

# A PHILOSOPHER'S VIEW

WALTER A. KAUFMANN / Professor of Philosophy  
Princeton University

---

## I

Some of mankind's greatest moralists spurned business societies. Their views deserve thoughtful consideration, although a lengthy survey would be out of place here. I shall begin with Plato.

Describing his vision of an ideal society in the *Republic*, Plato divides the citizens into three classes. The philosophers are at the top; his "middle" class consists of soldiers; and the largest class, at the bottom of Plato's pyramid, consists of all the other people, including businessmen and craftsmen. Plato is so little interested in them that he devotes almost the entire book to the higher two classes.

Late in his life, at the age of eighty, when he had become disillusioned about some of his earlier projects for social reform, Plato returned to some of the same topics with which he had dealt in the *Republic*, in the only other dialogue he wrote that is as long as the *Republic: The Laws*. Again, he says little about businessmen and business societies; but the remarks he does devote to them are striking. I shall quote four:

"The community which has neither poverty nor riches will always have the noblest principles; in it there is no insolence or injustice, nor, again, are there any contentions or envyings" (679, Jowett translation).

The second passage reads: "Had there been abundance, there might have been a great export trade, and a great return of gold and silver; which, as we may safely affirm, has the most fatal results on a state whose aim is the attainment of just and noble sentiments: this was said by us, if you remember, in the previous discussion" (705).

Thirdly: "The first and highest form of the state and of the government and of the law is that in which . . . 'Friends have all things in common.' Whether there is anywhere now, or ever will be, this communion of women and children and of property, in which

the private and individual is altogether banished from life, . . . no man, acting upon any other principle, will ever constitute a state which will be truer or better or more exalted in virtue. . . . To this we are to look for the pattern of the state, and to cling to this, and to seek with all our might for one which is like this" (739).

The mode of life that in the *Republic* was distinctive of the upper two classes is now envisaged as the ideal for all men. The younger Plato had granted private property, marriage, family life, and a personal sphere to the mass of men, if only because of the hardness of their hearts — to use a New Testament phrase. The old Plato clearly considers a communist society ideal, and a business society a misfortune. While it would be wrong to associate his communist ideal with the form that Communism has taken in the Soviet Union, in China, or in other modern countries, it is by no means irrelevant to recall that Plato's opposition to "the private and individual" did lead him in *The Laws* to call for severe penalties for heretics who would not accept the religious dogmas of the society he described, and even to demand the death penalty for second offenders.

The last passage I wish to quote from *The Laws* reads as follows: "The law enjoins that no private man shall be allowed to possess gold and silver, but only coin for daily use . . . No one shall give or receive any dowry at all; and no one shall deposit money with another whom he does not trust as a friend, nor shall he lend money upon interest; and the borrower should be under no obligation to repay either capital or interest. . . . The citizen must indeed be happy and good, and the legislator will seek to make him so; but very rich and very good at the same time he cannot be . . ." (742).

The last words have a familiar ring; they bring to mind Jesus' saying: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:24). The actual views of Jesus may well be a matter for controversy; but in considering him next, I shall confine myself to the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) and attempt to show briefly how that is at odds with business societies.

"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her

already in his heart. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, . . .”

In our society, the movie industry and advertising make a multibillion dollar business of multiplying lustful looks, and many magazines and newspapers do their valiant best, too. Indeed, this is not merely one business among others, nor even two or three, but woven into the fabric of our business society. Cosmetics, jewelry, fur, bathing suits, clothes, perfumes are designed and advertised as likely, if not guaranteed, to help women harvest lustful looks; and anything from cigarettes to cars is sold to women with the help of ads suggesting that with these props they can scarcely fail to be as — or at least almost as — alluring as the model in the picture; while men are led to associate the product with the enchanting woman pictured with it.

A few verses later: “Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God’s throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.”

Like the quotations from Plato, this saying suggests that relations between men should be simple and direct. To be sure, in a business society a man’s unadorned oral Yes or No is occasionally considered sufficient; but the spirit of this last passage appears to be directed against any reliance on elaborate contracts, although a business society depends on these. If my interpretation should seem doubtful, these verses, which follow only a few lines later, surely bear it out conclusively:

“But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.”

The following chapter (6) begins: “Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of

your Father which is in heaven. . . . When thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. . . . When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking."

x In our business society alms are given openly because charity is considered good publicity; and, more important, one keeps careful track of them to be able to claim the maximum income tax deduction. Indeed, charity is carefully planned with income tax deductions in mind. Prayer, too, is often public and calculated: Congress — and not only Congress — opens with a public prayer, and a politician running for office must mention God in his speeches, whether he believes in Him or not; otherwise he usually cannot be elected. And once elected, he is expected to invoke the aid of the Almighty every now and then as part of his "public relations." If anyone today said, as Alexander Hamilton did when attempts to frame the American Constitution bogged down again and again and it was suggested that the convention be opened daily with a prayer, that we are not in need of "foreign aid,"<sup>1</sup> he would utterly destroy his political career. It is no longer fashionable to pray only in secret: one prays "as the heathen do."

x Perhaps the most relevant passage in the Sermon on the Mount is this: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. . . . No man can serve two masters . . . Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

Here the central ethos of the business society is rejected unequivocally, and in the following verses this rejection is developed in images as well known as they are beautiful: "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body,

<sup>1</sup> Charles and Mary Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization*, One Volume Edition (Macmillan: New York, 1930), p. 317.

what ye shall put on. . . . Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. . . . Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek. . . . But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow."

Our business society is not only dedicated to the attempt to serve both God and mammon — or to persuade itself and others that it is serving God when it is serving mammon — it even pays lip service to the Sermon on the Mount and won't tolerate any public suggestion that this Sermon does not represent the greatest moral teaching of all time. One applauds Jesus' vehement denunciations of the relatively minor hypocrisies of his time and unjustly employs the word "Pharisee" as if it denoted the epitome of self-righteousness; but one lacks any awareness of the fact that the self-righteousness and the hypocrisy of the attitude toward the Sermon on the Mount that prevails in our business society far exceeds the imagination of the New Testament.

The ethic of the Sermon on the Mount is anchored in prudence, the frequently repeated promise of rewards, and the threat of punishments, however unpopular it may be today to admit this. This life, which according to the Psalmist rarely exceeds threescore years and ten or "by reason of strength fourscore years," is depreciated radically, along with this whole world, in favor of another life and another world that business societies view with the utmost skepticism — or, more often, do not consider at all. Jesus' repeated suggestion that the way to get something is to pray for it would be dismissed by any businessman as a poor joke, if it were not presented in the hallowed tones of the New Testament, which, for all practical purposes, signal that the suggestion need not be taken seriously as long as it is met with due reverence.

The Sermon on the Mount ends by distinguishing two kinds of

people: those who follow its precepts may be likened "unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock," while "every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand . . . and great was the fall of it" on the day of judgment.

X Plato and Jesus were by no means the only major moralists who stood basically opposed to the ethos of any business society. But there is no need here to discuss any others at equal length. It should suffice to mention a few others very briefly. What the Buddha, for example, preached was, in one word, detachment. He taught that suffering is universal; that it is caused by the frustration of desire and thus ultimately rooted in attachment, which in turn he traced to ignorance; and he claimed that understanding the causes of suffering can help us to overcome desire, to cease caring about the things we formerly worried about, to achieve detachment and attain the cessation of suffering.

In the words of Paul, the Buddha, like Jesus and Plato, "would have you without carefulness" (I Cor. 7:32), free of care and worry. Indeed, all three would agree with Paul that "he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife," and that it is therefore better not to be tied to a wife or father and mother; "for the fashion of this world passeth away." Jesus and Paul may have believed, unlike the Buddha and Plato, that this world was literally about to come to an end; but all four agreed that a man should ponder the fact that his life will come to an end within a few years, and our impending death deserves more consideration than laying up treasures in this world.

While it is not fashionable to see Jesus in this perspective, my reading is, of course, by no means novel. While it would be pointless and tedious to cite dozens of saints and scholars who have elaborated the same points, it may not be amiss to refer to the greatest Christian moralist of the past hundred years, Leo Tolstoy, who insisted again and again<sup>2</sup> that it is of the essence of Christianity that it teaches us to consider that we have to die soon and that — to use a popular American expression — "you can't take it with you."

<sup>2</sup> Most notably in the short story "How Much Land Does a Man Need" and in "The Death of Ivan Ilyitch." Both are reprinted, complete, in my *Religion from Tolstoy to Camus* (Harper & Brothers: New York, 1961).

Nietzsche, though strongly opposed to all the moralists I have mentioned so far and emphatically this-worldly, also spurned the business society. He counselled us to remain faithful to the earth, believed that our life on this earth is our only life, and that there is no other world besides this one. He also exhorted us to live dangerously; and all this seems entirely compatible with the ethos of a business society. Yet Nietzsche was openly contemptuous of business, and his attitude is particularly well expressed in his hyperbolic epigram: "Whatever can be paid for, is worth little."<sup>3</sup>

Can we summarize the most basic objections to the business society that we have encountered so far? Most of the moralists considered felt that a business society fails to give adequate attention to death, salvation, and the world to come; and all of them, without exception, believed that a business society stresses virtue insufficiently. We can be still more specific.

All of these men would agree that business societies emphasize getting and having rather than being and doing. Indeed, most, if not all, of mankind's greatest moral teachers have agreed that what we acquire and possess is less important than the kind of person we become, the life we lead, and the deeds we do. The charge is, in other words, that a business society emphasizes commodities and money rather than humanity — what has a price rather than what is priceless.

When it is formulated this way, the consensus seems more plausible to the modern mind than if we emphasize the belief in the impending end of the world, or the assumption of another world, or the fear of a day of judgment, or the dread of hell or of unpleasant reincarnations, with which this moral position has so often been associated. Many writers — and readers — find criticism of business societies still more plausible if the question "What is priceless?" is answered with a reference to religion and art; perhaps also to philosophy. But what really happens to these in business societies?

Let us begin with religion. Professor Boulding seemed to suggest in the first lecture in this symposium that in a business society the churches are islands of love and help to create a much needed balance. This was not a major point in his address but a passing

<sup>3</sup> Posthumously published note; *Gesammelte Werke, Musarionausgabe*, XIV, 93.

comment or, perhaps more accurately, a ritual bow, if not a sop. Surely, the churches are not, and rarely if ever have been, islands of love in a business society. Churches, as well as synagogues and temples, are invaded by the marketing orientation that permeates the society as a whole. The classical protest against this process may be found in the Hebrew prophets. Religion, instead of remaining an unblemished island, was corrupted and debased in their age, as it is in ours.

When we turn to art and philosophy, the situation is not nearly so clear cut. In any list of the greatest ages of the spirit we must include Periclean Athens, the Renaissance, and Elizabethan England; and in all three cases we find flourishing business societies. A contrast of Athens and Sparta is revealing. Athens had a business society, Sparta did not. Indeed, Plato's ideal society was plainly modeled on Sparta much more than on Athens. Yet Sparta produced no art, no literature, no philosophy that might brook comparison with Athens'. This is so striking that one may wonder why anybody should ever have thought that culture and the business society were enemies. But, of course, there are corrupting influences, too, in a business society; and these are so familiar and have been stressed so often that there is no need here to labor the point. To give a single example, there is the phenomenon that in the case of books is associated with bestsellers and in the case of some other media with box office appeal: people are urged to, and want to, read and see what "one" reads and sees; and what is not designed for large masses of people tends to be crowded out.

X As a result, writers and artists are often corrupted by their understandable concern for mass appeal.

The contrast between Germany after World War II and Germany after World War I is almost as stark as that between Athens and Sparta. After World War I, during the Twenties, Germany was prostrate economically. An inflation, during which ordinary postage stamps came to cost billions of marks, wiped out the savings of millions and was followed by vast unemployment and extreme poverty; but during those same years, before Hitler came to power in 1933, Germany went through one of her great cultural periods: Rilke and Stefan George wrote some of their greatest poetry; Thomas Mann, Hermann Hesse, and Franz Kafka, some of their finest novels.



After World War II, on the other hand, when the business society flourished and experienced a period of outstanding prosperity, German art, literature, and philosophy did not compare with the great creations of the Twenties.

The moral of these considerations is that any black-and-white picture of the relation of culture to the business society is vastly oversimplified and leaves out of account relevant factors. In our last example Hitler's impact must not be ignored: under his regime a very large number of creative spirits were driven from Germany, and education was ruinously transformed into brutal indoctrination. Hence it would not be fair to blame the state of the arts, of literature, and of philosophy in Germany during the first two decades after World War II on the business society. Quite generally, one can choose onesided examples to illustrate either the beneficent or the harmful influence of business societies on the arts.

Some of the great moralists have concentrated on the inhumanities of business societies. It is surely important to do this, and if one is a preacher in a business society, this is a crucial part of one's job, albeit a part most preachers comfortably ignore. But we should not make the patent mistake of believing that in other kinds of society — in heroic societies, for example — there are no inhumanities. We need only think of the outcastes in pre-industrial India and of the treatment of slaves in any number of nonbusiness societies. Cruelty is prominent in most societies, and it has disfigured capitalistic societies, too — especially during the industrial revolution when Marx wrote to protest against the exploitation of men, women, and children. But inhumanity can be found in communist societies as well, and its abundance in the Soviet Union, at least during the early years of that country, under Stalin, is granted by Khrushchev himself. Plainly, communism is no guarantee of humanity, as Plato supposed it might be; and to prove that point, we need not even rely on the realities of communist countries: we can point to Plato's attitude toward the arts, his reliance on deception and censorship, his opposition to "the private and individual," and his proposed treatment of heretics, in the *Republic* and *The Laws*.

If it is conceivable in spite of all this that a communist society might be humane in a truly exemplary fashion, it is no less conceivable —

and perhaps even more so — that a business society might be profoundly humane and a fertile ground for the development of the arts. Indeed, insofar as communism believes, with the old Plato, that everything should be “common” to the point where “the private and individual is altogether banished from life,” it must be deeply hostile to originality and novelty, and thus inhumane.

✕ The teachings of Jesus and Paul, of the Buddha and the old Tolstoy are even more radically opposed to any cultivation of art and philosophy than they are to business societies. Precisely that criticism of the business society which is generally considered most plausible — that it is hostile to the realm of the spirit, to the arts and literature — is least defensible: while prosperity tends to corrupt religion by leading men to love the things of this world and to simulate supernatural or otherworldly concerns that were truly fervent in times of need and distress, it does not necessarily brutalize men or lead them away from cultural concerns. On the contrary.

## II

The moralists considered so far were opposed to business societies. ✕ But there has been at least one major ethic that developed out of a business society and that is remarkably influential in our own ✕ midst: utilitarianism. It represents the most important attempt ever made to develop an ethic appropriate for a business society. This is most obvious in the straightforward utilitarianism developed by Jeremy Bentham in his *Principles of Morals and Legislation*, originally published in 1789.

His system was purely quantitative and entirely predicated on utility or expediency. This, of course, leaves open the question of the goal by which utility is to be judged. Theoretically, that goal could be the maximal development of the arts (in which case some further standards would be needed for judging the arts) or salvation in another world (and in that case a metaphysics or theology would be required to tell us what would, and what would not, be ✕ expedient). For Bentham, and for what we generally call utilitarianism, the goal was the greatest possible happiness of the

greatest possible number. Happiness Bentham understood simply + in terms of pleasure and the avoidance of pain.

The first chapter of Bentham's *Principles* begins: "Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure*. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do . . ." And in a footnote in Chapter IV he sums up much of his argument: "Not long after the publication of the first edition, the following *memoriter* verses were framed, in the view of lodging more effectually, in the memory, these points, on which the whole fabric of morals and legislation may be seen to rest.

*Intense, long, certain, speedy, fruitful, pure* —  
Such marks in *pleasures* and in *pains* endure.  
If it be *public*, wide let them *extend*.  
Such *pains* avoid, whichever be thy view:  
Such *pleasures* seek if *private* be thy end:  
If *pains must* come, let them *extend* to few."

Thus Bentham sums up his own hedonic calculus. We should weigh the intensity, duration, certainty or uncertainty, propinquity or remoteness, fecundity (i.e., "the chance it has of being followed by sensations of the *same* kind: that is, pleasures, if it be a pleasure: pains, if it be a pain"), and purity (i.e., "the chance it has of *not* being followed by sensations of the *opposite* kind") of both pleasures and pains to calculate their values, and in the case of actions that will affect others also "the number of persons to whom" the pleasure or pain "*extends*." In this way, according to Bentham, we can and should determine what will promote the greatest possible happiness of the greatest possible number: acts and laws that will have this consequence are to be considered good; acts and laws that do not, bad. ✕

In his little book on *Utilitarianism* (1863), which is not quite one-fifth the length of Bentham's *Principles*, John Stuart Mill tried to humanize this ethic and to make it more attractive by introducing quality into Bentham's purely quantitative approach; and his version is more widely known today than Bentham's. But before we consider it, let us ask whether Bentham's straightforward utilitarianism can help us with our problems. The ideal of the greatest possible happiness of the greatest possible number is impressive at first glance, and it even seems to provide a feasible ethical norm for a

business society. A businessman could work toward this goal, it seems, and have a good conscience as he does so. On closer inspection, however, the notion of the greatest possible happiness of the greatest possible number turns out to be problematic. Perhaps the first philosopher to grasp this fact was a Chinese of the fifth century B.C., Mo-tze. Indeed, he understood better than either Bentham or Mill how this ideal conflicts with culture.

Mo-tze criticized Confucian ethics and suggested that the goal of man should be "procuring benefits for the world and eliminating its calamities." He argued that "universality is the cause of the great benefits in the world, and partiality is the cause of its major calamities." By partiality he meant loving some people — especially, but by no means only, ourselves — more than others. "How is partiality to be replaced by universality? I say that when everyone regards the states of others as he regards his own, who would attack the others' states? Others would be regarded like self."<sup>4</sup>

From this basis, Mo-tze attacks the arts.<sup>5</sup> "The levy of heavy taxes on the people to construct the big bell, the sounding drum," and other instruments "is of no help in endeavoring to procure the benefits of the world and destroy its calamities. Therefore Mo-tze said: To have music is wrong." And more generally he said: "One's food should always be sufficient before one seeks to have it fine tasting; one's clothing should always be warm before one tries to make it beautiful; and one's dwelling should always be safe before one tries to make it pleasurable. . . . To put what is fundamental first and external decoration secondary: this is what the sage concerns himself with."

× He considered it immoral to spend money for cultural purposes while people are starving or without shelter. I should not question Mo-tze's nobility. But whether one considers this an objection or not, it is worth pointing out that food never has been, and is not yet, sufficient for all; and not all the people in the world have, or ever have had, warm clothing and safe shelter: hence, if we take

---

<sup>4</sup> These quotations are taken from *The Ethical and Political Works of Motse*, translated by Yi-pao Mei (Probsthain: London, 1929), chapter xvi.

<sup>5</sup> The following quotations are from Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, translated by Derk Bodde, Vol. I (Princeton University Press: Princeton, N. J., 1952), pp. 176 f., 104 f.

Mo-tze's counsel seriously, there is no time yet for culture. We should first have to solve the problem of want; only then, in some possibly very distant future, should we be justified in having art, literature, and philosophy.

Hsün-tze, a Confucian of the third century B.C., said: "Mo-tze was blinded by utility and did not know the value of culture."<sup>6</sup>

Whether we choose to put it that way or not, it is plain that Mo-tze took his utilitarianism seriously and was truly concerned about the greatest possible happiness of the greatest possible number, instead of just paying lip service to this ideal, and he did not esteem culture as highly as the Confucians did, nor even as much as people in our business society profess to do. Neither did the Buddha and Jesus esteem culture so highly; but unlike them, Mo-tze, in this respect like Confucius, was concerned exclusively with this world, this life, and earthly pleasures and pains. He wanted to alleviate suffering, not at the price of giving up attachment, like the Buddha, but at the price of culture. This is truly straightforward utilitarianism.

The question remains whether such universal love as he preached is compatible with a business society. The answer is obvious: business societies depend on partiality and do not flourish when no one considers his business concern any more important than anyone else's, and when nobody is willing to make deals that would be more advantageous to himself than to his rivals. Yet there is the possibility that a relatively humane business society, in which the great captains have been sensitized by a liberal education in the arts, in literature, and in philosophy, as well as history, psychology, and other sciences, might be better at "procuring benefits for the world and eliminating its calamities" than the kind of society Mo-tze envisaged.

John Stuart Mill's liberal education began with the study of Greek when he was three, and his humanity, sensitivity, and profound concern for culture are beyond question. Yet he did not take the line just suggested: what he propounded is a greatly attenuated form of utilitarianism. In the second chapter of *Utilitarianism* he said boldly: "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied;

<sup>6</sup> *The Works of Hsüntze*, translated by H. H. Dubs (Probsthain: London, 1928), pp. 263 f.

better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are of a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question. The other party to the comparison knows both sides." Mill, like Mo-tze, was clearly an attractive and noble man; but did he come to grips with the problem Mo-tze posed for us? Rather it would seem that Mill considers something else more important than pain and pleasure — so important that the quality of pleasures should be judged by this higher standard to which he himself refers on occasion as a "sense of dignity."

Mill says: "By 'happiness' is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by 'unhappiness,' pain, and the privation of pleasure. . . . Pleasure and freedom from pain, are the only things desirable as ends." Yet he does not try to show that Socrates' dissatisfaction yields a more intense, long, fruitful, or pure pleasure than the satisfaction of lesser mortals; and he clearly means that it would be better to be Socrates without experiencing any pleasure at all than to be a fool wallowing in nothing but pleasures. He plainly contradicts himself.

On the one hand, Mill writes under the influence of Bentham and James Mill, his father, as if he were developing an ethic for a business society; on the other, he has in the back of his mind — perhaps partly under the beneficent influence of his deceased wife — a Socratic ideal. So he compromises.

One might try to establish some consistency by making the most of this statement: "If it may possibly be doubted whether a noble character is always the happier for its nobleness, there can be no doubt that it makes other people happier, and that the world in general is immensely a gainer by it. Utilitarianism, therefore, could only attain its end by the general cultivation of nobleness of character, even if each individual were only benefited by the nobleness of others . . ."

Is it true that the noblest characters in our midst provide the greatest happiness for the greatest number? Clearly, the public does not think so. The mass of men feel certain that movie stars and baseball players and men like Henry Ford give, and have given, them far more pleasure than sculptors or painters. Over the centuries, a few outstanding artists, such as Shakespeare and Mozart, have probably produced a greater quantity of pleasure — using Bentham's calculus — than more ephemeral idols of the masses;

but no purely hedonistic defense of culture could possibly succeed. This has been shown most brilliantly and memorably by Aldous Huxley in his *Brave New World*.

This novel represents a deliberate, shrewd, and successful attempt to lead to the absurd the ideal of the greatest possible happiness of the greatest possible number, and it shows how this ideal is basically opposed to the arts. If "pleasure and freedom from pain, are the only things desirable as ends," as Mill said, you have to consider the possibility that by administering a drug to the mass of men you could drastically reduce their intellectual and creative potential as well as their anxieties and frustrations to the point where they would relax and be happy while ceasing to create or amount to much.

Any such result would have horrified Mill, who considered it better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. But his ideal was not really the greatest possible happiness of the greatest possible number, though he thought it was: his variation of utilitarianism reflects the confusions of a business society that wants both culture and the greatest possible happiness of the greatest possible number.

### III

I have criticized long enough, and the time has come to stick out my neck and offer a few brief remarks about my own ethic. The utmost brevity is called for because I have developed my ethic at some length elsewhere, and it would be inappropriate to repeat in detail what I have published in a recent book.<sup>7</sup>

Happiness is extremely relevant to ethics, and one should think about it clearly if one would make responsible decisions. As long as one does not consider how one's actions are likely to affect the happiness of other people as well as one's own, one acts irresponsibly. Yet happiness is not the only consideration; otherwise there would be nothing to save us from having to applaud the society Huxley pictures with such well placed venom in his *Brave New World*.

My ethic is not centered in happiness but in virtues. I propose four cardinal virtues without claiming that there must be precisely four.

<sup>7</sup> *The Faith of a Heretic* (Doubleday & Co.: Garden City, N. Y., 1961), chapter x: "Morality."

If I were shown that very similar or better results could be obtained by offering only three virtues, or even two, or by adding a fifth or sixth, I should be willing to consider that. But after giving considerable thought to this matter and again and again offering my initially quite provisional suggestions to criticism and discussion, I am prepared to argue for four.

1st. The first is a fusion of humility and ambition. Many people assume that these two qualities are incompatible, but in fact very high ambitions usually teach humility: the higher you aim, the more likely you are to realize your limitations and how far short you have fallen of your goal. Humility by itself, which I should call meekness, I consider no virtue at all. Being content to squat in the dust, admitting that one does not amount to anything or ever will, is more nearly a vice than a virtue; and ambition without humility does not seem to me to deserve admiration either. For this first virtue there is no name because it seems to have gone generally unnoticed. Taking into account that a sense of humor typically accompanies this fusion of humility and ambition, I call this virtue "humbition." The name, however inadequate, is meant to call attention to a remarkable combination of qualities and to facilitate discussion.

2nd. The second virtue is courage. This requires no special explanation, as I mean what is generally meant by this term.

3rd. The third virtue is love. This calls for a lengthy explanation; but having given one elsewhere, I shall give only a very short one. Love involves understanding what hurts those we love, caring, and assuming some responsibility. Empathy is usually taken to be a matter of intuition, but one can cultivate the habit of thinking about the feelings of others, and even that of sharing them. Virtues are habits, and therefore it is not improper to consider love, so understood, one of the virtues.

4th. The fourth virtue is honesty. Unlike Professor Boulding, I do not consider it a minor virtue but immensely important and by no means easy to develop. The difficulty obviously depends on how high you pitch your standards; and a high degree of honesty is harder to attain than a high degree of humbition, courage, or even love.

The scale of degrees should be noted to avoid misunderstanding.



When it comes to honesty, it is tempting to try to escape the sting of its challenge by assuming that the claim that honesty is difficult to practice and rarely attained must mean that almost everybody is dishonest. But when we say that it is difficult to be very courageous, we do not imply that almost everybody is a coward. Most of us are often cowardly to some extent or, to put the same point a little more pleasantly, not as courageous as we might be. The case of honesty provides an exact parallel. That being very honest is very difficult does not mean that everybody, or almost everybody, is lying all the time. But the extent to which we deceive ourselves and are not fully honest either with ourselves or with others is indeed staggering.

Conflicts among these four virtues are not only conceivable but common. Love and honesty often pull us in different directions: we compromise the truth to avoid hurting the feelings of others.

Occasionally, love may counsel us not to be too courageous, or to restrain our humbition. By speaking of four cardinal virtues I mean to suggest that the absence or near-absence of any one of these four would constitute a defect and a reason for admiring a man less; that a man in whom all four are highly developed would deserve great admiration; and that in making moral judgments we should give the utmost weight to all four. A defect in one can be justified only insofar as it has been the price for a higher development of one of the others.

How are these four virtues related to the business society?

Humbition is not only compatible with a business society but greatly encouraged by it. Sometimes ambition may be inculcated more than humility, but there is no problem of principle in this area.

On the contrary, few, if any, other forms of society are so congenial to humbition. In classical Greek morality, for example, the older heroic ideal survived to such an extent that humility was no part of Aristotle's ideal, the so-called great-souled man.<sup>8</sup>

Courage, too, poses no problem of principle; and at first glance one might assume that it is no less congenial to a business society than humbition. Yet the point has been made frequently in the recent past that even if courage should flourish at the top levels, the

<sup>8</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* 4.3.

junior executives and those who want to become junior executives are typically lacking in courage. The immense pressure toward conformity, the extreme fear of antagonizing a superior, and the growing anxiety lest one show a trace of individuality in the wrong place have been noted so widely that it will be sufficient here to refer to *The Organization Man*, and, if a more specific reference is desired, especially to the Appendix "How to Cheat on Personality Tests." In spite of the growing literature on the decline of courage, "idealism" is still frequently contrasted unfavorably with what is misleadingly called "realism," and some people talk as if it were a sign of "toughness" when people "face the facts" to the point of accommodation, avoidance of risks, and even outright cowardice. X Even so there is surely no necessary conflict between courage and the business society: a business society might well profit from stressing courage more than has been fashionable in recent years.

X Love is clearly much less congenial to the business society than my first two virtues. This is so evident that I shall not elaborate this point; and before returning to it once more briefly, let us consider the fate of honesty in a business society.

X Certainly, a minimal kind of honesty is an absolute requirement for a business society: you have to be able to count on people to keep their word about some things and even to tell the truth much of the time, as Professor Boulding has pointed out. But this involves no very high standards, and Mr. Voss has given examples of the often strikingly low standards of honesty in our own business society. X If I had to add a single additional illustration, I should emphasize the deep dishonesty that permeates most advertising. Misleading claims and irrelevant associations are of the very essence of most advertisements.

It would be idle to try to determine cause and effect at this point: the same low regard for honesty that is in evidence in advertising pervades our society; advertising, which carries over into public relations and politics, continually helps to lower what standards there are, but it would be less than honest to place most of the blame X on advertising which in turn is a symptom of the general ethos of our society. I suggested as much when discussing the Sermon on the Mount and now shall add some statistics. According to polls, "Though 83 per cent of Americans affirmed the Bible to be the

revealed word of God, 40 per cent confessed that they read it never or hardly ever," and "53 per cent could not name even one" of the Gospels.<sup>9</sup>

There is no reason to suppose that all such self-deception, hypocrisy, and dishonesty can be blamed on the business society. Were high standards of honesty in evidence in the feudal Middle Ages? Were hypocrisy and self-deception the exception in the time of Dante? And, to return to my third virtue, love, was that more highly developed in the age of the Crusades, in Sparta, or in Homer's time than it is today? The business society does pose serious problems for love and honesty; but so do other forms of society. ✕

The young Karl Marx believed, and many very intelligent people still suppose, that a business society must lead toward an unvirtuous and dehumanized society, and that only socialism can lead to a truly humane community. This is a variation on the theme with which I began, introducing it with four quotations from Plato. While I should not minimize the brutalities and vices of business societies, it seems clear indeed that neither socialism nor capitalism leads necessarily to happy humanity. It is utopian to suppose that any social arrangement can lead once and for all to the triumph of virtue. What is needed is tension, balance, and the possibility — ✕ indeed, the probability — that serious shortcomings may be corrected. To that end, few things if any are as important as civil liberties: free speech, free press, free criticism of what seems wrong. ✕

To suppose that this is impossible in a business society and feasible only in socialist countries would hardly be honest in our time. We have seen how many countries that started out with the ideal of socialism have resorted to the brutal suppression of civil liberties; while in the United States and in England, though the press is not as free as it might be and civil liberties are often violated, we still have a relatively high degree of freedom and plentiful opportunities for free discussion and radical criticism. As long as ✕ we have that, we do not need a totally different society but rather an awareness of what is wrong in our business society — an awareness that is supplemented, as I said in explaining my conception of love, by caring and assuming some responsibility. What we

---

<sup>9</sup> Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*, rev. ed. (Doubleday Anchor Books: Garden City, N. Y., 1960), pp. 220 and 222.

need is intensive and informed discussion of the inhuman tendencies in our society, of its faults and dangers, and of possible means of counteraction.

This symposium is therefore a splendid idea — for a start. Throughout the country, and in other lands, too, we need much more discussion than we have had in the recent past of the things that are wrong with the business society and of ways and means of improving it.