CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: HOW ARE WE TO DO ETHICS?

The fundamental task of any culture is to produce persons who are capable of carrying out the necessary tasks for that culture to survive and believe in itself. The crucial ingredient in this productive process is a set of values that tell the members of that culture what kind of humans they ought to be and how they ought to live and act. For most people in most cultures over the course of human existence, these values are so embedded in the fabric of social life that they go unquestioned. They are as normal a part of existence as the change of the seasons and the contours of the landscape. But at some crucial moments in the history of a culture, the regnant values become not just a matter to be lived out but a matter for inquiry. This is the moment in which ethics is born.

In our culture, it was the Greeks who first raised the question of how we as human beings ought to live. The answer they gave to it was so incredibly powerful that it has shaped the process by which our culture has produced individuals for two and a half millennia; that shaping has transformed not only the West but the entire world. The formation of this answer was the work of such thinkers as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, the Epicureans, and the Stoics. They differed in the details they gave to the ideal (and the details are important, for sure); but they all agreed on the basic structure of what constitutes excellence in human living. Although the answer they gave went through important permutations and transformations in succeeding historical epochs, its basic thematic structure remained intact until the creation of the modern world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was then that social, economic, and ideational forces destroyed the Greek ideal[1] and left our culture without a firm vision of excellence that we ought, as humans, to achieve. We still produce persons according to the old ideal, but can no longer justify or fully believe in the ideal. It is the loss of this ideal that lies behind the contemporary crisis of values, and overcoming this loss is the major task we ethicists must now accomplish.

The ideal of human excellence, of how we humans should live if we wish to live well, that the Greeks invented can be simply stated: to live well is to live ethically. What "the moment of ethics" produced in Greece was the commitment to remain in this state of self-conscious awareness of values, not to just accept what the social order demanded but to continually attempt to live according to values that had a deeper, more fundamental source of justification than the more or less arbitrary values of one's particular community. Socrates' dialectical inquiries undermined old norms, and the philosophic schools of the fourth century B.C. searched for a new, more abiding basis for value.

The quest to live ethically—to live according to values that one has determined to be right—necessarily brings with it the values of individualism and critical inquiry. While the Greek ethic demanded that persons be members of a community in order to live ethically, this living in community is far different from the kind of living in community done by people who do not question the primary values of their cultures. To be ethical, individuals must question the relations they have to their cultures, achieve distance from them, examine the ground of values, and then determine what the proper relation to the community ought to be. Above all others, Socrates gave birth to and exemplifies ethical life. Not only did he invent a powerful method by which he could question traditional value claims, but also had as his mission making his fellow Athenians question the culture's values, too, a mission he would not give up even in the face of being put to death for it.

For us this ideal of being an individual critically searching for values beyond those in the immediate culture may sound trite, but in the fifth century B.C. it was a vision of a new form of human existence, a new way of organizing the psyche and relating to one's culture. It was a path out of the devastating forms of human existence that led to the destruction of Greece in the Peloponnesian Wars. In those preethical forms of life people either were tied to social roles and acted from the value structures of those roles[2] or, as Athenian drama portrayed, were driven by overwhelming emotions, desires, and psychic forces. In neither case were people in control of their lives: they were ruled by their social circumstances or a flux of violent, impersonal psychic forces. Socrates witnessed great heroes destroyed by immense emotional and divine forces on the dramatic stage; he constantly heard of the power of fortune (*tuche*)[3] controlling human destiny, and lived through the defeat of Athens and its Periclean ideals. He realized that as long as humans had psyches that could be pulled this way and that by the emotions and social pressures of the moment, and so long as societies were in a constant state of social turmoil due to conflict between competing factions (*stasis*), there was little hope of human happiness.

In contrast, ethical life is a life of self-mastery, a life in which individuals are able to rule themselves and to live in a community of like-minded people. The philosophers found a new ground for human action, one that was neither socially nor subjectively determined—grounds that always caused conflict between societies or individuals. This new foundation for activity was a universal and objective truth that could be apprehended by a power of reason freed from social prejudice and raised to a position of dominance within the psyche.[4] Just as the sculptor of the great west pediment of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia carved an unperturbed Apollo standing above the chaos of the battle between the centaurs and Lapiths, guaranteeing a positive outcome, so the Greek philosophers created the vision of a power of reason that could know the final verities of the world and overcome the powerful conflicting forces raging inside the psyche.

It is the merger of the individual with the universal that allows the individual to critique any particular social order, overcome the power of momentary desires, give life meaning, and achieve autonomy in a way that is harmonious with all humans achieving a like autonomy. (Although, as we shall soon see, the idea of ethical life occurring in a particular community with particular values must be balanced against the universal. This is the Greek world, not the Enlightenment.) However, the path to such a state of self-mastery is arduous. How are we to achieve self-mastery? How can we come to live ethically?

The key to attaining an ethical life for the Greeks was the proper arrangement of the psyche.[5] Without the correct organization of the capacities and powers of the psyche, ethical life is simply impossible. Hence, ethics requires a moral psychology that understands the crucial parts of the psyche and how optimally to arrange them. The optimal structuring of the psyche for the Greeks was governed by five fundamental principles.

First, the many parts of the psyche must achieve a harmonious unity such that all parts work for the good of the whole person over the course of a lifetime. Fragmentation or multiplicity in the psyche is an evil, for it causes disruption and conflict, enervates the psyche, and leads the psyche away from its final good.

Second, such a unity can be achieved only if reason is capable of attaining wisdom and directing the rest of the psyche. Emotions and desires, being bent only on their own immediate gratification, always fragment a person unless they are controlled by the power of reason; for reason is the sole capacity we have that can gain a vision of who we are as whole human beings living from the past into an indefinite future. However, our capacities to reason cannot function unless we attain knowledge. (Acting on reason based on ignorance is no better than being driven by social forces or emotions). Hence, part of ethical life must be the attainment of wisdom concerning what human beings are and what they ought to be. It follows that ethical life is also a life that involves the pursuit of philosophic and scientific wisdom.

Third, developing the power of reason is not sufficient for becoming ethical, for reason could still be overwhelmed by other forces. It is necessary that reason achieve a place of dominance in a psyche that is hierarchically organized. As Plato says, "the soul of a man within him has a better part and a worse part, and the expression self-mastery means the control of the worse by the naturally better part."[6] Hierarchy is present not only in the psyche but in every aspect of existence. For instance, in Aristotle's universe, the Unmoved Mover rules the heavens, the heavens rule earthly activity, masters rule slaves, men rule women, parents rule children, reason rules the psyche, and the psyche rules the body. It is crucial in understanding Greek ethics to see how the concepts of unity and hierarchy become merged so that one cannot be thought without the other. One of the purposes of this book is to separate the concepts and show how unity is possible without a hierarchical ordering of the elements in a system.

Fourth, the hierarchical organization of the psyche can be achieved only if we develop proper character traits, the virtues. The Greeks knew that reason alone could not accomplish the task of directing activity. For this, one needed virtues. The Greek concept of virtue (*arete*) is quite different from the one we have received from Victorian Christianity.[7] A virtue is that which enables anything to perform its function well, where the function might be a social role or whatever a thing or species alone can do or whatever it best can do. Hence, the virtue of a knife is sharpness, and the virtue of an eye is sight. For us to know what are our virtues as human beings (rather than our virtues as flute players or ship pilots), we must know what our human function is. Aristotle states it as follows:

> For just as the goodness and performance of a flute player, a sculptor, or any kind of expert, and generally of anyone who fulfills some function or performs some action, are thought to reside in his proper function, so the goodness and performance of man would seem to reside in whatever is his proper function. What can his function possibly be? Simply living? He shares that even with the plants, but we are now looking for something peculiar to man. . . . Next in line there is a life of sense perception. But this, too, man has in common with the horse, the ox, and every animal. There remains then an active life of the rational element.[8]

Here is not only the framework for the development of a theory of virtues, but also the justification for why reason is to organize the psyche. It is our natural function to become rational, and when we use our rational capacities fully, we reap happiness. What allows us to develop our reasoning capacities in both practical and theoretical affairs are the virtues. The moral virtues for Aristotle are those character traits that neither suppress the desires and emotions nor let them overwhelm us. They are character traits that give practical reason material on which to operate and the state of mind to deliberate well over what to do. It is always the mean or the moderate disposition that gives these possibilities; hence, moral virtues are defined as the mean. For instance, in reaction to the emotion of fear that arises in dangerous situations, we can either repress the emotion and face whatever is threatening us, however dangerous (rashness); be overwhelmed by the emotion whenever it occurs, and flee (cowardice); or develop the trait of courage, which lets us experience the emotion, deliberate about the possibilities, and then choose the best course of action. The character traits of rashness and cowardice do not let reason direct the psyche, for they are obsessive and allow no variability of response. It is the virtues that give us flexibility and allow our rational capacities to direct our activities in all human affairs.

While the moral virtues direct practical life, the intellectual virtues allow theoretical reason to attain its end: knowledge of the final principles (*archai*) by which nature works. This knowledge is crucial not because it gives the possibility of a technological mastery over nature, as it did for the Enlightenment philosophers and scientists, but because such knowledge joins us with these final principles and overcomes our insufficiencies as mortal human beings. When we contemplate these final verities, we become like the gods. "[T]he activity of the divinity which surpasses all others in bliss must be a contemplative activity, and the human activity which is most closely akin to it is, therefore, most conducive to happiness."[9]

The fifth great principle for attaining the proper organization of the psyche is community, for the virtues can develop only if we live in communities that instill them, and the power of reason can develop best in enlightened educational systems. A community is a set of people webbed together through friendships and a shared ideal of what is good. Unlike contemporary Western society, which assumes that humans are in a fundamental competition with one another for scarce resources, the Greeks found that self-fulfillment could occur only in a social environment in which the actualization of one's individual good provided good for the community and vice versa.[10]

The community is also responsible for fostering language, and it is crucial for the ascendance of reason in the psyche that the proper language be spoken. This is the language of philosophy. Whenever Socrates encountered an ethical claim couched in ordinary language (as illustrated in the *Meno*) or was given a poetic rendering of life (as by Agathon in the *Symposium*), he countered with a philosophical discourse that rendered the previous speech impotent. Plato censured the poets, and Aristotle claimed that philosophic wisdom had a higher place than productive (artistic) knowledge. It is little wonder that Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, and the Stoics all founded schools—communities in which a philosophic ideal of ethical life could be achieved in both language and human relations.

The proper organization of the community mirrored that of the psyche. The community would be healthy—unified and free of factional disputes and disruptions—only when the rational element in society gained a hierarchical ascendancy, be this in the form of a few philosopher kings or many citizens making themselves wiser by sharing their truths with one another in assembly.

The ideal is now complete: Humans live well and achieve happiness when they organize their psyches according to the principles of unity, reason, hierarchy, virtue, and community. When reason rules the psyche, rational humans govern the state, and our knowledge reveals ultimate principles of nature, then we achieve a kind of perfect self-mastery. This self-mastery is the zenith of ethical life and defines what it means to live well as a human being. In this state we no longer are buffeted by the vagaries of fortune, emotion, and social faction. We are unified in ourselves, unified with others, and at one with nature in knowledge. This is the great ideal that launched Western culture on its journey to ascendancy in the world, and one that still informs how we create human beings today.

When we negatively reinforce inconsistent, nonintegrated behavior, we see the old principle of unity at work. Whenever we ask a child, "What is your favorite color [friend, flavor, activity, toy, etc.]?" we are teaching ranking, which is the primary process for organizing the psyche hierarchically. At the top of the hierarchy is still reason, as is evidenced by the two decades of education we demand of persons entering the middle and upper classes, virtually none of it having to do with the training and deepening of the emotions. Finally, we develop moderate character traits (virtues) to curb emotional outbursts and delay gratifications. We then take all that we have personally developed to the socioeconomic world, where in work we use it for both our own and other people's welfare. We are ideal human beings when we are consistent, able to rank priorities, guide our lives with reason, control our desires, and engage in productive social intercourse.

Thus, the ideal appears to be intact. But it is not. What occurs is the empty reproduction of the old ideal; there is little life or belief left in it, because every major value of the ideal has been challenged or discredited in the past two hundred years. That is, we keep producing members of the upper classes of the culture in the old way that has brought the West so much success, but there is a certain feeling of deadness to the process, a deep doubt that this really is the way human beings should be formed. This, I think, is what lies behind the contemporary crisis of values. We do not believe fully in the kind of human beings we are creating.

The first values of the Greek ideal to be severely challenged by the modern world were those of community and virtue. Although Alasdair MacIntyre[11] attributes the demise of virtue ethics and moral communities to the misguided Enlightenment project of discovering universal moral laws, history tells us that the ethics of particular moral traditions partially failed because people in such traditions could not peaceably resolve their disputes with one another when their religious and moral values differed. During the Reformation and early Enlightenment, countless religious communities entered into some of the bloodiest and most disruptive conflicts seen in Europe. Virtuous men and women supporting the values of their communities attempted to annihilate virtuous men and women of communities based on other values. Virtues and values tied to particular communities of belief were found to be ultimately destructive, and the Enlightenment philosophers sought to discover a universal moral law available to all rational humans regardless of community, just as Newton had discovered universal laws of motion that governed a serenely ordered nature.

It was not just their unresolvable disputes and the search for a universal morality that destroyed communities with strongly held traditions and virtues, for they might have sustained those positions if they could retain some isolation from the rest of the world. But with the coming of age of capitalism, this was no longer possible. With the approach of a universal economics, small communities with contained traditions and virtues uncontaminated by society at large had to disappear in favor of an ethic that, in Kant's words, would be true for any rational being anywhere in the universe.

But this hope for a rational ethics soon failed. Kant and Hume conclusively demonstrated that reason cannot know final metaphysical verities, although Kant thought it could objectively construct universal moral laws. Subsequent ethical theory demonstrated that no such absolutely valid laws can be proved. With Darwin, reason lost its aura as the faculty that distinguished humans from the beasts, the faculty that allowed them to rise above nature and be close to the divinities. Reason is for us what the claw is for the tiger; it is no more grand than that. We are inherently part of the animal realm and have no special *telos*, no final good for the species other than the good that informs all species: survival and reproduction. And as if more were needed, Nietzsche then unmasked reason for its manipulations and pretenses. He showed how reason, rather than controlling the psyche, was the pawn of a stronger impersonal force, the will to power. More important, he raised the question of whether a rationally directed psyche was capable of living as richly and deeply as a psyche not so organized. Reason was seen not only as impotent, but as life negating.

Other voices joined in the chorus condemning reason. Hume, Kant, Darwin, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, and the pragmatists did their work well. We can no longer believe that reason can penetrate to the ultimate verities of the world, especially verities that can ground moral life. Reason is at best a pragmatic tool for the organization of life and the exploitation of nature for human purposes.

Nietzsche, Sartre, Foucault, and Derrida also took issue with the values of unity and consistency, showing how such values limit the intensity of life and are liable to make us intolerant when we find values outside the ones that govern our unity. Freedom and life are intrinsically tied to multiplicity, not unity. To have a clear, unchanging set of values that give a fully closed unity is, in Nietzsche's terms, to be dead; in the words of more politically oriented thinkers, it is to be inherently biased to one's particular way of life and intolerant of other races, other classes, other cultures, and women.

Finally, feminism and minority movements have revealed to us the sins that hierarchy has perpetrated on those who were not allowed to be at the top of the system. If hierarchy demands that some rule others and take precedence over them, then we can expect in hierarchical systems large numbers of persons and things cast into dependence and secondary status. In the West these have typically been minorities, women, lower classes, and emotions and desires.

Many of these critiques of the Greek ideal coalesced in the work of Sigmund Freud. The Greek ideal had assumed that all the parts of the psyche were available to consciousness and could be harnessed by reason. Freud discovered that the psyche has unconscious processes that are not ordinarily accessible to conscious awareness and are not rationally controllable. Indeed, he found just the opposite—that the unconscious processes are so powerful they can manipulate reason to do their bidding without reason's even suspecting it. As Freud so poignantly says: with Copernicus we discovered we are not at the center of the universe, with Darwin we learned that we do not have a special place in the order of nature, and with himself we discover that we are not even masters of our own psyches. We can further say that the Greek ideal of rational dominance within the psyche not only failed to unify the psyche but helped drive many emotions and conflicts underground, increasing the bifurcation between conscious and unconscious experience. When only rational elements are allowed into conscious life, then what is unacceptable to reason must be banished to the dark hinterlands of the psyche. These unacceptable elements (such as oedipal desires, rage against one's parents, and narcissistic strivings) do not die but wage successful guerilla warfare against the citadel of rational consciousness.

Despite brilliant attempts by some of our finest contemporary ethicists to reinstate at least a part of the Greek ideal,[12] the above criticisms are a Rubicon that cannot be crossed. The belief that reason can know and ground itself in objective universal values metaphysically embodied in the universe is dead. The belief that we have a natural human *telos* that if realized will constitute excellence is dead. The belief that the locus of moral life is a small community of like-minded people is dead. The belief that reason can completely organize and direct the psyche is dead. The belief in the glory of hierarchical systems is dead. In sum, the Greek ideal, at least in its pure form, is dead.

For some, including myself, the death of this ideal has been freeing. Reason-dominated, hierarchical persons with their highly controlled emotions stifled life, limited creativity, crushed those with opposing values, exploited nature, and drove their psyches into dissembling self-relations. Yet those who now praise multiplicity, irrationality, and anarchy fail to remember the horrors of the Peloponnesian Wars and portrayals of tragic heroes. A return to these values brings only the same results: a world and psyche torn by factions.

We cannot reinstate the old ideal, but neither can we live in the absence of any unifying ideal. A new ideal needs to be developed, but on what grounds? The importation of ideals from other cultures (Native American, Asian, etc.) can seem forced and artificial. Rather, we must first turn to our own traditions, to the ashes of the consummated Greek ideal, to see if there can arise some truths unscathed by modern critiques, truths that can be a foundation for a new ideal of human excellence. Four such truths appear:

1. Happiness is only possible when we succeed in realizing an ideal of human excellence (hence, every ethic needs a theory of human excellence).

2. An ideal of human excellence must be grounded in an understanding of who we are as biologically and socially constituted human beings (hence, every ethic must have a theory of human nature).

3. Character traits are the chief determinants of action (hence, no ethic can be adequate without a theory of virtue).

4. The proper organization of the psyche is the *sine qua non* for being able to live well as a human being and act ethically (hence, every adequate ethic must have a moral psychology).

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1. Both Plato and Aristotle realized that there was a fundamental distinction between pleasure and happiness, and that the peculiar human state of happiness is the proper end for which humans should live.[13] Happiness, unlike pleasure, occurs only when we realize in our concrete existence an ideal of human excellence. That is, we are happy when we know we are living as we ought to. What this means is that if we have no ideal of excellence, we cannot be fully happy, regardless of what we do, for there will not be a sense of realizing an ideal. Hence, we cannot be satisfied with not replacing the Greek ideal, for without an ideal like it we are limited in our possibilities for experiencing happiness.

Unfortunately, the major schools of ethics that have developed since the demise of the Greek ideal—Kantianism, utilitarianism, Marxism, and existentialism—either do not raise the question of excellence or explicitly deny the possibility of defining it. Kant can tell us what a right act is and that we should perform right acts, but this leaves out most of the experiences of life. By Kant's criteria we are ethical only in situations where we might lie, steal, harm another human being, and so on. Kant himself states that there is no necessary relation between following moral laws and being happy; this is a position directly counter to that of Aristotle, in which the realization of ethical excellence in all areas of human life results in happiness, except under dire circumstances.

The utilitarians fare no better in helping us, for knowing that we are to maximize pleasure over pain does not give us a model for excellence. Do Socrates, Christ, and Gandhi weigh how their acts will give more or less pleasure? How silly. That the utilitarians confused pleasure with happiness was evident when John Stuart Mill admitted that some pleasures are "higher" than others. If they are, the criterion for their excellence cannot be pleasure itself, and, hence, we must go beyond utilitarianism if we are to discover what gives happiness in human living.

Marx emphasizes community over the achievement of individual excellence, and existentialists deny there is any achievement that would constitute a fitting end for human development. For Sartre, living authentically means giving up the belief that there is a final ideal to be achieved.

If contemporary ethical theories do not give us an ideal of excellence and the Greek ideal is dead, how are we to determine what constitutes human excellence? My answer to this question brings us to the second truth I wish to retain from Greek thought.

2. We can understand what it means to live well as a human being only when we understand what it means to be a biologically and socially constituted human being. The only way to know how to live well as human beings is to know who we most basically are as humans and what we most basically need. (This will be discussed in chapters 2 and 5). Excellence has always been tied to some form of realization-of-our-basic-nature ethic. Without a theory of what our basic nature is, there can be no ideal of what we as humans should become.

Yet the prevailing wisdom is that there is no such thing as a determinate human nature. The onslaught against theories of human nature has come from a number of different sources, sources that on other matters are diametrically opposed to one another but on the matter of there not being a human nature stand in agreement: Darwinism, existentialism, cultural anthropology, and behavioral psychology. With Darwin we find that there is no peculiar human nature; what activates us at the deepest level of motivation is the same as what motivates all living beings: survival and reproduction. There is nothing distinct about human nature. Cultural anthropology and behavioral psychology both hold that there is no human nature beyond Darwinian drives; that we come to be who we are as humans through cultural forces or conditioning events. Our nature is a virtual *tabula rasa*; it can be molded in almost any way.

Perhaps as a reaction against such biological and environmental determinisms, existentialists such as Nietzsche and Sartre propose that we have an ontologically prior freedom that can never be relinquished by any particular determination. No matter what we become—a middle-class businesswoman or a Kurd tribesman, we are free to choose to be other than we are. In Sartre's famous words, our "existence precedes our essence." But for us, the result is the same as the social and biological determinisms: there is no basic human nature.

These four powerful schools of thought have all but driven the question of human nature from contemporary thinking. But can we do without a theory of human nature, a theory that specifies what our basic needs are and what constitutes a proper functioning of ourselves as human beings? We have already determined that without such a theory we cannot have an ideal of human excellence. But the lack of a theory of human nature also prevents us from constructing just the opposite of a theory of excellence, namely, a theory of psychological pathology.

If we conceive of human nature as being only a social construction, then optimal functioning can be defined only in relation to social norms, and, hence, must be equated with "normal functioning," a term which at best is vague and at worst repressive of all deviant forms of behavior. If optimal functioning is equated with normal functioning, then neurosis ("diseased" human functioning) must include such abnormal actions as those of geniuses, heroes, rebels, and eccentrics of all stripes. Sometimes, not being normal is a sign of fundamental health rather than neurosis, for the normality of a whole culture can be diseased, as in Nazi Germany. If the goal of psychotherapy is merely to produce human beings who can fit into the normal scheme of things, then it is a conservative institution, serving the reigning interests of the day. In order for psychotherapy to be more than this, it must have a theory of human nature that allows it to define both optimal and nonoptimal states without reference to present accepted modes of social behavior.

Just as we measure the health of an organ by whether it is performing its "task" or "work" in a proper way, so we need to know the "task" of the psyche in order to measure its health. What is the work of the psyche? I cannot conceive of any way to answer this question other than by positing a set of basic needs the psyche must fulfill. We can say a pathological condition exists when a person is chronically unable to meet a certain need or needs, and that excellence is attained when all the needs are being met. We can further say that a society is diseased if it systematically prevents all of its members, or a certain class of its members, from satisfying one or several of the basic needs.

What happens if we hold that there are no basic needs beyond the Darwinian ones? Suppose we find an adult unable to enter into any kind of close friendship, existing on the borders of the social world without any significant interaction with it, and having minimally developed cognitive and emotional faculties. This person is not interested in any kind of adventures or explorations, has little appreciation of cultural or natural beauty, and is more or less incapable of independent action. However, because of independent wealth, this adult is able to survive quite well with days filled with the pleasures of good food, baths, and passive entertainment along with a mild alcoholic euphoria. And, because of an aggressive sexuality fragmented off from other parts of the psyche, this person is able to place more than an average amount of genes in the next generation (with the children raised by adoptive parents).

Most everyone, from psychotherapists to ordinary observers, would, I hope, evaluate the condition of this person as pathological. But why? How can we say that anything has gone wrong with human development here unless we say that we have basic needs for such ends as intimacy, sociality, adventure, and autonomy, and that our emotional and cognitive faculties must work well in order for these needs to be satisfied? If all that motivates us are the Darwinian urges and a want for more pleasure than pain, then this adult is not a hideous deformation of what humans can be, but a model! That is, without a theory of what humans basically need, we have no grounds for preferring a society that produces people like this person (who reproduce and feel moderate pleasure) to one that develops institutions that help people become autonomous beings capable of intimacy, adventure, and social productivity, who delight in developing their powers of feeling and knowing. How can we say that children who are molested are mistreated, unless we can say that children have a need not to have their bodies violated, for such violations hinder the development of a healthy sexuality and a secure autonomous self, both fundamental human needs?

Thus, for both a theory of excellence and a theory of pathology, we need a concept of human nature that is grounded in a theory of basic needs. I will attempt to show in chapter 5 that we have ten basic needs: survival (or coming to terms with mortality), sexual identity, adventure, order, social recognition, intimacy (friendship), autonomy, knowledge, beauty, and sacredness. The emotional, cognitive, and self systems of the psyche are then all defined in reference to these needs; they must be developed adequately in order for the needs to be satisfied. Excellence in living occurs when we develop the psychic systems to the point where we are able to come to terms with death, develop a firm sexual identity, achieve a satisfying place in the social order of our choice, develop stable structures of values, put enough adventure in our lives to keep zestfully growing, have intimate friendships, autonomously direct our lives, transform our worlds into homes through knowledge, dwell in some form of sacredness, and respond to and create beauty. Excellence in human life is the complex affair of balancing these fundamental values.

I do not hold that the basic needs can be articulated only in the ways I express them. No one has ever empirically discovered a need—they are hypotheses to account for our behaviors—and, thus, any particular description is bound to have some arbitrariness in it. Are what the sociobiologists call "a need for reproductive fitness," what the psychotherapists call "a need for sexual identity," and what Plato in the *Symposium* calls "eros" the same need? I think so. Which description should be preferred? For what purpose? Each description fits a context—population geneticists cannot work with "eros"; Plato is not concerned with shifts in species populations.

Despite the impossibility of finding a "final" description for the needs, it is nonetheless necessary to have some articulation of them, for without it we cannot have a theory of human nature, or human excellence, or human pathology. What recommends my articulation of the needs is that I have not tried to be reductive and seek for the unity of the psyche in a single source of motivation, as have most philosophers and scientists. What moves us is multiple and conflicting; unity comes in developmentally organizing the psyche, not in a single goal or aim. I have been Hegelian in my approach to the needs. I find a part of the truth in many thinkers whom I attempt to synthesize into a new system (and indeed, I do not think an important articulation of a human need is left off my list—that is, if one is willing to make such connections as seeing the will to power as an aspect of autonomy). Unlike Hegel, I do not have a grand dialectical metaphysics or any claim to have discovered "the truth" about human nature. What I try to present is human nature in at least a part of its motivational complexity in hopes that this conceptual scheme might give us some possibility of living happier lives.

Although we can now see more clearly why a theory of human nature is necessary in order to have an ethic of excellence, we still must face two great problems. The first is that when we argue from what human nature is to what humans ought to do, we violate one of the accepted laws of ethical theory: an 'ought' cannot be derived from an 'is'; a value cannot be derived from a fact. Just because human beings have a nature, *X*, does not mean that the actualization of *X* is necessarily good. Suppose we are aggressive by nature; does this mean it is good to act aggressively? Such an inference is obviously problematical, but the alternative of attempting to discover how we ought to act without any knowledge of what human beings are is even more problematic. What is true about the is–ought rule is that any description of human nature, while a necessary condition for a moral claim, can never be the sufficient condition for such a claim. Before such a description can issue into a value, one must go through a process of moral reasoning that involves universalization and empathy,[14] takes into account that we live with other humans, and is quite capable of denying individual needs for the satisfaction of the needs of others, or of denying some needs in oneself so that others may be realized. Although this process of moral reasoning is necessary for the construction of ethical values, it alone is insufficient without some knowledge of what we as human beings most basically need.

Hence, in order to have an ethics of what constitutes human excellence, we must have both a theory of human nature and an understanding of the process by which legitimate ethical claims can be formulated. Sociobiologists such as E. O. Wilson think that a scientific knowledge of human nature is all that is needed for ethics,[15] while metaethicists such as R. M. Hare[16] assert that all we need, to have an ethical system, is the process of ethical thinking. I am claiming that both are necessary conditions for the formulation of ethics; neither by itself is sufficient.

The second rule my position violates is that of the autonomy of ethics. Ethics has been seen as a specific "language game" that has its own rules and structures of justification that can be understood and developed without reference to any other subject matter. This position sees the job of ethicists as the elucidation of these linguistic rules and justificatory structures. Ethics is seen as metaethics; ethicists are to relinquish their somewhat burdensome and embarrassing position of proposing certain ways of life as good and are to take on the more neutral task of elucidating ethical thinking so that people will know what they mean when they are making an ethical claim. Metaethicists do not need practical wisdom or a knowledge of human nature, but a sense of logic and how to examine language.

Metaethics has been extremely important, for we can now do ethics in a more self-consciously critical way. The work of the metaethicists, from Moore to Hare, has given us a much better conception of how moral language functions and how it differs from other languages. But understanding how ethical language functions is not enough; the tool of ethical language must be used to do the work of ethics, the work of inquiring into the question of how we ought to live as human beings.

Is it the job of ethicists to give answers to the question of how human beings ought to live, rather than just to elucidate the structures of moral language? Are we to leave this problem to others, holding that it is a question that each person must answer for herself, or are we ethicists to give guidance by proposing answers? These two alternatives are not incompatible, unless ethicists demand disciples and thoughtless adherence to their proposals. We need both an understanding of ethical language and proposals for how to live—proposals that can stimulate people to raise ethical issues for themselves more than do the rather dry texts in metaethics.

Thus, I hold that we ethicists need to relinquish our safe harbor of conceptual analysis and once again practice the art of practical wisdom. Ethics, as understood here, is a highly complex field, involving a rich history of texts and research into the numerous areas of science, social science, and the humanities that deal with human nature. We can no more expect that human beings with different occupations from ours will have the leisure or tools to encompass this material than we can expect ourselves to learn how to build airplanes or design infrastructures for skyscrapers. We need to explore all that we have recently discovered about human nature and to construct new theories of how we as humans ought to live. I say this with some embarrassment, for to claim to have practical wisdom about human living seems to involve also claiming that one's life is a model for living (assuming that one is an adult and acts according to one's knowledge and principles). This embarrassment is lessened by admitting that we are always fallible in forming ethical systems. As Robert Neville says, an ironic smile must grace the faces of ethicists,[17] for they know that ethical systems must be formulated and fully believed and yet that there are no final grounds for saying that any ethical system is right. Normative ethics is a task that sorely needs to be done and done well, even if it means putting ourselves in the uncomfortable position of claiming to have wisdom about human life in a world that never permits certainty in this area.

3. A third truth from Greek ethics has been discovered by a number of contemporary ethicists:[18] that character determines action in a more fundamental way than do rules. Rules or principles (such as the Ten Commandments) may be important in ethics, but only if one has already developed the character trait of acting according to principles. Without this trait, our reasons can generate moral rules *ad nauseam*, but they will not affect our actions. Character is, according to Aristotle, a set of dispositions we develop in response to our emotions and desires. Hence, character governs our relations not only to others but also to ourselves. Aristotle states this thesis straightforwardly when he writes that "the friendly relations which we have with our neighbors and which serve to define the various kinds of friendship seem to be derived from our relations to ourselves."[19] This doctrine that our relation to ourselves will mirror our relationships with others is seminal not only for Aristotle, but also for psychotherapy and the ethic proposed here.

We can see that the development of the proper character traits is a place where ethics and psychotherapy converge. Ethics is concerned with how to live well and with what constitutes right actions in relation to others; psychotherapy is concerned with the self's having a healthy relation to itself. These are two sides of the same coin, according to Aristotle's maxim, for we cannot treat others well without having a good self-relation, and we cannot treat ourselves well unless we are also willing to be ethical with others. The heart of Aristotle's ethical vision and the heart of the one proposed here is the development of a moral psychology, a psychology that defines what a healthy self-relationship is and then relates this pattern to living in a community of other human beings.

Ethical psychology focuses on the questions of what arrangement of the psyche is optimal and what traits of character will bring this optimal arrangement into being. These traits are called "virtues;" a virtue being any trait that enables us to live well as human beings.[20] From this definition we can see that before we can say which traits are virtues we need to know what it means to live well. And we cannot know what it means to live well as a human being until we have formulated a theory of human nature. My problem with much contemporary writing on the virtues is that the authors want to say what the virtues are without developing a theory of human nature or saying what it means to live well as a human being.[21] This text proposes a theory in which living well essentially involves developing capacities, character, and a self to satisfy our multifold basic needs. I hope to show that if we arrange our psyches to meet our basic needs, we will also develop ethical relations with others (see chapter 10). In short, it is only when we become tolerant of all the psychic forces within ourselves that we can be tolerant of all the different peoples and perspectives in contemporary culture. Personal tolerance and understanding and social tolerance and understanding cannot be separated.

While there are many traits that enable us to realize our basic needs, harmonize the psyche, and live well with one another, I am in full agreement with Aristotle that the basic notion in all the virtues is the mean between extremes relative to the person and situation.[22] Or, as the maxim at Delphi said, "Nothing in excess." Character traits that are virtues must be a mean to Aristotle because they allow us to feel our emotions and desires without being overwhelmed by them. They allow the sources of motivation for practical life to surface but prevent any one of them from becoming a tyrannical, insistent drive. Thus, with virtuous character traits we can have a full and rich set of desires and emotions without being dominated by them. This moral psychology is fully aligned with contemporary psychoanalytic theory in which the self's relation to its desires and emotions ought not to be one of either repression (deficiency) or infantile lack of control (excess). A healthy state is when we can feel all of our feelings yet govern our actions with knowledge and foresight of what is best for us and others. (The virtue of moderation (*sophrosyne*) is discussed in chapter 11.)

4. The fourth principle I think we must take from the Greeks is that *the key to living well is the proper organization and unity of the psyche.* What gives unity to the psyche is what we will call "the self" or "the person," in distinction from the ego, which is the part of the self present in conscious, rational activities. Unity of self is not a genetic given or an entity, but a set of relations among the components of the psyche that is an achievement of development (this development is discussed in chapter 7). A human organism can have a more or less unified self, from almost no self (as in severe schizophrenia) or multiple selves occupying the same body, to a strong, vital self that can both feel emotions and desires and act on them with wisdom.

Unity of the psyche—a self—is needed to hold the multifarious parts of the psyche together, solve conflicts, and lead the human being into the future. Without a strong self powerful desires, emotions, social pressures, and compulsions can overwhelm the person and make choice impossible. This was as true for the Greeks as it is for contemporary psychotherapy. What was the evil of multiplicity and faction for Plato (see chapter 3) is neurotic fragmentation for psychotherapy today, where parts of psychic functioning become split off from the conscious workings of the self and act independently of its aim. Hence, the paramount issue in both psychic and social life is integration: integration of all the parts of the psyche and social world, no matter how low and despised these parts might be.

How are we to develop a strong self so necessary for the unity of the psyche? The lesson we have learned during the course of Western culture is that unity cannot be achieved through hierarchical organization, for hierarchy crushes diversity in the psyche and the social world. When reason is made the dominant element in the psyche, the irrational components (certain needs, desires, and emotions) get placed at the bottom of the hierarchy, and no language is created to communicate with them. They soon become repressed and forced out of the main flow of conscious life, just as the lowest classes, minorities, and women have been cast (caste) out of the mainstream of our hierarchically organized culture.

Our question now is clear: "What can we use as a model for organization that will produce unity without necessarily involving substantial repression or negation of certain parts of the psyche (or state)?" The democratic model of allowing all voices to have equal say at all times is too chaotic to give unity to the psyche, and the dialectical model of mediating opposites is inadequate to handle the complex multiple relationships within the psyche, only several of which constitute true dialectical oppositions.

The grounding idea for this text is that the ecological model for understanding natural systems that has recently been developed in the biological sciences is the optimal model for organizing the psyche.[23] Ecological organization recognizes that every element of a system is intrinsically interconnected with every other element and that all the elements have importance. How can we hierarchically arrange such elements of an ecosystem as the rainfall, the mean temperature, the carnivores, the herbivores the carnivores eat, the flora the herbivores eat, and the amount of nitrogen, phosphorus, etc., necessary for the flora to grow? The elimination or distortion of any one element affects all the elements in the ecosystem. The components of the ecosystem must also be in the right proportion to one another. Too many deer grazing an area is as disastrous as too few; too much reason in the psyche as harmful as too little. The series of feedback mechanisms which govern a web of causality in an ecosystem insure that the distorting element, the element grown out of proportion, will, in turn, be affected by the system it has altered. The parts of the psyche reason drives into the unconscious return to pervert reason.

Hence, with an ecological model for organizing the psyche, we can give each of its elements a proper place and proper proportion. There need not be any necessary systematic repression. We can have the genuine multiplicity of experience so loved by Nietzsche, along with the unity demanded by Plato and Aristotle.

We are now faced with a set of new problems. If ecology has discovered the way natural systems in fact work, and the psyche is more or less a natural system, isn't the psyche already functioning in an ecological way? Yes, the principles that govern ecological interactions in nature are always functional. A violent intrusion of a foreign element into an ecosystem can destroy it, but it will be replaced by a different ecosystem according to various ecological principles. The key for this analysis of the psyche is to develop an optimal ecological system—one that is able to support a maximum of diversity while retaining a homeostatic unity. Just as a number of ecosystems have been so severely interfered with that they have become unbalanced and have ceased to function as life sources to the species that formerly inhabited them, I will claim that the hierarchical model we have for organizing the psyche has made the psyche unable to harbor all of its "life forces." My aim is to develop a new model for organizing the psyche that will optimize its diverse powers and aspects while retaining a balanced unity.

In order to do this, we must ascertain what the components of the psychic ecosystem are and understand how they are dynamically interrelated. Part II of this book is an attempt to answer these questions and delineate what the psyche as a well-balanced, homeostatic ecosystem would be.

Even if we are able to change the way we organize the psyche into a balanced ecosystem, there is still a problem for ethics. Excellence in the West has usually been associated with hierarchical models. Being excellent is being the best, the highest member of a particular class. How can we speak of human excellence within the framework of ecology? Shouldn't we drop the notion altogether? But if the experience of happiness requires us to hold an ideal of excellence, doesn't such a position prevent us from being happy? There is obviously a tension between an ethic that is based on an ideal of human excellence and ecology as a model for arranging both the psyche and the social order. Part III of this book attempts to resolve this tension and show how, with the attainment of ecological speaking, thinking, and dwelling, we can attain a kind of excellence heretofore unrecognized in the West.

We must prepare for our discussions of the ecological constitution of the psyche and the ecological ideal of excellence by first gaining a fuller understanding of the relation between ideals of excellence and happiness, why the hierarchical model of the psyche was invented and finally failed, and the dangerous and ambivalent role ideals can play in our lives if they are not functioning correctly. These issues constitute the themes of the three chapters of Part I. However, before we can begin to deal with them, there is one last question we must face in this introduction.

How is one to write about an ecological model of the psyche? How is the reader to approach such a text? The book might be written in the style of this introduction, with its (hopefully) clear concepts, arguments, and unemotional delineation of problems and ideas. But if it were written this way, then it would only reinforce the hierarchical model of the psyche with reason as the dominant capacity. Hence, the style present in almost all ethical texts of importance since the Greeks cannot be used in ecological ethics.

This is not to say that we must throw reason entirely out as a number of recent theorists and artists seem to be saying. There is nothing wrong with reason per se. What has gone wrong is how reason has gotten out of balance. It has become too large and other elements have become too limited for the psyche to function well. Hence, this is not an antireason treatise, but one that attempts to place reason as one element among many in the psychic ecosystem.

In writing this text, I have tried to let a number of the voices in the psyche speak, not just reason. Those who demand rational argumentation may find my use of myth, metaphor, and symbol highly questionable and needing demystification, yet we know from psychoanalytic theory that these linguistic forms may carry to parts of the psyche truths that cannot be carried there by clear concepts and logical arguments.

There are other differences between an ecological text and a hierarchical text. One is the lack of a need for "parent-bashing," the process by which writers are supposed to attack the reigning authorities in the field so that their work may become dominant. In a hierarchical model, such antagonistic criticism is necessary, for the only way to get to the top of the hierarchy and gain legitimacy is through dethroning those now reigning. Ecologists, on the other hand, seek to understand how ideas from different views can cohere to form a wider system of understanding. This nonantagonistic style is one trend in feminist writing.

Ecological writing also differs from hierarchical writing in that it welcomes interdisciplinary modes of thinking. Hierarchies are field-dependent; reaching the top is something one can typically do only in a specialty. But just as many types of species, organisms, and nonorganic conditions constitute an ecosystem, so ecological writing attempts to see how a variety of perspectives can form a unified system for understanding human nature. Thus, in this treatise I examine human nature not only from the viewpoints of such disciplines as anthropology, sociobiology, psychoanalytic theory, and philosophy, but within philosophy I will try to interweave such diverse figures as Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Nietzsche, Whitehead, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger. We will not only study problems in how to live (ethics), but see how these relate to problems of language and epistemology.

Such interdisciplinary texts have two monumental problems. The first is that, at present, truth is defined as a function of following a particular methodology in a special discipline. Hence, I can claim to have truth in biology if I have followed the correct experimental procedures and put my conclusions in properly quantified empirical language, and I can claim truth in sociology if I have followed the accepted procedures for collecting data, and so forth. An interdisciplinary approach by definition transcends any particular methodology and therefore is supposedly incapable of generating truth.

The disciplines are of vital importance; they are the most concrete relations we have to reality. Yet the very basis for their success—a limited scope of inquiry—prevents them from giving us a whole vision of ourselves and the world. Without such an understanding, we cannot gather ourselves fully as human beings. A culture needs an integrated theory of human nature to help its members achieve personal integration. Theory and life cannot be separated.

It is this function of integrating various kinds of knowledge that gives us criteria for judging the adequacy of interdisciplinary thinking. Are the sources that are being integrated accepted as knowledge by at least a portion of experts working in established fields? Is the integration coherent, or are there contradictions and rough fits? Is the picture complete, or has the integration omitted problems and areas that need to be addressed for there to be a full discussion of the topic in question? Finally, is the interdisciplinary vision alive—does it speak to our experience? There are countless "complete and coherent" pictures in art galleries that we do not notice because they are dull or typical or simply don't call to us. Then we come across a painting that draws us into it, that relates in some primal way to our lived experience—a Rembrandt recalling us to our humanness, a Van Gogh revealing the swirling, dynamic chaos of life. Is the Rembrandt painting "true"? Is the Van Gogh landscape "true"? Here it is appropriate to remember Alfred North Whitehead's famous statement: "In the real world it is more important that a proposition be interesting than that it be true."

The second difficulty with interdisciplinary texts is their usual shallowness. Myriads of texts have been written on each of the problems, subjects, and thinkers of this book; for one text to attempt to encompass them all seems to doom it to superficiality. I admit that many chapters, and even pages, of this text need books to explicate them fully. But to demand that all books be specialized is to fail to understand the need the psyche has for seeing how its many facets can be integrated. If there is a depth to this book, it is the depth of a net stretched over the surface of human life. Each part of the net captures a bit of that life, a bit that I welcome other explorers to pursue in greater depth.

Not only does an ecological text spin webs over its multifarious subjects; it is also part of wider webs that include it. One of these wider nets is the movement in contemporary ethics away from the Kantianism–utilitarianism debates and the skirmishes in metaethics toward different ways of conceiving ethical life. New thinkers are introducing the centrality of character and virtues (Alasdair MacIntyre, Phillipa Foot, Edmond Pincoffs, James Wallace), the relation of ethics to developmental psychology (David Norton), and the relation of ethics to both metaphysics and the community orientation of Puritanism and Confucianism (Robert Neville). Within this group my text has most of its reverberations with MacIntyre, given our historical orientation, our love of the Greeks, and our finding failures in both deontological and utilitarian ethics. Where we essentially differ is that MacIntyre demands a choice between Nietzsche and Aristotle, while I think that both must be seen as representing fundamental truths of human existence. MacIntyre bases his ethic on a purely social construction of human nature, while I give more credence to biology, by grounding ethics in a set of basic needs, and to psychoanalytic theory, which deals with the psyche at levels other than those of consciousness. Finally, MacIntyre's ethics is fundamentally conservative, asking us to return to a way of life now gone; I am groping for an ethic that has yet to be lived.

Another part of the wider matrix is ecology itself. I add nothing to the structures of ecology already developed, but apply them for the first time to the psyche.[24] I think that such an "inner" ecology is as important as an ecological attitude toward our environments, for I do not think the latter can be sustained unless the former is achieved. We will always feel at odds with our environments if the structures of our psyches do not mirror the structures we find in nature.

I also raise the question of what kind of language is ecological language. That is, scientists and philosophers have written about ecological structures in the typical languages of science and philosophy. But these languages were constructed by a hierarchically constituted psyche in a hierarchically organized value system. They speak to only one part of the psyche and hence fail to engage the psyche in its fullness as an ecosystem. Hence previous speech about ecology has not been ecological speech. An embodiment of ecology in speech must be something other than the rational conceptual language of science; it must harmonize a chorus of different voices.

I also hope to show how ecological language and thinking are closely connected to hermeneutics as developed by such continental thinkers as Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur. Both ecological and hermeneutical thinking emphasize webs and intercontextuality; both locate the knowers in temporal traditions and see them as intrinsically intertwined with the material to be known. Both reject the notion that has characterized modern scientific epistemology: that one must achieve an unbiased, uninvolved objectivity in order to attain knowledge.

A third part of the wider web is feminism. My learning has been immeasurably enriched by the feminist thinkers of the past quarter century, and I wish the voice in this book to be in concert with theirs in the formation of a view of human nature and community that is nonhierarchical, not based in Darwinian competition, not valuing radical autonomy as the highest value, but centered, rather, on relationships and balances as fundamental.[25]

Finally, this text is an attempt to provide a more adequate notion of what constitutes human health and optimal functioning than what currently is available in the field of psychotherapy. Neither Freud's concept of the ability to work and love, nor the contemporary notion of freedom and the ability to make choices[26] is rich enough to encompass what makes up the fullness of human well-being. Also, I think that psychoanalytic theory needs a fuller, more complex theory of the self than is available even in the recent self-psychology of such theorists as Maslow and Kohut.

The preparation for our journey into the psyche is now complete. We have mapped out the territory we need to explore, attempted to say why such a journey is needed, and gotten our equipment ready. Now it is time to embark to that ancient land of Lydia and King Croesus where our voyage begins.