally rational, cooperative, and friendly; only danger, threats, and desperate need make us behave otherwise.
7. Everyone will benefit most in a society that promotes compromise, working together, respect, tolerance, and consideration of the common good.
8. Unrestrained individualism and competition lead to conflict, resentment, injustice, and violence.

