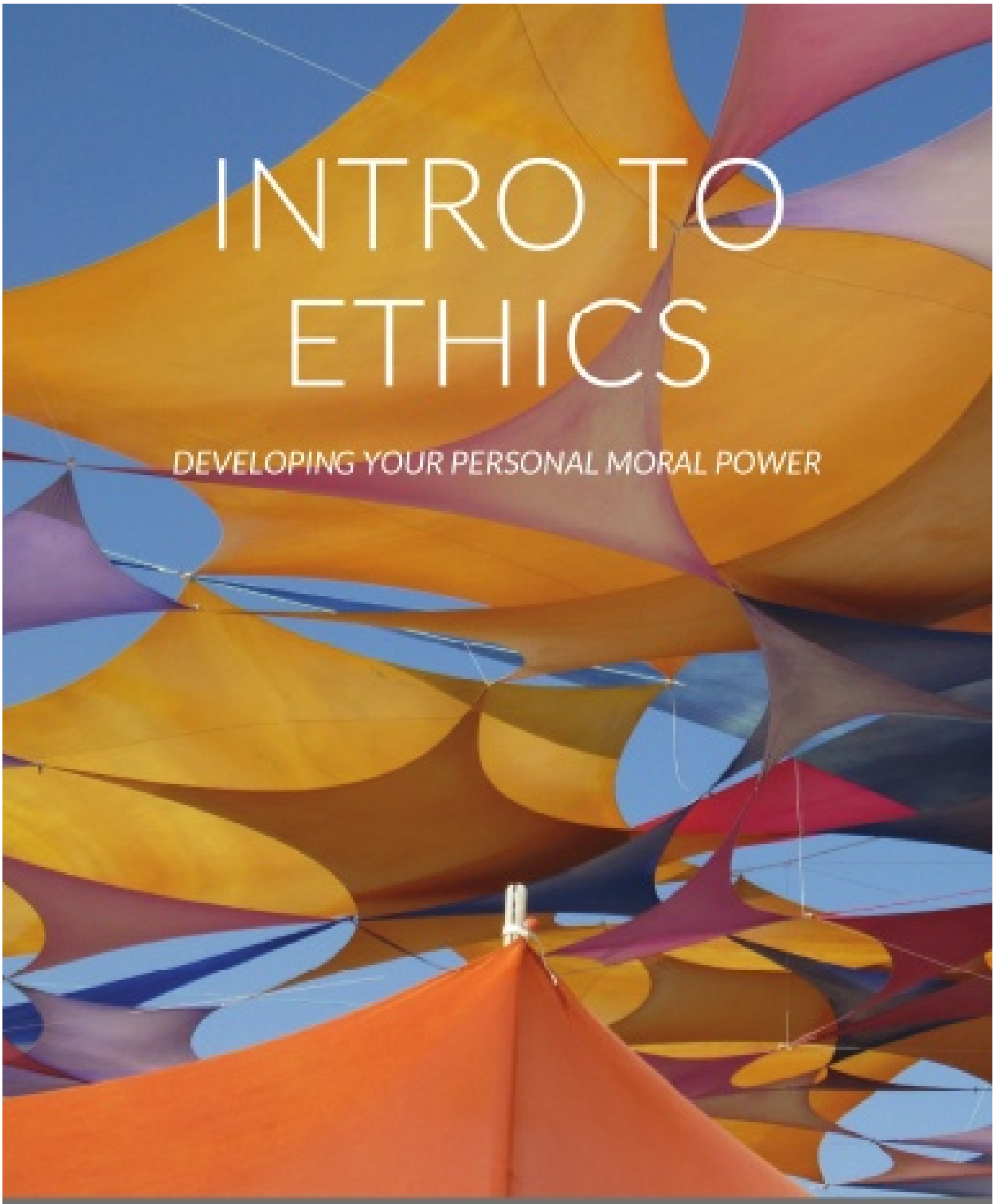
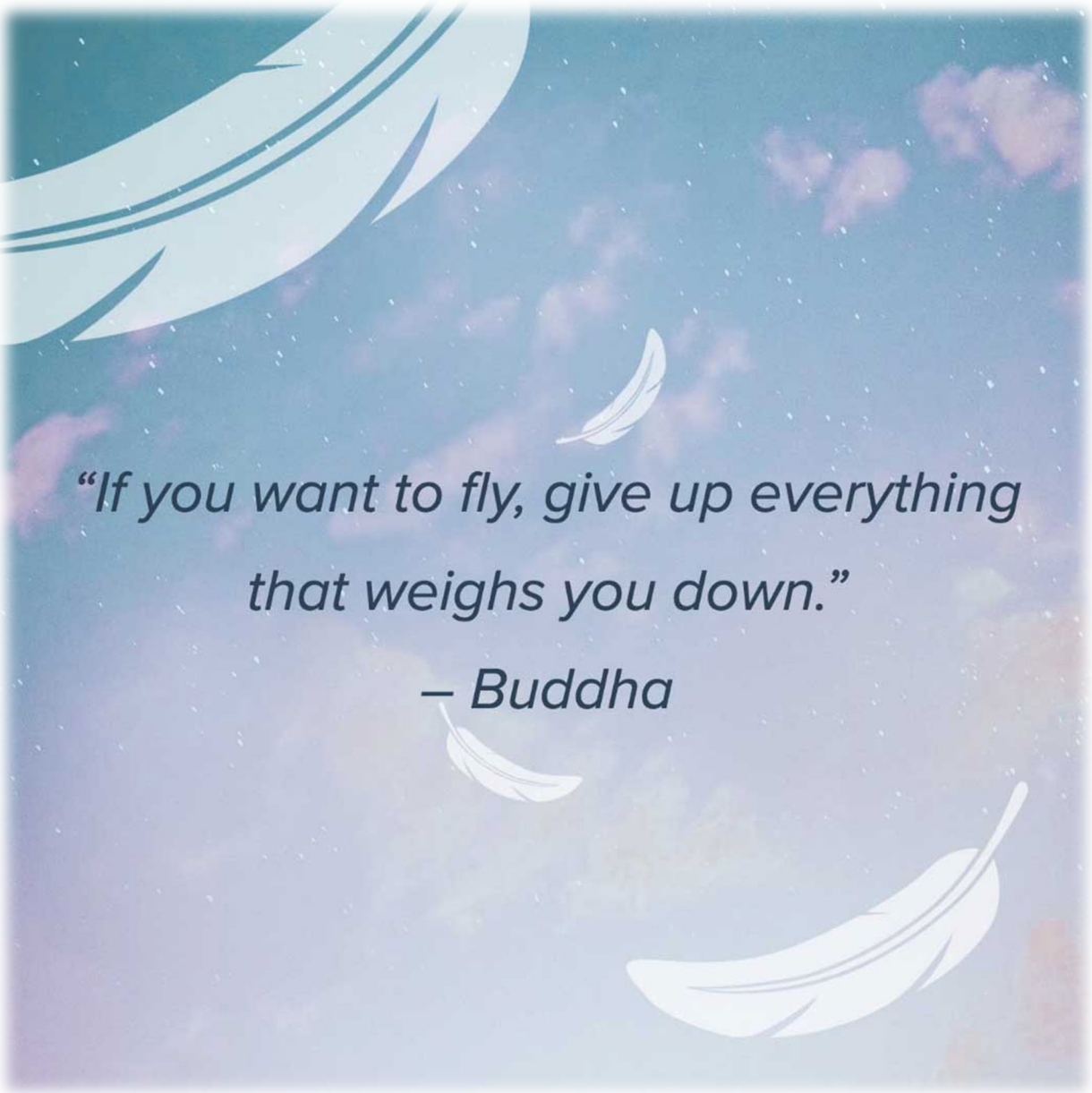


# INTRO TO ETHICS

## *DEVELOPING YOUR PERSONAL MORAL POWER*

Robert D. Walsh, M.A., Ph.D.


"If you want to fly, give up everything
that weighs you down."
– Buddha

# INTRO TO ETHICS

## DEVELOPING YOUR PERSONAL MORAL POWER

~

R. D. Walsh, M.A.,Ph.D.

**Bitterroot College ~University of Montana**
Hamilton, Montana

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# FOREWORD

## Moral Entrepreneurship

This Business Ethics textbook, *Intro to Ethics*, was formerly entitled *Entrepreneurial Ethics*. But it is not a book about applying ethics to entrepreneurship. It is a book in which the principles of entrepreneurship are applied to ethics. Let me try to explain what I mean.

Entrepreneurship is fundamentally about 'seeing'. It is about seeing (or "in-seeing") possibilities within a situation where others see only problems and dead ends. Many researchers

have tried to figure out how original entrepreneurial in-seeing or insight happens, how it can be taught and nurtured. Nobody knows for sure. But I believe that, in general, the development of practical insight and original in-seeing or insightfulness—the heart of entrepreneurship—is naturally developed by reflective, philosophical study accompanied by targeted, practical exercises that stimulate and challenge how you see things, both in business and in the making of moral judgments generally. Enhanced, enlightened seeing is the natural end of philosophical study. Thus, this present text aims to help you develop both your business acumen and your mastery of making sound, enlightened moral judgments. It might have been titled *On Becoming an Entrepreneurial Seer*.

Now, a "seer" is sometimes thought to be a person who has supernatural powers to see into the future. This idea is fanciful because there is no future 'out there' waiting to happen that can be 'seen into'. Rather, entrepreneurs with original insights *create* the future and, by envisioning or seeing it, make it present and real. When this kind of entrepreneurial in-seeing is directed at your personal, unique and dynamic moral value orientation, then this insightful reflecting and tinkering in the service of living the best possible life is what I think of as *moral entrepreneurship*.

# FOREWARD

The path to becoming a moral entrepreneur is the path of personal growth and development. This path leads sometimes to a disruption and reconfiguration of old moral values that were inculcated (reinforced, patterned) into your behavior during childhood. These moral values can become calcified and rigid and may not be the right fit for you anymore. They can become like old products which have served their purpose but now need to be replaced with something new and different that works more effectively. Your most trusted moral values will stay with you for a lifetime. Yet, the way in which you value your moral values and deploy them in your everyday life will shift and change with experience, knowledge, and circumstances.

This textbook, *Intro to Ethics*, has been developed on the classical philosophical model for in-seeing and insight creation. It will illuminate and allow you to critically evaluate and change old, sedimented and conventional moral values when you see that they are no longer as comfortable as they once were, no longer fit you just right, as if you have outgrown them. This will open-up the possibility for something new and different to happen: a renewed *you* ("you" understood as the locus of a unique moral value set*)* produced by your own entrepreneurial efforts.

Whereas the capitalist entrepreneur desires to start a new business, strategy, or product line, the moral entrepreneur desires to create or creatively re-configure a new moral self. To be successful with this, entrepreneurial ethics, like capitalist entrepreneurship or social entrepreneurship, requires concerted effort and a commitment on your part. Otherwise, it won't happen. *Intro to Ethics* presents an active, hands-on approach to moral value creation that requires you to be 'doing ethics' rather than merely talking about it or memorizing abstract formulations. You don't want to hear a carpenter talk-talk-talk about building your house; you want her to build it!

I learned this 'can-do' attitude from my good ol' dad, George F. Walsh. The son of Irish immigrants who grew up during the Great Depression, my dad was an intrepid entrepreneur. While studying advertising and marketing in night school, he worked his way—by dint of hard labor he would tell us, proudly—into the advertising department of Baldwin Locomotive Works in Philadelphia, PA. This hard-earned beginning would lead him to eventually create his own business, Walsh Advertising Agency. He worked with a variety of industrial clients, mainly in the specialty glass industry that grew up in South Jersey due to the abundance of silica thereabouts. He was a fervent proponent of free-market capitalism guided by Christian values.

My dad helped me to see the value of diligent work in pursuit of an original idea; the fundamental importance of straight-shooting honesty as the backbone of success; and the willingness to take calculated risks to achieve your heart's desire. "Success is never final," he would remind me, "and failure never fatal."

My mom, Dora L. Walsh, was the daughter of Italian immigrants. She was a social entrepreneur. She was a Registered Nurse and army veteran who worked in hospitals for years. She saw a need for personal health care to extend beyond the hospital, especially for the elderly. Never content with an inadequate status quo, she created a Home Health Care organization that brought together hundreds of volunteers and professionals to assist sick and elderly persons stuck at home. Her organization would become the model for all other counties in the state of New Jersey, influencing state-wide health care policy. She won numerous awards for her work, served on the boards of hospitals, and had a perpetual scholarship named in her honor. She was a tireless advocate for the vulnerable her entire life. My mom taught me to care.

# FOREWARD

Because my parents thrived on entrepreneurial energy, I found myself at a young age being entrepreneurial before I knew what that meant. I started my first business with a premium shoe shine kit my dad gave me for Christmas when I was twelve, so I could shine his shoes properly. I soon became an expert shoe-shiner, and then I marketed my expertise. After school and during the summer, I would make the rounds of local businesses and shine the shoes of executives while they sat at their desks. My first introduction to the world of business turned a handsome ROI!

Using everything I learned from my parents and many teachers, the entrepreneurial approach to ethics that is reflected in the structure, purpose, design and function of this text is focused squarely on the creative development of your personal moral self through a process of insightful illumination that I believe will be of real, practical value to you for the rest of your life. Creating personal benefit for you is what entrepreneurial moral education is all about—producing morally driven, enlightened persons who have taken control of their moral value orientation and are intent on seeing how to configure it to achieve living the best possible life here and now in a world with others. All your other success in life will surely depend on your success with achieving that.

Welcome!

Robert D. Walsh, Ph.D.

Bitterroot College
University of Montana
Hamilton, Montana

August 19, 2020

# INTRODUCTION

## Living the Best Possible Life

The practice of philosophy has always been concerned with the achievement of excellence in living. Since it was first invented by ancient Greek sages like Socrates, Aristotle, Plato, Pythagoras, Epictetus and many others, the practice of philosophy has been understood to involve a commitment to a certain *way of life* oriented to the successful achievement of practical life goals. The idea that philosophy is somehow detached from real life is a misunderstanding. Fact is, from the very start, philosophy was born out of an intense existential interest in how you should go about living *the best possible life*. That interest came to be called "Ethics."

Every rational person wants to live the best possible life. Don't you? Of course, that doesn't mean that I know what the best possible life is for you or for anyone. We each must figure that out for ourselves. But, for all of us, creating and living the best possible life certainly involves developing personal moral values. That is exactly what those first Greek philosophers spent a good bit of time trying to actualize in their lives. This textbook follows their lead.

The various discourses that arose among the ancient philosophical schools—reflections reaching out to every area of knowledge—were not pursued purely for their own sake (enjoyable as that might be), but for the sake of cultivating the moral growth and development of the students who engaged in those reflections and exercises. As Pierre Hadot (1922 - 2010), a renown French

philosopher, puts it in *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, the early Greek philosophers understood the study of philosophy as "the training of human beings, as the slow and difficult education of the character, as the harmonious development of the entire human person, and finally as a way of life, intended to 'ensure…a good life and thereby the 'salvation' of the soul."[1]

The ideas that were examined by philosophers were put into practice through various forms of 'exercises' that were intended to bring about moral value upgrades. These exercises formed steps along the path of living the best possible life. The reflective discourses clarified the practical exercises theoretically, while the practical exercises concretized the theoretical ideas in the immediate certitude of lived experience. These mental and practical exercises, along with reflective philosophical training, were thus meant to bring about an enlightenment of moral consciousness and create an increase in personal moral growth and development, an increase in personal moral power.

# Personal moral power

Personal moral power is your ability to achieve living the best possible life. Moral values guide our actions, and actions, in the final analysis, are what morality is all about. Talking about ethics won't produce moral power any more than talking about sit-ups will produce flat abs. It is the hands-on practice of philosophical exercises that is necessary to develop the musculature of moral power. In the ancient Greek schools, these exercises constituted a way of life that had the goal of creating a well-rounded person of excellence in every regard, ready to face moral challenges in your private and professional life.

***Talking about ethics won't produce moral power any more than talking about sit-ups will produce flat abs.***

Because of the personal development orientation of *Intro to Ethics*, the subject matter presented in this text is less important than the practice of working with what is revealed by that subject matter, along with the exercises that are designed to lead to an expansion or deepening of your moral consciousness in relation to it. Abstract ideas are of no practical value until they are embodied in your everyday engagements. As Aristotle said, "What good is the study of ethics if you don't put it into practice?" Everyday life is the only place where morality happens. Yet, despite the ever-present nature of morality in everyday life, there is often a curious lack of awareness about how moral values guide our actions.

Morality is mostly invisible in everyday life. We act morally without realizing fully how we are doing so. This invisibility is because your morality was learned, starting from when you were a young child, in much the same way as your native language and basic social skills were learned. Your cognitive, social, and moral development overlap and all share the same functional invisibility.

[1] Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2002) 65.

Think about it. We learn to speak our native language without first learning grammar or syntax. For example, most of us are readily capable of using the subjunctive mood and we may do so many times a day. Yet, we do this without knowing what the subjunctive mood is or the rules for when and where it should be used. This is because we all learn our native language imitatively, and then use it intuitively, by a kind of subjective 'feel' in a situation that will convey what we mean effectively to others. This intuitive use of language is then socially structured into meaningful speech through the recognition of what we say by others.

Such intuitively driven, social use of language is different than learning a rule for the use of the subjunctive mood and then consciously trying to apply the rule in appropriate circumstances, as beginners often do when learning a second language. Morality works similarly.

Most people make many moral judgments every day without knowing exactly what a moral judgment is or how it might be distinguished from an aesthetic judgment, say, or a judgment of taste. In fact, if you ask most people on the street what a moral judgment is you will undoubtedly get the same quizzical response you would get if you asked them to explain the use and abuse of the subjunctive. Just as you can use language effectively without knowing the rules, you can also act morally without reflectively knowing how you are doing so.

Morality remains mostly invisible for most adults. It stays in the background of their mostly moral actions until moral value conflicts bring it to the foreground. Generally, this invisibility of morality is not a problem. Social reinforcement generally keeps people's actions within conventionally accepted standards. Ignorance of syntax won't necessarily be fatal to a sales pitch. But the potential problem with conventional morality is that it allows of no way to think critically about itself. It has no perspective from which to see its own moral value orientation clearly. Conventional morality remains stuck in conventional thinking. And that will make growth and development of your moral power difficult if not impossible.

Conventional morality effectively reduces you to the position of being a slave to the moral value orientation that was programmed into you as a child and which continues to be reinforced

by conventional culture. This may not be all bad, of course, especially if your moral values were programmed into you by benevolent sources. But, even so, conventional morality is too often narrow and limiting, and can become rigid, brittle, and ineffective. It is surely insufficient for a more enlightened, fluid consciousness aiming at excellence and success in life. This would be a person who aspires toward living the best possible life rather than merely going along with the conventional morality of the crowd.

## The practical purpose of this text

From the perspective of personal moral growth and development, then, the purpose of this text is to provide you with numerous moral ideas, principles, conceptual frameworks and exercises that will expand your moral consciousness and thereby put you fully in charge of your moral value orientation. Since it is your moral value orientation that structures your entanglements in the world, it will be much to your benefit to be in the moral driver's seat rather than to be driven along by unseen conventional moral forces.

**The purpose of this text is not to make you be more moral.** No text and nobody can do that for you. Your morality is *entirely* up to you. The purpose of this text is to make you more reflectively conscious of how it is that you already are making moral judgments so that you can then decide whether you want to upgrade your moral value orientation or not, according to how *you* see fit from *your* study of the moral theories, principles and perspectives presented in this text. It will then be fully up to you to decide how much and in what ways you might want to tinker with and make changes to your moral value orientation.

The chief purpose of this text is to put you fully in charge of your personal moral value 'database'. This is easier said than done. It is not a task that can be completed by merely reading a book or taking a course in ethics. Rather, it requires a personal commitment on your part to achieving excellence as a way of life. This is a commitment that you should adopt *for life*, starting right now—if you haven't already. Here is why I think you should do that. Your morality is the way that you configure the values that construct your sense of self. These moral values configure your whole life and all your personal and professional engagements in the world. In this way, moral values are geared to living the best possible life. I think that it is best not to leave your desire for success in life to blind allegiance to half-conscious moral values.

# Moral development

Current states of consciousness are raised by being challenged and disrupted. You may find that you have some resistance to engage such challenges to your moral values. Resistance to change is normal, even when it is you changing yourself. Disrupting your own moral status quo can be uncomfortable because your moral status quo is your comfort place, the old rocking chair on the front porch of your moral psyche. But the potential moral power that can be created from challenging and disrupting your comfortable moral status quo now will be justified by a large margin down the road.

I guarantee you that there will be a practical payoff in personal growth and development for you from your effort of engagement with this text—proportionate to your investment, of course. The study of ethics will enhance your life. This is your chance for an upgrade to your moral value orientation. But a passive download won't work. Knowing what justice is doesn't guarantee that justice will appear in your everyday life. Moral ideas must be brought to life through practice. Seeds must be planted to grow.

# The structure of the text

The nine chapters of *Intro to Ethics* present the basic tools that you will need for the investigation of your moral value world. These tools will open-up your ethical understanding of how morality works in practice. They are meant to help you make possible your determination of what you want your personal moral value orientation to look like.

The tools presented in these nine chapters are both conceptual and practical tools. Conceptual tools are the various moral theories, the ideas underlying them, and the principles and perspectives derived from the theories that the chapters investigate. There are also practical tools in the form of strategic ideas and concrete perspectives that can be deployed pragmatically to reconfigure and refine your moral value orientation toward the achievement of the greatest possible success in life. The Stoic principle of action presented in Chapter 6, for example, is just such a tool.

At the end of each chapter there is a section focused on putting the ideas presented in the chapter into practice. The Practice section includes a list of terms you should know how to explain to an intelligent friend; a set of study questions to help you secure your understanding of the ideas and concepts presented in the chapter; reflection questions intended to take your thinking beyond the ideas presented in the chapter; and, finally, scenario exercises designed to target the development of empathy and moral response as you determine what you would do if you were in the scenario.

# Chapter summaries

Chapter 1 reviews some of the basic ideas from the history of moral philosophy in the Western tradition that are pertinent to the overall goals of the text. The basic idea is to show how ethics, understood as the reflective study of morality aimed at living the best possible life, first emerged and was developed within a practical philosophical context, and how this context has informed the approach to ethics that is reflected in *Intro to Ethics*. The distinction between ethics

and morality is investigated. Challenges to a purely rational ethics are considered; a "relational relativism" is proposed; and moral pluralism is described.

Chapter 2 focuses on contributions to Ethics from the field of Moral Psychology. Again, the intent of this chapter is focused practically. Moral Psychology is shown to be particularly helpful in demonstrating how non-rational aspects of human functioning can impact moral consciousness and moral actions. Social Psychology research has shown that cognitive and perceptual biases, situational factors, emotions, and emotional intelligence all play a crucial role in your moral life and influence your moral judgments.

Bringing the insights from Chapters 1 and 2 together, Chapter 3 opens a mini reflection on human nature understood as *subjectivity*. It investigates the moral subjectivity that is necessarily presumed in any ethical consideration and addresses the question of whether this moral subjectivity can be cultivated and developed. The developmental moral stage theory of psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg is presented as representative of the rationality-focused *Ethics of Justice*, while a counterpoint to this liberal, modernist orientation is presented by Carol Gilligan from a feminist point of view in the context of an affectively-focused *Ethics of Care*. The Ethics of Justice and the Ethics of Care are broad, and, therefore, not precisely defined, moral value delineations or perspectives. These two moral outlooks will weave their way through the entire extent of *Intro to Ethics.* Sometimes they will be sharply defined across a moral chasm, with justice in conflict with care; and sometimes they will be deeply entwined and mutually reinforcing, as is the case with volunteerism and strategic philanthropy.

Continuing the investigation into the existential situation of the moral subject, Chapter 4 looks at various theoretical orientations and perspectives from within the general context of the Ethics of Care. These moral theories and perspectives are specifically geared to your personal moral growth and development. They are naturally oriented toward putting you in charge of your morality. Virtue Ethics, Self-actualization theory, Phenomenology, and Existentialism are presented collectively as both a general approach or 'method' for actually "doing philosophy" (rather than merely talking about it) and as a justification of that 'method' as well. This chapter is all about the everyday process of creating your moral self; how to do it and why you should.

Whereas Chapter 4 looks at moral theories that inform a personal growth and development approach to Ethics, Chapter 5 approaches morality from the perspective of the theoretical orientations that inform an exclusively rational moral decision-making approach, along with its own justification. Deontological theory or duty ethics is contrasted with the teleological theory of Utilitarianism. How these two theoretical perspectives are deployed in practice is explained and demonstrated. These rational theories are naturally oriented to an Ethics of Justice. Since these moral frameworks are so embedded in Western culture, you will undoubtedly find them to be intuitively familiar. Yet they can be tricky to manage in practice in several ways, especially because of how emotion will inevitably figure into the process. The impact of emotion on your deontological and teleological moral value judgments will be investigated using the Runaway Trolley 'thought experiment' to reveal where you stand.

Chapter 6 returns directly to the question of your personal moral power. This question is taken up within the context of the philosophy of Stoicism and the psychotherapeutic treatment program that was somewhat derived from it called Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). Stoicism, it is argued, is well-suited for dealing with moral life and business in the twenty-first century. In fact, Stoic moral values are very much alive and well today, as you will see. This

chapter presents a concrete, practical Stoic program for moral self-development that is geared toward your achieving the best possible life in the world, both in your personal life and your professional business career. How we can lose our personal moral power, how we can unconsciously give it away and the consequences of this is contrasted with how we can 'take back' our personal moral power—although this may be challenging to accomplish. The benefits of this practice, however, are shown to be clearly connected to success in both business and life generally.

Yet, there are limits to our personal moral power. Various social science experiments, such as Milgram's obedience study, Darley & Batson's Good Samaritan studies and the Stanford prison experiment-gone-bad seem to suggest that our process of moral deliberation, judgment and action is impacted, influenced and limited by unconscious situational factors. We supposedly control our moral life, but to what extent? Should we be held morally responsible for decisions we make that were not completely under our control? To what extent are you or are you not in control of your moral life? These questions will be investigated in Chapter 7 through a reflection on whether moral character—if it exists at all—is capable of withstanding the situational influences of corporate culture, or whether we are, morally speaking, "victims of circumstances." Sam Sommers, author of *Situations Matter,* will help to decide this question from the perspective of what he calls the "flexible self."

The first seven chapters of the text focus on your individual personal moral value orientation, cultivation and development. But we are not merely isolated, separate individuals functioning autonomously from one another. We are also thoroughly social beings. In fact, we may be more essentially social than individual, despite appearances. Chapter 8 looks at the relation of the individual to the social world from a rational Ethics of Justice perspective reflected in Social

Contract and Distributive Justice theories and the question of the relation between morality and legality.

Chapter 9 continues to investigate the social dimension of your everyday, existential moral situation in the world, but more from the perspective of an Ethics of Care and the question of your personal moral growth and development in relation to others. The theory of Moral Egoism is presented from both positive and critical perspectives and is contrasted with the idea of altruism. It is shown how the egoism/altruism continuum is reflected in both the theory of Moral Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights theory—moral perspectives linking the individual to the social world. Consideration of egoism and altruism also raises the important question of strategic philanthropy. Your personal stance in regard to these moral perspectives can be determined from a reflection upon philosopher Peter Singer's classic thought experiment about the Drowning Child presented in this final chapter of *Intro to Ethics*.

Let's get started!