Morality from Within: A Nietzschean Model of Ethics

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Introduction

Without question, Friedrich Nietzsche was one of the most influential modern European thinkers. Even today, his philosophy pervades many aspects of American culture. We have all heard, and often quote Nietzsche's saying "Whatever doesn't kill me makes me stronger," or some version of that. Given this omnipresence, it is not at all surprising that Nietzsche has been one of the most misunderstood philosophers throughout modern history.

This thesis has afforded me the opportunity to offer a new interpretation of Nietzsche's ethical philosophy—namely, that Nietzsche's ethical philosophy is a model we may adopt in order to create an ethical system that is based on altruism and benevolence, if that is our desire. Without becoming an overman, we unknowingly create a virtue in which preservation is the ultimate end. Indeed, only in becoming an overman will an individual, or group of individuals be free to create an ethical system in which our course of action is not motivated by preservation.

I will begin the thesis by elaborating on relevant aspects of Nietzsche's ethical philosophy and showing how these aspects have been misinterpreted and misappropriated in the past. The first chapter will be devoted entirely to this end. In the second chapter, I will outline relevant aspects of the ethical philosophy of Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill as examples of ethical systems, which unknowingly hold preservation as their ultimate end. I argue that Kant's Categorical Imperative breaks down to a principle of utility when scrutinized and that the principle of utility—as given in Utilitarianism, by Mill—is little more than a principle that aids in preservation, which Mill does not claim nor deny.

Chapter 1
Friedrich Nietzsche

My purpose here is to elaborate on some of the relevant principles of Nietzsche's philosophy in order to show how it has been misinterpreted and misappropriated in the past. I intend to show that only in becoming an overman will we be truly free to create an ethical system in which altruism and benevolence determine our course of action—if that is what we hope to do. I do not intend this chapter to be a comprehensive summary of Nietzsche's philosophy, for doing so would be superfluous to the goals of this thesis. I therefore assume a basic knowledge of Nietzsche's philosophy. Rather than include a comprehensive summary and analysis, I will concentrate my efforts on Nietzsche's ideas of the death of God and the theoretical idea of an overman.

The Death of God

Nietzsche's idea of the death of God has been the focal point of much controversy—particularly if you examine the idea from an ethical viewpoint. Nietzsche illustrates the idea of the death of God with his parable of the madman, from The Gay Science. Therefore, I will begin my interpretation of Nietzsche's death of God with an analysis of this parable in which a madman runs into the streets claiming that God is dead:

> *The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. 'Whither is God?' he cried; 'I will tell you. We have killed him—you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained the earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or*

> *down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.'*[1]

Obviously, as with much of Nietzsche's writing, this parable is filled with ambiguity, leaving much room for interpretation. What does Nietzsche mean when he says that God is dead? Is he literally asserting that God did, at one time, exist and then was killed, or is this parable a metaphor that harbors some deeper meaning? Nietzsche, here, is intending God to be a metaphor for innate moral value. God, as used by Nietzsche in this parable, is not to be confused with an actual entity that we have killed; rather, we have destroyed an idea. Specifically, God is the idea that there is innate, *a priori* moral truth. One might analogously define such moral truth as objective[2] moral truth. God, in this sense, is an idea that people have created, which assumes that moral value—right and wrong—is objective rather than self defined.

In this parable, the madman claims not only that God has died, but that we have killed him. We killed God by destroying the idea that moral truth is objective. We must not misconstrue this to mean that all individuals have come to the conclusion, or made the conscious realization that moral value has no *a priori* truth. On the contrary, a simple observation of the great diversity existing within various moral and ethical systems—most of which consider themselves to be objectively true—show that the great majority

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[1] This translation of the parable of the madman was taken from *Existentialist Philosophy* (Oaklander, Nathan. Existentialist Philosophy: An Introduction. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1996. 99.), by L. Nathan Oaklander, who cited *The Gay Science*, by Friedrich Nietzsche, translated, with commentary by Walter Kaufmann. Translation copyright ©1974 by Random House, Inc., originally published 1882.

[2] Objective, as used in this thesis, can be defined as truth that belongs to the object of thought rather than the thinker. Therefore, anything objective will hold true regardless of perspective or viewpoint.

of individuals and, indeed, groups of individuals, have not realized their murder of God: "Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; and they, too, were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, and it broke into pieces and went out. 'I have come too early,' he said then; 'my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men...this deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars—and yet they have done it themselves.'"[3] In other words, Nietzsche is claiming that we have destroyed the idea that moral truths are objective without the realization of our actions.

One may justifiably ask, how could we have destroyed the idea that there is objective truth—namely, morality—without knowing that we have done it? To answer this question, I will turn to the concept of preservation as an ultimate end.

Preservation

How can an individual kill God (destroy the idea that there is objective moral truth), without knowing he has done so. Simply answered, we do so by unknowingly creating our own virtue, which typically functions towards the attainment of preservation as the ultimate end. In other words, we create[4] some sort of a moral or ethical system that will ultimately aid in our preservation. Nietzsche makes the claim that we unknowingly create our own virtue, thereby killing God, although he does not claim that it is most always towards preservation as an end that we unknowingly direct this action. A moral standard, for example, that classifies murder as bad helps us create a world in which we will not be killed. Although this moral standard may fail in its pursuit to create such a world, it nevertheless functions towards that end. The idea of preservation can be very

[3] Oaklander 99.
[4] To create may also entail adopting a virtue.

ambiguous unless explained very clearly; therefore, I will take some time to define the preservation towards which human action and morality are typically focused.

In defining preservation, I will use the typically accepted idea of Darwinian natural selection, which is the idea that the genepool of a population of organisms can change over time as a result of individuals with certain heritable traits leaving more offspring than other individuals. I do not intend this to be a comprehensive depiction of natural selection; rather, I hope to outline the essential details. Natural selection argues that if an individual has some genetic characteristic that will allow it to survive or reproduce more effectively (behavior being such), that trait will eventually increase in the population because the individual with the beneficial trait will theoretically leave more offspring.[5] For instance, certain insects systematically fly away from light towards regions of darkness. This genetically programmed behavior aids in preservation by allowing the insect to hide from predators. Tests have shown that this behavior is not learned. It is very obvious how such a behavior that would increase the fitness of an individual would increase in the genepool.

Humans have been no less subject to natural selection than any other animal. It can be easily understood, in a context of natural selection, how genetically programmed behavior that would increase the fitness of an individual would be passed on to later generations and eventually—all things being equal—would become dominant behavior in the population for both animals and humans.[6] Therefore, evolution by natural selection produces organism that will behave in a way that will increase their fitness. Evolution by

[5] The ability to leave more viable offspring may be analogously called increased fitness.
[6] The extent to which behavior is based on genetic makeup as opposed to purely environmental factors is debatable.

natural selection has produced humans in such a way. In other words, we, as humans, have evolved to act in ways that increase our fitness.

How does one account for altruistic behavior?[7] A common argument is that humans are different from animals because we have reason and are therefore able to perform altruistic actions. Many argue that we have a cognitive capacity, which all other animals do not possess. I completely agree with such an argument and, in fact, insist that we are the only animals that possess the ability—through reason—to act in ways that are contrary to natural selection (altruism as opposed to inclusive fitness). In other words, we are the only animals that can act completely altruistically. We can act in ways that will help others regardless of the cost to our level of fitness. For example, humans sometimes sacrifice their own lives for the sake of others.

Although we possess the ability to act altruistically, and do so on rare occasions, we are not free from the grip of natural selection. Most every moral belief we hold dear or ethical system we employ, aids in preservation. By preservation, of course, I mean the proliferation of our genes. This is not to say that we consciously act[8] in ways that will directly increase our fitness. Actually, we are unaware that we are acting with preservation as the ultimate end. It can now be understood how we have killed God (destroyed the idea of objective morals), without knowing that we have done so. Everyday we create, or act according to a human created virtue, which aids in preservation.

One may ask, did not Nietzsche himself focus on the attainment of preservation as his ultimate end? Indeed, he did; however, he did so knowingly. He did so with the

[7] An altruistic act may be defined as any behavior that decreases the fitness of an individual who performs such an act.

realization that he had "killed God" in the process. In Beyond Good and Evil, Nietzsche states, "The falseness of a judgment is for us not necessarily an objection to a judgment; in this respect our new language may sound strangest. The question is to what extent it is life-promoting, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-cultivating."[9] Nietzsche in this sense was an overman. I will describe the idiosyncrasy of the overman later in the thesis.

It is essential to understand that the goal which Nietzsche knowingly sets here (preservation) need not be the end goal of all perspectives. Nietzsche, here, sets life-preservation et cetera as the end goal of his perspective, which for Nietzsche offers a means of comparison among alternative perspectives, such as master and slave morality. Nietzsche, however, makes no claim that preservation must be the only goal, or a goal that each person should strive for. The overman, whom I will describe in a later section, is free to create his own goal and therefore create a virtue that aids in the attainment of that goal. If we are free to create our own goal, how do we go about doing so? More troubling, if there is no objective truth and all ethical systems are as good as any other, by what criteria do we navigate such a daunting task as reinventing ethics? To answer these important questions, I turn to the concept of perspectivism.

Perspectivism

Nietzsche's idea of the death of God does not imply relativism, which is the idea that there is no objective truth and therefore, all perspectives are equal. Rather, it implies perspectivism. A common mistake made by many readers of Nietzsche's philosophy is to assume that moral nihilism--which is the idea that there are no moral facts or moral

[8] By action, I am referring to behavior, which includes the behavior of creating moral principles.
[9] Nietzsche, Beyond 11.

truths—necessitates that morality has no value. This is not a claim that Nietzsche makes. Rather, the moral nihilism that Nietzsche facilitates is one of moral perspectivism. Moral perspectivism, as such, is the idea that a moral stance cannot be separated from an environmental or cultural context. In other words, a person always thinks or perceives from a particular perspective, with that perspective being defined by that person's experience. His experience may include education, faith, and language. Virtually everything that makes a person classifiable influences that person's perspective. Nietzsche's philosophy is founded upon this very idea: "Gradually it has become clear to me what every great philosophy so far has been: namely, the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir; also that the moral (or immoral) intentions in every philosophy constituted the real germ of life from which the whole plant had grown."[10] Nietzsche, in Beyond Good and Evil claims, "There are no moral phenomena at all, but only a moral interpretation of phenomena."[11]

Bernd Magnus and Kathleen Higgins, in The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche rightly state that a misinterpretation of this idea manifests itself in the assumption that moral perspectives cannot be compared and, therefore, leave no room for evaluation.[12] This wrong assumption would essentially be the equivalent of saying that no moral perspective is better than any other. Nathan Oaklander makes this incorrect assumption in commenting on Nietzsche's moral nihilism: "When we give up objective values we are left with an infinity of choices none of which are marked out as 'right.' Our infinite freedom thus becomes a cagelike freedom or an unfreedom in which it is impossible to

[10] Nietzsche, Friedrich. Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1989. 13.
[11] Nietzsche, Beyond 85.

choose. For the possibility of freedom depends on the possibility of making decisions and choices, that is if we cannot choose then we are not free."[13] This is incorrect. Although the choices we make are not necessarily marked out as right by some objective external truth, we cannot deny that our choices inevitably have consequences and that these consequences can be considered desirable or undesirable in relation to the goal of our action. For example, if a person's goal were to create a world in which all people were equal in opportunity, this particular goal would be better achieved if he were to practice egalitarianism in his everyday actions. Although these actions are not marked out as right by an external truth, they are obviously the desirable course of action considering the goal. In other words, moral perspectives, which influence the choices and actions we uptake may be compared and evaluated on the basis of their ability to reach some goal. To say that all actions and the perspectives that influence those actions are as good as any other would only be valid if we considered the actions and perspectives apart from any context, which is impossible.[14]

Master and slave moralities as an example of perspectivism

Nietzsche offers an analysis and critique of two perspectives—that of the master and slave: "Wandering through the many subtler and coarser moralities that have so far been prevalent on earth, or are still prevalent,...I finally discovered two basic types and one basic difference. There are master morality and slave morality."[15] The bulk of On the Genealogy of Morals, by Nietzsche, is devoted to examining the origins and idiosyncrasies of master and slave morality. Because this is an excellent example of the

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[12] Magnus, Bernd and Kathleen Higgins, eds. The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche. New York: Cambridge UP, 1996. 196.
[13] Oaklander 79.
[14] Magnus 198.

evaluation of perspectives, I will spend some time elaborating on Nietzsche's critique of master and slave morality.

According to Nietzsche, our common definitions of 'good' and 'evil' began with ressentiment. Ressentiment can be roughly defined as the jealousy felt by the powerless toward those with power. It is an emotion that arises when a person cannot achieve that which another person has. This emotion leads to the creation of slave morality. Slave morality can be seen as a defensive reaction to the values (perspective) of the powerful. This defensive reaction is creative in that it gives birth to a contrary perspective, which is slave morality.[16] In On the Genealogy of Morals, Nietzsche offers an analogy in order to elaborate on the origin slave moralities:

> *That lambs dislike great birds of prey does not seem strange: only it gives no ground for reproaching these birds of prey for bearing off little lambs. And if the lambs say among themselves: 'these birds of prey are evil; and whoever is least like a bird of prey, but rather its opposite, a lamb—would he not be good?' there is no reason to find fault with this institution of an ideal, except perhaps that the birds of prey might view it a little ironically and say: 'we don't dislike them at all, these good little lambs; we even love them: nothing is more tasty than a tender lamb.'*[17]

In this analogy, the birds of prey are the powerful and the lambs are the powerless. In reaction, motivated by ressentiment, the lambs create a contrary perspective, which deems the actions of the birds of prey as evil. Naturally, to act contrary to the birds of prey would be considered the opposite of evil, good.

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[15] Nietzsche, Beyond 204.
[16] Magnus 208.
[17] Nietzsche, Friedrich. On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1989. 44-45.

Although the lamb and bird of prey analogy illustrates master and slave morality and the origins of good and evil, it is very hypothetical; obviously, a lamb and bird of prey do not interact in such a manner. A more realistic example would be the social stigma often placed on the wealth. The rich are generally portrayed as evil in various novels and movies, while poverty is often praised as a virtue. Nietzsche would most likely insist that slave morality in this case is the "self-righteous rejection of a success that one cannot hope to achieve and a rejection of the values that define that success as well."[18]

Master morality, as opposed to slave morality is a perspective in which it is held as a virtue to demonstrate strength, even at the cost of others. The possession of power, under this perspective, should not necessitate guilt: "To demand of strength that it should not express itself as strength, that it should not be a desire to overcome, a desire to throw down, a desire to become master, a thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs, is just as absurd as to demand of weakness that it should express itself as strength."[19]

Nietzsche is obviously opposed to the feelings of ressentiment, which gives rise to slave morality. If what I've written here is true, and Nietzsche holds that there are no objective truths, how can he be opposed to the ressentiment, which gives rise to slave morality? The fault that Nietzsche finds cannot be that ressentiment is a mere feeling, for much of what he promotes are actions that arise out of passions and feelings. The fault cannot be ressentiment's lack of objective truth, for there is no objective truth according to Nietzsche. As I've stated above, perspectives may be compared. Nietzsche is not opposed to slave morality because it is inherently wrong, but rather because it is less

[18] Magnus 208.
[19] Nietzsche, Genealogy 45.

functional to the goal Nietzsche has set, which is the betterment of the individual and the species. Nietzsche believes, as the quote above (footnote 10) illustrates, that the betterment of the self and the species (preservation) is a goal against which perspectives should be weighed. This goal is arbitrary in that it is not objectively justified. Nietzsche himself came up with this goal based on criteria that he also created. It is now apparent that Nietzsche was not a relativist, but a perspectivist who understood that perspectives can be compared, as Nietzsche himself demonstrated with master and slave morality.

The Overman

Nietzsche often wrote of an overman. The overman is the ultimate possibility of what a human has potential to become. He will realize that all of morality arises from perspective and that there is no objective truth that justifies morality. The overman has realized that God is indeed dead, and that humans have killed him. Once this is realized, the overman will be free to create his own virtue: "A virtue must be our own invention, our most necessary self-expression...."[20] According to Nietzsche, the death of God—which I've previously summarized—allows the overman the possibility of this creation of virtue. As Nietzsche puts it, "The noble type of man experiences itself as determining values...it knows itself to be that which first accords honor to things; it is value-creating."[21]

I contend that only in becoming an overman will we be truly free to create a world in which altruism and benevolence determine our course of action. Until then, our actions will be motivated by preservation. This is not to say that preservation is bad or that

[20] Magnus 183.
[21] Oaklander 115.

altruism is good. As Nietzsche held, there are no objective morals or values. We must determine the kind of world in which we want to live, and work to create that world. Only in becoming an overman will we be free to do so.

Nietzsche made no claim that realizing the purely subjective basis behind morality was an easy process. Quite the contrary—he illustrates how difficult and painful the process of becoming an overman can be in Human, All Too Human: "A sudden terror and suspicion of what it loved, a lightning-bolt of contempt for what it called 'duty',...perhaps a desecrating blow and glance backwards to where it formerly loved and worshipped, perhaps a hot blush of shame at what it has just done and at the same time an exultation that it has done it,...such bad and painful things are part of the history of the great liberation."[22] As Nietzsche correctly acknowledges, the process of reevaluating all previous values and comparing perspectives with the knowledge of the death of God would be a frightening task, for there is no longer a failsafe. The consequences of our actions are fully our own. This is unlike many other theologies and philosophies in which we can attribute our actions to an outside, objective truth. For instance, the crusades were falsely presumed to be justified by God.

The idea of an overman is fraught with ambiguity and therefore has often been misinterpreted. Using the idea of an overman, much political misappropriation has occurred. The Nazis are an excellent example of such. The Nazis used the idea of master morality and the overman to justify their cruel actions towards those with slave moralities such as the Jews. The first, and most obvious of the mistakes the Nazis and other perpetrators of Nietzsche's philosophy made was to confuse slave morality for social standing. Slave morality does not necessitate low social power or low social standing due

to financial and non-financial reasons.[23] Quite to the contrary, the endurance and persistence through misfortune can lead to strength. Hence Nietzsche's famous saying, 'What does not kill me makes me stronger.' According to Nietzsche, slave morality is not characterized by social circumstances, but rather a weak, reactive state of mind in which one labels strength as evil.

Many complaints of Nietzsche's philosophy have spawned from argument that his philosophy has been used to promote tyranny and cruelty. With closer examination of the fundamentals outlined above, one can see that the individuals or groups that employed the idiosyncrasies of Nietzsche's philosophy as a justification for the actions are the very readers that Nietzsche despised; the readers that perused through his material jumping to conclusions without true understanding of his message. One may rightly ask, how can political misappropriation be an option if there are no objective truths, for if there are no objective truths, the cruelty displayed by the Nazis could not be considered wrong? The misappropriation of Nietzsche's philosophy has not been misappropriation on the basis of it being non-virtuous according to some standard of objective truth. Rather, it is a misappropriation on the basis that is does not consciously create its own virtue. The Nazis blindly adopted Nietzsche's morality. They did not realize that there is no objective truth behind morality. Simply stated, the Nazis were the farthest thing from overmen possible. They killed God without the knowledge that they were doing so.

In the above argument against the Nazis arises an original reading of Nietzsche. To summarize this original reading and interpretation, Nietzsche thought that the overman was an individual that would realize that all of morality is perspective--owing

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[22] Oaklander 104.
[23] Magnus 207.

nothing to objective truth--cast away all previous values systems and create values of his own: "...the strength to create for ourselves our own new eyes—and ever again new eyes that are even more our own: hence man alone among all the animals has no eternal horizons and perspectives."[24] What previous critics and supporters of Nietzsche have overlooked is that Nietzsche was not merely trying to wipe away our old value system in order to recommend a new value system of his making. Doing this would be a blatant contradiction, for merely adopting a value system without creating one's own is what Nietzsche was wholly against. Simply adopting the value system given by Nietzsche is exactly what Nietzsche hoped to avoid. This is shown in The Antichrist when Nietzsche says, "I teach you the overman. Man is something that should be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?"[25] The man here that Nietzsche speaks of is not only those that we surround ourselves with on a daily basis, but also those of whom we read and study—namely, Nietzsche himself.

It can now be understood from the previous arguments and clarifications that, although Nietzsche himself has often supported the proliferation of power and strength at almost all costs, this was not his message; this was merely his own personal value system—a value system that he created after consciously killing God. A value system that he, as an overman, created for himself. His message was to deny all other value systems—even Nietzsche's own—and realize that there are no objective truths and therefore, we are free to create our own value system. This can be seen in Thus Spoke

[24] Oaklander 140.
[25] Oaklander 110.

Zarathustra when Nietzsche writes, "'This is my way; where is yours?'—thus I answered those who asked me 'the way.' For the way—that does not exist."[26]

By stating that we are free to create our own value system, Nietzsche is not implying that we must create a value system that is completely original. It would be absurd to think that every individual should create a wholly original value system. Values may be functional in achieving a common goal and may therefore be adopted by most everyone. However, we must realize that the values we adopt hold no objective truth. By realizing that all values are subjective, we may adopt a value system and make it our own. The Nazis failed to do this for they adopted Nietzsche's value system as their own without realizing it arose from Nietzsche's idea that preservation should be the ultimate goal and that we may weigh all perspectives against this goal. Most all supporters of the moral philosophy of Nietzsche have made the same mistake.

How we choose to apply Nietzsche's philosophy as a model for ethics is not clear, for we must decide the course we are to take. I would like to reiterate that my intention in this thesis is not to come up with a comprehensive ethical system. Rather, I hope to open up for discussion the way that Nietzsche's philosophy can be used as an ethical model. I will, however, as an example, offer a critique of two perspectives in order to illustrate how Nietzsche's model may function. Again, I am not attempting to come up with a complete ethical system, but rather I want to provide an example of a limited use of Nietzsche's model.

Imagine two perspectives, one in which knowledge is held as the highest virtue and one in which compassion is held as the highest virtue. Depending on the goal we set for ourselves, which is an essential step in applying Nietzsche's model of perspectivism,

[26] Nietzsche 195. Zarathustra

one perspective will be better than the other at accomplishing the set goal. Imagine that the goal we set is the scientific advancement of society at all costs. It seems clear that the first perspective, which holds knowledge as its highest virtue will be better apt to attain this goal. We would be able to guide our actions and decisions by such a perspective. For example, we would find it necessary to commence with studies in cloning and other controversial scientific issues. I am not trying to argue that scientific advancement should be the highest goal or that we should adopt a perspective that is functional to this end. This is merely an example of the employment of Nietzsche's ethical model.

> *"We have left the land and have embarked. We have burned our bridges behind us—indeed, we have gone farther and destroyed the land behind us. Now, little ship, look out! Beside you is the ocean: to be sure, it does not always roar, and at times it lies spread out like silk and gold and reveries of graciousness. But hours will come when you will realize that it is infinite and that there is nothing more awesome than infinity."*[27]
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> --Friedrich Nietzsche

[27] Oaklander 101.

Chapter 2
Kant and Mill

The ethics of both Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill are excellent examples of theories unknowingly created with preservation as their end. Therefore, in this chapter I will attempt to show that both the ethics of Kant and Mill—although they may hold some practical value—break down to theories that promote preservation as an end. First I will summarize the ethical theory of Kant, followed by that of Mill. Finally, I will elucidate how these two ethical systems are, indeed, little more than theories that promote preservation. My intention here, as with that Nietzsche chapter, is not to provide a comprehensive summary of these two ethical systems. Rather I will outline some of the key ideas in order to make my point.

Immanuel Kant: Foundations of Ethics

Political Theory

In my summarization of Kant's ethics, Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals was used as a primary source, and An Introduction to Kant's Ethics by Roger J. Sullivan was used as a secondary source in my analysis of Kant's ethics. Therefore, most of my analysis will be derived from that of Sullivan with which I generally agree. To better understand the moral philosophy behind Kant's ethics, it is beneficial to begin, as Sullivan does, with relevant aspects of his political theory, for much of the moral philosophy that provides the foundation for his ethics lies in his political theory. Kant believed that morality cannot exist and flourish outside of civil society in which a political state enforces the moral law. He therefore proposed the idea of an ideal state, or political system in which morality is held in the highest regard.

Kant is now often referred to as a liberal. Kant's version of liberalism, as such, is the idea that the purpose of the government, and all governmental institutions, is to protect life and freedom. This political philosophy, which is prevalent in Kant's writings is often referred to as "neutrality," or the "neutrality principle."[1] This principle holds that each person has the freedom to define and work for his own happiness so long as the pursuit of their happiness in done in such a way that no laws are broken in the process. Accordingly, the role of the government is to merely insure each individuals' freedom from interference by other individuals. By government, I am referring to all governmental institutions.

One may ask, why are governmental institutions necessary? According to Kant, people are typically motivated to act in favor with their own interests, even if such actions may adversely affect others. We are all inclined to pursue our own selfish desires regardless of the damage that we may inflict upon other individuals. The role of the government can then be understood as negative, in that is imposes various constraints that are necessary to provide each person with the freedom to pursue his own happiness without the interference of others.[2]

Kant was in no way proposing a government that would be tyrannical in nature. He opposed the type of government, which enforced laws on the foundation of their practicality of ensuring the governments survival. Rather, Kant believed that the justification for a society that is regulated by government should be moral. History presents a problem to Kant's wish for a society that is based on morality. History has shown that morality varies with religious or cultural traditions. In solution to this, Kant

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[1] Sullivan, Roger J. An Introduction to Kant's Ethics. New York: Cambridge UP, 1994. 8.
[2] Sullivan 10.

proposed what is often translated as the Universal Principle of Justice, which stated roughly says, "Behave in such a way that your choices are compatible with the greatest amount of external freedom for everyone."[3] Kant believed that this principle would transcend religion and culture.

How did Kant justify his Universal Principle of Justice? After all, what makes freedom an imperative? Kant believed that the appeal to reason would justify the Universal Principle of Justice. Inherent in each individual, according to Kant, is the ability to differentiate between that which is morally right and morally wrong: "...we do not need science and philosophy to know what we should do to be honest and good, yea, even wise and virtuous. Indeed we might well have conjectured beforehand that the knowledge of what every man is bound to do, and therefore also to know, would be within the reach of every man, even the commonest."[4] This idea is central to the ethics of Kant and is prevalent in all of his ethical writings. Implied in Kant's writings is the idea that if one can justify the Universal Principle through reason alone, as Kant believed was possible, than the laws that a government lays down for its citizens must be laws that anyone must be able to recognize, through reason, as morally right.

Liberalism, as it is now called, to which Kant is now often conjoined, is focused on realizing the worth of every human person. This, as shown above, is the essence of liberalism. How did Kant justify the claim that all people have worth? His claim to human dignity lies in autonomy. Autonomy, loosely defined, is the capacity of each person to think and choose in such a way that will promote respect for all other individuals by enacting laws that come from a political structure. In other words, the

[3] Sullivan 11-12.

ability to act on the Universal Principle of Justice is what Kant called autonomy. Sullivan argues that Kant believed that the basis for autonomy does not lie in a person's emotions or feelings.[5] Because, according to Kant, people's feelings and desires vary so much from day to day, they cannot be the basis for any universal code of conduct. For example, when wronged, a person is often motivated by a temporary desire for revenge. Rather, the basis for autonomy is reason, with which all humans are endowed.

Implicit in all of Kant's political theory is the idea of equality. Kant believed that the liberal state must also be egalitarian in order to promote the Universal Principle of Justice.[6] Egalitarianism, as Kant used it, does not mean the assurance of equality regarding possessions or power. Rather, Kant referred to equality of opportunity. Realizing that every individual has the same moral status, or that every individual has the ability to be autonomous means that the laws of the political system must apply to every person equally. In other words, there should be no privileged class in regard to opportunity. No person or group of people should have the privilege of using others merely for his own purposes.

The principle of equality set forth in the egalitarian state that Kant thought possible implies a principle of universality. If people hold the same innate moral status, than the administration of justice through the governing body must be indiscriminant. No individual within the society should have any special need or interests that will affect the implementation of justice.[7]

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[4] Kant, Immanuel. Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals. Trans. T.K. Abbott. New York: Prometheus Books, 1988. 29.
[5] Sullivan 15.
[6] Sullivan 16.
[7] Sullivan 17.

Indeed, Kant's political theory, as Sullivan points out, captures many themes of Kant's moral theory, which is at the foundation of his ethical thought. Sullivan argues that four general ideas, three of which I will present here, are prevalent in Kant's political thought and recognizably spills over into his moral thought.[8] The fourth, which I will not address further, deals with placing morality within the public forum. First, morality cannot, and should not be based on experience. According to Kant, experience shows that people have taken part in all sorts of acts, some which may even be considered immoral. Kant was anything but empirical, striving for a moral philosophy that was in no way based on empirical evidence. Second, Kant believed that no person should violate a moral standard on the basis of necessity. Moral imperatives hold and bind absolutely and should never be violated, even if circumstances seem reasonable. Lastly, effectiveness can in no way be an adequate measure of morality. An effective law or policy is by no means a moral law based simply on a criterion of effectiveness.

Categorical Imperative

In the preface to his book, Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals (FPMM), Kant states that he intended to describe the ultimate moral norm and justify its ability to bind us under its doctrine: "I limit the question suggested to this: Whether it is not of the utmost necessity to construct a pure moral philosophy, perfectly cleared of everything which is only empirical...."[9] Kant, having presented the Universal Principle of Justice attempted in this particular work to restate the moral norm so it would apply to our behavior as well as our motives.

[8] Sullivan 22-23.
[9] Kant 11.

Kant argued that all moral laws are imperatives that obligate us unconditionally, or categorically. Therefore, in FPMM, Kant refers to the moral norm as the Categorical Imperative. Although there is only one moral norm (the Categorical Imperative), Kant gave three different versions, each having its own emphasis:

> ***Version 1 –Autonomy or of Universal Law:*** *"I ought never to act in such a way that I could not also will my maxim should be a universal law."*
> ***Version II—Respect for the Dignity of Persons:*** *"Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of any other, always as an end and never as a means only."*
> ***Version III—Legislation for a Moral Community:*** *"All maxims that proceed from our own making of law ought to harmonize with a possible kingdom of ends as a kingdom of nature."*[10]

Kant began his attempt at the construction of a moral norm by making the claim that there is nothing better than a morally good will. In making this claim he assumed that all other things that we typically consider good, such as good physical health, good mental health, and good economic standing could all be used immorally to pursue some evil end. Only morally good character is untarnished and truly moral: "Nothing can possibly be conceived in the world, or even out of it, which can be called good without qualification, except a Good Will. Intelligence, wit, judgment, and the other talents of the mind...are undoubtedly good and desirable in many respects; but these gifts of nature may also become extremely bad and mischievous if the will which is to make use of them, and which, therefore, constitutes what is call character, is not good."[11]

In the first section of FPMM, Kant asks and answers three questions in attempt to elucidate on the nature of the Categorical Imperative. First, he asks what makes a person

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[10] Sullivan 29.
[11] Kant 17.

morally good, or what makes a person have a good will? What is it about a person that makes him morally good? Kant held that a good will is not represented in the end results of the actions of a person, but rather depends on the intentions with which a person acts. Kant contends that the worth of an action "does not depend on the realization of the object of the action, but merely on the principle of volition by which the action has taken place, without regard to any object of desire."[12] He argued that people ought to form their intentions without regard to failure or successes, for these ends are not qualities of a person's moral character.

The next question that Kant attempted to answer is what kind of intention makes a person morally good, or what kind of intention does a morally good person display? Here, Kant made a distinction between two types of intentions. First there is the desire for happiness, in which a person strives to reach some goal in order to fulfill a desire to be happy. According to Kant, motivation for happiness can often lead individuals to do morally reprehensible things. The second kind of motive, is the intention to act from duty. It must be understood that there is a difference between being happy and being morally good. According to Kant, if our desires for happiness lead us to do what is morally good, we do not necessarily have a morally good character.

The answer to the second question leads us to the third question Kant deals with—namely, what does it mean for a person to intend to act from duty? Simply put, to act from duty is to do whatever the moral law demands of us out of respect for the law alone.[13] Kant states this in the first section of FPMM: "Duty is the necessity of acting from respect for the law. I may have inclination for an object as the effect of my proposed

[12] Kant 24.
[13] Sullivan 32.

action, but I cannot have respect for it, just for this reason, that it is an effect and not an energy of will."[14] How does Kant justify the idea that we should conform to what the moral law demands of us regardless of our other desires and inclinations? He argues that following the moral law must be a rule for satisfying our reason, rather than our desire. Reason alone will tell us that the moral law is necessary, and following it is our duty. This can be shown when examining the first version of Kant's Categorical Imperative: Autonomy or the Universal Law.

Version 1: Autonomy/Universal Law

The first version of Kant's Categorical Imperative, Autonomy or of Universal Law, reads: "I ought never to act in such a way that I could not also will my maxim should be a universal law."[15] Kant was not speaking of arbitrary laws that hold no moral value, such as a law stating that an individual cannot drink until the age of twenty-one. Such a law may be practical, but holds no inherent moral value. Kant was speaking of laws that govern the moral world.

How does one determine whether a law holds some moral value or is just an arbitrary policy? Kant believed that all people could test the morality of proposed laws by thinking of the laws logical consequences. By employing the first version of the Categorical Imperative, Kant believed we could determine whether a law holds moral value. If laws cannot be conceived of without some contradictions or are incompatible with other universal moral laws, then the law does not have moral value.

Kant gave many examples of how Universal Law can be used to determine the moral value of a maxim. For instance, Kant provides the maxim of false promises, in

[14] Kant 25.
[15] Sullivan 29.

which an individual borrows money with no intent of paying it back. The maxim can be understood as: "When I believe myself to be in need of money, I will borrow money and promise to repay it, although I know I will never do so." If this maxim is converted in such a way that it would be a universal law, it would read: "It is a universal law of nature that when anyone believes they are in need of money, they will borrow it and promise to repay it without having any intention to do so."[16] First, one must inquire whether there is any contradiction in the maxim if it were held as universal law. According to Kant, this particular maxim provides a logical contradiction because if everyone made promises with no intention of keeping them, nobody would believe the other person's promises, so the purpose of making a false promise would be nullified. This is an example of the application of the first version of Kant's Categorical Imperative. This particular version of the Categorical Imperative is very systematic, meant to provide an actual means of determining the moral worth of a maxim.

Version 2: Respect for the Dignity of Persons

The second version of the Categorical Imperative that Kant provides is, at its foundation, the same as the first. Philosophically, they say the same thing; the second being a different way to represent the first. However, they are presented in such a way that the second version is less systematic. The first version provides us with a formal test that we may employ to determine the moral worth of any maxim. The second is more qualitative, appealing to the humanity in people. The second version of the Categorical Imperative reads: "Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of any other, always as an end and never as a means only."[17] It must be understood that,

[16] Wood, Allen W. Kant's Ethical Thought. New York: Cambridge UP, 1999. 87.
[17] Sullivan 29.

although Kant believed the role of government was from a position of neutrality, the second version of the Categorical Imperative implies positive roles that an individual must fulfill in order to be moral, for the second version commands every individual to treat others as an end.

Regarding the second version of the Categorical Imperative, Kant emphasized a separation between persons and objects.[18] He argued that the only value that things, or objects have is subjective value; value given to the object from the observer or owner of the object. People, however, have intrinsic, objective worth because they are rational, emotional individuals capable of autonomy. This in essence, is why each individual should be treated as an end in himself and not merely as a means to serve some other purpose. Kant's reasoning here is unique, for he is not basing the worth of individuals on some morality that is dictated by a dogmatic religion, but rather through pure reason.

Version 3: Legislation for a Moral Community

The third version of the Categorical Imperative that Kant proposed is by far the most abstract and confusing. Kant used this version as a way to inspire his readers to create a political state based on morality, that he proposed was possible. As the first version is very systematic, following set criteria to arrive at the moral validation of various maxims, the third version is an ambiguous command, which proposes we strive for an ideal state: "All maxims that proceed from our own making of law ought to harmonize with a possible kingdom of ends as a kingdom of nature."[19] This version of the Categorical Imperative represents Kant's vision that we can create an ideal society of which morality is the foundation.

[18] Sullivan 67.
[19] Sullivan 29.

Now that the fundamental aspects of Kant's ethics have been summarized, we are ready to proceed with the other major ethical system that is readily apparent in contemporary ethics. This ethical system is known as utilitarianism.

John Stuart Mill: The Principle of Utility

Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) are typically credited as the main proponents of the ethical theory known as utilitarianism. For the purposes of this thesis, I will target my inquiry and critique at Mill's utilitarianism as provided in Utilitarianism. This is not to say that the two forms of utilitarianism are distinct in their essence. Rather, to direct my attention towards both theories would be redundant, as they are essentially the same. It must be understood that my intent here is not to analyze and critique every aspect of Mill's utilitarianism. Rather, I hope to summarize and clarify the essential aspects of the principle of utility, using Mill's writing as a guide. In doing so, I hope to bring to light the strengths and weaknesses of the principle of utility.

One may justifiably ask, why should a thesis regarding the philosophy of medical ethics include a section on Mill's utilitarianism when the time spent on such an endeavor could be allocated towards some other end? My answer is twofold—First, utilitarianism is extremely prevalent in contemporary ethics, which, accordingly, makes it relevant to this thesis. Secondly, I find utilitarianism, or rather, certain aspects of the principle of utility to be necessary in quintessential ethics.

Mill was a systematic thinker, and accordingly, thought that any moral theory that binds individuals to its standard must be based on a common principle: "There ought to

be some one fundamental principle or law, at the root of all morality, or if there be several, there should be a determinate order of precedence among them; and the one principle, or the rule for deciding between the various principles when they conflict, ought to be self-evident."[20] Being a systematic thinker and supporter of a moral theory of first principles, Mill supported utilitarianism. The principle of utility, which is the first principle of utilitarianism, roughly stated, insists that the test of right or wrong, indeed, the test of morality, must determine what action produces the most happiness and the least pain. Roughly stated, the principle of utility holds that actions are right as they tend to promote happiness, and wrong as they tend to produce pain. Happiness as such, Mill argues, "is not something to be contradistinguished from pleasure, but pleasure itself, together with exemption from pain."[21]

Being that Bentham had proposed the principle of utility earlier, Mill, at the time he wrote Utilitarianism, was already well aware of the many criticisms that utilitarianism had encountered. His approach in explaining the fundamentals of utilitarianism was unique in that he, for the most part, explained utilitarianism by addressing these criticisms and elaborating on what utilitarianism is not. Among the most obvious of these criticisms is the objection that to limit the purpose of existence of all humans to the attainment of pleasure or happiness likens us to animals: "To suppose that life has (as they express it) no higher end than pleasure—no better and nobler object of desire and pursuit—they designate as utterly mean and groveling; as a doctrine worthy only of swine..."[22] Wittingly, Mill retorts by contending that those who make this argument are the ones that portray humans as despicable creatures, for they suppose humans are

[20] Mill, John Stuart. Utilitarianism. New York: Prometheus Books, 1987. 15.
[21] Mill 16.

"capable of no pleasures except those of which swine are capable."[23] In other words, those who argue that the pursuit of happiness as an end in itself is vulgar do not understand that the pleasures of the intellect, creativity, virtue, and morality, pleasures that are commonly considered good, are included in this pursuit. This, of course, is not to the exclusion of the pleasures of mere sensation.

One may ask, are all pleasures that promote happiness as an end considered equally valuable and that the basis of comparison should lie in their quantity? Mill believed that some kinds of pleasure are more desirable than others and that pleasure is not merely a measure of quantity, but also of quality. How then does one determine which pleasure is of greater quality? Mill simply answers, "Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a decided preference, irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure."[24] Mill also believes that it is an unquestionable fact that people who are capable of appreciating and enjoying two distinct pleasures will give preference to "a manner of existence which employs their higher faculties."[25] One may object that experience shows people often postponing the higher pleasures for the lower out of temptation. An example of this would be sexuality verses health. Although being sexually promiscuous may be detrimental to one's health, an individual will often choose to be promiscuous due to sexual temptation. Mill contends that such an objection posses no threat to the concept of varying quality of pleasures, for "men often, from infirmity of character, make their election for the nearer good, though they know it to be the less

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[22] Mill 17.
[23] Mill 17.
[24] Mill 18.
[25] Mill 19.

valuable; and this no less when the choice is between two bodily pleasures than when it is between bodily and mental."[26] In this case, the individual is pursuing sensual pleasure to the injury of his health, knowing fully that health is the greater good.

At this point I must make a point of clarification--the principle of utility can be easily misconstrued to mean that one must do whatever is in the interest of his own personal happiness and must avoid his own personal pain. This interpretation of utilitarianism fails to understand that Mill and Bentham were concerned with the overall happiness altogether. This means that utilitarianism, according to Bentham and Mill, is an ethical system that should be impartial. One should only consider one's own happiness as it relates to the net overall happiness. Thus, utilitarianism is an ethical system that promotes equality. No one person's happiness is more important than another person's under the principle of utility. It should not be inferred that one should fix their attention on promoting the good of the entire world, for to do so would be unrealistic and counterproductive. Rather, "the great majority of good actions are intended not for the benefit of the world, but for that of individuals, of which the good of the world is made up."[27] Here, Mill makes a distinction between public utility and private utility. Public utility is exemplified when an individual has the opportunity to be a public benefactor, noticeably increasing the happiness of mankind. This is much less common than private utility, which is in the interest of "some few persons."[28] Both, according to Mill, are valid employment of utility.

Later in Utilitarianism, Mill addresses another common objection to the principle of utility—namely, happiness cannot be the rational purpose of life, for happiness is

[26] Mill 20.
[27] Mill 30.

unattainable. Objectors as such, according to Mill, make the mistake of thinking happiness, as utilitarianism defines it, to be the "continuity of highly pleasurable excitement,"[29] which is obviously impossible to obtain. Rather, the happiness of which Mill wrote "was not a life of rapture; but moments of such, in an existence made up of few and transitory pains, many and various pleasures, with a decided predominance of the active over the passive, and having as the foundation of the whole, not to expect more from life than it is capable of bestowing."[30] Mill had no misconceptions that life would, or ever will be and endless barrage of happy moments. He knew that life was, and always will be plagued with pains of various sorts. The object of utilitarianism is to limit the pains and increase the overall happiness.

Utilitarianism can be labeled a consequentialist theory, for it judges the rightness or wrongness of an action based on the consequences that it produces: "...utilitarian moralists have gone beyond almost all others in affirming that the motive has nothing to do with the morality of the action, though much with the worth of the agent."[31] Mill goes on to give an example of a drowning man; the action of saving a drowning man is morally right regardless of the motive. Whether one is motivated by duty or some desire to become recognized as a hero, the worth of the action is determined by the promotion of happiness. This is unlike Kant's ethics, which hold that the morality of an action is based on its intention evoked from duty. From the idea that utilitarianism is a consequentialist theory, it may be inferred that all actions, according to a utilitarianist, are to promote some end. The principle of utility does, according to Mill, recognize that

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[28] Mill 30.
[29] Mill 23.
[30] Mill 23-24.
[31] Mill 29.

humans may sacrifice their own greatest good for the good of others; however, it does not recognize this sacrifice as good in itself, or by its own virtue. Rather, "the only self-renunciation which it applauds, is devotion to the happiness or to some of the means of happiness, of others; either of mankind collectively, or of individuals within the limits imposed by the collective interests of mankind."[32]

One may certainly ask, as one would ask about any ethical system, what are the motives to obey the principle of a particular ethical system? What are the motives to obey the principle of utility? Mill believed that we need not look any further than the "subjective feeling in our own minds."[33] In other words, the will to obey the principle of utility lies in human consciousness. Mill is not making the argument that the will to obey the principle of utility is innately planted by some external entity. Nor is he making the argument that this will is acquired through experience and conditioning. Rather, he believes questioning the origin of the will to follow a principle to be irrelevant to the promotion of utilitarianism. If the feeling to obey the principle of utility is innate, Mill sees "no reason why the feeling which is innate should not be that of regard to the pleasures and pains of others." If the feeling is acquired, Mill believes that they are no less natural: "It is natural to man to speak, to reason, to build cities, to cultivate the ground, though these are acquired faculties."[34] Therefore, whether the will to follow utilitarianism comes from God or from conditioning is irrelevant.

[32] Mill 28.
[33] Mill 42.
[34] Mill 43-44.

Arguments against Kant and Mill

Kant and Mill both attempt to offer a philosophy that will provide an ethical system that may meet our needs. Such a system should obviously be pragmatic in a sense; ethics must be functional, for the purpose of ethics is to guide actions. By functional, I mean that the system should indeed be capable of guiding our actions. Do Kant and Mill succeed in their endeavor to provide a functional ethical system? In many regards, yes; Kant and Mill offer ethical systems that may be applicable in a variety of situations. My goal here, however, is not to show that these ethics are functional, but rather that, when taken to their logical extreme, break down to little more than a means for promoting preservation, so I will forgo a description of situation in which these ethical systems may work. I contend that they do not provide a means to evaluate the difficult ethical dilemmas that inevitably arise in modern ethics beyond the scope of preservation. In other words, these ethical systems, if abided by, will not allow us to act altruistically, if that is what we choose to do.

In regard to Kant's philosophy—as I've described, the justification for an ethical system, according to Kant must be reason. Kant argues that we may use the Categorical Imperative—namely, the principle of universality to determine if an action is moral. If the action is contradictory or fails to live up to another moral principle, the action may rightly be considered immoral. In other words, if I can will a maxim to be universal law without logical contradiction, the action can be regarded as moral. As an example, Kant offers the false promise in which he examines whether it is moral to make a false promise if the occasion offers benefit for doing so: "Every one may make a deceitful promise

when he finds himself in a difficulty from which he cannot otherwise extricate himself."[35] Kant claims that such a universal maxim would end in contradiction, saying, "For with such a law there would be no promises at all, since it would be in vain to allege my intention in regard to my future actions to those who would not believe this allegation, or if they overhastily did so, would pay me back in my own coin. Hence my maxim, as soon as it should be made a universal law, would necessarily destroy itself."[36] Mill, in *Utilitarianism* rightly explains that "when [Kant] begins to deduce from this precept any of the actual duties of morality, he fails, almost grotesquely, to show that there would be any contradiction, any logical (not to say physical) impossibility, in the adoption by all rational beings of the most outrageously immoral rules of conduct. All he shows is that the consequences of their universal adoption would be such that no one would choose to incur."[37] No person would choose to incur such consequences because they decrease preservation. These consequences are not towards the greatest good. They may promote pain and decrease pleasure. In other words, the first version of the Categorical Imperative, which is a means to evaluate our actions, can be reduced to a principle of utility.

Let us examine another action that is commonly considered immoral—murder. For the sake of argumentation, let the maxim be "I may kill whenever doing so is in my best interest." The universal maxim would appear as, "Everyone may kill when it is in their best interest to do so." We can readily imagine a world in which this maxim was universal. Such a world would closely resemble the state of nature as described by Thomas Hobbes. A world that exists as such would offer no logical contradiction. It is,

[35] Kant 11.
[36] Kant 28.

however, a world that few would choose to live in. Hence, Kant does little more than support a principle of utility—if the universal adoption is not going to contribute to the good of the many, than the action is immoral. The Categorical Imperative provides no means under which we may evaluate our actions beyond that of utility.

As argued above, Kant's categorical imperative breaks down to nothing but a version of the principle of utility, but can I show that the principle of utility breaks down to a principle which promotes preservation as its ultimate end? Mill contends that happiness is the ultimate end of utilitarianism: "Whatever is desired otherwise than as a means to some end beyond itself, and ultimately to happiness, is desired as itself a part of happiness, and is not desired for itself until it has become so. Those who desire virtue for its own sake, desire it either because the consciousness of it is a pleasure, or because the consciousness of being without it is a pain, or for both reasons united."[38] I would be forced to argue that Mill does not take his critique far enough. He does not realize that happiness too serves a purpose, and that purpose is preservation. It is quite obvious that a happy individual will ultimately be healthier that an unhappy individual, all things being equal. A healthy individual will display a greater fitness and thereby increase his/her chance of preservation.

Another argument against the principle of utility, although this does not stem from the above argument regarding preservation, is that it is not practical at guiding our actions. It seems fairly obvious—at least to anyone who has dealt in the least with ethics—that an ethical system or standard must be functional in a real setting. Philosophizing about the dynamics of abortion and health care distribution does little in a

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[37] Mill 13.
[38] Mill 53

situation where choices must be made. Therefore, a system of ethics that is to be functional must be able to help guide the individual or group that is to make the decision.

I contend that the principle of utility cannot be the guide used in ethical dilemmas in which a decision must be made. Quite simply, the principle of utility offers no realistic means of measuring happiness. Even in the simplest of dilemmas, utilitarianism is useless. For example, if three children are trapped in a burning house and a man has time to only make one trip into the house, which does he choose? The principle of utility offers no quantifiable means of measuring happiness in an ethical scenario.

The dilemma becomes compounded if two of the children are small and may be carried out together and the third is much larger. It could be argued that according to the principle of utility, the man must choose to save the two children at the expense of the third, for the happiness of saving two of the children would be greater than that of saving just one. But in this situation, how is happiness measured. Perhaps the two children that are saved will become murderers and contribute to the suffering of many. Perhaps the child left to die would have become a musician, contributing to the happiness of many. There is no way to tell. The principle of utility offers no way to actually quantify happiness. This in part is due to the fact that utilitarianism speaks for the happiness of the whole rather than of an individual. If the larger child that is trapped in the burning house were the hero's son, while the other two children were unknown to him, the hero would most likely be happier saving his son. This decision may be easier if utilitarianism regarded the happiness of the individual, but as I have discussed earlier, it does not.

Another argument against the principle of utility is that, even if there were a way to quantify happiness, there is often little time to do so in an acute situation. In a

situation of policy making, such as of allocation of health care, the principle of utility could arguable be used to help make the policy (this is assuming that there were a way to quantify happiness). However, in a situation that demands a decision be made with the utmost efficiency—as is often the case in health care—the ability to determine which action would produce the greatest happiness for the whole would be unrealistic.

The final argument that I want to make against utilitarianism is that the idea of a greatest good is self-defeating and contradictory. If we do what is in the interest of the greatest good—promoting happiness and decreasing pain—humans would persist and overpopulate, as is already occurring. Eventually we would reach our carrying capacity, which is the maximum amount of people the earth can sustain due to limited resources. This would result in the death of many. Therefore what is in the best interest of the whole is ultimately not in the best interest of the whole.

It can now be understood how the ethical philosophy of Kant—namely, the Categorical Imperative breaks down to a principle of utility. It can also be understood that the principle of utility, when examined breaks down to a means of promoting preservation. These are just two examples of ethical systems that are directed, unknowingly toward this end. Many others can also be placed in this category. Therefore, I contend that if we want to create and ethical system that is beyond the scope of preservation as the ultimate end, we must become the overman by adopting Nietzsche's model of ethics.

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