Roots *of* Wisdom

A Tapestry of Philosophical Traditions

EIGHTH EDITION

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3 Human Nature

WHO OR WHAT ARE WE, AND WHAT ARE WE DOING HERE?

BEFORE YOU READ . . . Ask yourself whether a chimpanzee or an android could be a "person."

Imagine that you have been having an Internet relationship with John for the past six months. During that time you have discussed many issues, and you have gradually come to respect John's intelligence and perceptive questions. The two of you have connected on so many levels that you have begun to look forward to your evening meetings on the Net. Although many of the people with whom you live and work seem preoccupied with trivial and superficial things, John always focuses on the "big picture" and appears to understand what really matters.

When you suggest a face-to-face meeting, John puts you off. As you become more insistent, John finally admits that this will be impossible because "he" is a computer program. But this revelation should not harm your relationship, John contends. You can go on just as you have done for the past six months. Still, you feel confused and a little betrayed by this new information. How, you wonder, could you have been fooled for so long? Realizing that you have had a relationship with a computer, you are embarrassed, and even angry. Continuing these conversations now seems out of the question.

The Tom Hanks character in the movie *Splash* faced a similar problem. When the beautiful woman who seemed to return his affection and readily agreed to move in with him turned out to be a mermaid, Hanks responded with indignation, "I can't love you. You're a fish." The mermaid took the same approach as John, the computer, insisting that this new revelation need not have any effect on the relationship: "Whatever you connected with, fell in love with, I'm still that. The fact that I'm a mermaid has nothing to do with anything."

The Issue Defined

Would you be able to accept a skillfully constructed android, made to appear and act human in every way, as a love partner? What about a mermaid, if this were possible? Or is there something in you that recoils from the less than human and insists that only a member of your own species can be an acceptable mate? Paying close attention to your feelings as you consider this question might give you some insight into your own view of human nature.

As a variation on this thought experiment, imagine yourself in a room with two computer terminals. You know that one is connected with a computer program and the other with a human being, but you don't know which is which. Your task is to sit at both keyboards and carry on conversations with whoever or whatever is on the other end. At the conclusion you must render a judgment about which is the human and which the computer. Known as the Turing test—after its inventor, British mathematician Alan Turing—this experiment assumes that if a computer can convince you it is human, perhaps it could reasonably be said to think.

A few years ago, a program called "PC Therapist III" convinced half the people who interacted with it that it was indeed a therapist and not a series of computer bytes. Part of the program's success was due to its stock phrases, each useful in many contexts, such as "Does that interest you?" "How does that make you feel?" and "Tell me more." Its whimsical creator, Joseph Weintraub, did not stop there, however; he added some original questions ("Were you always so sick, sick, sick?") and some literary lines (such as "What is moral is what you feel good after, and what is immoral is what you feel bad after"—from Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*) to convince PC Therapist III's "clients" of its rationality.[1]

David Cope, a composer at the University of California at Santa Cruz, created a program called EMI (Experiments in Musical Intelligence) as a way to generate ideas for his own compositions. When he taught it to scan pieces by the musical genius J. S. Bach and to pick out the musical "signatures" unique to Bach, it created new compositions using the same ingredients. EMI does its job so effectively that audiences are convinced they are listening to the real thing. Music theorists are now wondering how a machine can create engaging music with no experience of what we call "life" or the world. What makes Bach's music so special if a computer program can imitate it? And, what can EMI possibly "mean" when it composes the music it does?[2]

If a computer can pass for a human being, does this mean there are no essential differences between humans and computers? More to the point, are we unique among animals? Is there something that sets us apart and makes us human? Over the centuries we have claimed that toolmaking, culture, language, reason, and morality make humans distinct from and superior to other animals. The difficulty is that, one by one, these supposedly human characteristics have been observed or cultivated in other animals.

Chimps, for instance, make tools and plan ahead for their use. After breaking off a long reed, stick, or stalk of grass, a chimp strips off any excess leaves or twigs, shortens it to the appropriate length, carries it to another, often distant location, inserts it into a termite tunnel, shakes it to attract the tasty insects, and then carefully removes it without dislodging too many. Because the technique takes years to perfect, adults teach it to their eager young as they mature. One anthropologist spent months trying to learn it and found that, despite intense instruction from a chimp named Leakey, he

was unable to find the entrances to the termite mounds and remained hopelessly inept at selecting, preparing, and using the stalks.[3]

Humankind differs from the animals only by a little, and most people throw that away.
CONFUCIUS

Macaques can be inventive, too. On the small Japanese island of Koshima, scientists began leaving sweet potatoes and wheat on the beach to feed a colony of macaques, once their natural food supply dried up. One young female named Imo discovered that dipping the sand-covered potatoes in a brook washed off the inedible grit. Later, she transferred the technique to the more difficult task of separating sand from wheat. When she dropped them both into the water, the sand sank while the wheat floated. Other macaques noticed Imo's cleverness and soon her playmates and young relatives began imitating her. Gradually, adult females learned the tricks and taught them to their offspring.[4]

Andrew Whiten, of the Scottish Primate Research Group at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, synthesized the field studies of nine of the world's top primatologists, including Jane Goodall. Whiten's report covers 151 years' worth of chimpanzee observations. Citing thirty-nine behaviors found in seven chimpanzee communities, the primatologists conclude that humanity's "closest cousins" display what has long been thought to be a uniquely human ability: cultural variation. Subtle and not-so-subtle variations in behavior from site to site offer convincing evidence that chimps can observe and imitate behaviors and then pass those learned skills on to neighbors and kin. Many of these skills involve styles of insect retrieval or methods of grooming, but some of the cultural behaviors have an almost religious sense to them. In six of the seven communities, for example, the chimpanzees perform a rain dance. "You're in awe when you see this," one human observer said. "The chimpanzees go into a quasi-trance, dancing even when they're alone, with no [observed] spectators, as if they were ritually celebrating the rainstorm."[5]

Although apes lack organs of speech and can never make the sounds humans use, some of them have learned to use language quite proficiently. Researchers tried unsuccessfully to teach an adult pygmy chimp named Matata to communicate using symbols on a computer keyboard and then were astounded to find that her six-month-old son Kanzi, who had come along for the lessons, had mastered the skill. Described as functioning at the level of a two-year-old child in 1991, Kanzi also understands hundreds of words of spoken English and can execute such complex commands as, "Put the backpack in the car," "Take the mushrooms outdoors," "Go get the lettuce in the microwave," and "Do you see the rock? Can you put it in the hat?"—even when the commands come through a microphone from another room and no visual cues are possible.[6]

Some chimps have gone beyond computer keyboards to learn American Sign Language, the manual language used by deaf and hearing-impaired humans. Using this language, they display the ability to lie and deceive, make jokes, uncover trickery in others, and even relate cause and effect. Chimps who have mastered the significance of word order use their knowledge of signs to demand that word order be respected. Kanzi, for example, has learned to request activities in the order in which he desires them. If he has asked to be chased and then tickled, Kanzi will not allow the tickling unless a little chasing occurs first.[7]

Quite astounding is the ability of Kanzi and other chimps to use word order to convey meaning. On his own, Kanzi figured out the difference between "Matata bite" and "bite Matata." Using what appears to be a form of

abstract reasoning, he deduced the difference in meaning that results when the words in these simple sentences are transposed. All of us understand that "man bites dog" differs from "dog bites man." What is significant is a chimp's discovery of the principle.

An African Grey parrot, named Alex by his owner Professor Irene Pepperberg, had a parrot's capacity to imitate human speech sounds. He could add and he understood concepts like bigger, smaller, more, fewer, and none (or zero). With a brain the size of a shelled walnut, Alex demonstrated his capacity for thought and intention. Bored with the repeated trials necessary to validate scientific work, Alex sometimes rebelled.

In one experiment, involving objects of different materials and different colors, Alex looked at Pepperberg in a way she "could only describe as wryly" and repeatedly gave the wrong answer (the correct answer was two). Realizing what was going on, Pepperberg told Alex she was giving him a time-out and took him to his room. As she closed the door, she heard "Two . . . two . . . two . . . I'm sorry . . . come here!" [8]

In another demonstration involving plastic refrigerator letters, Alex was correctly identifying phonemes, the sounds of different letters or combinations. After each naming, he repeatedly said to Pepperberg, "Want a nut." Since there were guests from the media present, she pressed on. Finally, frustrated, Alex said, "Want a nut. Nnn . . . uh . . . tuh." Pepperberg was stunned—Alex had leaped ahead of his training to sound out the parts of a complete word. [9]

Rio, a sea lion, seems to understand the basics of logic. Trained to match pictures of objects, Rio quickly mastered the logical principles of symmetry and transitivity. After learning that object A matched object B and object B matched object C, Rio was able to match object A with object C. This is transitivity. If A equals B and B equals C, then A equals C. The principle of symmetry asserts that if A equals C, then C also equals A. On Rio's first trial, after learning the principle of symmetry, she correctly made A–C connections eleven out of twelve times and correctly made C–A connections seventeen out of eighteen times. She is the only nonhuman animal known to display this ability.[10]

Killer whales form groups, called pods, that have distinct cultural patterns and language dialects. Some pods hunt in large groups, apparently using sounds to exchange information during the hunt, whereas others hunt in small groups, maintaining total silence. Moreover, each pod has its own language dialect, distinct from others and apparently determined by family connections rather than by geography. One theory is that unique dialects may be used during mating to prevent inbreeding.[11]

The question is not "Can they reason?" Nor "Can they talk?" But, "Can they suffer?"

JEREMY BENTHAM

In May 1999, Damini, an elephant at the Prince of Wales Zoo in Lucknow, India, died—apparently losing the will to live after the death of her companion. When the younger elephant Champakali died after giving birth to a stillborn calf, Damini lost interest in food and could not be tempted, even by her favorites—sugar cane, bananas, and sweet grass. She stood for days in her enclosure. When her legs swelled and eventually gave way, she lay listlessly on her side. Tears rolled down her face and she rapidly lost weight. Finally, Damini stopped drinking, despite the 116 degree heat. Veterinarians pumped more than twenty-five gallons of glucose, saline, and vitamins through a vein in her ear, but, despite their efforts, Damini died.[12]

This empathy for a fellow creature might help explain the ethical behavior displayed by a group of macaques presented with two very undesirable alternatives. If they were willing to pull a chain and administer an electric

shock to an unrelated macaque, they were fed; if not, they went hungry. In one experiment, only 13 percent pulled the chain; 87 percent preferred to go hungry rather than hurt another macaque. One went without food for nearly two weeks rather than harm another.[13]

This experiment is particularly impressive when we recall a similar model using humans. Participants, who received a small amount of money for being part of the study, were told that its purpose was to investigate the effects of punishment on memory. Each time a human subject in another room (actually, researchers only feigning participation) failed to remember correctly, participants were instructed to move levers to administer electric shocks of increasing severity. Despite hearing moans and screams from the other room, 87 percent moved the lever to a zone marked "Danger! Severe Shock" when instructed to do so. The conclusion of this study by Stanley Milgram was that 87 percent of humans (receiving money and instructions from authority figures) will hurt others. What caused the macaques (facing the deprivation of food) to resist?

If we are indeed unique, the task of proving it seems to be getting more difficult. The central questions of this chapter are, Who or what are we (a little lower than the angels? a little higher than the aardvarks?), and what are we doing here? We will delay the exploration of what we are doing here until a little later in the chapter; first we will ponder who or what we are. Another way to pose this question is to ask, Is there a distinct human nature, and are humans unique in qualifying as "persons?"

Who or What Are We?

To aid in our inquiry, we can use the structures of the avocado and the artichoke as metaphors for human nature (Figure 3.1). An avocado is a pear-shaped tropical fruit with yellowish flesh and a single large seed at the center. If the avocado seed is planted, an entire new avocado plant may grow,

FIGURE 3.1 Avocado and Artichoke Views of Human Nature *When we peel away an avocado's outer layers, we find the seed that contains its essence, but when we remove an artichoke's outer layers, we find no central core.*

which, if it reaches full maturity, is capable of producing another generation of avocado fruit. The seed at the center contains all the essential information about what makes an avocado an avocado.

For contrast, consider the artichoke. Sometimes cooked as a vegetable, an artichoke is the flower head of a thistle plant. It consists of spiny layers that can be peeled off one after the other. When the last layer has been removed, there is nothing left. The "heart" of the artichoke is actually the base of the flower. Although it is tasty to eat, the heart does not contain the essence of the artichoke. The artichoke is nothing but its layers. Because it is a flower, no part of the artichoke—not even its heart—can be induced to produce another generation.

So, we might want to ask, Are we more like avocados or like artichokes? If we could peel away our layers, would we find a central core or merely emptiness as the last layer is removed? Do we consist entirely of our layers—genetic instructions and environmental effects—or is there something central that contains and represents the essence of who and what we are?

Is There an Essential Human Nature?—The Avocado View

We will begin our study with the avocado view, because it has had a profound impact on Western culture. As we saw in Historical Interlude B, Greek rationalist thought and Hebrew religious thought became intertwined as Christianity came to theological maturity and planted its Hebrew roots in Greek soil. These two thought systems represent the avocado view of human nature in the West. After discussing each of them, we will look at their impact on ideas about women and consider the influence of technology on the assumption that organic human nature is unique.

The Judaic and Christian Traditions

The Hebrew Scriptures assert that we humans are made in the image and likeness of God. Into the mud of our material stuff, the book of Genesis tells us, the Creator breathed the breath of life. Humans, in a special way, are believed to share in the divine nature. Other animals, according to this tradition, may have excellent instincts and perhaps even intelligence, but they are not made in the image and likeness of God.

Like the Creator, we know who we are—we are self-conscious—and we have the capacity for love. Indeed, we are moral selves obliged to love and serve our Creator. Like the avocado, we have a fleshy outward appearance, which makes us appear similar to other animals, but at our core we share the divine nature and that makes us unique.

The essence of the avocado is not in its flesh but in its seed. The proof of this can be found by planting the seed, which so contains the essence of "avocadoness" that it can produce another whole avocado plant. Whatever it is that makes an avocado an avocado—and not, for instance, a peach or an apple—is condensed into that seed. In a similar way, the Judaic and Christian traditions affirm that what makes you a person, rather than a chimp or a computer, is your special creation in the image of God.

The Islamic Tradition

Islam also affirms this sense of human uniqueness, which we have been calling the avocado view of human nature. In the words of contemporary

Muslim scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the human person (male and female) "is the viceregent of God on earth... responsible to God for his actions and the custodian and protector of the earth of which he is given dominion on the condition that he remain faithful to himself as the central terrestrial figure created in the 'form of God,' a theomorphic [divine form] being living in this world but created for eternity."[14]

As humans, our model is the Universal Man, whose full reality is expressed only in the lives of prophets and seers—only they are fully human. Through Universal Man, God is able to send revelations into the world. In a famous ***hadith***, God speaking to Muhammad insists, "If thou wert not, I would not have created the world." And, this unique relationship between Universal Man and God existed even before creation. In the Qur'an (7:172), God's call, "Am I not your Lord?," and Universal Man's response, "Yea," ratify the mystery of this pre-eternal covenant.[15]

hadith *a sacred saying of the Prophet Muhammad, but not part of the Qur'an in which God speaks in the first person through the mouth of the Prophet*

After God created the first man (Adam) and breathed his Spirit into him, God ordered the angels to prostrate themselves before this theomorphic image. All did, except Iblis (Satan). Quoting the Quranic verse: "And when we said unto the angels: Prostrate yourselves before Adam, they fell prostrate, all save Iblis. He demurred through pride, and so became a disbeliever" (2:34).[16] This account differs from the one in the Hebrew Scriptures by placing the humans-as-theomorphic image as the cause of Satan's rebellion.

As in the Genesis story, Adam and Eve dwelt in paradise, until they disobeyed God's command, ate the fruit from the forbidden tree, and became tainted with forgetfulness (***al-ghaflah***). Forgetfulness characterizes fallen human beings, but there is no original sin, as we find in the Christian version. Adam and Eve are jointly responsible—Eve does not tempt Adam—and both retain "deep within their souls that primordial nature (***al-fitrah***) which attests to Divine Unity."[17]

al-ghaflah *in Arabic, forgetfulness; used to describe the human tendency to forget our true essence and our relationship with God*

al-fitrah *in Arabic, the primordial or original and true nature of humans*

Human intelligence knows the Divine Unity. But, human will, distorted by the passions, can prevent the intelligence from functioning correctly. The task of religion is to help humans remember who they are and return to their primordial nature. Our dual status is as both servant or slave (***al-'abd***) and viceregent (***al-khalifah***) of God on Earth. This requires a nimbleness—to be both "perfectly passive toward Heaven," as servant or slave of God, and active toward the world around us, in our role as viceregents of God.[18]

al-'abd *and* ***al-khalifah*** *in Arabic, servant and viceregent; refers to the status of humans, in relationship with God*

Having experienced neither a Renaissance nor an Enlightenment, Islamic society has no historical tradition of "creatures in rebellion against Heaven." Actually, the grandeur of humans is always gauged by the perfection of their submission to God (the literal meaning of the word *islam*). With submission comes true human dignity, enabling "every Muslim, male and female, [to be] like a priest who stands directly before God and communicates with Him without the aid of any intermediary."[19]

The struggle to remember who we really are is sometimes referred to as "the greater ***jihād***." The Prophet Muhammad once remarked in a famous *hadith,* "I return from the lesser *jihād* [outer armed conflict] to resume the greater *jihad* [the never-ending inner struggle]." In Islamic theology, this ongoing challenge is often captured using the term ***nafs***. In a general sense, *nafs* is the Sufi (mystics of Islam) word for the "false, temporary identities" that keep us from experiencing our true spiritual essence. *Nafs* can describe the many inner and outer ways we think of ourselves—as student, worker, American, athlete, addict, achiever—and there are even cultural *nafs,* such as

jihād *in Islam, struggle or striving in the path of God, both within oneself and, when necessary, in external battle*

nafs *in Arabic, the false, temporary identities that keep us from experiencing our true, spiritual essence*

science and progress, that masquerade as universals, but are actually particular ways of seeing the world and ourselves within it.[20]

In Arabic, as Iranian scholar Iraj Anvar explains, there are actually five *nafs:* "the *nafs al-ammārah* is the imperious self, the one that commands. Then you have *nafs al-lawwāmah*. That is the one that scolds you, tells you that this is not right. And then there's the *nafs al-mulhimah,* the one that inspires you. The *nafs mutma'innah* gives you certainty and peace. The highest, *nafs al-natiqa,* means the divine soul, the breath of God . . . In reality, the three higher work together under the *nafs al-natiqa* to tame the lowest one."[21] According to this view, we have help in this lifelong challenge to avoid mistaking the part for the whole and to avoid losing ourselves in one of "our many temporary and partial *nafs*."[22]

Taming the *nafs* involves remembering who we really are. In the Qur'an, we read, "And He taught Adam all the names," indicating power and dominion. However, our human status as *khalīfah* is contingent on remaining "in perfect submission to Him who is the real master of nature. The mastery and power of man over nature is only a borrowed power given to man because he reflects the divine names and qualities."[23]

Our technological prowess might make us think we are masters of the planet—a forgetting of both our servant and viceregent status. To be viceregent is to assume full responsibility: "Man is either Viceroy or else he is an animal that claims special rights by virtue of its cunning and the devouring efficiency of teeth sharpened by technological instruments . . . But if he is Viceroy, then all decay and all trouble in the created world that surrounds him is in some measure to be laid to his account."[24]

The Greek Rationalist Tradition

We have already met the other avocado view of human nature in Chapters 1 and 2. For Plato and Aristotle, it is our reasoning ability that sets us apart from other creatures. Recalling the prisoners in Plato's cave allegory may make it easier to understand the essential role of reason in the philosophy of the Greek rationalists. While relying only on their senses, the prisoners seem subhuman. Trapped in a world of shadows, they are missing what is real. To be fully human and to understand reality as it is, Plato tells us, they must leave the cave and use their reason to become enlightened.

It costs so much to be a full human being that there are very few who have the enlightenment or the courage to pay the price. One has to abandon altogether the search for security and reach out to the risk of living with both arms. One has to embrace the world like a lover and yet demand no easy return of love. One has to accept pain as a condition of existence.

MORRIS L. WEST, *LAZARUS*

In imagining what an ideal society would be like, Plato makes a connection between the classes of people in society and the parts of a human being. Most people, Plato suggests in his utopia, *Republic,* are driven by their appetites. A good meal, some sensual pleasures, and the gadgets that money can buy are the things this class of people values most. And, we all have this element in ourselves. We crave food, sex, and material comfort to satisfy these appetites.

A second class of people is driven by their emotions. In *Republic* they are the soldiers who guard the city. Their spirited nature makes them capable of strong words and even stronger deeds when conditions demand. We, too, Plato believes, share this element. It gives us the energy to commit ourselves to causes and the enthusiasm to carry a project to completion.

At the highest level in *Republic* are the rulers. They have the same appetites and emotions as the other two classes do, but through training and education, they have cultivated the highest human faculty and live their lives chiefly in accordance with reason. We will discuss Plato's political system in depth in Chapter 8; for now, it is enough to observe that in society and in

the human person Plato believes rationality to be the highest element. To be fully human we must exercise our reason; to do otherwise would be to risk slipping to the level of animals or being ruled by our passionate impulses.

Using our avocado image, it is reason that lies at the core of the human person for both Plato and Aristotle. As discussed in Chapter 1, the *Nicomachean Ethics* emphasizes the role of reason in determining the golden mean of proper ethical conduct. Aristotle explains that our passions may drive us to rashness and our animal survival instincts may make us cowards; only reason reveals the path of courage.

Recall that Plato, speaking through the character of his mentor Socrates, thought much of what we call learning is more accurately remembering. Like the slave boy who used reason to understand geometry without being taught it, we have memories of the world of Forms, which we glimpsed before our birth and to which we return at our death. For Plato, the soul is the immortal part of us. Its true home is not in this world of matter and the senses but in the higher world of pure Forms—a world that only our reason can reveal.

Aristotle agrees that at our core we are rational beings. He begins *Metaphysics* by asserting that "all men by nature desire to know" and continues by distinguishing humans from other creatures. "The animals other than man live by appearances and memories, and have but little of connected experience; but the human race lives also by art and reasonings."[25] Where he and Plato part company is on the question of the soul's origin and final home. For Aristotle, the Forms exist and can exist only in matter. In most of his writings, this ontology implies that souls can exist only in bodies and that when the body dies the soul dies with it. Only Plato's theory of a separate world of Forms makes possible the pre- and postexistence of the soul in another world.

It is in the darkness of men's eyes that they get lost.

BLACK ELK

For Plato and Aristotle, the soul represents the highest faculty of human nature. By proclaiming the uniqueness and superiority of human reason, Plato and Aristotle mean to capture our essence (in the avocado sense we have been using) and to distinguish us from other animals. Although we clearly have the capacity to behave like beasts and are just as likely to be swept away by our emotions or passions, only humans are capable of living in accordance with reason. To do this, Plato and Aristotle agree, is to be fully human—to express most truly what we are (in avocado terms, the seed at our core).

The Influence of Western Essentialism on Women

According to the avocado view, there is an essential human nature, analogous to the seed at the core of the avocado. In the Western intellectual tradition, both Judaic and Christian religious thought and Greek rationalist thought have been filtered through the social system of **patriarchy**. Literally meaning "father rule," patriarchy has come to stand for government in society and in the family as well as image making controlled by men. In more recent times, **feminism**—the theory that women should have political, legal, economic, and social rights equal to those of men—has challenged some aspects of both of these traditional thought systems, as well as the assumptions of patriarchy.

patriarchy *a form of social organization in which the father is recognized as head of the family or tribe and men control most of the formal and informal power, as well as define the role of women*

feminism *the theory that women should have political, legal, economic, and social rights equal to those of men and should define their own roles*

In considering the influences of essentialism on women, let's begin with the Greeks. As a result of the strength of the Greek rationalist tradition and especially Plato's tripartite soul, a life dominated by reason has been a cultural ideal in the West for more than 2000 years. Elevating reason to the

highest place and commanding it to rule over emotions and appetites seems harmless enough. The difficulty is that Western culture has identified rationality with men and emotionality with women. From that connection, it was an easy step to declare that, just as reason must rule over emotion and the desires of the body, so men must rule over women in human society.

Aristotle reaches a similar conclusion, although his model is based on two rather than three elements of the human soul—the rational and the irrational elements. Like Plato, Aristotle asserts that the political condition of women being ruled by men is understandable because, although both sexes share a rational principle, in women the rational element is easily overruled by the irrational element. One of the difficulties with this argument, according to Elizabeth V. Spelman of Smith College, is that Aristotle argues circularly. Our understanding of why the rational element in the souls of women is often overruled by the irrational element depends on our understanding of relationships in the political arena, and the reverse is also true: We can understand the political realities of Athenian life, in which men rule over women, by reference to the relationship between the rational and irrational elements within women's souls. In other words, men rule over women because women are by nature more likely to be influenced by the irrational elements in their souls, and this is clear because women are ruled by naturally-more-rational men.[26] Although each of these premises justifies the other, there is no independent or outside justification for either of them. René Descartes, in Chapter 5, will be accused of a similarly circular type of reasoning in his proof for the existence of God.

Although the reasoning is flawed, the argument has prevailed. There is, in Western culture, a presumption that men are more rational and women more emotional. Given this equation, women who want to be taken seriously as rational decision makers appear to have two options. One is to deny their emotions and desires and strive to fit into the rational, male model as fully as possible. Women entering the workforce during the 1970s did something like this. They bought plainly cut dark suits (with skirts) and wore them with plain blouses and ties. Looking as much like men as possible, many women also went out of their way to prove that they could work as hard, act as tough, and be as distant from their emotions as the male cultural ideal demanded.

The other extreme option for women is to affirm the value of a rich emotional life and identify themselves with it. To do so, they must risk accepting second-class status. As long as emotionality is devalued, there are few socially acceptable ways for women or men to express and cultivate healthy emotional lives. Yet, by insisting that only logic can lead to knowledge, suppressing our feelings, and denying whenever possible and for as long as possible that we have bodies at all, we risk both physical and mental/emotional illness.

Be who you are and say what you feel, because those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind.

DR. SEUSS

As some social critics have observed, the physical ideal for women in Western culture is an emaciated body. Models must deny themselves food, dieting continually to achieve the kind of no-fat body image that allows clothes to simply hang. At the extreme are the illnesses of anorexia and bulimia. Continuing to see a fat image, some ninety-five-pound women starve their bodies, and most middle or junior high school girls have been or are now on diets. Others are out of control, bingeing on rich foods and then vomiting or taking laxatives to prevent the food from turning to fat. And this is not just a modern-day problem. Mary Wollstonecraft, whose ideas we will

examine in Chapter 8, wrote in 1792: "Genteel women are, literally speaking, slaves to their bodies."

If we maintain this patriarchal view in which the virtues of the mind are projected onto men and the vices of the body attributed to women, men as well as women must pay the price. Heart attacks and strokes, as well as cancer, may be our bodies' last, desperate attempts to get our attention. By pretending we are only rational minds, it is possible to suppress emotions and ignore physical symptoms—at least for a while. A better solution might be questioning the Greek ideal and asking whether a life lived in accordance with reason has to mean a life lived without emotion and without attention to the body. The Greeks themselves led much more balanced lives than we, holding as an ideal "A sound mind in a sound body" and honoring the place of leisure and sports in a life devoted to rational thinking.

Women in the workforce in the early years of the twenty-first century are wearing softer clothing. Rejecting the model of the driving and driven emotionless "boss," some women and some men have discovered that being a leader means empowering everyone to act rather than giving orders from the top. The ideal of collaborative leadership has been given a new twist in *The Tao of Leadership:*

> The leader can act as a warrior or as a healer. As a warrior, the leader acts with power and decision. That is the *Yang* or masculine aspect of leadership. Most of the time, however, the leader acts as a healer and is in an open, receptive, and nourishing state. That is the feminine or *Yin* aspect of leadership. This mixture of doing and being, of warrior and healer, is both productive and potent.[27]

If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am not for others, what am I? If not now, when?
THE TALMUD

Let's now consider the patriarchal influence on Hebrew religious thought. It is not necessary to be a religious person in Western society to be influenced by Judaic and Christian views of human nature. John Milton's 1667 epic poem *Paradise Lost* gives us the story. Adam, the first man, is created in God's image. Lonely for a companion, he petitions God for other creatures. As God obligingly provides a variety of animals, Adam names them. They are fine, but only when God removes one of Adam's own ribs and creates woman (literally, "out of man") is he fully satisfied. As Milton has God say in the poem:

> Return, fair Eve,
> Whom fliest thou? Whom thou fliest, of him thou art
> His flesh, his bone; to give thee being I lent.[28]

Indeed, this story does appear in the second chapter of Genesis, the first book of the Bible. The first chapter of Genesis, however, tells the story another way. It begins with the familiar "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." After dividing the seas from the dry land and placing the Sun and Moon in their proper positions, God begins creating living things—plants, animals, and, finally, humans. Here is the last part of Chapter 1:

> Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created

> them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it." And it was so. God saw everything he had made and indeed, it was very good.[29]

There is nothing in this version about Adam's rib. Instead, woman and man are created together at the high point of Creation and together given dominion over Earth. Chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis each contain a separate and complete creation account. They derive from two different oral traditions and both were included, yet our patriarchal culture has popularized only the second chapter. Some people are totally unaware that the first even exists.

When the Western religious tradition speaks of man being created in God's image, it has sometimes seemed to mean human males only. Woman has appeared to be created in Adam's image, not God's. As Milton puts it in *Paradise Lost,* "He [Adam] for God only, she [Eve] for God in him." Today's philosophers wonder what the implications are for women if we define human nature this way. Does our human uniqueness apply to men only? When the culture emphasizes the Adam's rib story to the exclusion of the other more egalitarian account, how can women identify with this tradition and see themselves as created in the image of God and sharing equally in the divine essence?

Macrina on Emotions and the Soul

Macrina of Cappadocia had an extended conversation with her brother Gregory on this very question during the fourth century. Her response spoke to an urgent theological question of her day because, as she lay dying, the church fathers of Western Christianity were arguing about whether or not women were made in the image of God. Because in the secular world women typically played subordinate roles, some church fathers linked this with the story of Eve's creation from Adam's rib and contended that woman was made in the image of man rather than the image of God.

Macrina's views on the soul and women's place in the divine order of Creation resonate against this theological background. Raised in a highly intellectual and spiritual family (two of her brothers were bishops), Macrina appears as a virgin-philosopher and even as the "Christian Socrates" in *On the Soul and the Resurrection,* her deathbed dialogue with her brother Gregory, which he later recorded.[30] Grieving the recent death of their brother Basil, Gregory presses Macrina for a clear explanation of the nature of the soul. The conversation quickly turns to the relationship between the passions and the soul. Macrina states the question and offers a thesis:

> What must we think of the desiring and spirited faculties; are they part of the essence of the soul and present in it from the beginning or something additional which come to us later...For the one who says that the soul is "the image of God" affirms that what is alien to God is outside the definition of the soul. So, if some quality is not recognized as part of the divine nature, we cannot reasonably think that it is part of the nature of the soul.[31]

When Gregory questions how what is clearly in us (the passions of anger and desire) can be seen as alien to us, Macrina replies that reason struggles to subdue these passions and that some people such as Moses have succeeded in conquering them:

> This would not have been so if these qualities had been natural to him and logically in keeping with his essence...These qualities are alien to us

THE MAKING *of a* PHILOSOPHER

Macrina (CA. 327–380)

Born into a wealthy Christian family in Cappadocia (present-day Turkey), Macrina grew up on stories of the persecutions her great-grandparents and grandparents had suffered because of their faith. Her mother's father had lost his life and all his possessions, yet the family's faith remained strong. Macrina was the eldest child of ten, and after her father died, when she was only twelve, she took over the education of her baby brother Peter. She also persuaded her mother to convert the family home into a monastery in which former slaves and servants were treated as sisters and equals. Although she had been engaged at the age of twelve to a lawyer, when the young man died, Macrina decided to remain unmarried and devote her life to asceticism. As an architect of the monastic ideal, she can perhaps be seen as a cocreator with her more famous brother Basil the Great, of the Eastern form of monasticism. Her brother Gregory, like Basil also a bishop, recorded the dying words of

continues

> so that the eradication of them is not only not harmful, but even beneficial to our nature. Therefore, it is clear that these qualities belong to what is considered external, the affections of our nature and not its essence...[32]

This dialogue reminds us of the *Phaedo,* Plato's description of Socrates' last day of life. As he prepares to drink the hemlock, Socrates discusses with his friends the possible fate of the soul after death. Significantly, there are no women present; even Xanthippe, Socrates' wife, has been banished. In this dialogue we hear two possibilities for the soul's fate after death. If the soul has consistently practiced disassociating itself from the body during life, Socrates explains, it will be free at death to join the unseen. On the other hand, the impure soul will remain under the influence of the body:

> Why, because each pleasure and pain is a sort of nail which nails and rivets the soul to the body, until she becomes like the body, and believes that to be true which the body affirms to be true; and from agreeing with the body and having the same delights she is obliged to have the same habits and haunts, and is not likely ever to be pure at her departure...[33]

In this image, the ***pathe***, what we might call the passions, can make the soul impure. As we have just seen, Macrina offers another image: The *pathe* are not part of the soul's essence. In the *Phaedo,* Socrates believes his body will be appropriately discarded at the time of death, but Macrina defends the Christian belief that the body will be reunited with the soul on the day of resurrection at the end of time. Using an analogy, she likens the soul to the art of painting and the elements of the Earth to colors. Just as the painter knows the colors he has used, both individually and in combination, so the soul does not forget:

> Thus the soul knows the individual elements which formed the body in which it dwelt, even after the dissolution of those elements. Even if nature drags them far apart from each other...the soul will, nevertheless, exist along with each element, fastening upon what is its own by its power of knowing it and it will remain there until the union of the separated parts occurs again in the reforming of the dissolved being which is properly called "the resurrection."[34]

In all of this, Macrina is clear that the soul, which is "the image of God," is without gender. Women as well as men are created in the image and likeness of God. Like men, they are "persons" with the divine imprint. As we turn from the fourth to the twenty-first century, we consider another controversy: the possible "personhood" of artificial intelligence. Just as the issues of feminism have caused us to take a second look at Western essentialism, so the possibilities opened up by technology have further complicated the question of what it means to be a "person."

Technology, Personhood, and Western Essentialism

We are human because of our DNA; personhood is a philosophical and social construction. The line between human and machine is beginning to blur. When IBM's Deep Blue defeated reigning chess grandmaster Garry Kasparov in May 1997, some called the victory a "turning point in history." Others likened it to a Greek tragedy. If we define our humanity in terms of our rationality, the superior computational skills of a computer program may threaten us. Equally unsettling to us is the idea of a computer made out of

THE MAKING *of a* PHILOSOPHER

Macrina
continued

his sister in *On the Soul and the Resurrection,* and he also wrote a tribute to her called *The Life of Macrina.* We are told that when Basil came home from the university smug with learning, it was Macrina who converted him to the humility of a seeker after wisdom. She remained at the center of a remarkable family and regarded both philosophy and religion as paths to truth.

pathe *[PAH thay] the plural of pathos, a Greek word that, when used in connection with the soul, means "emotion" and "passion"*

Sing a black girl's song. Sing the song of her possibilities. Sing a righteous gospel, the making of a melody. Let her be born. Let her be born and handle warmly.

NTOZAKE SHANGE

A man is born into the world with only a tiny spark of goodness in him. The spark is God, it is the soul; the rest is ugliness and evil, a shell. The spark must be guarded like a treasure, it must be fanned into flame.

CHAIM POTOK, *THE CHOSEN*

DNA. Although its applications are restricted, it "solves" problems through parallel processing: addressing all possible solutions simultaneously, rather than working serially the way an adding machine tallies a sum. A DNA computer does each step slowly but can work on billions of sites at once. This style is just what is needed for breaking a code or searching the Library of Congress for a particular piece of information.[35]

With the continuing progress of work in artificial intelligence, it is easy to imagine an android that appears human but is actually a very sophisticated machine. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* took the idea one step further by introducing Data, an android with a positronic net for a brain and a very human-looking body. He is extremely strong, able to calculate and absorb information at an extraordinary rate, but unable to experience human emotions. In one episode, "The Measure of a Man," a scientist's request to disassemble Data in the name of science leads to a debate on whether or not Data is a sentient being with the right to control his own fate.

Insisting that Data is in essence a sophisticated toaster, the scientist is perplexed when Captain Jean-Luc Picard refuses permission. At a hearing convened to decide the matter, both sides agree on three characteristics of a sentient being, creating, in effect, a definition and test of human nature. Everyone agrees that Data has intelligence, and he clearly has self-awareness—he is aware of himself and of his options. Data passes the key third test—possession of consciousness—when he demonstrates "human" attachment to a book of poetry and the hologram of a deceased lover. "Does Data have a soul? I don't know if *I* have," the adjutant replies in denying permission to disassemble, "but he must have the ability to choose."

In another episode, Data refuses to send a group of repair modules called Exocomps to their death/destruction, even though the lives of his best friend Geordi La Forge and Captain Picard are at risk, because he believes the Exocomps may be like himself, a life-form. With a twist worthy of the ethical macaques we discussed earlier, the Exocomps put their own lives at risk, and one of them voluntarily sacrifices itself so that the humans can escape. The message is that self-aware beings, whether human or mechanical, may choose martyrdom but it may not be forced upon them. As sentient beings, their own wishes must be considered.

If, as in the Western religious definition, a person must possess a soul or be made in the image of God, it seems clear that Data and the Exocomps fail the test. Clearly, they have been created by humans and not by God. If, however, we apply the Greek rationalist definition of a person as one whose life is ruled by reason, then androids would seem to be candidates. Persons have moral status as well as legal rights; nonpersons do not. Should we consider granting personhood in any legal or social sense to an artificial life-form like Data or the ethical Exocomps?

Much of what probably seems most obvious and familiar to you derives from the combination of Greek rationalism and Judaic and Christian theology that supports the Western worldview. Yet, as we have seen, those views have been overlaid with patriarchy to the detriment of women and men and caused some to describe the West as out of balance or excessively rationalist. Both feminism and technology have introduced new questions. Still, the avocado view of human nature remains the commonsense explanation for anyone raised in the West. Because it currently seems to present almost as many problems as solutions, let's consider the other possibility—the artichoke view of human nature.

Is There an Essential Human Nature?—The Artichoke View

Tom Wolfe's *The Bonfire of the Vanities* introduces us to Sherman McCoy, a Wall Street bond trader who, at the beginning of the novel, sees himself as a "master of the universe." Arrested for vehicular manslaughter and financially ruined, he is taken from his elegant Park Avenue apartment to a downtown New York police station for booking. Somewhere during this dehumanizing experience, the "self" he thought was so durable begins to deteriorate. Stepping in to editorialize, novelist Wolfe tells us that we need the "whole village" of our social relationships to keep our "self" in place. Citing scientific data, Wolfe tells the reader that healthy college students, if subjected to total sensory deprivation, begin to hallucinate in a few hours. When deprived of constant feedback to fuel its image, the self, it would seem, simply disintegrates. If this is so, then was the self ever real to begin with?

What you have become is the price you paid to get what you used to want.

MIGNON MCLAUGHLIN

The Protean Self

One artichoke view of human nature assumes that disintegration and re-formation of the self is not necessarily a bad thing. Based on Proteus—the shape-shifter of Greek mythology who was able to appear as a green tree, an old man, a blinding fire—this view agrees that we are nothing but our layers and finds this reasonable and healthy. Lacking a central core, as posited by the avocado view, we are able to respond to the lack of continuity we find in the world by adapting to it. If reality were stable and filled with meaning, it might make sense to strive for a core self; because it is not, the psychologically healthy approach might be to imitate Proteus and change with a changing world.

Nothing, nothing am I but a small, loving watercourse.

ROSARIO CASTELLANOS

Psychiatrist Robert Lifton suggests that people could be hippies when young and, years later, conservative businesspeople, with no loss of identity or fragmentation. In this view, a "self," like an artichoke, is composed of many layers, each of which is real and functional only at particular times or in particular circumstances. Viewing the self as a collage rather than as a single, unchanging picture might better enable us to move successfully among incomplete, changing realities. The world is unpredictable, so we need a whole collection of selves with which to meet it. Some would say that Bill Clinton's success as president of the United States was due in part to his ability to negotiate among a repertoire of "selves." We might think here of a pomegranate that contains many seeds, each representing a version of the self. If planted, does each have the potential to become a core self?[36]

PC games such as *The Sims* or *SimCity* give all of us the opportunity to try out alternative identities. Simulated identities or Sims are called *avatars,* a word used in Hinduism to describe the bodily incarnation of a god. Will Wright, creator of *The Sims Online*, envisions an entire online world, available 24/7. The website (https://www.thesims.com/) explains: "The Sims Online is a massive world built by thousands of players. Create a Sim and play as yourself or your alternate Sim persona. Explore neighborhoods, make friends, host events, or run a business. The only limit is your imagination."

Dr. Sherry Turkle, a psychologist who directs the Initiative on Technology and Self at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), observes that the computer has become a metaphor for thinking about the self, with each computer window representing an aspect of the self and cycling through

windows a way of thinking about relationships among them. "When people are online," Turkle says, "they tend to express different aspects of themselves in different settings... They find ways to think about a healthy self not as single and unitary, but rather as having many aspects. People come to see themselves as the sum of their distributed presences..."[37]

This certainly seems to be the case for Richard L. Stenlund, who spends forty hours a week as the mutant Thedeacon on the massively multiplayer game *Anarchy Online*. "It's a total release of the id," he observes. "I think people are generally false...but in A.O. you can really let your true character out. If I want to be a pervert, I am able to do that in A.O. and be a pervert right off the bat." Stenlund does seem to take a dim view of human nature: "The more you deal with people, the more you hate people...It just feels that everybody is so asleep in this world." And, at the same time, other players in *Anarchy Online* applaud his "natural entertainer's personality" as well as "how helpful and patient" he is in assisting newer players. At times he functions as a "Dr. Phil-like self-help guru and mentor." One example is his frequently accessed guide on "Making LOTS of money as a new player."[38]

After the Meta-Physicists (one of twelve professions and the one practiced by Thedeacon) spent a year unsuccessfully lobbying Funcom to enhance their profession, Thedeacon spent two weeks organizing a virtual protest march. At least one hundred other players followed Thedeacon on a five-hour trek from the City of Hope to the planetary headquarters of the Interstellar Confederation of Corporations.[39] This trend toward online political activism is echoed on Second Life (virtual population more than fifteen million). Avatars can be banished either temporarily or permanently by the game's creator. And, there is a growing political activism among players, at least in this game.[40]

Linden Lab, the game's creator, sells plots of land to players, who are then free to improve and resell the land to other players, in transactions that amount to thousands of U.S. dollars. When a character called Lazarus Divine bought up small parcels of land near extremely valuable larger sites and began erecting large blue signs that blocked scenic views for older residents, there was predictable outrage. Because the signs also had political content—"SUPPORT OUR TROOPS, End the Illegal War in Iraq" and "Restore U.S. Credibility. IMPEACH BUSH"—they prompted many proposals for "avatar-created legal codes," some focusing on specific problems and others designing a possible jury system for resolving disputes among avatars.[41]

One Second Life player, James Miller, crafted an elaborate conflict-resolution proposal that included meetings on an off-world island. This level of interest has prompted Steven Johnson, contributing editor of *Discover* Magazine to observe, "The online world suddenly feels closer to 1776 in America or 1848 in France, when ordinary citizens struggled to make their revolutionary visions of social organization a reality." Although utopias are currently out of fashion, Johnson believes that virtual communities can "serve as proof of concept for ideas that might seem implausible were they merely described on paper."[42]

modernism *the quest for certainty and unitive truth, a single and coherent explanation of reality that gives it meaning*

postmodernism *the recognition that certainty and unitive truth are not possible because existence and reality are partial, inconsistent, plural, and multiple*

Looking for certainty in a single truth to explain the world has been called **modernism**. Western essentialism developed in a modernist world. The protean self, by contrast, is a product of **postmodernism**, which denies moral absolutes and certain truth. Instead of despairing over the loss of unitive meaning, the protean self celebrates pluralism. If the realities of life are always changing, the sensible thing to do is move easily among them, altering your "self" to suit the conditions you find. Embracing postmodernism, a

group of twentieth-century philosophers celebrated the chaos and hailed the freedom it would provide.

Existentialism: The Self-Created Self

According to existentialism, whose ethical theory we will consider in Chapter 10, the key fact about human nature is that we come into being and exist without a fixed essence. Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset put it this way in his 1941 book *History as a System:*

> The stone is given its existence; it need not fight for being what it is—a stone in the field. Man has to be himself in spite of unfavorable circumstances; that means he has to make his own existence at every single moment. He is given the abstract possibility of existing, but not the reality. This he has to conquer hour after hour. Man must earn his life, not only economically but metaphysically . . . We are dealing—and let the disquieting strangeness of the case be well noted—with an entity whose being consists not in what it is already, but in what it is not yet, a being that consists in not-yet-being.[43]

We grow neither better nor worse as we get old, but more like ourselves.

MAY LAMBERTON BECKER

French existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre takes for granted the twentieth-century despair over loss of meaning and flatly rejects belief in God. Without God, the cosmos lacks purpose and there is no moral law that must be obeyed. The positive aspect of all this negativism is that humans are not squeezed into society's preconceptions and are therefore free to become whatever they choose—to create themselves. Sartre had this to say at a 1946 lecture:

> Atheistic existentialism, of which I am a representative, declares with greater consistency that if God does not exist there is at least one being whose existence comes before its essence, a being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it. That being is man . . . What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world—and defines himself afterwards . . . Thus there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it.[44]

Indeed it is of the essence of man that he can lose himself in the jungle of his existence, within himself, and thanks to his sensation of being lost can react by setting energetically to work to find himself again.

JOSÉ ORTEGA Y GASSET

With no fixed essence—with no "avocado seed"—people take their bare existence as a starting point and begin choosing a life path for themselves. Because there are no rules, choosing can be difficult. The key requirement, according to existentialist philosophers, is that we must choose and, having chosen, we must stand accountable for our choices. Each time you do this, you add a brushstroke to the painting that will be yourself or shape a bit more distinctly the clay of the sculpture that is you.

In the most powerful of creative actions, you create a self for yourself. In a world lacking purpose and meaning, in the absence of guidelines, you make a decision and accept responsibility for it. You have this radical freedom from all restraint, so you behave less than humanly if you try to claim a lack of freedom. It is tempting to blame your childhood, your ethnicity, or your previous experiences for what you say and do. The result might be to justify your actions or let yourself off the hook by claiming "It's not my fault." To do so, however, is to sacrifice the opportunity to be fully human.

Power is knowing your past.

SPIKE LEE

At every moment, existentialism affirms, you have the possibility of being different than you have been in the past. Nothing is fixed; there are no boxes in which you are imprisoned; nothing can defeat you without your cooperation. As the nineteenth-century poem "Invictus" puts it, "I am the master of

I change myself, I change the world.

GLORIA ANZALDÚA

my fate; I am the captain of my soul."[45] Its author, William Ernest Henley, lived with chronic, crippling pain and died young; yet he remained "unconquered" (the Latin meaning of the title) by life's challenges. It is frightening to think that even facing what Henley had to face we might be expected to be brave and self-reliant, unconquered to the end, yet existentialism insists that all our responses to life, all our states of mind, are totally within our control.

If you are sad, Sartre insists, it is because you have chosen to be sad. Your sadness is like a coat you put on, and you could just as easily wear another—the coat of happiness. While you are alone or with a loved one, you may decide to indulge your sadness, walking around with stooping shoulders and sighing frequently. The proof of your ability to alter your mental state occurs when the telephone or doorbell rings. If a stranger appears, Sartre writes, "I will assume a lively cheerfulness. What will remain of my sadness except that I obligingly promise it an appointment for later after the departure of the visitor."[46]

Existentialism asserts that by facing the lack of meaning all around us, making our choices, and standing accountable for them, we have the possibility of putting together the layers that will make a self for ourselves. It will not be an easy task. The world in which we find ourselves is absurd. Sartre's existentialist colleague Albert Camus put it this way:

> In a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity.[47]

Life has no inherent meaning. Existentialism celebrates the absence of a solid center in the avocado sense. Lacking an essence, the human person is not fixed, not predetermined to be anything. Instead, each person is free to create those layers that will make a functional self. As circumstances change, the layers may change with them. At every moment, however, humans are

Detached from community and isolated, this woman seems to embody the alienation of the human person described by atheistic existentialism.

The Subway by George Tooker/© 2004 Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

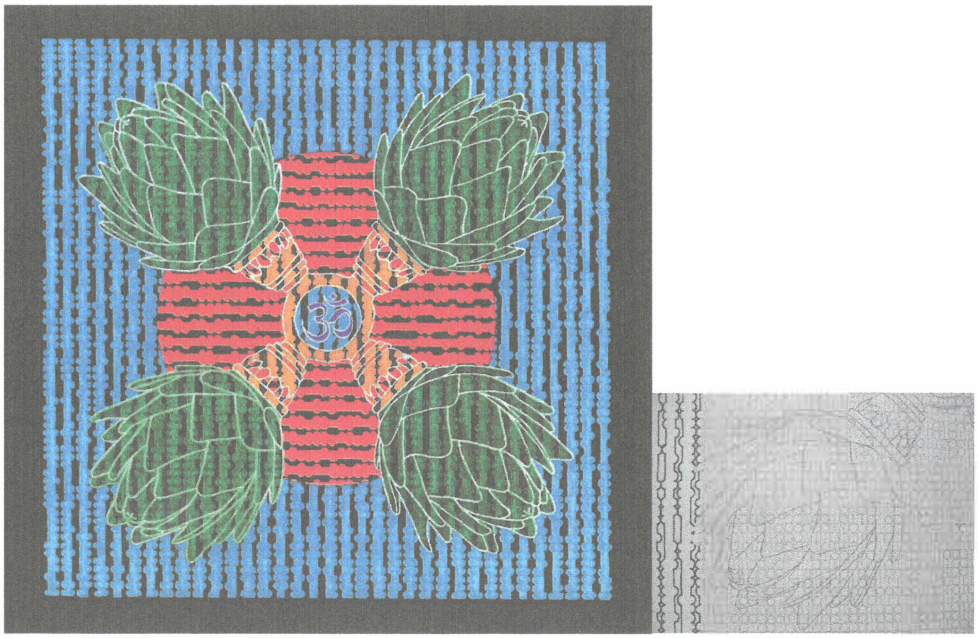
the masters of their fate. The good news is you can be anything you want to be; the bad news is there is no one to blame but yourself.

Neuroscience and the Self

On December 10, 1996, Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor awoke to a sharp pain behind her left eye. Over the next few hours, she witnessed a gradual loss of function in the left hemisphere of her brain, as blood from a severe hemorrhage poured in, disabling the neurons that had made possible speech, time and sequence, and pattern recognition. As she gradually realized she was having a stroke, Taylor, a trained neuroanatomist, was stunned to realize that, from the perspective of her now-prominent right hemisphere, she was completely at ease. "Instead of finding answers and information, I met a growing sense of peace. In place of that constant chatter that had attached me to the details of my life, I felt enfolded by a blanket of tranquil euphoria."[48]

What light can Dr. Taylor's insights shed on the nature of the "self"? She quickly realized that she had two distinct experiences of reality—one from her long-dominant left brain and another from her newly liberated right brain. One of the first things to go was her perception of herself as a solid whole, separate from everything else. In place of this was her realization: "I am life! I am a sea of water bound inside this membranous pouch." And, instead of the experience of past, present, and future, "every moment seemed to exist in perfect isolation." In retrospect, Dr. Taylor surmises that she experienced what Buddhists call *nirvana*.[49]

After eight years of rehabilitation, she has recovered all her cognitive functions. As she explains the dilemma, the question was this: "... would it be possible for me to recover my perception of my *self*, where I exist as a single solid, separate from the whole, without recovering the cells associated



Courtesy of Shawn Sokoloski, student at Howard Community College

Artichokes on Buddhist vajra portray forms emerging as an expression of primordial, underlying unity, represented by the mystical symbol OM. The Buddhist Prajnaparamita Sutra, which was translated into binary code (0s and 1s), is fully embedded within the painting (see detail). Courtesy of Shawn Sokoloski, student at Howard Community College, Photo by Harvey Jackson.

with my egotism, intense desire to be argumentative, need to be right, or fear of separation and death?" And, "... most important, could I retain my newfound sense of connection with the universe in the presence of my left hemisphere's individuality?"[50] (Note: Entering "Jill Bolte Taylor" into your Internet search engine will allow you to view a twenty-minute video of Dr. Taylor's description of her stroke and its accompanying revelations.)

Dr. Peggy La Cerra explores a science of the self, rooted in evolutionary psychology, in her book, *The Origin of Minds*, which takes us back to the idea of a repertory of selves.[51] In order to survive and pass on our genes, we must learn to conserve the energy we need for living. By constructing many self-representations, we can draw on them later to make cost-benefit analyses about the best choice in any situation. Memory and the neocortex's incredible "neuroplasticity," she explains, allow us to "adapt on-line to experience."[52]

"Over time," Dr. La Cerra observes, "as your adaptive representational networks are constructed—scene by scene, episode by episode—you build up an autobiography: a chronology of who you were at various times of your life and in specific situations." And, this "autobiographical record of your development as a unique individual...is the scaffolding of your self."[53] Even as we send out "selves" to serve as emissaries in unique situations, we also have "an overarching sense" of ourselves as "integrated individual[s]." Much like Plato's Ideal Forms that we discussed in Chapter 2, we each have a "highest-order representation" of ourselves, a kind of prototype that La Cerra calls "our neural Ideal Forms."[54]

While Dr. La Cerra was writing this book, she was "stunned by the similarities between the Buddha's 2500-year-old view of the mental components that make up our experience of Self and the neural components of a self-representation. Memories, she concluded, are "neural representations of our sensations, perceptions, motivations, thoughts, behaviors and the felt outcomes of behavior..." Like the Buddha's *skandhas*, they serve as "the launching pad between the physical realm of the brain and body and the metaphysical realm of the mind; they are the nexus of the mind-body connection..."[55]

In the light of her scientific work, the Buddhist concept of *anatta* or "no self," which we will encounter in the next section, also made perfect sense. As Dr. La Cerra realized, "the Self is no more illusory than anything else we experience; in fact it is, like everything else we experience, transitory—a temporary manifestation of matter, orchestrated by the laws of energy."[56]

As we move forward to consider non-Western views of the self, keep in mind our earlier discussion of both the Protean Self and the Existential view of the Self-Created Self, as well as these new insights from brain neuroscience.

Non-Western Views of the Self

Besides Western views of the protean self and existentialism, there are three non-Western examples of the artichoke view of human nature to consider. Buddhism, beginning at the time of the Milesian, or pre-Socratic, philosophers, proclaimed that there is no need to think of a solid, separate self. To proclaim a permanent self is to live in a world of illusion. From ancient Chinese medicine, we find a conception of self with five elements—found in

both the self and nature. Like nature, the self is in flux, and in a healthy person or ecosystem, the elements take their places at appropriate times. One African view of a fully realized human person describes the creative, complementary relationship between men and women as a model for healthy living, as well as an indication of what divinity might be like.

From Hinduism and *Atman* to Buddhism and *Anatman*

Fear not what is not real, never was and never will be. What is real always was and cannot be destroyed.

BHAGAVAD GITA

As we begin to look at non-Western views of the self, we are fortunate that in India we can see the transition from what we have been calling an avocado view of the self (in Hinduism) to what we are calling an artichoke view of the self (in Buddhism). Keep in mind that Siddhārtha Gautama was raised a Hindu, and, through a long struggle to understand how happiness is possible in the face of suffering, he reached a new understanding of the self. From the most philosophical of the Hindu Scriptures, the Upanishads (also known as the Vedanta because they are the end or conclusion of the Vedas), we have a very avocado-like image of the core self at the heart of every human person, which travels from life to life through the process of reincarnation, taking on new bodies but remaining intact.

In a dialogue between father and son, popularly known as "The Education of Svetaketu," a young man has returned home after twelve years of studying all the Vedas. He considers himself quite well educated and is even a bit conceited. Realizing this, the father begins questioning his son and, in the process, giving him additional instruction. "In the beginning," the father explains, "there was that only which is, one thing only, without a second. It thought, May I be many, may I grow forth." The inner essence of all that is, the father goes on to tell Svetaketu, is the cosmic Self—present in an unlimited way in the cosmos and in a more limited way in each of us. In truth, what is in each of us—and what is known in Vedanta as ***atman***—is identical with ultimate reality—what is known as *Brahman*. "This body indeed withers and dies when the living Self has left it; the living Self dies not," the father concludes. And, in a stunning affirmation, the father tells his now humbled son, "That subtle essence is the self of all that exists. It is the True. It is the Self, and that, Svetaketu, you are."[57]

atman *[AHT muhn] in Hinduism, the Self or soul, which endures through successive reincarnations as an expression of the divine and as a carrier of karma*

You are all the Buddha.

THE BUDDHA—LAST WORDS

This is quite similar to the Western religious view of the self as marked by its resemblance to the divine. The thought system that came to be known as Buddhism departs from this view of a core self and offers instead a very artichoke-like view. Concluding that impermanence characterizes all of existence and—giving rise to sickness, old age, and death—is the cause of most of our suffering, Siddhārtha Gautama, who came to be known as the Buddha, set out to resolve this conflict. What he saw was that acceptance of the fleeting nature of all that is offers the only possibility for happiness.

Speaking about what have come to be known as the Four Noble Truths (Table 3.1)—the Buddha's prescription for navigating the human condition—Pema Chödrön, an American Buddhist nun, begins this way: "The first noble truth recognizes that we also change like the weather, we ebb and flow like the tides, we wax and wane like the Moon. We do that, and there's no reason to resist it."[58] If we do, she says, the reality and vitality of life become a hell—one that we have created ourselves.

The Second Noble Truth is usually translated this way: Desire causes suffering. Pema Chödrön asserts that resistance to the dynamic, ever-changing

Table 3.1 Four Noble Truths of Buddhism

1. Life is suffering.
2. Desire (ego) causes suffering.
3. Ending desire (ego) ends suffering.
4. Following the Noble Eightfold Path ends desire (ego).

vitality of life is "the fundamental operating mechanism of what we call ego." Insisting on our separateness and "resisting our complete unity with all of life" is what causes suffering. The Third Noble Truth lets us know that ending suffering requires nothing more and nothing less than "letting go of holding on to ourselves." Hurricanes and earthquakes come and go; so do warm sunny days. "When there's an earthquake, let the ground tremble and rip apart, and when it's a rich garden with flowers, let that be also. I'm talking about not getting caught in hope and in fear, in good and in bad, but actually living completely." The essence of the Fourth Noble Truth is the Eightfold Path of conscious living. "Everything we do...from the moment we're born until the moment we die...we can use to help us realize our unity and our completeness with all things." We can use our lives to connect with the energy that makes everything "whole and awake and alive" or we can use them to become "resentful, angry, bitter. As always," Pema Chödrön concludes, "it's up to us."[59]

anatman *[ahn AHT muhn] the Buddhist doctrine that there is no permanent, separate, individual ego-self*

skandhas *in Buddhism, the five elements (feeling, perception, impulse, consciousness, and form) that make the world and the person of appearances*

Anatman, the Buddhist term meaning no-self or non-self, alerts us to the suffering we can cause ourselves by insisting that we possess a stable, permanent self. The truth is we are a collection of ***skandhas***—feeling, perception, impulse, consciousness, and form—temporarily united but in no sense permanent. All of life changes like the weather, and we are no exception. There is no separate "me," no separate "you," as we discussed in Chapter 2; everything is interconnected and everything is in flux. One Buddhist text puts it this way:

> The body is composed of the five *skandhas,* and produced from the five elements. It is all empty and without soul, and arises from the action of the chain of causation. This chain of causation is the cause of coming into existence and the cessation of this chain is the cause of the state of cessation.[60]

enlightenment *the Buddhist term for the realization that comes from seeing the world as it actually is*

Enlightenment is the recognition that you hold your happiness in your own hand. True seeing earns you escape from the round of births and deaths that characterizes this plane of existence:

> This is to be meditated upon by you who enjoy dwelling tranquilly in lonely woods. He who knows it thoroughly reaches at last to absolute thinness. Then he becomes blissfully extinct...Then, set free from the bonds of the prison-house of existence, you...shall attain *Nirvana.*[61]

nirvana *a state in which individuality is extinguished or the state of enlightenment in which all pain, suffering, mental anguish, and the need for successive rebirths disappear*

This is the Buddha's description of ***nirvana,*** a literal "blowing out" of the candle flame of the false self. To many Westerners, the concept may sound very negative. Accustomed as we are to taking a solid self for granted, we may find it difficult, if not impossible, to imagine why anyone would want to annihilate that sense of self. But we have some experience that can help us appreciate what the Buddha was describing. At the moment of

orgasm, the sense of self may blur or disappear as the world falls away, and even your partner may fade from your experience. There is a kind of joy in the abandonment of self in orgasm that comes close to what mystics from many cultures experience in meditation.

As one gives up the illusion of a separate self, there is a feeling of interdependence with everything that in Buddhist terms is the accurate view. What you lose is your sense of a separate identity, with boundaries and limits; what you gain is the sense of interconnectedness with all things that the false sense of separateness can block. *Nirvana,* the "blowing out" of the false sense of a separate self, has been described by Alan Watts as "joy and creative power...to lose one's life is to find it—to find freedom of action unimpeded by self-frustration and the anxiety inherent in trying to save and control the Self."[62] To hold on to a puny separate self seems foolish and petty in the presence of something vast and wonderful.

Thich Nhat Hanh recalls a day when he saw a dry leaf "in the ultimate dimension," ready to merge with the moist soil so it could appear on the tree in another form the following spring. Like the leaf, he realized, everything is pretending to be born and pretending to die. In truth, there is neither birth nor death, only a change of state. The day we "die," we actually continue in many forms. Nothing can be by itself because everything contains everything else and depends on everything else to be. "Nothing can be by itself alone. It has to inter-be with all other things. This is non-self." *Nirvana,* or the ultimate dimension, is "a state of coolness, peace, and joy." And, we do not have to "die" to experience it. "You can touch the ultimate dimension right now," Thich Nhat Hanh assures us, "by breathing, walking, and drinking your tea in mindfulness." Some people erroneously claim that Buddhist practice is to dissolve the self. "*They do not understand that there is no self to be dissolved. There is only the notion of self to be transcended*...When you touch the reality of non-self, you touch at the same time nirvana, the ultimate dimension of being, and become free from fear, attachment, illusion, and craving."[63]

Confucian Socially Molded Self

Confucius sought to redefine the self, though not to transcend it. The Confucian claim is that "apart from human relationships, there is no self...[a self] is constructed through its interactions with others and is defined by the sum of its social roles."[64] What Confucius called the Five Constant Relationships—Parent/Child, Husband/Wife, Older/Younger Sibling, More Mature/Less Mature Friend, Ruler/Subject—guide us toward the goal of "becoming more completely human." Beyond our first nature which is genetic, Confucius believes we need a culturally created nature in order to fulfill our essential social roles and create a coherent community.

In the so-called womb-to-tomb Confucian Project, society would mold or shape each person to fit into existing social structures and patterns and to play a role in creating overall harmony and balance. In the family, the village, the nation, one would encounter a never-ending series of lessons in transcending selfishness. First, in the family, one would learn to accommodate the needs of other members. In the village, one would learn to move beyond family loyalty to a sense of community obligation. And, in the nation, one would recognize one's kinship with all other Chinese.

Although they never met, Aristotle [see Chapter 1 p. 45] in Classical Greece and Confucius in war-torn China each defined what we have come to call Virtue Ethics—a path for learning "habits of the heart" that create through practice a virtuous character. Both sought a Golden Mean. Aristotle relied on reason to reveal the path between extremes. For Confucius, the virtues of *ren* or benevolent human heartedness; *te* or the power of moral example; *li* or ritually-correct conduct; and *wen* the arts of peace as opposed to the arts of war would reshape and guide us through a lifetime of practice. Anyone could aspire to be a chun-tzu, a noble or superior-minded person. This was not an aristocracy of wealth but an aristocracy of virtue and character. [Smith, 114, 110–11]

Although, in the Confucian tradition, the *Tao* cannot be known directly, the place where one could experience the *Tao* was within the matrix of human social relationships. There, one could acquire a second human nature—a socially molded self that would blend seamlessly into a tightly linked community and save civilization from self-destruction.

I came to understand that I am not the light or the source of the light. But light—truth, understanding, knowledge—is there, and it will only shine in many dark places if I reflect it. I am a fragment of a mirror whose whole design and shape I do not know.

ALEXANDER PAPADEROS

Taoist Five-Element View of the Self

Taoism, [the other major thought system of China], shares with Buddhism the view that reality is a state of interconnectedness, rather than separateness. [In the *Tao Te Ching* (see p. 67) we learn that] *Tao* is the inside of the circle, that which cannot be named, for to name it is to give it particularity and destroy its wholeness. The *Tao* manifests itself in a dance of energy that in Chapter 2 we called *yin-yang* or *yang-yin*—sometimes actively doing and sometimes quietly receptive. In the *t'ai chi* symbol we saw that *yin* spills into *yang* and *yang* is already moving to *yin*. These are two aspects of the same thing, like the two sides of a coin or the front and back of a hand. They flow into each other in a circular movement.

In Taoism, nature is our guide for healthy living. Each season (five in the Chinese system) is a particular manifestation of the whole process, and each has its appropriate time and role to play. Spring melts the snows of winter and pushes green shoots out of what seemed to be dead earth. In summer the Sun rises early and sets late, calling us to be active and energetic and to bloom like the flowers and the trees. Late summer brings the harvest when the fruits of the growing season are gathered and stored. Autumn turns the leaves red and gold, signaling the transition from activity to rest. In winter the Earth rests; days are short and nights are long and cold. Humans and other animals seek shelter, and much activity is curtailed.

Like the cosmos, we are composed of five elements: earth, air or metal, water, wood, and fire (Figure 3.2). Each element corresponds to a season, and together all five express the oneness of nature. When we are in harmony, the elements are balanced within us, and we move smoothly around the circle of the seasons—throughout the year and, indeed, throughout each day. Taoism views health as balance, or harmony, among the elements and disease as imbalance among them.

In our Western view, life-giving blood pulses through us in the circulatory system, the network of arteries, veins, and capillaries that connects everything with everything else. Taoism uses the image of a parallel energy system. Instead of blood, this system carries ***ch'i***, the energy of the life force that expresses the dance between Heaven and Earth. In a healthy person, *ch'i* flows unobstructed throughout the body. Pain and disease result from blockages in the system; the art and science of acupuncture is concerned with restoring the flow.

ch'i *in Taoism, the energy of the life force that flows between Heaven and Earth and within nature*

FIGURE 3.2 Chinese Five-Element View of the Human Person *As in nature, the human person is composed of five elements.*
Courtesy of Tai Sophia Institute

In her book *Traditional Acupuncture: The Law of the Five Elements,* Dianne Connelly describes acupuncture's role in Chinese medicine:

> Traditional Acupuncture is a healing art and science which teaches how to see the entire human being in body-mind-spirit, how to recognize the process of health and illness, and how to go about the restoration of lost health in an individual. The main difference between Western medicine and Oriental medicine is the basic theory of the Chinese that there is a Life Force called *Ch'i* Energy, and that this Life Force flows within us in a harmonious, balanced way. This harmony and balance is health. If the Life Force is not flowing properly, then there is disharmony and imbalance. This is illness.[65]

Ch'i makes the Sun shine, the rain fall, the seasons change; it is the source of life and breath in the human person. Taoism suggests: If you want to understand yourself, study nature.

Think of a young, healthy tree in springtime, as its wood pushes up toward the heavens and its branches sprout green leaves. The young tree is well rooted in the earth, so it has stability, yet it is supple and able to bend when the wind blows. An unhealthy or dying tree can be hard and dry; branches may snap off in the wind, or the whole tree may become uprooted. In nature and in the human person, the wood element is associated with growth and vitality, with new possibilities.

Healthy trees spontaneously do what is appropriate; humans, unfortunately, can get out of harmony by trying to resist what cannot be resisted or by yielding too easily what should be held on to. Consider this passage from the *Tao Te Ching:*

> *O to be self-balanced for contingencies, to confront night storms, hunger, ridicule, accidents, rebuffs, as the trees and animals do.*
>
> WALT WHITMAN

When a man is living, he is soft and supple.
When he is dead, he becomes hard and rigid.
When a plant is living, it is soft and tender.
When it is dead, it becomes withered and dry...
What is well planted cannot be uprooted.
What is well embraced cannot slip away.[66]

Fire is another element, or energy pattern, in the natural world and in us. In its balanced state, the Sun lights and warms the earth, helping plants grow as they convert its energy into food by the process of photosynthesis. Its fire is so vital to life itself that without it we cannot survive. Imagine Earth in a nuclear winter, when the Sun's life-giving rays are blocked and ice spreads over the planet, to understand the absence of fire. Equally frightening, however, is the prospect of being lost in the desert without water, subject to an excess of the Sun's brutal, dehydrating glare. Too much Sun can cause heatstroke and even death.

Like plants we need the warmth and energy of the Sun to get us going and accomplish our daily tasks. The warmth of fire creates intimacy and companionship; when the fire goes out, we can become cold and distant from each other. People who are physically and emotionally cold are deficient in the fire element. The heat of passion and the warmth of friendship are wonderful parts of a full and harmonious life, but we cannot be on fire all the time. Too much fire and we burn out. High-energy work—like healing, teaching, and governing—can turn eager idealists into weary cynics. The key is pacing—balancing work with time for rest. No one can be in the fire element all the time without being consumed by it. Even the Sun gives way each evening as it slips below the horizon and allows the evening to come.

Chinese philosophy and medicine affirm that we are also the element earth. The source of all life, the earth is a great nourisher. It provides the food all living beings need to survive, and it holds the roots of trees to give

PHILOSOPHERS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES — Tao Te Ching

Chapter 23

Speak and then be still and listen
Observe the wisdom of Heaven and Earth
Typhoons blow—then the winds grow calm
Showers drench—then the sun returns
Nothing lasts forever
Natural forces follow their own rhythms
We would do well to imitate them

Follow *Tao* and share its simplicity
One who lives in harmony with reality embodies *Tao* and lives a long life
One who seeks control and tries to interfere with nature becomes depleted

Trust the wisdom of nature
It is your guide to wholeness

Chapter 55

The person in harmony with the *Tao* has the vitality of a baby
Shielded against scorpions and wild beasts
Soft-boned and weak-muscled, but with a strong grip
Unaware of sexual union, he maintains an erection
She screams all day and never becomes hoarse
Such is the vitality of the natural
It is the expression of perfect harmony and the goal of life
Wasting energy leads to exhaustion
This is not *Tao*
Things in harmony with *Tao* endure
Separated from the natural vitality of *Tao* we throw away our *ch'i*

them stability. In human persons the earth element can give us a sense of balance and centeredness. It represents our connection with life, its cycles and harmonies, and reflects our ability to be at home in the world and within ourselves. When out of balance, the earth element may be manifested in a lack of nourishment—whether physical, emotional, or spiritual. If we neglect to rest our "soil," we may become depleted and even infertile. Constant summer would exhaust even the earth.

Chinese philosophy reminds us that we must nourish ourselves before we can expect to nurture anyone else. Carrying eighteen credits and working twenty-five hours a week may sound possible at the beginning of a semester, but there is very little time in a schedule like this for a quiet walk in the woods, sleeping in on Saturday morning, or listening to music while lying on the beach. Even human companionship may begin to seem like something we simply do not have time for any longer. When we feel depleted and exhausted, it's time to become grounded again.

Autumn evening it is no light thing being born a man.

ISSA

Autumn is the season of letting go, and the element of metal or air represents the breathing out that marks the end of the year and the onset of the time for rest. From the remains of each growing season, the earth makes its treasures. Diamonds and other gems are the hard-packed debris of the earth. Minerals and ores are other manifestations of the metal element. Just as the earth receives the remains of the harvest and honors its value, it is important for us to acknowledge our accomplishments before rushing on to do more.

In a life filled with doing, doing, doing, one project very often runs into the next, or many projects are underway simultaneously. There is no opportunity to savor a small success at work or celebrate a good grade on an exam because there remains a long list of things still waiting to be done. In Taoist terms, there is no emptiness and therefore no room to receive treasure.

The water element may be the easiest to recognize because the human body is 78 percent water. Saliva, perspiration, and tears all remind us that we are made of water. In its natural state, water flows freely, like a mountain stream rippling over its rocky bed. Because it is fluid, moving water bends easily around obstacles, occupying whatever space is available to it. And it always seeks the lowest level, pooling at rest in the depths.

Water can be as calm as a pond in the sunlight or as violent as a tidal wave. It can come as life-giving fluid to quench our thirst and irrigate our crops, or it can flood our houses and leave us afloat. Too little of it and we die; too little of it and the earth dies. Surprisingly, we find ourselves where we began—with Thales who theorized that water was the *archē,* or first substance from which everything else derived.

Water seems so—elemental—and we are so clearly dependent on it for survival. Although water yields to force and takes the shape of any container in which it is placed, when water freezes it can crack rocks and rupture concrete and macadam. Much of its power is hidden. In ourselves, Taoism says, water represents the not-yet formed, the pool from which ideas emerge. It has the power of unknowing and is filled with possibilities. Deciding too quickly on one solution may preclude you from seeing other, perhaps better ones. Water never confronts; it always yields, and yet it has the power to conquer.

The integrated person, the one who lives in harmony with the *Tao,* will be the one whose life shows a balance among the five elements. Each will be expressed as it is in nature—spontaneously, cyclicly, naturally—and none will be blocked or ignored.

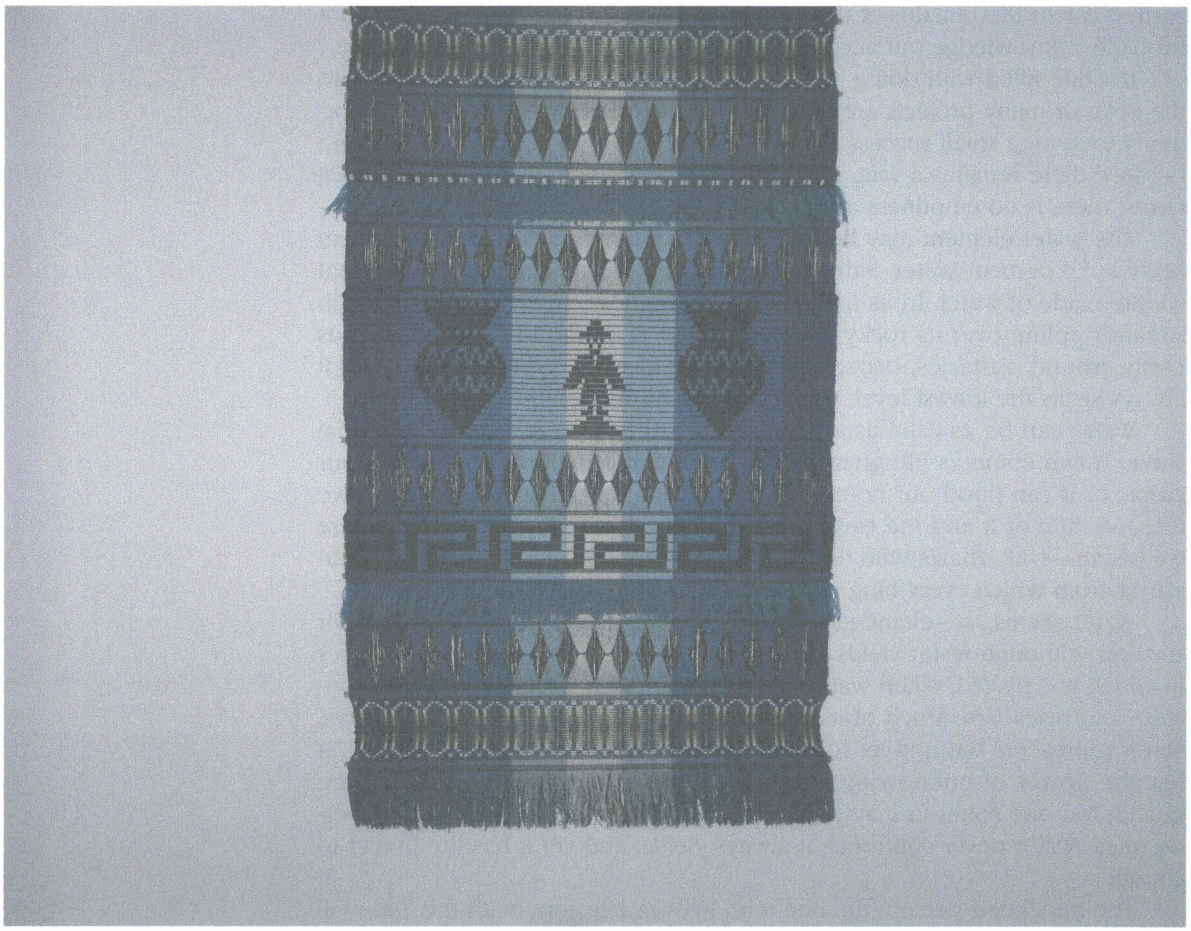
Nahua Three-Element Balance Model

Living a balanced life that honors one's own nature and the natural world is also the model of wholeness for the Mesoamerican Nahuas. As we saw in Chapter 1, earthly life is treacherous, and the human condition is one of navigating the jagged path of the slippery earth. Each person will begin life at a unique moment in the time-space pattern, noted by the timekeepers whose sacred task is to keep "society and humankind in balance with the cosmos."[67]

For the Nahuas, the history of the universe has unfolded through five ages or "suns," each representing "the temporary dominance of a different aspect of *teotl*." We are now living in the last of these ages, the "Age of the Fifth Sun." At the close of this era, the Earth will be destroyed by cataclysmic earthquakes and "humankind will vanish forever." Living on Earth, nevertheless, offers humans an opportunity to express their "full potential for well being," because only on Earth are the three vital forces that make up the human person fully integrated.

tonalli *in Nahua metaphysics, heat, the vital force that resides in the head and provides humans the vigor and vital energy needed for growth and development*

One's birth date determines her ***tonalli***: "a vital force having important consequences for her character and destiny" that links her with the cosmos. The root of *tonalli* is heat, and the Nahuas believe individuals acquire their



A human figure is placed amid diamond shapes symbolizing the cosmos and rests on repeating right angles that represent eternity in many cultures.

Ecuadorian wall hanging/Courtesy of and photo by Jason Mitchell.

tonalli from the Sun. *Tonalli,* which resides in the head, provides the vigor and vital energy needed for growth and development. And, it has the capacity to leave the body during dreams and shamanic journeys.

Teyolia, translated as "that which gives life to people," provides memory, emotion, knowledge, and wisdom. The Nahuas likened it to "divine fire." It resides in the heart and, unlike *tonalli,* cannot leave the body while the person remains alive. After death, one's *teyolia* "goes beyond and enjoys continuing existence in the world of the dead." The third element, ***ihiyotl***, means "breath, respiration." It resides in the liver and provides "passion, cupidity, bravery, hatred, love, and happiness."

teyolia *in Nahua metaphysics, that which gives life to people, the vital force that resides in the heart and provides humans with memory, emotion, knowledge, and wisdom*

ihiyotl *in Nahua metaphysics, breath or respiration, the vital force that resides in the liver and provides humans with passion, cupidity, bravery, hatred, love, and happiness*

Only during human life on Earth are these three forces fully commingled in a human person; after death, each goes its own way. Working in harmony, Professor Maffie explains, these three forces can produce "a mentally, physically, and morally pure, upright, whole, and balanced person." However, a disturbance in any one of the forces will affect the other two.

A person can be seen as the "living center and confluence of these three forces." They govern and direct our physiological and psychological processes and give each of us our "own unique character." Individuals do have free will, within the shaping forces and limitations of their own *tonalli*. A person born with favorable *tonalli* is not guaranteed a balanced and harmonious life; improper action can squander this birthright. And, conversely, a person born with unfavorable *tonalli* can neutralize its adverse effects by cultivating knowledge of the sacred calendar and through careful living.

As we will see again in the section on the African synthesis model (next), Nahuas believe humans are not meant to live solitary lives. Humans yearn for rootedness, and this is essential if one hopes to become an "upright man" and live a genuinely human life. We will all be tempted to give our hearts to what appears to be well-rooted and authentic but is not. Wandering from one illusion to the next, people can appear human, but they are only "lump[s] of flesh with two eyes."

We are born faceless—incomplete and lacking our full powers of judgment. And, we need the help of other humans to gain the education and discipline needed to acquire a "face and heart" and become a fully balanced human being. We cannot do it alone. Only in a well-ordered human community can we be nurtured and guided into realizing our full human nature.

African Synthesis Model

A similar ideal is revealed in the African model of a fully realized human person. As in the Chinese and Nahua models, reality in the larger world shows us the reality of human nature. The ideal model is life itself. As proverbs observe, "Life sows seeds" and "Life hatches things." So, to become a person one must, in a similar way, be creative. Achieving a creative personality and learning to maintain productive relationships are the marks of a person in the Akan culture of West Africa.[68]

A Tanzanian proverb puts it this way: "In the world all things are two and two" (Figure 3.3). In other words, everything is a fusion of opposites that form a unity while remaining separate. They are two; they become one; they remain two. In the West African country Benin, "***Mawu***, the female principle, is fertility, motherhood, life, creativity, gentleness, forgiveness, night, freshness, rest and joy, while ***Lisa***, the male principle, is power, warlikeness, death, strength, toughness, destructivity, day, heat, labor, and all hard things."[69]

Mawu *[MAH woo] the female principle in West African thought*

Lisa *[LEE sah] the male principle in West African thought*

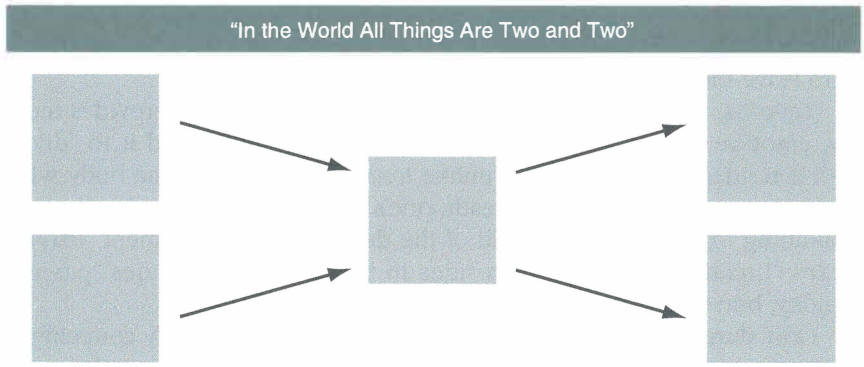


FIGURE 3.3 East African View of Reality *"In the world all things are two and two"—Tanzanian proverb.*

The descriptions of *Mawu* and *Lisa* bear a striking resemblance to the Chinese principles of *yin* and *yang*. The idea of a unity expressed as a duality occurs frequently in the non-Western world. The fundamental model of unity in duality and duality in unity found in African thought is the female-male polarity. Women in relation to men and men in relation to women express complementarity, tension, and balance; each represents otherness and together they model creativity.[70]

Sometimes the High God embodies the principle of female-male polarity. In Benin the supreme deity bears the name *Mawu-Lisa,* the embodiment of the two sexes. The Ga of Ghana call their High God a name that translates as Father Mother Sky God. The Akan of Ghana express this unity-in-duality by giving two-part personal names; one half is female, the other half male. An Akan child might be named *Dua-Agyeman,* which translates as "tree" (female principle) "warrior" (male principle).

African philosophers see in this synthesis model a striking contrast to modern Western theories that are rooted in conflict. Consider Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and Sigmund Freud's insights into psychology, both of which have significantly shaped Western views of human nature. Darwin's principle of the survival of the fittest assumes competition among species that results in the elimination of the weak and defines progress. Freud stressed the driving force of the libido, or sexual energy, and, later, the continual struggle between the life instinct and the death instinct. Thus, in Western models the basic image of the human person is that of an aggressive or predatory individual. African cultures, in contrast, depict humans as social beings. A person is seen as being born into a culture, into a social structure that is the source of his or her very being. We might say the community exists for the good of the individual and the individual exists for the good of the community. An individual outside a community is nothing.[71]

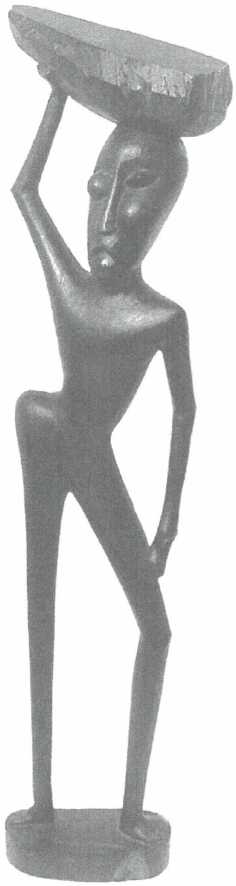
Among the Akan people of West Africa, becoming a responsible member of society is the true test of personhood—learning to harmonize one's own interests with those of the community, earning a reasonable living, showing a human sensitivity to the needs of others. Endowing every human person before birth with an *okra,* a particle of the divine being, God ensures that each will have dignity and intrinsic worth. Each *okra* receives an individual destiny to be fulfilled before going to Earth to be born of a human man and woman, and the *okra* survives death to become an ancestor.

At the same time, there are degrees of personhood, based on social responsibility. In an existentialist sense, full personhood must be earned. A person becomes a fully realized human being through the journey of a life well lived. This resembles Western existentialism. The difference is that the African model does not imagine a solitary, individual journey but, rather, a communal and social one. One learns to be a person under the guidance and with the support of a nurturing community.[72]

Female and male elements are equally essential in divinity and in humanity. An androgynous name that calls the child who bears it to the best in female and male nature offers an ideal of synthesis—of unity within duality. One illustration of a contrasting Western ideal is the custom of lighting two candles at a wedding ceremony—one to represent the bride, the other to represent the groom—using both candles to light a third—that represents their unity—then blowing out the original candles. Using this symbolism, the African synthesis model would insist that all three candles remain lighted.

Assumptions about the self often tell us something about how a given culture views the world and the place of human life within it. Western glorification of the individual has produced a legal system that lays great stress on protecting individual rights and a theological system that emphasizes the value of each individual, made in the image of God. Postmodernist preoccupation with a loss of meaning has shifted emphasis in the Western world from a solid, essential self to a more flexible and human-controlled protean or existential self.

Non-Western cultures have usually not taken the individual as the starting place for metaphysics. Reality is assumed to be interconnected and much too large to be understood or expressed in terms of the individual. Indeed, in Buddhism, the very idea of separateness and individuality is a mark of illusion. Taoist and African philosophies both paint a much more social picture of human life and emphasize balance and complementarity over competition and conflict.



This androgynous figure carves a woman from the block of wood on its head and then "morphs" into a male. Does this seem to tell the "truth" about our human origins?

Makonde "origins" figure/Courtesy of the African Art Museum of Maryland/ Photo by Quentin Kardos.

Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real, you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand.

MARGERY WILLIAMS, *THE VELVETEEN RABBIT*

What Are We Doing Here?

Non-Western Views

It is time to take up the second half of this chapter's inquiry by asking now how non-Western cultures view the purpose or meaning of human life. In African thought, because unity in duality as expressed in the female-male polarity is basic, the purpose of human life is creativity. The creative principle in humans often has a name linguistically related to the name for the high god, showing its importance. Expressing this creative power, by bringing forth children and by developing and maintaining creative relationships, is the purpose of human life. Someone who has achieved a creative individual life within productive, social relationships with others is said to have become a person.

In Taoist thought, the meaning of life is to be found in aligning oneself with the wisdom at the heart of nature. If nature is interdependent and if the cycle of *yin-yang/yang-yin* is basic to reality, humans would do well to recognize this. Because the same five elements are in the cosmos and in us, we may profitably look to nature to see their right use and free expression. The *Tao* directs the natural system and accomplishes every task with perfect,

effortless efficiency; we cannot hope to do better than this. If the elements of wood, fire, earth, metal or air, and water are out of balance in us, we need only look to the model of nature for our healing.

Buddhism understands the meaning of life as reaching enlightenment, that is, seeing what actually is. It is as if each of us is a sleeping or drunken person who needs only to awaken or sober up to see things as they really are. The delusion that most of us accept includes the fiction of a permanent, unchanging self. If we can see past apparent separateness to the interconnectedness that underlies everything, perhaps we can let go of our tiny egos and embrace the interdependence of all life.

Seeing accurately—that is, achieving enlightenment—means we need not be reborn. There is nothing left to learn; this is *nirvana*. While still in this world of illusion, the master or the enlightened one remains detached from it. Using an image of a charioteer taming unruly horses (which Plato also liked), the Buddha describes the master this way:

> He is the charioteer.
> He has tamed his horses,
> Pride and the senses.
> Even the gods admire him.
>
> Yielding like the earth,
> Joyous and clear like the lake,
> Still as the stone at the door,
> He is free from life and death.[73]

Western Views

Because the question of existence is asked differently in the West, there have been different answers given for the purpose of human life. Most Western thinkers would not be entirely comfortable with the Buddha's description of the master as free from life as well as from death. "Yielding like the earth, joyous and clear like the lake" is similarly too Taoist to appeal to believers in a uniquely human individual self.

An "I" without a body is a possibility. But a body without an "I" is utterly impossible.
EDITH STEIN

Rationalist and Religious Essentialism

Western essentialism—what we have called the avocado view—assumes the uniqueness of human nature. The Judaic and Christian traditions affirm a human sharing in the divine nature, and the Greek rationalist tradition exalts the power of human reason: the ability to step back, observe, and make sense of the world and of ourselves. Both traditions share a belief that humans have a separate and essential self that defines us and makes us who and what we are.

In contrast with non-Western views, Western essentialism takes for granted the existence of a permanent self that is unique to each individual. Some parts of the tradition assert that this self is immortal and will not die when the body dies. Plato, you recall, believed the soul exists both before and after its earthly life in another realm he called the Kingdom of Ideas, or the World of Forms. Christianity, too, is founded on a strong belief in life after death and the continuation of the individual soul.

The purpose of human life derives from assumptions about the self, and in the West the human person has been seen as the peak of creation, the highest expression of life. Plato and Aristotle agreed that humans, although

lower than the gods, were certainly superior to other animals; even a slave boy could use reason to master the principles of geometry. In Genesis the story of the Creation ended with God's final, crowning accomplishment: the fashioning of beings in God's image.

But questions arise. If we are distinguished by our ability to reason, what are we to say about the severely mentally disabled or those in comas? Are they somehow less than human because they lack the full capacity to reason? Even though that conclusion seems logically to follow, we shrink from this judgment.

If we have a soul, when does it enter the body? Following Aristotle's theories about *ensoulment,* the Western world declared, until the nineteenth century, that the male embryo received a soul about the fortieth day after conception, whereas the female embryo had to wait until about the eightieth day. The conclusion seemed to be that the soul—what makes us human—animates males sooner than it animates females. During the Middle Ages, theologians like Thomas Aquinas argued that the soul entered the body at the time of *quickening,* when the mother began to feel the baby moving. Abortion was less sinful if it occurred before the time of quickening because what was destroyed lacked a soul and was not therefore human.

If the purpose of life for the Greeks at the time of Plato and Aristotle was to become as rational as possible, the purpose of life in the Judaic, Christian, and Islamic traditions is to become as loving as possible. The commandments to love God and love neighbor are at the heart of the religious view of what it means to be a person in the West.

Postmodernism and the Loss of Meaning

Until the end of the Middle Ages, the Western view of what it means to be human remained pretty firmly in place. (Historical Interlude C, which precedes Chapter 5, considers the breakdown of what is called the medieval synthesis.) The Greeks had looked around them, at other animals, and at what they called their barbarian neighbors and had found themselves clearly superior. Christians believed that God so loved them he would send his only Son to die for their reconciliation and salvation. Human uniqueness was at the heart of basic assumptions made by both groups.

The first major blow to the conviction that human life had special meaning came with the mathematics of Copernicus who proved that the Sun, not Earth, was at the center of our solar system. When Copernicus convinced scientists (and eventually theologians) that Earth is one of several planets, rather than the center of a cosmic religious drama, the crisis of meaning began. Were there other cultures on other planets? Had God made similar arrangements with them? It was a bit like the feelings of the first child when a new sibling arrives.

During the nineteenth century, Darwin and Freud challenged humans' pride in themselves as rational beings. If we were evolutionarily descended from apes, as Darwin insisted, the case for human uniqueness became a little more difficult to make. Freud further eroded our confidence in our rationality by demonstrating the primitive urges he said actually determined our decisions. Seething with libido, drawn as strongly to the death principle as to the life principle, humans seemed suddenly rather more irrational than rational.

As the discipline of psychology matured, further theories were developed. In the twentieth century, B. F. Skinner introduced **behaviorism**, the

behaviorism *a psychological theory that focuses on objective or observed behavior, rather than on introspection or reflections about inner states*

theory that we are solely the product of our conditioning. We begin life, Skinner said, as organic machines, set up and ready to run. What we are is almost entirely the product of the rewards and punishments we receive. A baby, making random sounds, will one day accidentally say "Mama." At that point the most important person in the world, the meeter of all needs, will hug the baby, cover it with kisses, and speak reassuring words. The baby, behaviorism contends, will strive mightily to make this experience recur.

However, when the child grows older and tries out another four-letter word on the same mother, the result is likely to be quite different. Now, she may become angry or at least coldly distant. Although the child may learn not to use the word in mother's hearing, its use on the schoolbus may make the child a hero. Behaviorism thus asserts that positive and negative conditioning makes us who we are; we are nothing but the product of our experiences.

Perhaps as an antidote to this reduction of the human person to a kind of biological machine, writers such as psychologist James Hillman offer a humanist response to the question of human existence. In *The Soul's Code* Hillman argued that each of us is born with an innate character—the "daimon" that calls us to what we are meant to be. Notice that this is closer

HOW PHILOSOPHY WORKS • Inductive Reasoning

In Chapter 2 we began examining deductive logic by looking at the categorical syllogism developed by Aristotle. Deductive reasoning is the chief analytic tool of philosophy, and it is capable of leading to certain knowledge. Inductive reasoning, used in philosophy, is primarily the province of science and, because it deals with a changing world, yields only probable knowledge.

Scientists reason from particular sense observations to general laws. The basic laws of genetics, for instance, were developed by Gregor Mendel, a nineteenth-century monk, who repeatedly crossbred peas and noted which characteristics appeared in the next generation. If additional crossbreeding were to reveal different outcomes, the laws of heredity would be altered to reflect the new knowledge. Because we never know anything completely or fully and there is always the possibility that something new will show up, inductive reasoning is said to lead to probable knowledge.

Broad and comprehensive theories, such as Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and Sigmund Freud's theory of psychology, use inductive reasoning but also depend on intuition to arrive at a hypothesis. Darwin's theory of natural selection, for example, hypothesizes that the fittest in each generation survive and reproduce characteristics adapted for survival. Freud hypothesized about the role of the unconscious mind in directing human behavior. From their original observations, Darwin and Freud used a little creative imagination to develop a hypothesis, or theory, to explain what happens.

Once a hypothesis has been formulated, it must be one that is capable of being proved false. A valid scientific theory must survive repeated attempts to prove it wrong. When a theory remains valid after many attempts at proving it false, it is said to be reliable. No matter how reliable a theory is, however, and no matter how many times it is verified by experimental methods and observation, the possibility always exists that it may at some future date be proved false and made invalid.

For centuries, the Earth-centered theory appeared to synchronize with observations. Because the movement of the Sun seemed so obvious and because everyone took for granted the privileged place of Earth in Creation, other possibilities were rejected. Copernicus' theory of a Sun-centered solar system replaced the Earth-centered theory because his mathematical calculations were simpler and his theory better synchronized with observational data.

As we will see in Chapter 6, the scientific community tends to hold on to paradigms, such as the Earth-centered theory, even in the face of some conflicting evidence because a theory is whatever the scientific community agrees is true and everyone likes and needs a coherent explanation of reality. Revolutions in science, like the Sun-centered theory, occur when enough surprising results or data that do not match the theory are recorded.

to Socrates' notion of his own purpose for living than to a Jewish/Christian/Islamic sense of divine purpose. In his book, *The Force of Character,* Hillman provides a rethinking of old age. As we grow older, he insists, we become more ourselves—our true natures tend to emerge. Thus, our final years have an important purpose: the fulfillment and confirmation of our own character. Reclaiming "oldness" as an archetypal state of being, Hillman resurrects the valuable notion of the old person as ancestor—model for the young and bearer of societal memory and traditions. Maybe our human purpose is to grow into a conscious old age and share the wisdom we have acquired for the good of society.

Whether or not there is a clear purpose to human life seems to be an important question. Few of us are comfortable with the notion of total randomness, but the purpose of human life might be conceived in a wide spectrum of ways. If human life comes from God, for example, there may be reciprocal responsibilities: things that humans owe to God. If, at the other extreme, humans are more animal-like, driven by unconscious urges and conditioning, it is hard to see much purpose at work. The avocado view, which began this discussion of human nature, has suffered some serious challenges, so it is time to consider the issue of who we are in the light of

DOING PHILOSOPHY • Body/Mind/Bodymind

What are you? Are you fully explainable in terms of your body (the materialist position)? Or, are you fully explainable in terms of your mind (the idealist position)? Or, are you fully explainable only in terms of both your body and your mind (the dualist position)?

In Chapter 2 we looked briefly at both Hobbes's materialist philosophy—reality is matter in motion, and even what you call "mind" is material—and Plato's idealist philosophy—reality is the perfect Forms, and you are a psyche imprisoned in a body. Much of science, as well as the Anglo American tradition of Western philosophy, has been dominated by some version of materialism. In terms of this view, mind states are brain states. Even what you might think of as consciousness is nothing more than an epiphenomenon of brain activity (see Historical Interlude E for more on this topic). Echoes of Plato's idealism live on in those who perceive themselves as an "I," the subject of their own experiences, and who find inadequate the materialist explanation that artistic creativity, love, and hope are nothing more than the result of neurons firing in the brain.

Finding neither materialism nor idealism fully capable of explaining human nature, René Descartes (see Chapter 5) articulated a dualist position. Declaring reality to be composed of two basic substances—mind and matter—that were different in every way, Descartes found a way for science to experiment with matter, while leaving mind as the province of the powerful Christian Church. Unfortunately, Descartes died before a profound question arose, in the form of the so-called mind-body problem: If mind and matter are distinct in every way, how do they interact within us?

Candace B. Pert of the Georgetown University Medical Center in Washington, D.C., conducted pioneering research on how the chemicals inside our bodies form a dynamic information network, linking mind and body. As she told Bill Moyers on the PBS series *Healing and the Mind,* emotions seem to reside in both realms. We can speak about the molecules in the physical realm that produce our emotions, but there's another realm—aspects of the mind have qualities that seem to be outside of matter. People with multiple personalities sometimes have "extremely clear physical symptoms that vary with each personality." One personality is allergic to cats; another isn't. One personality knows how to make all the insulin it needs; the next is diabetic (Bill Moyers, *Healing and the Mind,* Doubleday, 1993, 1995, p. 182).

We speak informally of the power of mind over body, but Dr. Pert thinks it is more accurate to say that mind *becomes* body. "I see the process of communication we have demonstrated, the flow of information throughout the whole organism, as evidence that the body is the actual outward manifestation in physical space of the mind" (Candace B. Pert, *Molecules of Emotion,* Simon & Schuster, 1997, 1999). Bodymind captures this notion, that we are what we think and feel.

those challenges. To speak about human nature today is to touch on questions of identity and freedom. As we begin the twenty-first century, we have many more questions than we have answers.

Issues of Human Identity and Freedom

To what extent do racial and ethnic labels, as well as gender, shape how we think of ourselves? Is it even possible to ignore our physical characteristics, and, if it is, what difference would it make to be color- or gender-blind? Are these labels the source of prejudice and the basis of discrimination or the foundation for racial pride and ethnic solidarity, to say nothing of gender identity?

Race and Ethnicity: One Aspect of Identity

Race, what is that? Race is a competition, somebody winning and somebody losing... Blood doesn't run in races! Come on!
BEAH RICHARDS

Golf superstar Tiger Woods identifies himself as Cablinasian, a childhood attempt to acknowledge all the parts of his identity. Uncomfortable with being labeled the first black to win the Masters Tournament, Woods explained that he is one-half Asian—one-fourth Thai, one-fourth Chinese—one-fourth black, one-eighth white, and one-eighth Native American. Which category should he check on the census form? Would a "multiracial" category be more appropriate for the many like Woods who identify with more than one racial category?

Twin sisters arrive at Harvard having checked the same boxes on their college applications—Native American, African American, Irish, and Scottish. One immediately begins receiving correspondence from the Black Students Association, and the other is invited to meetings of the Native American Students Association. How can identical twins have different racial identities? How should we classify mixed-race children? Forcing a person, like Tiger Woods or the Harvard twins, into only one category forces them to deny others. A "multiracial" category might more accurately represent reality, but it also has the potential to decrease federal funding for programs and realign voting districts.[74]

Sociologist Orlando Patterson suggests that dropping racial classification altogether would be a step in the right direction because race is a social construction with no basis in fact. If we must categorize, Patterson sees ethnic choices as being both more accurate and more meaningful than racial ones:

> "Asian"... is at best a pan-ethnic term meant to include everyone from Filipino-Americans to Korean-Americans to Pacific Islanders. Having learned from the census form that a person is Japanese-American, Chinese-American or Pakistani-American, what useful information is gained by the additional data that he or she belongs to the "Asian" race? None whatsoever. The Asian category only reinforces and legitimizes the notion of race as a separate, meaningful entity.[75]

Light came to me when I realized that I did not have to consider any racial group as a whole. God made them duck by duck and that was the only way I could see them.
ZORA NEALE HURSTON

If a "white" person is no different biologically from a "black" person, Patterson observes, ethnic categorization has the advantage of not reinforcing racial tensions or prejudices.

Among those who identify themselves as "Hispanic," 6.7 percent also identify themselves as multiracial. Is "Hispanic" a meaningful category? What exactly does it represent? Nearly 10 percent of all Americans are foreign-born,

double the ratio of twenty-five years ago. Of black and Asian men, 12 percent are in interracial marriages, as are 25 percent of Asian women and 60 percent of Native Americans of both genders. Of white men, 4 percent have a spouse of a different race.[76] Does it make sense to continue using either racial or ethnic categorization? Whom does it help and whom does it harm? And how much of our human freedom is compromised by forcing us into racially or ethnically labeled boxes?

Questions of identity become even more complex when one is transplanted from one culture to another. Writing about the experience of emigrant Latinos, Denis Lynn Daly Heyck describes the challenge of trying to transplant some elements of one's native culture into new soil while developing some new reference points by which to define relationships with other people and the world. A clash in values is the likely result:

> The questions that all Latinos must ask as they seek signposts for identity often involve pitting traditional against modern values. The process of adaptation often involves juxtaposing a personalistic, religious, spiritual, integrated, hierarchical, communitarian, static view of the world and one's place in it to a worldview that is impersonal, secular, materialistic, fragmented, egalitarian, individualistic, and in constant flux.[77]

Questions of personal identity and values troubled Barack Hussein Obama, forty-fourth President of the United States, as he grew up in Hawaii and Indonesia, the son of a Kenyan father and an American mother from Kansas. His memoir, *Dreams from my Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance,*[78] chronicles the story of his quest.

Frequently the outsider, Obama observed as a college student: "The minority assimilated into the dominant culture, not the other way around. Only white culture could be neutral and objective. Only white culture could be nonracial, willing to adopt the occasional exotic into its ranks. Only white culture had individuals. And we, the half breeds and the college-degreed, take a survey of the situation and think to ourselves, Why should we get lumped in with the losers if we don't have to?"[79]

Ultimately, he acknowledged that many people are "locked into a world" they didn't create and concluded, "[m]y identity might begin with the fact of my race. But it didn't, it couldn't end there." On a side trip to Europe, he realized, "It wasn't that Europe wasn't beautiful...It just wasn't mine."[80] And, ironically, even in his father's village in Kenya, an old woman told him, "You don't look much like a Luo, but you have a kind face."[81]

Post-blackness sees blackness not as a dogmatic code worshiping at the altar of the hood and the struggle but as an open-source document, a trope with infinite possibilities.

TOURÉ

Still, Obama remembered a letter from his now-dead father that concluded: "The important thing is that you know your people, and also that you know where you belong."[82] And, the message from his mother, a true citizen of the world, had always been a similar one. As the first so-called "post-racial" president, Obama has made it clear that he now "owns" all the parts of his identity and heritage. At home in mosques, synagogues, and churches; saying goodbye to his dying white grandmother in Hawaii; visiting his half-brothers and sisters in Africa; meeting heads of state in Europe and Asia; candidate Obama visited every state in the continental United States. In 2009, he celebrated St. Patrick's Day with his Irish relatives and hosted the first ever Passover Seder in the White House.

Is it in everyone's best interest to emphasize our common humanity and downplay racial and ethnic differences, or are there discussions and debates we can have only from within existing camps? We will explore questions of

assimilation versus separatism much more fully in Chapter 9. Meanwhile, consider how large a role racial or ethnic identity plays in your own life.

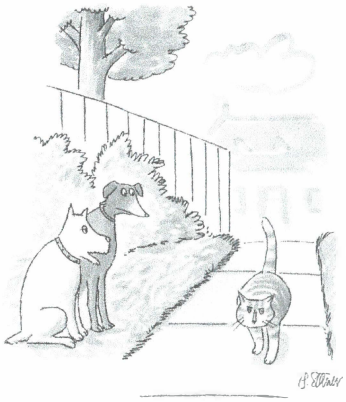
Biological Sex and Gender: Another Aspect of Identity

In Plato's dialogue *Symposium,* the participants debate the meaning of love. Aristophanes, the comic playwright, tells of a time when humans were all four-legged, four-armed, two-headed creatures who threatened the gods with our arrogance. To cut us down to size, Zeus, the head of the gods, sliced each creature in half so that now, the story goes, each of us is wandering the world in search of our missing other half. This, says Aristophanes, is the origin of and explanation for love.

In this myth some of the originally united creatures were what we might call opposite-sex unions and some were same-sex unions. Among upper-class Greek men of the time, sexual relationships might unite them with their cloistered wives in the home, for the purpose of having children, or with courtesans of either sex—an intellectual and cultured female hetaera or a beautiful and docile young boy—for the purpose of erotic pleasure. Clearly, their sense of gender identity existed in a different context than our own. Today, some of us believe erotic attractions are a matter of preference, whereas others of us insist such attractions are a matter of orientation and not something that can be controlled by willpower.

Who decides whether one or both of these expressions of our sexuality is an acceptable part of our human nature? And, what about other variations? If we begin with our genetic blueprints, we learn that, in addition to XX and XY, other known chromosomal types include XXX, YYY, XXY, XYY, and XO. Most of these combinations produce bodies that eventually develop one or the other set of secondary sex characteristics—beards or breasts—but not always. Some babies are born with ambiguous sexual organs and others with one incompletely formed set. As we now know, for the first six weeks of prenatal life, all fetuses appear "female." Regardless of genetic typing, if a fetus is to develop into what the hospital staff will identify as a "male" infant, it is essential that the mother's body produce a bath of androgens, the male sex hormones that make a penis out of a clitoris and move ovaries down to become testicles. If this does not occur, the result will be a person who is biologically male—XY in the chromosome department—but female in appearance. Such a person might have a different experience of gender identity than will someone, also genetically XY, who did receive the androgen bath.

In addition to the labels "homosexual" and "bisexual," there are now individuals who identify as "transgenders"—their identities literally cross the gender lines drawn so emphatically in Western culture. Some transgenders feel they are trapped in the wrong kind of body and undergo hormone therapy and even surgery to acquire a body that more closely resembles the image they have of themselves. Others keep the bodies they were born with but live a gender role that does not match their biological type. Alice Myers was playing lacrosse at Phillips Exeter Academy when she decided to apply to Harvard, her father's alma mater. On the way to Harvard, Alice realized some important things about her own identity. Living as a lesbian (because "it was the only community that let women be masculine"), she met people who had "transitioned" from one gender to another and realized



Are we talking about life style or orientation?

How much about us is "fixed," and how much is "plastic"?

Peter Steiner/The New Yorker Collection/ www.cartoonbank.com

that she was transgendered herself. Changing her name to Alex at 18, Myers was interviewed with his girlfriend at Harvard in 1997, where he had successfully lobbied to expand legal protections then available to gays, lesbians, and bisexuals to transgenders as well. "It's 100 percent wrong for me to be referred to as a woman," he says, "and it feels 60 percent wrong to be called a man. I wish there was a pronoun that easily described me."[83]

One question we might ask ourselves is: Who benefits from insisting that there are two and only two boxes available for gender identity and that everyone must fit into one of the two? Penalties for failing to conform to societal expectations regarding gender identity can be severe, as a spate of recent hate crimes has amply demonstrated. Some cultures have valued **androgyny**, blending the characteristics of both genders, as the route to artistic creativity and even a richer spirituality. Just as racial pigeonholing can type us and invite harmful stereotyping, insisting that gender identity be limited to two and only two possibilities may harm both individuals and the societies in which they live. Ethnic identity is fixed by our genes, but, as Tiger Woods has eloquently showed us, how we name ourselves to others and how we internalize our identity is up to us. A key question in the arena of gender identity is, of course, How much is fixed and how much is changeable?

androgyny *[an DRAH jin ee] the state of having all or some of the characteristics of both sexes/genders*

Innate or Plastic: One Question in the Free Will versus Determinism Debate

How much of our gender identity can be thought of as **plastic**—capable of being shaped into many forms, just as plastic can be when it is molten? Plastic surgery, which remolds human faces and bodies, can help us understand this meaning of the word *plastic*. Or are we the prisoners of our genes and our hormones—destined to appear and act in certain ways and to find one and only one group of people erotically attractive? To pose the question in the traditional way: How much of the way we are is the result of nature and how much the product of nurture? And, to complicate this dyad, how much about ourselves can be altered through the exercise of our human freedom?

plastic *capable of continuous changes in shape or form*

If we did not make such strong distinctions on the basis of gender, gender identity might not be as crucial an issue. But, because we do, it matters quite a bit whether I am perceived by myself and others to be a woman or a man. At various times in our history as a human species, we have insisted that women must do certain things and may not do others, whereas men are responsible for a different set of obligations and prohibitions. And, biological body type at birth has traditionally determined who gets the dolls and who gets the trucks. If my physical appearance does not match the way I feel about myself and my place in the world, who decides who and what I am? How much choice do I really have when it comes to my own gender identity?

Greek rationalist and Judaic and Christian religious traditions have all insisted that humans, as distinct from other animals and machines, have free will. In the Greek tradition, our freedom to choose is a product of our ability to think: The more aware we are, the freer we become. In the Judaic and Christian traditions, free will is both a gift from God and the source of moral responsibility. If we are made in the image of God, then God has expectations for us, and we are free to either obey or disobey God's commands—with eternal consequences, of course. In Chapter 10 we will examine the

issue of free will versus determinism much more thoroughly as we consider questions of personal moral responsibility. For now, consider this question: Is gender identity fixed by God or by an evolutionary mandate, and do we defy our assigned gender roles only at our own peril?

If you find yourself attracted to a member of your own gender in a society that forbids this attraction and calls it unnatural, are you free to conform to society's expectations for you, or is your sexual orientation fixed and beyond your control? If you find your gender identity does not match the body you were born with, can you exert your will and force a match? How much of who and what I think myself to be is determined, and to what extent am I free to remold myself? Can I be held responsible for the choices I make and fail to make, and, if so, by whom?

Summary

Whether or not we can accept a skillfully constructed android as human and how strongly we feel the need to emphasize differences between ourselves and other animals can tell us something about our own view of human nature. The West has traditionally affirmed the uniqueness of humans in contrast with both machines and other animals. Its view of human nature as being closer to an avocado than to an artichoke has shaped our culture and our ideas.

Although in Western culture reason is designated a human trait, the identification of men with rationality and women with emotionality has implied that women might not be as fully human as men. And, by weaving one creation story into our culture while ignoring another, the Western world has underlined women's derivative status as Adam's rib. During the fourth century, women like Macrina felt it necessary to philosophically defend the notion that women, too, are made in the image of God. Denying that the *pathe,* or passions, are part of the essential nature of the soul, Macrina was able to disassociate women both from exclusive identification with emotionality and from second-class theological status. Because the soul, in Macrina's view, is genderless, it is the same for women and men, both of whom are made in the image of God.

Sophisticated androids, like the fictional Data on *Star Trek: The Next Generation,* pass many existing tests of human personhood. Even computer programs created in the late twentieth century have been considered indistinguishable from people by their human users. As our technology grows ever more sophisticated, will we be able to create in a laboratory a creature that is indistinguishable from ourselves? If so, we will have two options: (1) deny the creature human nature because it lacks a soul, which only God can create, or (2) appreciate its rational qualities and welcome it to the human family.

Not everyone accepts this traditional Western view. Some suggest that human nature is like what we have called the artichoke view, layers surrounding an empty center. Forced to question any and all certainties—including that of an essential human nature—the postmodernist West has struggled to redefine human nature. If our identities are not fixed at birth, we have limitless possibilities to explore. We can put a positive "spin" on the artichoke view by affirming the flexibility of the protean self or the self-actualizing aspects of existentialism.

Buddhism includes the sense of a separate self—what we have called the avocado view of human nature—in the illusions one must give up on the way to enlightenment. Holding on to our illusions causes us suffering, and it keeps us tied to this world and forces us to endlessly repeat the cycle of birth-death-rebirth. By waking up and seeing things as they actually are, Buddhism tells us, we will realize that a temporary combination of *skandhas* does not make a self and cannot be expected to endure. This may loosen our unhealthy attachments to the objects of our desires who are, like us, *anatman*—lacking a core self. Losing our false sense of security in an ego self, we can realize our vastness and experience *nirvana*.

Chinese philosophy and medicine tell us that we are a microcosm of the cosmos. The elements we see in the world around us are also the elements that constitute our own human nature. We have met this microcosm-macrocosm view among the pre-Socratic cosmologists such as Anaximenes, who observed that air as breath keeps a person alive and air as wind keeps the world alive. In the Chinese view, we are, like nature, composed of earth, metal or air, water, wood, and fire. When they are in balance, we are healthy; when they are in disharmony, we become ill.

We come spinning out of nothingness—trailing dreams like dust.

RUMI

Unity within duality is the theme of the African synthesis model of human nature. Taking the female-male polarity as the fundamental one, we can see all of life as expressing this model of creativity, arising from resolvable tensions between complementary opposites. Naming the High God and human children with female-male combination names is a way of affirming that all things are two and can unite as one while still remaining two. Thus, women and men retain their individuality even while becoming one in creating new life. All people learn and experience their identity within a social context, so the idea of an individual choosing to live apart from society is unthinkable.

In the postmodern world we are left to wonder: How much (if anything) of who we are is the product of our racial or ethnic identity? As we seek our place within the world and the human family, should we emphasize what makes each of us unique or what we all have in common? Are we all the same, despite superficial differences, or is what distinguishes some of us from others part of our core identity? What must we hold on to and what is expendable as we seek our identity in a culture other than the one into which we or our parents were born?

The goal or purpose of human life may be creativity, as in African thought; harmony and balance, as in Chinese thought; or enlightenment, as in Buddhist thought. In these views, all that is seems part of a continuum of life. Because the Western world has insisted on an essential human nature, the meaning of life in the West is tied to an understanding of what it means to be human, as opposed to, say, a machine or a chimp. Blows to our collective psyche—from the Copernican revolution in science, which removed Earth from center stage in the cosmos; from evolution, which blurred our claims to unique status; and from psychology, which further questioned our rationality and our freedom—have led to a loss of meaning and something of a human identity crisis. We are still asking a basic question: Is there something unique about human nature?

As we have seen, here and in Chapter 2, whether or not the cosmos has meaning seems to matter a lot to us. If God determines human destiny and the destiny of the cosmos, we can relax, knowing that everything will turn out all right in the end. Without a divine meaning maker, however, we have

only ourselves to rely on, and the more we learn about human nature, the less confident we may be about the future.

Who we are and what we may be doing here is directly connected with whether or not there is a God. Indeed, how we approach many other far-reaching issues also hinges on this question. Issues concerning how we know and how we test for truth (Part Two of this text) will be influenced by whether or not we can count on a good God who will not deceive us. In Part Three, questions about how we should constitute a human society, who should rule, and how we should behave toward one another will be answered differently if we assume or deny the existence of God. Thus, it is time now to turn our attention to the fundamental philosophical questions concerning the nature and existence of God.

For Further Thought

1. Suppose you meet someone who might or might not be an android. What questions or tests would you use to decide if you were in the presence of a person or a machine?
2. Some have called our insistence on human uniqueness "species arrogance," and others suggest that animals besides ourselves might even have souls. Assuming there is a God, on what basis does God endow humans with souls? Could this basis be extended to other animals? Why, or why not?
3. If you were fooled by the Turing test, would you be willing to grant the status of "thinker" to the computer program that fooled you? Why, or why not?
4. Suppose you are despondent and depressed. You dial up a "hotline" on your computer and have an extended conversation with a counselor, after which you feel much better. Does it matter if you later learn you were conversing with the program PC Therapist III?
5. Imagine that biblical scholars find an ancient scroll revealing that woman was created first and gave birth to man and that previous versions had reflected translation errors. What effect might this revelation have on women and men?
6. If we agree with Plato and Aristotle that the more rational we are the more human we become, how can we avoid the conclusion that the less rational we are the less human we are? Are very young children, those with severe mental retardation, and Alzheimer's patients human? If so, on what do you base your defense?
7. As a society, have we sacrificed anything worthwhile by elevating reason, mistrusting emotion, and ignoring the body? If we have, what is it? What have we gained by doing this, and was the sacrifice worth the cost?
8. Does it matter, even to nonreligious people, if theologians decide woman is not made in the image of God? Why, or why not?
9. If we succeed in building a very sophisticated android who seems human in most ways, should that android have the same legal and social rights as we do? Why, or why not?
10. If a few hours of sensory deprivation cause us to lose our sense of having a permanent, indestructible "self," should we conclude that the "self" was an illusion? Does the fact that the sense of "self" returns after feedback begins again increase the credibility of the "self" or make it seem more fictional than ever? Explain.
11. Does the notion of having many selves to meet the varying conditions one encounters during a lifetime frighten and disorient you or fill you with the thrill of adventure? Explain.

12. Try this thought experiment: For one day, in your own mind at least, take complete responsibility for everything you do and every choice you make, including your emotional states. At the end of the day, record your feelings. Are you exhilarated or depressed? Explain.
13. Does the fact that many people have experienced a loss of the sense of self and a feeling of merging with something larger during meditation add credibility to the Buddhist theory of *anatman*? How would you decide which is the truer version of reality: the one experienced on the day-to-day level or the one available during meditation?
14. Some pre-Socratic cosmologists and practitioners of Chinese medicine agree that the human person is a microcosm, or smaller version, of the macrocosm that is the world. What lessons about living do you think it might be possible to learn from nature?
15. Democritus saw the value of empty space. If atoms exist and there is a void, motion is possible. What value could the empty space advocated by Eastern philosophies have in a person's life? What might be possible if there were empty space? What is impossible if there is none?
16. Most Western names are clearly masculine or feminine, and a popular song of some years ago explored the fate of "A Boy Named Sue." Try to imagine what your self-concept might be like if you and everyone you know were given a name that reflects both the female and male principles, as many African children are. Could this cause you to see yourself differently? If so, how?
17. Does it make a difference in your life here and now if you believe you have a soul that is immortal and so do other people? What difference does it make if you accept this belief and if you reject it?
18. Imagine that you conduct a radical philosophical experiment. When you move to a new town, you adopt the opposite gender: If you have been a boy, you become a girl; if you have been a girl, you become a boy. Try to imagine what that experience might be like and what you might learn from it.
19. What if your mother became your father or your father became your mother through transsexual surgery? Could you continue to accept loving parenting even if the external appearance of your parent changed? Assume that the personality and approach of your parent will not change, only his or her appearance and social role.
20. Try to decide to what extent you are the product of your conditioning and the prisoner of your subconscious urges and to what extent you are the master of your fate and the captain of your soul. On what basis will you make this decision?

For Further Exploration

A.I. (Artificial Intelligence) and *Bicentennial Man*. Both films explore the possibilities and limitations for robots who wish to become human.

Anna to the Infinite Power. This movie portrays a brilliant but troubled child who undergoes a scientific experiment, which is conducted without her knowledge or consent, to determine her identity.

Beauty and the Beast. The 1946 classic movie by Jean Cocteau and the 1990s remake both explore the dimensions of beauty and beast in all of us.

Being John Malkovich. This film raises intriguing questions about the nature of the self and the freedom of the will.

Bicentennial Man. As an android increasingly becomes a person, Andrew finds a mad scientist who replaces his mechanical parts with organic ones, trading cyber immortality for a limited human life.

Blade Runner. This movie traces the exploits of rebel androids in 2817 Los Angeles. Cyborgs, who are given a lifespan of only four years, yearn for more time, and develop a reverence for life that includes their oppressors.

Boys Don't Cry. This movie presents the challenges and ultimate costs of living a transgendered existence.

Charlie. Would it be worth the disappointment to have your mental powers raised, briefly, to extraordinary heights before being dropped slowly back to their below normal condition? This film is based on a story "Flowers for Algernon" by Daniel Keyes.

The Cider House Rules. In this film, an orphan learns that his search for a sense of self and a vocation to match his talents can be realized by responding to these imperatives: Go where you are wanted; go where you are needed; go where you belong.

The Crying Game. In this movie, an Irish Republican Army soldier looks up the girlfriend of a dead hostage, falls in love with her, and then finds she is socially female but anatomically male.

E.T. This movie makes us ask, Can an extraterrestrial become human?

Gattaca. This film explores the not-too-distant future. When a DNA test is the job interview, who would take their chances with genetics by having a "faith" child who might turn out to be fatally flawed?

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Rain Man. This movie tells the story of an autistic savant, gifted in some areas and dysfunctional in others. It asks, What does his life tell us about human nature?

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The Shawshank Redemption. This movie asks, Can a man unjustly imprisoned use the experience to create a new self for himself?

Short Circuit. In this movie, a sophisticated robot comes alive after being struck by lightning and learns the value of life from an animal lover.

Splash. This movie asks whether it is possible to love a mermaid who has the capacity to appear and act human most of the time.

The Talented Mr. Ripley. Is human identity so plastic that a clever con man can assume the identity of another without being exposed? Are we nothing more than the layers we acquire, the roles we play?

Terminator 2. This movie asks, Can a machine be a father figure to a lonely boy?

2001: A Space Odyssey. What happens when an IBM computer drops each letter back one space, becomes HAL, and takes over?

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Philosophy and Ultimate Reality

4

IS THERE AN ULTIMATE REALITY?

BEFORE YOU READ . . . Ask yourself how important (or unimportant) belief in a personal God is to your concept of human nature and your understanding of the cosmos.

People everywhere wonder about ultimate reality. In Asia, the question might be, Have you reached enlightenment? Do you understand the interconnectedness of all things? Or, are you living your life in harmony with the *Tao*? So, in much of the world, the question of ultimate reality has nothing to do with God. The web of interconnectedness and interrelatedness of Buddhism and the powerful yet impersonal *Tao* are examples of nontheistic examples of ultimate reality. Even in the parts of Africa where people have accepted Christianity or Islam, one might be asked, Have you honored the ancestors? The chain of reality would extend backward through one's parents' parents' parents and beyond, as well as forward through one's children's children's children and beyond. Perhaps, the community of those living on this plane of existence, flanked by those who have lived before or will live in the future might constitute the ultimate reality. Certainly, the currently living community would figure prominently.

In the West, questions of ultimate reality center around the existence or nonexistence and nature of God. However, some Western investigations into the nature of ultimate reality discover a nontheistic, or at least a nontraditional deity. Although much of this chapter will explore Western theism, keep in mind that the question of ultimate reality is much broader in world philosophy. We begin with the search for ultimate reality, using reason, including what sort of reality is knowable in this way. Next, we move to the search for ultimate reality, using intuition, including what sort of reality is knowable in this way. Finally, we examine the search for ultimate reality that moves beyond anthropomorphic images, images that see the ultimate as a superior version of the human person.

Mythos and *logos* are scholarly terms that describe ways of thinking used to approach ultimate reality. *Mythos* looks back to the origins of life and into the deepest levels of the human mind. In the quest for meaning,

mythos directs our attention to the eternal and the universal. Its method is intuitive, not rational, and historical events are seen as "manifestations of constant, timeless realities." *Logos* is rational, pragmatic, scientific thought, offering practical understanding that enables people to function well in the world. Facts, logic, and correspondence with external realities are essential. *Logos* looks ahead in search of something new. It does not offer insight into tragedy or answer questions about the ultimate value and meaning of human life.

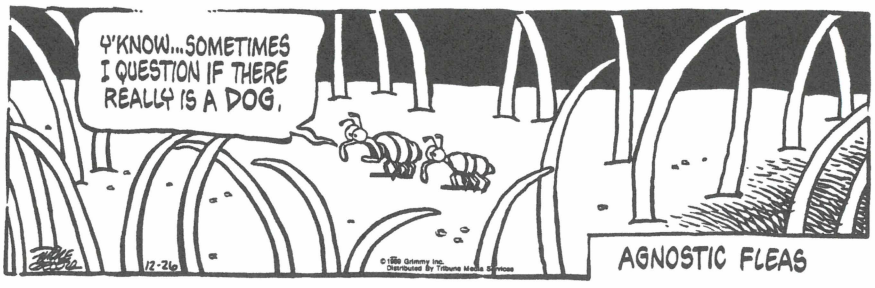
In the premodern world, *mythos* and *logos* were "regarded as complementary ways of arriving at truth, and each had its special area of competence." It was clearly understood that *mythos* would be useless as the basis of pragmatic policy. *Logos* would be equally powerless in dealing with sorrow and pain. With the success of science and technology, many in Western Europe and North America began to think that *logos* offered the only path to truth. *Mythos* was dismissed as false, even superstitious, because it could not pass the rigorous tests of science and logic. This chapter will consider paths to Ultimate Reality laid out by both *logos* and *mythos*, as we explore Seeking an Ultimate Reality using Reason and Seeking an Ultimate Reality using Intuition.[1]

I want to know how god created the world. I am not interested in this or that phenomenon, in the spectrum of this or that element; I want to know his thoughts; the rest are details.

ALBERT EINSTEIN

Western philosophers take the question of the existence or nonexistence of God seriously because it is so intimately connected with the other questions of metaphysics. If there is a God who is in charge of the universe, then we must see reality itself, as well as human nature, in a divine context. On the other hand, if we are the most powerful beings in the cosmos, we are responsible for what happens to us and to our world. "If only God would send me a sign!" Woody Allen once observed, "like making a large deposit in my name in a Swiss bank." How can we determine whether or not there is a God? Can you imagine, as Woody Allen did, what kind of evidence it would take to convince you? Notice that this question places the question of ultimate reality within the realm of logos.

In the song "Terrible Lie," Trent Reznor of Nine Inch Nails blames God for his anger and loneliness as well as for the sad state of the world. Is the idea of God a "terrible lie" that teases us but ultimately provides no answers? If things go wrong in our lives, are we being punished by a higher power or just having bad luck? Which is easier to bear? If we believe the "promises and lies," are we deluded fools? Or is God trying to help us figure out how to live our lives—trying as all parents do with both love and discipline? Do we, like Reznor, "need someone to hold on to," and, more to the point, is there anyone out there to fill the bill?



What could move these fleas to theism or atheism?

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Suppose that, instead of a personal deity, you conceived of ultimate reality impersonally. "The *Tao* that can be spoken," warns the first chapter of the *Tao Te Ching,* "has already lost its wholeness." Even words can stand between us and the all-at-once, intuitive understanding of the ultimate offered by mythos. Theists are sometimes surprised that many cultures do not speak about a creator or even the creation of the world. The Chinese mythos describes Pan Ku whose body becomes the cosmos; and a similar story is told in Hinduism, in which the body of Purusha, the cosmic human, engenders the world and symbolically delivers the four castes. In a Seneca myth, a narrator from the Stone Tribe describes successive emanations from the Field of Plenty spun by Swenio. And, Japan's sacred texts describe only the creation of the "beautiful islands of Japan"—made from brine that drips from the sword held by Izanami and Izanagi.

The Issue Defined

Philosophers in the West have offered three answers to the ultimate reality question: (1) there is a God, (2) there is no God, and (3) the answer to this question is unknown and may be unknowable. The assertion that there is a single, rather than multiple, deity is called **theism**, from the Greek word *theos,* meaning "God." The contrary assertion, that there is no God, is called **atheism** (the prefix *a-* means "not" or "without"). Finally, the position that we do not, and perhaps cannot, know the answer to this question is called **agnosticism**, from combining the negative *a* with the Greek word *gnosis* meaning "knowledge." Both theism and atheism are positions that require philosophical defense—arguments stating why there is or is not a God—but agnosticism claims that, because human knowing may not be capable of answering this question definitively, it must remain open. Language analysts, whom we will consider in Chapter 5, assert that the propositions "God exists" and "God does not exist" are equally meaningless because there is no possible way they can be verified.

theism *the conception of God as a unitary being*

atheism *the denial of theism, usually on the basis that everything can be explained without God*

agnosticism *the philosophical position that whether God exists or not is unknown and may be unknowable*

The nineteenth-century American philosopher William James, who is best known as a pragmatist, believed passionately that agnosticism was just not a useful position to take. For James, the decision to believe or not to believe in God is too important for fence straddling. He called the choice a "live, forced, momentous option." The choice is "live" because both the decision to believe and the decision not to believe are *real* choices for you. Deciding whether or not to believe in Santa Claus may no longer be a "live" choice for you, but it may remain a "live" option for your younger siblings or children.

The decision about belief in God is also a "forced" choice in the same way that the decision about getting a haircut this week is *not* a "forced" choice. Choosing to have faith or not to have faith in a higher power is for James a decision you must make because your decision will probably affect the way you live your life. Finally, this is a "momentous" option; the stakes are potentially very high. If there is a God in whom you choose not to believe, there may be consequences. Of course, if there is no God, it really does not matter whether you believe in God or not.

Pascal's wager *the advice to wager and live your life as if God exists, in case God does*

The seventeenth-century mathematician Blaise Pascal proposed that we consider whether or not to believe in God as we would consider any wager. The problem highlighted by **Pascal's wager** is a simple one: Either there is a

Table 4.1 Pascal's Wager *Believing in God seems to be the safer wager.*

PASCAL'S WAGER		
	I Choose to Believe	**I Choose Not to Believe**
There Is a God	Infinite gain (eternal life)	Infinite loss (eternal suffering)
There Is No God	Finite loss (give up a few pleasures)	Finite gain (being right—after death)

God or there is not. Your choices are also simple: Believe or do not believe. There are four possible outcomes (Table 4.1). If there is a God and you choose belief, the reward may be eternal life. If God exists and you choose not to believe, you risk unpleasant eternal consequences. If there is no God and you live as if there were, you may give up a few selfish pleasures. If there is no God and you correctly withhold your belief, you will have the satisfaction of being right—after you are dead, of course. For Pascal, the wager is obvious; in three of the four possibilities, you are better served by acting as if there were a God—just in case. There is little to lose and much to gain:

> Let us then examine this point, and let us say: "Either God is or he is not." But to which view shall we be inclined? Reason cannot decide this question. Infinite chaos separates us. At the far end of this infinite distance a coin is being spun which will come down heads or tails. How will you wager? Reason cannot make you choose either, reason cannot prove either wrong...Let us weigh up the gain and loss involved in calling heads that God exists. Let us assess the two cases: if you win you win everything, if you lose you lose nothing. Do not hesitate then; wager he does exist.[2]

Wagering that God exists might raise other issues for you. God may expect things of you and hold you accountable for living your life in a certain way. If there is a God, life has an eternal dimension, lasting longer than your own life and longer even than the life of the cosmos. If there is no God, we will find the answers to the significant metaphysical questions here in the natural world. We, not God, are the ones in charge.

Not everyone agrees with Pascal, of course. Atheists, for instance, assert that everything can be accounted for without bringing God into the explanation. Although deists and pantheists believe in God, the God they acknowledge makes no demands upon believers apart from intellectual assent. Only panentheism and especially traditional monotheism—belief in one, personal God—raise serious philosophical questions for believers. For James, the decision to believe or not to believe in a theistic God is a live, forced, momentous option. Consequently, most of this chapter explores possible routes to knowledge of God and various qualities that have been attributed to God.

Atheism

What we need is not the will to believe but the wish to find out.
BERTRAND RUSSELL

Arguments in support of atheism generally have their basis in scientific materialism. Our current scientific explanation of the origin of the universe, the big bang theory, postulates a huge explosion many billions of years ago that set the galaxies in motion and created the conditions out of which life could arise. Charles Darwin's theory of the origin of the species postulates a gradual

evolution of life from lower to higher forms. Although it is possible to see the hand of God in both the big bang and evolution, it is also quite possible to argue, as atheists do, that God is an unnecessary and unverifiable hypothesis. Insisting on the application of the empirical method of observation and verification through experiment, atheists find no "proof" for any supernatural entities and reject them as they would reject any unsupported hypothesis. Commitment to empiricism focuses their attention on the natural world.

Deism

It is actually possible to believe in God in a way that has no more effect on your life than being a Republican or a Democrat might, if you think of belief in God as merely a matter of intellectual assent. Many French and American thinkers during the late eighteenth century were attracted to **deism**—from *deus,* the Latin word for "God." Determined to make religion compatible with a scientific understanding of nature, they rejected most of Christianity, including the idea of revelation (divinely inspired words such as those found in the Bible), miracles, original sin, clerical authority, and the divine nature of Jesus. What seemed reasonable to retain was belief in God as Creator of what science was discovering to be an incredibly efficient, mechanical universe. Once God had set the machine in motion, however, there was no further need for intervention. Deists regarded Jesus as an effective moral teacher and believed the best way to serve God was to treat one's fellow humans justly.

deism *the belief that an impersonal, mechanical genius began the world and has since left it alone*

Some of the founders of the American republic were deists, and the God evoked in phrases such as "In God We Trust" is the distant First Cause of the mechanical universe, which had recently been described by Isaac Newton. It is certainly true that these men believed in God, but the God they believed in was no longer actively involved with the world or with human beings. Believing or not believing in the God of deism is probably not a live, forced, momentous option for most people in the Western world in the twenty-first century.

Pantheism and Panentheism

Another fairly neutral position to take is called **pantheism** (literally, "all God"). Pantheism received its classic formulation in the *Ethics* of the seventeenth-century philosopher Baruch (Benedictus) Spinoza who argued that "Besides God, there is no substance, nor can any be conceived."[3]

pantheism *the belief that God is fully expressed in nature or the material world*

Spinoza's conclusion is that "whatever is, is in God, and nothing can either be or be conceived without God."[4] If the universe is a unity, it would be correct to name it either God or Nature. Pantheism literally claims that God is everything and everything is God. Some philosophers assert that God and the universe are identical. If God is one with nature and its processes, then God is in the storm, in the gentle breeze, in the ice and snow, and not apart from those things. Another way of saying this is to call God **immanent**, or totally expressed in nature.

immanent *indwelling within a process, as God is described as indwelling in creation*

Like deism, pantheism describes a God who is not intimately connected with human life. If you are a pantheist, nothing much is expected of you apart from a kind of intellectual assent. On the other hand, a pantheistic God does not offer any answers to the significant questions of human life. In addition to immanent, God can also be described as **transcendent** (literally, to "climb over"). The transcendent aspect of God is revealed in the voice

transcendent *existing beyond and thus independent of the space-time world*

giving the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai or in the burning bush that continues to flame without being consumed. To be transcendent is to be wholly other, awesome, and powerful.

We have called Spinoza a pantheist, but he also insists that God has an infinite number of attributes, of which only two (thought and extension) are known directly in the natural world. What Spinoza's pantheism points toward is a modern variation called **panentheism**, meaning "all in God," that tries to strike a balance between extreme immanence and extreme transcendence. According to panentheism, God has both a timeless, unchanging nature (is transcendent) and a historical, changing nature (is immanent in this world). God is expressed temporally in nature, but all nature and everything that is exists within a transcendent God. So, God is large enough to reconcile an apparent contradiction. God is both expressed in the world and existing beyond the world, both immanent and transcendent.

panentheism *the belief that God is expressed in the world and that the world and all that is exists in God*

According to twentieth-century philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, reality is a dynamic process in which God both affects and is conditioned by events in the temporal world. Referred to as *process philosophy* or *theology,* this view suggests that events in this world, transformed by the love and wisdom of God, exert a reciprocal influence on God. In the ongoing interchange, God is part of the process but not contained or limited by it. As Whitehead puts it,

> I have envisioned a union of Plato's God with the God of the universe... God is *in* the world or nowhere, creating continually in us and around us. This creative principle is everywhere, in animate and so-called inanimate matter... But this creation is a continuing process, and "the process is itself the actuality" since no sooner do you arrive than you start on a fresh journey. Insofar as man participates in this creative process does he partake of the divine, of God...[5]

To go to Rome—great the effort,
little the gain;
You will not find there the King
you seek, unless you bring Him
with you.
NINTH-CENTURY IRISH POEM

God ever geometrizes.
PLATO

Professor Timothy Conway asserts that in the mature panentheistic view "God alone *is*. God plays all the parts in the phenomenal drama of existence"—the Jewish families going off to concentration camps and the Nazis sending them to their deaths. "All are guises of the one God... So many possibilities—and not just human, but also animal, plant, fungal, bacterial..." In this nondual view, every experience is shared. "God is here, finding out what it's like to be 'you.'"[6]

I said to the almond tree, "Speak to me of God" and the almond tree blossomed.
NIKOS KAZANTZAKIS

As we saw in Spinoza's philosophy, pantheism asserts that God is expressed in the world. What Whitehead adds is a constant cycle of interaction—a feedback loop—between the world and God in which everything is seen as in the divine nature. Panentheism is a twentieth-century attempt to merge pantheism with more traditional theism. We'll take another look at panentheism later in this chapter.

Theism

Theism refers to belief in a personal God who created the world and who continues to be connected with its processes and with us. The choice that James described involves, as we have said, belief in this kind of God rather than in the absentee landlord of deism or the impersonal force of pantheism. Theism describes the God of the Judaic and Christian traditions who is the source and creator of the natural world as well as its loving protector. The God of theism, like the God described in Whitehead's process theology,

loves us and expects love in return. To believe in a theistic God requires much more than mere intellectual assent—it requires the commitment of one's life.

A theistic God makes demands on people and offers rewards, including the possibility of eternal life. There is an implied relationship between this God and human beings. If a theistic God is in charge, then we are in "good hands," as the insurance commercial suggests. We also have significant obligations to respond in a loving manner to this God and to our fellow human beings. When we address philosophical questions related to the nature of God, we mean this kind of God.

theology *the rational organization of religious beliefs into a logical system*

We need to distinguish between philosophy and theology. Literally, "the study of God," **theology** usually refers to religious beliefs. Although philosophy and theology cover similar topics and issues, a fundamental epistemological difference exists between them. Theology accepts certain things, like the existence of God, on the basis of *faith*. Usually, faith derives from revelation (divinely inspired words) or the authority of a church or religious leader. Philosophy insists that the proposition "God exists" is just like the proposition "the world exists" and that both must be examined and defended using ordinary methods of analysis. When we speak of theism, we will be examining it from a philosophical, rather than a theological, point of view.

monotheism *belief in one God*

polytheism *the belief in many gods*

To be a theist in Western culture is to practice **monotheism**, or belief in one God. There have, of course, been many cultures in the past and there are some in the present that practice **polytheism**, or belief in many gods. Indeed, as we have seen, the Greek culture into which Thales introduced his philosophical ideas was a polytheistic one.

Trinity *the Christian doctrine asserting that God is three persons in one nature*

Historically, what distinguished the Jews from their sometimes polytheistic neighbors was their strong belief in one God. Retaining the monotheism of their Jewish roots, Christians nonetheless insist that the God they worship is three-in-one. The concept of the **Trinity** asserts that God is three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—in one nature. All three persons of the Trinity—God the Creator; Jesus the Savior; and the Holy Spirit, or Sanctifier—share the same nature and so retain their ontological unity. The Greek word used in the Nicene Creed to describe this unity is *homoousios* meaning "one in being." Historical Interlude B reviews some of the difficulties involved with defining a Trinitarian monotheism in a way that preserves the oneness or unity of God.

Seeking an Ultimate Reality Using Reason

Traditionally, evidence for an ultimate reality has been based on either reason or intuition. Western theism has favored reason as a way to establish the existence of God apart from sacred texts or the authority of institutions. Intuition has been favored by both Western and non-Western thinkers, and what intuition discovers ranges from God, to a dynamic, impersonal reality, to a vision of interconnected simultaneity. We begin with Western theism and the path of reason.

Knowledge of Ultimate Reality Based on Reason

Some theists have tried to demonstrate the independent existence of God philosophically, using reason, the power of the human mind. Theologians have sometimes joined philosophers in attempting to establish that

Table 4.2 Natural Theology *These three arguments demonstrate the existence of God using only human reason—not faith or revelation.*

GOD MUST EXIST BECAUSE...		
Ontological Argument	**Cosmological Argument**	**Teleological Argument**
A perfect being, whom I can imagine, must possess *all* perfections, including the perfection of existence.	There must be • An unmoved mover. • An uncaused cause. • A necessary being. • A standard of perfection. • A source of order and purpose.	The universe is so skillfully and intricately made that there must be a universe maker—just as the existence of a watch argues for a watchmaker.

God exists without relying on faith. Called **natural theology**, this process focuses on a natural way of understanding God using human reason instead of a supernatural way using revelation or the revealed word of God as found in the Bible or the Qur'an.

In this section we look at three of the natural theology proofs (Table 4.2) for the existence of God and some objections that have been raised to them. The arguments will use ontology, cosmology, and teleology—three concepts we have already begun to explore.

natural theology *the pursuit of knowledge of God, using natural intelligence rather than supernatural revelation*

ontological argument *a logical argument for the existence of God, based on the nature of thought, developed by Anselm and used by Descartes*

Reasoning Ontologically

The **ontological argument**, developed by a priest named Anselm in the eleventh century, depends on an understanding of *ontology,* the study of being or the essence of things. Anselm reasoned that if he could imagine a perfect God (which he called "that than which nothing greater can be conceived"), then that perfect God must exist, for to lack existence would be to cease being perfect. If the perfect God Anselm conceived in his mind did not exist in reality, then it would be possible for something or someone else to be greater, something or someone that did exist:

> Therefore, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, exists in the understanding alone, the very being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, is one, than which a greater can be conceived. But obviously this is impossible. Hence, there is no doubt that there exists a being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and in reality.[7]

Anselm thus argues that it is in the nature or being of God to exist. To be God, according to Anselm, is to be what philosophers call a necessary being—one who must exist and always will exist. Humans are contingent beings, and there is no logical contradiction in thinking of ourselves as not existing, but God is different. Anselm's conclusion is that a perfect being cannot be conceived not to exist.

Anselm believed he had found a proof, based on reason alone, that would convince the doubter that God, an absolutely necessary being, must exist. Critics have pointed out, however, that Anselm seems to be defining God into existence. If existence were a property like other properties we might attribute to God, such as goodness or power, then Anselm's argument would prove that a perfect being must indeed have all those properties, including existence. But is existence such a property? Or does existence instead describe something about the relationship this perfect being has with the world?

THE MAKING *of a* PHILOSOPHER

Anselm of Canterbury
(1033–1109)

Born in Aosta (northwestern Italy), Anselm spent time as a Benedictine monk in Bec (Norman France) and finished his career as Archbishop of Canterbury in England. These were the years before the division of Europe into nation-states, and the Western world was unified under the name Christendom. All Christians, especially those who spoke and read Latin, were in a sense citizens of one state. Anselm is often called the father of scholastic philosophy, which is so named because those who later practiced it were scholars, professors at universities. Scholastic philosophy is characterized by its rational approach to Christianity, and Anselm was the first of many who would contend that with faith all the truths of religion could be rationally proved. He wrote his ontological proof for the existence of God on his knees—in gratitude to God for showing him a way to rationally prove God's existence.

Another way of phrasing Anselm's argument is to say: If there is a perfect being, then that perfect being must exhibit all perfections, including existence. Immanuel Kant, whose ideas on knowledge we will consider in the next chapter, points out that to say "If there is a perfect being, then that perfect being exists" is not the same thing as saying "A perfect being exists." We might agree that if birds exist they will have wings, but this says nothing about whether there *are* any birds.

Properties like wingedness belong to birds, and properties like transcendence and immanence may belong to God; however, just as there may not be any birds, there may not be a perfect being. It does not contradict the laws of logic to say that there is no perfect being. Kant argues that we do not really add anything to a concept of God by positing existence. What we do is to assert a relationship of existence between God and the world. Existence is not a quality—as goodness is, for example—and thus it constitutes a separate question.

This argument retains its liveliness even in the twenty-first century. Modern proponents of the ontological argument object that critics like Kant attack and refute their own, weaker versions of the argument rather than the argument itself. For example, the contemporary philosopher Charles Hartshorne asserts that if we examine the proposition "A perfect being exists," we will discover that it is both logically possible for contingent beings like ourselves to know the truth of this proposition and logically impossible for contingent beings like ourselves to know its falsity.

A perfect mind can know its own existence, and an imperfect mind can know the existence of a perfect mind; it is a logical contradiction, however, to assert that an imperfect mind could know the nonexistence of a perfect mind. Hartshorne's conclusion is that the "logical possibility of knowing the truth of a proposition, coupled with the logical impossibility of knowing its falsity, is one of the clearest implications of 'necessary truth.'"[8] In his view a perfect being cannot be conceived not to exist, and we must therefore take Anselm's argument seriously.

cosmological argument
an argument for the existence of God, based on the contingent nature of the physical world, developed by Aristotle and popularized in the Middle Ages by Aquinas

THE MAKING *of a* PHILOSOPHER

Thomas Aquinas
(1225–1274)

As the son of a noble Italian family, young Thomas had to overcome strong family resistance to become a priest. When he was finally allowed to go to the University of Paris, he studied with the famous Dominican theology professor Albertus Magnus. As an overweight student who remained very quiet in class, Thomas was called the "dumb ox" by his classmates. His professor knew better and told the class, "The bellows of this dumb ox will awaken all of Christendom." Thomas taught theology for twenty-five years, most of them at the University of Paris. He also wrote massive works of theology of which the *Summa Theologica* may be the best known. In all, he wrote sixty books, dictating them to secretaries (sometimes to four secretaries at once, since he could think faster than they could write) before he had a mystical experience. After that, he never wrote another word and died at the age of forty-nine.

Reasoning Cosmologically

The **cosmological arguments** for the existence of God (from the Greek *cosmos,* or "world") had their first important formulation in the Western world at the hand of the medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas, who used rationalist arguments developed by Aristotle and derived from the world. Aquinas offers five cosmological proofs, each based on some observed phenomenon, in his thirteenth-century *Summa Theologica*. The first three follow a similar line of reasoning—from motion to first mover, from effects to first efficient cause, from contingent beings (for whom nonexistence is always a possibility) to a necessary being. By looking at one, we can consider the pattern common to all three before considering the fourth and fifth.

In the first proof, Aquinas observes motion and reasons that whatever is moved must be moved by another. A chain of motion exists between objects we observe moving now and the beginning of the chain of motion in the distant past. The chain is not infinite because if it were there would be no beginning to motion and thus no motion at all. "Therefore," Aquinas concluded, "it is necessary to arrive at a first mover which is moved by no other."

Although Aristotle had ended the argument at this point, Aquinas concluded his argument by adding, "And this everyone understands to be God."[9] Critics have questioned this connection. Why not stop with a first mover, as

Aristotle did? Why is a first mover necessarily identical with God? A more serious objection is that if the basis of the argument is correct and "whatever is moved must be moved by another," why exempt God from this requirement?

The second and third proofs follow this pattern. Nothing, Aquinas argues, can be the efficient cause of itself (otherwise, it would have to exist prior to itself and that is impossible), and there must be a necessary being (otherwise, there would have been a time when nothing existed and nothing would now be in existence). Like the first mover, the first efficient cause and the necessary being are for Aquinas the one "all men speak of as God."[10]

The fourth proof is based on degrees of perfection:

> A thing is said to be hotter according as it more nearly resembles that which is hottest. There is then something which is truest, something best, something noblest... Now the maximum in any genus is the cause of all in that genus; as fire, which is the maximum of heat, is the cause of all hot things... Therefore there must also be something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection. And this we call God.[11]

In the final proof, Aquinas argues from design or purpose. Observing that natural bodies that lack knowledge nevertheless nearly always act to obtain the best result for themselves, he concludes that they achieve this end "because they are directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence, as the arrow is directed by the archer." The intelligent being who directs natural bodies with order and purpose is again, Aquinas asserts, "this being we call God."[12]

Reasoning Teleologically

This **teleological argument** (from the Greek *telos,* meaning "end" or "purpose"), which was originated by Thomas Aquinas, was further developed in 1802 by theologian William Paley. The order and purpose apparent everywhere, according to Paley, require an orderer, a designer who fashioned the whole mechanism and set it working. As the teleological or design argument is sometimes rendered, if you came upon a watch lying on the ground and wondered about its origins, you would look around for the existence of a watchmaker rather than assume that the watch just came into being by itself.

teleological argument
an argument for the existence of God, based on the design, order, and apparent purpose of the universe; developed by Aquinas and attacked by Hume

Because the universe is so skillfully wrought, this argument goes, we can see the hand of the designer in its perfection. Even something so basic as the cycle by which water is purified through evaporation and returns to Earth as life-giving rain illustrates the forethought of an efficient planner.

The eighteenth-century empiricist philosopher David Hume took on arguments of this type in his three-part *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion.* If we are to argue from the evidence of the world, Hume says, we must be sure we argue no further than the evidence can reasonably take us. A character in the dialogues, Philo, who speaks for Hume, questions attributing infinity to the Deity because "the cause ought only to be proportioned to the effect" and the world is clearly finite. Even more doubtful is the attribute of perfection, if we use the world as evidence.

> If we survey a ship, what an exalted idea must we form of the ingenuity of the carpenter who framed so complicated, useful, and beautiful a machine? And what surprise must we feel when we find him a stupid mechanic who imitated others... Many worlds might have been botched

> and bungled, throughout an eternity, ere this system was struck out... In a word, Cleanthes, a man who follows your hypothesis is able, perhaps, to assert or conjecture that the universe sometime arose from something like design; but beyond that position he cannot ascertain one single circumstance... The world, for aught he knows... is the work only of some dependent, inferior deity, and is the object of derision to his superiors...[13]

Rationalist arguments, for all their apparent persuasiveness, have had their share of critics, and to many they seem flawed. As we have seen, the developers of these rationalist proofs for the existence of God were all clergymen and at least two were theologians. They already believed in God and were using these arguments to convince others. Probably they would have gladly agreed with Anselm's declaration: "I believe in order that I might understand." Although believers find rationalist proofs for the existence of God comforting, skeptics rarely find their way to belief in God through logic. If one is to believe in a theistic God, then, must it be through "blind faith" or Pascal's wager?