

7

Axiology, Ethics, and Justice

BY THE TERM “MORALITY,” we refer to a conscious state in which the soul acts as a judge. In other words, conscience is a soul that judges. As I pointed out in chapter 6, in the context of modern psychology, the soul is identified with the consciousness of existence. Therefore, from the perspective of modern psychology, conscience is the consciousness of existence when it operates as a judge. If the soul is identified with the consciousness of existence, that is, if we exclude the mind as a repository of God’s uncreated grace, then conscience is determined by its three natural powers, namely: the sentiment, the intellect, and the will.

In the context of modern philosophy, the most influential moral theories are those that have been put forward by Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), John Stuart Mill (1806–73), Adam Smith (1723–90), and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). However, as I will argue in what follows, none of these moral theories can stand as a general philosophy of morality.

Using ideas he inherited from John Locke, David Hume, Charles-Louis de Secondat Montesquieu, and Claude-Adrien Helvétius, Bentham attacked the received Lockean doctrine, and he reformulated it by founding it on utilitarian principles. Bentham’s political thought is mainly a quantitative theory of pleasure.¹ His moral theory, in particular, consists in a felicific calculus, according to which the value of a particular pleasure *per se* is determined by its intensity, duration, certainty, propinquity, fecundity, and purity. Moreover, by conceiving the ends of legislation to

1. Crimmins, “Bentham and Utilitarianism in the Early Nineteenth Century,” 38–60; Hart, *Essays on Bentham*.

include security, subsistence, abundance, and equality, and by envisaging political structures to advance these ends, Bentham argued that the value of a pleasure is also determined by the number of the persons affected by it.

Bentham's felicific calculus implies that the quality of each pleasure is ultimately determined by its quantity, or, at least, by its intensity. Hence, the most important defect of Bentham's moral philosophy is that it cannot address qualitative issues as such. Another severe defect of Bentham's moral philosophy is associated with his argument that the value of a pleasure depends on the number of the persons affected by it. This argument is problematic because it contradicts the subjectivity of conscious states, and because one may define one's moral duties according to one's own individual interests. Accepting that one has moral duties does not *ipso facto* imply that one is a properly socialized person, since one's perception of one's moral duties may be mingled with selfishness. Thus, Bentham's moral philosophy may reduce to a mere philosophical justification of egoism. However, Bentham's moral philosophy may also underpin the suppression of individuality, because Bentham argues for the protection of social goods without having formulated a universal moral criterion that would unite individuals into a harmonious whole without suppressing individuality.

J. S. Mill attempted to improve Bentham's utilitarian moral philosophy by arguing that utility as a moral criterion is of a qualitative nature, and not of a quantitative one.² Under the influence of socialist and liberal ideals, Mill argues that the general interest of society must be respected and take priority over individual interest because of its intrinsic value, and not merely because it may coincide with people's individual interests. In Mill's own words, human happiness is intrinsically better than that of a particular individual, since it is of an altogether "higher" type. The central principle of Mill's utilitarian morality is the following: treat others as you would like them to treat you and practice charity. Thus, from Mill's perspective, a pleasure is worthy to be experienced by man only if it is intrinsically noble, and the value of man himself is the foundation of utilitarian morality. In Mill's own words, "it is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied."³

2. West, "Mill and Utilitarianism in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," 61–80.

3. Mill, "Utilitarianism," 9.

It goes without saying that Mill's utilitarian morality has significantly improved Bentham's utilitarianism. But Mill's moral philosophy has defects that are due to the intrinsically contradictory character of utilitarianism itself. In particular, following the logic of utilitarianism, Mill maintains that pleasure is the ultimate criterion of morality, and, simultaneously, he aims at deducing that a particular pleasure, that is, human happiness, is "higher" than all other pleasures. In other words, lacking a criterion of morality that transcends pleasure, Mill tries to create a universal hierarchy of pleasures, which is absurd. Furthermore, according to Mill, if no other factors interfere (e.g., coercion, restrictions, etc.), conscience is attracted, and it should be attracted, to the morally higher pleasures; hence, he makes a logically illegitimate inference from "is" to "ought."⁴

Inherent in the tension between "being," or what is, and "will," or what should be, is an expectation for a new beginning, for the sake of which and due to which a human may undertake enormous risks and jeopardize almost everything; in particular, someone may decide to sacrifice him- or herself, identifying being ("I am") with will ("I want"), or may choose evil, sacrificing his or her humanity to satisfy a selfish desire. Evil emerges and manifests itself when, during the tug of war between the ego and the ego's ideal self (or what psychoanalysts call the "superego"), someone sees himself as falling short of his ideal self. In that case, he internalizes his situation in a negative way, and he reacts vindictively by psychologically, that is, internally, annihilating humanity and the "other." Evil is not a product of social conditions. Evil is a tragic expression of one's impulse to complain and take vengeance for one's inner failure, in the sense that one has failed to respond effectively to the qualitative requests of one's own self. In other words, evil does not have an inherent basis, that is, its ultimate cause is neither lack of culture, nor nature, nor external oppression, but it springs from the will. Therefore, within the human will lies a link between humanity and evil. This link cannot be overcome through fair historical acts, that is, it cannot be overcome through the pretense that "the end justifies the means," because any act that is fair yet simultaneously causes pain, victims, and destruction cannot cancel evil.

Only a perverted person can legitimize evil (e.g., take measures that cause pain, death, destruction, etc.) by claiming that, in this way, he tries

4. George E. Moore has called the previous syllogism the "naturalistic fallacy"; Moore, *Principia Ethica*.

to overcome the contradiction between an ideal end and the actual state of affairs. One could try to justify evil by pointing out that a physician who prescribes a bitter medicine or inflicts pain through a lancet does something evil, too, and that, ultimately, a physician's "evil" practices cure patients. However, in the case of a capable physician, an apparently "evil" practice is transformed into something good because it is pervaded by the positive nature and spirit of medical science, whereas the evil that stems from a negativity bias causes evil for the sake of evil, since an avenger or a judgmental actor who is characterized by a negativity bias, far from successfully dealing with a negative situation, adds his psychological problems to an already negative situation.

Departing from classical utilitarianism, Adam Smith, the acknowledged father of classical political economy, has proposed a moral theory that is founded on the principle of "sympathy." From Smith's perspective, sympathy consists in the intuitive perception of the normative character of human behavior. In other words, according to Smith, "sympathy" combines empathy (i.e., the emotional interconnectedness that we feel with other humans) with the judgment and evaluation of individuals' behavior in particular situations.

Smith maintains that sympathy must be pure, unconditional, and universal. Additionally, he postulates that individuals make decisions based primarily on self-interest. Thus, he defines self-interest in a broad way; Smith's definition of self-interest includes sympathy. However, faced with Hobbes's and Rousseau's arguments that selfish desires may injure others, Smith has to answer the following question: how can the selfish desires of individuals be contained, while still enabling individuals to thrive by pursuing their self-interest? Smith answered to the previous question by developing a psychological metaphor called the "spectator."

According to Smith, we should think of the spectator as someone who observes our behavior and the behavior of others. When we are observing someone taking a decision or an action, part of us is judging that action: that is the "spectator." Smith argues that, "to approve of the passions of another, therefore, as suitable to their objects, is the same thing as to observe that we entirely sympathize with them; and not to approve of them as such, is the same thing as to observe that we do not entirely sympathize with them."⁵ Smith relates sympathy to approval as follows: "To approve of another man's opinions is to adopt those opinions, and to

5. Smith, "Sympathy," 105.

adopt them is to approve of them[;] . . . it is equally the case with regard to our approbation or disapprobation of the sentiments or passions of others.”⁶

According to Smith, the aforementioned inner spectator judges according to his sense of what is proper behavior, and, simultaneously, he complies with the principle of sympathy. However, the following question emerges: how should we act when we do not know if others approve or disapprove of our actions? Smith answered to the previous question by arguing that we use the aforementioned inner spectator to evaluate our own actions, and, for this reason, we have self-contained mechanisms and dynamics for controlling selfish desires.

Smith attempted to create a coherent systematic science of man grounded in sympathy. However, sympathy is not a necessary conscious state, conscious states are characterized by subjectivity, and, since the sentimental and the volitional powers of conscience can influence sympathy, sympathy may not lead to the formulation of unconditional moral judgments. In order to confront the previous logical difficulties, Smith resorts to the psychological metaphor of the spectator, and he argues that an individual’s own conscience can be used as a substitute for the conscience of an external sympathizing spectator whenever the first operates as an impartial spectator. However, the previous argument is a logical contradiction, because, in this way, Smith eliminates sympathy in the fields of deliberation and judgment, which are supposedly underpinned by sympathy. In other words, the way in which Adam Smith uses the term sympathy implies that he has not clarified if sympathy is a moral sentiment, as he has theoretically asserted, or if it is an expression of moral rationalism, as it is implied by the role that the impartial spectator plays in Smith’s moral theory.

The contradictory character of Smith’s moral theory corroborates the argument that I put forward in chapter 6, according to which a selfish soul can never be spiritually free. Smith postulates selfishness as an ontological attribute of the human being, and he tries to endow sympathy—which is a particular sentiment of the selfish individual—with universal authority. In order to endow sympathy with universal authority, thus protecting and dignifying the selfish ontological core of the individual, Smith’s moral theory, by using the psychological metaphor of the spectator, makes the individual’s inner life so shallow that sympathy is

6. *Ibid.*, 106.

subjected to reason. In other words, ultimately, Smith's individuals can have sentiments only if their sentiments are not sentimental, that is, only if their sentiments, instead of expressing the person's existential otherness, conform to reason. Therefore, in the context of Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, individuals pursue their selfish interest, but, ultimately, they conform to the commands of the reason of the established system, in the sense that they pursue their selfish interest according to the established system's rationality, and, for this reason, they are ultimately, transformed into undifferentiated units of a self-regulating system that, in his *Wealth of Nations*, Smith described as the economic system of "natural liberty."⁷

Smith's economic system of "natural liberty" is a scientifically rigorous reformulation of physiocracy, which was the first systematic attempt to explain economic behavior in similar ways to natural (that is, inanimate) behavior. Physiocracy was pioneered by François Quesnay (1694–1774) and Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot (1727–81). The physiocrats argue that there is a "natural order" that allows and enables human beings to live together. Samuelson and Nordhaus have given a concise account of physiocracy as follows: "a remarkable description of the economy as a circular flow, still used in today's texts . . . was made by Quesnay, Louis XIV's court physician. He stressed that the different elements of the economy are as integrally tied together as are the blood vessels of the body."⁸ The thought of the physiocrats, the mentality of industrialism, and Adam Smith's aforementioned moral theory converge in the publication by Adam Smith of *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776, which "marks the birthdate of modern economics."⁹ The physiocrats and the modern economists, in general, follow a positivist epistemology, which has been summarized by John Elliott Cairnes as follows: "Political Economy is a science in the same sense in which Astronomy, Dynamics, Chemistry, Psychology are sciences. Its subject-matter is different; . . . but its methods, its aims, the character of its conclusions are the same as theirs."¹⁰

The physiocrats, the classical economists, and the neoclassical economists follow a positivist epistemology, which was summarized by Cairnes in the quotation above. In general, modern economics is dominated by the argument that there are economic laws and that the primary

7. Sabine and Thorson, *A History of Political Theory*, 624; Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*.

8. Samuelson and Nordhaus, *Economics*, 376.

9. *Ibid.*, 376.

10. Cairnes, *The Character and Logical Method of Political Economy*, 35.

aim of economics is the discovery of those laws. Thus, the dominant theories of modern economics are fixated on essentialism (philosophical realism) and Newtonian mechanics. But, as Alexander Woodcock and Monte Davis have pointed out, even in the context of natural sciences, “Newton’s triumph was not an explanation of anything,” and “the twentieth century has taught us that the universe is a queerer place than we imagined, perhaps (in J. B. S. Haldane’s words) queerer than we *can* imagine,” that is, “much of reality is not so obliging.”¹¹ In contrast to physiocracy and Newtonian mechanics, science is a consciousness or-thosis, in the sense that the purpose of science is to create theories that help consciousness to approach reality (both the reality of consciousness and the reality of the world). Physical and historical reality is not merely an object whose particular manifestations are statically conceived by scientific consciousness; instead, physical and historical reality is a goal toward which scientific consciousness is dynamically oriented, and scientific consciousness seeks to identify physical and historical reality with scientific consciousness itself, that is, scientific consciousness seeks to eliminate any distance between scientific consciousness and any object of scientific research.

The economic system is a particular case of the general issue of the communication among conscious beings. If we leave the realm of unconscious communication, to which physiocracy is confined, and attempt to deal with problems of deliberate cooperation, we need a moral theory. Through his psychological metaphor of the spectator, Smith attempted to articulate a moral theory that gives rise to such a high level of conformity to the established system that, ultimately, degrades human beings to the level of inanimate, or purely instinctive behavior, so as to safeguard the rationality of the established system. In the context of Smith’s moral and

11. Woodcock and Davis, *Catastrophe Theory*, 10, 14. According to Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, “our universe has a pluralistic, complex character. Structures may disappear, but also they may appear. Some processes are, as far as we know, well described by deterministic equations, but other involve probabilistic processes” (Prigogine and Stengers, *Order out of Chaos*, 9). Furthermore, it should be emphasized that there is a fundamental asymmetry between physical (or astronomical) time and historical time, and, therefore, there is a fundamental asymmetry between natural science and social science. Whereas physical time is, more or less, uniform, historical time is subject to structural changes. Physical time obeys its own entropy, which means that it flows in a precise and unalterable (irreversible) direction toward a precise but unknown end, but historical time is not characterized by any entropy, because it is a free outcome of the action of human consciousness, and, therefore, it is subject only to the laws imposed on it by the intentionality of human consciousness.

economic theories, and, generally, in the context of the so-called “classical economics” (whose paradigmatic representatives are David Ricardo and Thomas R. Malthus), the “system” becomes a mechanism that obeys its own terms and logic, it gives rise to the autonomy of economics from real people’s needs and will, and it is imagined as an impersonal and ruthless mechanism, while “systemic morality” is merely a training tool for making people judge, desire, and evaluate according to the rationality of the established system.

The so-called classical political economy (i.e., the economic theories of Adam Smith, D. Ricardo, and T. R. Malthus, as well as the economic theories that are based on the works of the previous pioneers of “classical economic thought”) trains economists and, generally, economic actors to subordinate the concept of “value” to the concept of “price” and, by implication, to subordinate the creativity of the human being to the rationality of the established economic system. As Louis Lavelle has pointedly observed, a price is a fact, but a value is a judgment.¹² Value transcends action, and, simultaneously, it is integrated into action and guides action, since value is the structure of action, and action confirms the existence of value. Moreover, ultimately, values determine prices. The existence of values enables humans to develop their consciousness of existence, since, due to values and through values, a man is aware that he is not necessarily determined by “objective conditions,” but he can change his existential conditions, instead of merely seeking ways of rational adaptation.

In the history of modern philosophy, the most prominent theory of moral rationalism was formed by Immanuel Kant. Kant’s theory of morality is grounded in the principle of the “categorical imperative.” A categorical imperative is a command, or a rule, that applies in all situations and at all times. This categorical imperative is that we should do what is rationally (logically) right for human beings.

Kant’s moral theory has two basic assumptions, namely: (i) Only human beings are capable of rationality. Hence, Kant maintains, it is imperative to protect man’s rationality and, precisely, his ability to be rational, since to take away our ability to be rational means to take away our humanity. In other words, for Kant, the distinctive attribute of humanity is rationality. (ii) As rational beings, only humans are autonomous, that is, they can make volitional choices, whereas all other creatures on

12. Lavelle, *Traité des Valeurs*.

the planet pretty much react instinctively. Moreover, according to Kant, man's autonomy should be protected.

In his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant argues that the following two ethical imperatives should guide our actions: (i) We should do what is best for everyone equally. (ii) We should do what preserves the needs of each individual equally. Thus, the first formulation of Kant's categorical imperative is the following: "I ought never to act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law."¹³ In other words, Kant argues that, if it doesn't logically make sense that your action (that you are regarding as ethical) could be made dispositive,¹⁴ then it is not the best ethical action. The second formulation of Kant's categorical imperative is the following: "Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end."¹⁵ From the perspective of Kant's original assumptions, if someone uses other people as a means to achieve his own goals, for instance, if he deceives people, he trumps their rationality, instead of preserving their ability to be rational, and, therefore, he commits an assault on those people's humanity itself.

Kant's moral theory is focused on ethical duty, and it is intimately associated with the morality of modern civil society. Moreover, Kant's ethics, epistemology, and ontology have influenced the scholarly work of numerous Protestant theologians.

Even though Kant's moral theory helps the development of the rational power of conscience, it is seriously problematic. First of all, Kant's argument that the moral law is a categorical imperative leads to oversimplification. The following counter-example disproves Kant's universality claim: indeed, as Kant contends, we should not wish lying to become a universal law, but if you know that a person X is asking you information about a person Y in order to harm, or even kill, Y, then it might be neither psychologically easy nor rational to give X true information. Additionally, Michel Anteby, Professor of Organizational Behavior at Harvard University, has pointed out that so-called "moral grey zones" emerge in more or less every sector or enterprise when official rules are repeatedly broken with, at minimum, a supervisor's approval, and they

13. Paton, *The Moral Law*, 67.

14. By dispositive, I mean relating to or bringing about the settlement of an issue, a general settlement/rule.

15. *Ibid.*, 91.

rely on personal trust at all levels.¹⁶ According to Anteby, a characteristic example of such a “moral grey zone” is the following: “physicians often afford paramedics and EMTs considerable leeway to ‘play doctor’ or ‘experiment’ with certain drugs and dosages when they believe it is critical to a patient’s survival.”¹⁷

Kant has bought the logical power and coherence of his moral theory at an extremely high cost, since, in order to achieve such a high level of logical power and coherence, his moral theory eliminates the sentimental power of conscience, and it precludes sensitivity and discretion of judgment. Thus, given that conscience has three natural powers—namely, the sentiment, the intellect, and the will—Kant’s moral rationalism inhibits the development of an integrated conscience, and it gives rise to a rather shallow personality.

The fallacy of Kant’s moral theory originates from his ontological claim that the Good-in-itself is inaccessible to the human being. The Kantian subject is capable of knowing only the products of his or her own consciousness, and, therefore, ultimately, Kant’s epistemology is grounded in imagination. In fact, this is Kant’s conclusive argument in the first edition of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, published in 1781. In the first edition, Kant uses the term “transcendental imagination,” by which he refers to the unknown common root uniting sense and understanding, but, frightened of the consequences of such a bold claim, he decided to omit the term “transcendental imagination” from the second edition of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, which was published in 1787.¹⁸ Additionally, Kant argues that imaginative formation (*Einbildung*) is distinct from the power to give form to an intuition (*Bildungskraft*), because it makes images without the presence of a sensible object, either by invention (*fingendo*) or by abstraction (*abstrahendo*). As I argued in chapter 2, imagination is necessarily unstable. Faced with the consequences of his assumption about the unknowability of the Good-in-itself and with the inherent instability of imagination, Kant attempted to fortify the subject’s ego and transform it into a substitute for the unknowable Good-in-itself through the categorical imperative, that is, by filling the human soul with moral duties, which, as I argued earlier, give rise to a person whose conscience is not integrated, and whose inner life is shallow.

16. Anteby, *Moral Grey Zones*, chapter 9.

17. *Ibid.*, 143.

18. Makkreel, *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant*, 21.

In contrast to the aforementioned moral theories, methexiology implies that ethics consists neither in duty nor in the individual's selfish will, but in a radical sense of unselfishness that opens up our minds to the mysterious, yet knowable, Good-in-itself. According to Hesychasm, on which methexiological ethics is founded, the Good-in-itself, in the form of God's uncreated energies, is accessible to humans, if and to the extent that they rise above and sacrifice their individual certainties, that is, their selfish thoughts and desires. In other words, since humans can participate in the God's deifying uncreated energies—if and to the extent that they cleanse their minds from logic and sentiments, which keep humans confined to the realm of the ego—methexiological ethics consists in being godly. As I have already explained, the mind should be understood as the repository of God's uncreated energies, and, therefore as something distinct from both the intellect (the seat of reason) and the passionate part of the soul (the seat of emotion). Hence, humans can use their intellects and the passionate part of their souls wisely only if they are governed by the mind, which, in its turn, should be filled only with God's uncreated energies.

The essence of methexiological ethics can be understood by contemplating on the following story from the book *Gerontikon*,¹⁹ which contains sayings of Eastern Orthodox monks: Abbé Serapion once went to the house of a prostitute, pretending he was a client. Before the prostitute started offering her services, he asked her to allow him to read his canon (prayer rule). Then Abbé Serapion started reading from the book of Psalms, and, after each particular psalm, he was praying to God to save that prostitute. Abbé Serapion's canon made the prostitute's conscience shudder, and, by the time Abbé Serapion finished his canon, the prostitute had undergone a spiritual conversion. Finally, the prostitute asked Abbé Serapion to guide her to a way of life that would be in accordance with God's will. Abbé Serapion led the prostitute to an abbey of nuns, where he left her with the abbess, but he ordered the abbess to give no prayer rule to the former prostitute and to let her do what she wanted. However, after two days, the former prostitute asked the abbess to give her a prayer rule, and, after a few more days, she asked the abbess to spend the rest of her life in prayer and by following the rules of that monastery. The abbess acted according to the requests of that former prostitute, thus following the guidelines that had been given to her by Abbé Serapion and what is

19. *Gerontikon*, 239–40.

written in 1 John 3:21–23: “if our hearts don’t condemn us, we have boldness toward God; and whatever we ask, we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing in his sight.”

Abbé Serapion did not impose any correctional measures on the former prostitute, because he was primarily concerned not with her deeds, but with her soul, in accordance with Jesus Christ’s teaching that, “from within, out of the hearts of men, proceed evil thoughts, sexual sins, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly.”²⁰ Abbé Serapion discerned that the soul of that woman was longing for the Absolute and that the mismanagement of the quest for the Absolute had led her to the desecration of her being. Therefore, he led her to a way of life in which the Absolute, for which she had been longing for so long, could be disclosed, and he let her meet the Absolute of her own free will. Abbé Serapion did not even request that woman to confess her sins to him, because he was aware that the sacrament of confession is not a particular formal rite, but it is the mystery of metanoia, and that the essence of sin is the lack of metanoia. Therefore, the purpose of a spiritual guide and of ethics, in general, should be to save man’s soul from remaining closed toward God and toward the fellow-humans.

From the perspective of methexiology, ethics should not treat man as if he were a being that should be deontologically corrected, or ethically “rebooted,” according to a particular set of imperatives, but it should aim at opening up man’s soul to the Good-in-itself, namely, to God, and to the fellow-humans. The essence of ethics is exactly the previous kind of psychic openness. Every other perception or criterion of ethics, whether it be atonement through self-inflicted pain and/or self-sacrifice, or rational self-control, or individual sentiments, proceeds from and is underpinned by a sense of self-vindication, and, for this reason, it keeps man’s soul closed and, therefore, sinful, no matter how pious one’s external behavior is. In fact, this is the meaning of Jesus Christ’s Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector.²¹

The aforementioned methexiological approach to ethics underpins and leads to a particular approach to justice: justice as restoration of the sociality of the human soul and, by implication, as social responsibility. The main purpose of positive law is to achieve, protect, and, in case of

20. Mark 7:21–22.

21. Luke 18:9–14.

social disorder, restore social peace. However, history has shown that positive law contradicts itself whenever some of its rules cannot convince people that they are in harmony with the essence of justice. For this reason, Pythagoras has pointed out that societies should be governed by benevolent laws.²² When social consciousness disapproves of certain laws, it characterizes them as unjust, and, in this event, human consciousness becomes upset and is instigated to resistance. Therefore, humanity needs a stable and trustworthy measure and criterion of justice; this is the purpose of divine justice, because the foundation and the shelf of the just republic is the Good-in-itself. Both Plato²³ and Aristotle²⁴ maintain that the Good-in-itself is the foundation and the shelf of the just republic, because they conceive of the city-state as a society of free and equal persons whose purpose is the achievement of a perfect life, that is, a life in the image of God.

According to the Old Testament, the purpose of divine justice is the restoration of the communion between humanity and God, and, for this reason, the Old Testament's system of justice is characterized by mercy. Therefore, for instance, in Ezra 9:15, we read that people should be glad God doesn't give them what they deserve, in the sense that God's love and mercy had spared the Israelites when they did nothing to deserve it. In the same spirit, in his Proverbs 25:21–22, King Solomon writes the following: "If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink: for you will heap coals of fire on his head, and the LORD will reward you." Moreover, prompting man to act in a godly way, Lamentations 3:27–31 says: "It is good that a man should . . . give his cheek to him who strikes him, and let him be filled with disgrace. For the LORD will not cast off forever." However, according to the Bible, over the years, divine justice has been distorted into a license for revenge and into an instrument through which ruling elites impose their commands on people. In Matthew 5:39, Jesus delineates his approach to justice as follows: "If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."

The aforementioned biblical passages make clear that injustice originates from an injury in the sociality of the human soul, that is, injustice is a consequence of a spiritual illness, and, therefore, the purpose of real

22. Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*, 126.

23. Plato, *Republic*, 544a; *Statesman*, 302b5.

24. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1283b41–1284a3, 1288a33–b5.

justice is to restore the sociality of the human soul by properly training people to be in harmony with themselves, with their fellow-humans, and with God; any other kind of justice is a distortion of justice, because it serves worldly and selfish goals. Writing from a strictly philosophical perspective, Plato has also argued that injustice is an “illness” (*nōsema*),²⁵ and, therefore, he has characterized those political systems in which injustice prevails as “illnesses” (*nosēmata*).²⁶ Hence, a real system of justice neither legitimizes revenge through state institutions (e.g., prisons, firing squads, concentration camps, etc.) nor serves the selfish interests of social elites, but it treats criminals as spiritually ill persons who need spiritual cure, and it seeks to restore the sociality of the criminals’ souls.

When the scribes and the Pharisees found a woman guilty of adultery, and, according to their laws, they were ready to stone her to death, Jesus Christ told them: “He who is without sin among you, let him throw the first stone at her.”²⁷ Once, Peter asked Jesus: “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?”²⁸ Jesus’s answer to him was the following: “I don’t tell you seven times, but seventy-seven times.”²⁹ Given that, in the context of the Bible, the number seven is the number of completeness and perfection (deriving much of each meaning by being associated with God’s creative work), Jesus’s answer, that, is “seventy-seven times,” means that we should not even keep track of how many times we forgive someone. In other words, Christ’s ethics of unselfishness underpins and gives rise to a system of justice grounded in forgiveness. This enlightened form of forgiveness corresponds and is inextricably linked to a program of spiritual training whose purpose is spiritual conversion (*metanoia*).

In keeping with its anti-legalistic attitude, methexiology implies that a just society is one in which laws of the state are kept to the bare minimum. According to a traditional saying of Athonite monks, “a good act is not really good, unless it has been done in a good way.” Therefore, no good act is really good unless it is based on man’s freedom of will. For instance, the welfare state appears to be something good, but, in reality, it is not good, primarily because of the following reasons: first, it is

25. Plato, *Gorgias*, 480b1.

26. Plato, *Republic*, 544c6–7.

27. John 8:7.

28. Matthew 18:21.

29. Matthew 18:22.

based on violence, in the sense that it presupposes and necessitates high levels of taxation and social security contributions; secondly, it increases the power of the state and restricts people's freedom of will; thirdly, the very existence of the welfare state indicates that people's conscience is not properly cultivated, since they are unable to voluntarily manifest their sense of social responsibility. Hence, unless people become capable of voluntarily manifesting their sense of social responsibility, the welfare state is manipulated by corrupt social elites that use it as an instrument for justifying the expansion of state power and social control mechanisms, which, ultimately, serve the selfish interests of the ruling elites (e.g., even though several people argue that taxation is justified on the grounds that it redistributes wealth, the truth is that the biggest portion of the taxes that are collected by the state benefit the economic elite through economic subsidies, business contracts between the state and private corporations, and state-financed educational, social-security, and public-order systems that reflect the mentality and serve the interests of the economic elite).

It is important to keep in mind the three temptations that Jesus Christ overcame in the desert, according to Luke 4:1–13. The first temptation was the following: "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." Symbolically, and in regard to politics, the previous temptation means that the devil tempted Jesus Christ to impose his authority on people by "purchasing" people's support, that is, by appealing to and manipulating people's basic instincts, primarily people's need for food and security. However, even when his human nature was starving, Jesus Christ steadfastly responded as follows: "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'" The second temptation was the following: "I will give you all this authority and their glory. . . . If you therefore will worship before me, it will all be yours." Symbolically, and in regard to politics, the previous temptation means that the devil tempted Jesus Christ to subordinate eternity and spiritual freedom to the logic of history and to adopt a pragmatic attitude toward historical becoming. However, Jesus Christ steadfastly responded as follows: "Get behind me Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and you shall serve him only.'" The third temptation was the following: "If you are the Son of God, cast yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will put his angels in charge of you, to guard you.'" Symbolically, and in regard to politics, the previous temptation means that the devil tempted Jesus to impose his authority on people through glamor. The

intellectually weaker and more average types of people can be controlled and manipulated through “bread,” that is, through tangible benefits, but strongly intellectual types are susceptible to intellectual illusions, and, therefore, the most effective way of manipulating the latter is through glamor. However, Jesus Christ steadfastly responded as follows: “It has been said, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’”

From the perspective of methexiology, any discussion about justice is meaningful only if it involves the cure of injuries in the sociality of the human soul and the protection of people against the aforementioned temptations of Christ. As I have already argued, unless the injuries in the sociality of the human soul are cured, man cannot be spiritually free, since a selfish soul is imprisoned in the dark “cave” of natural necessities (e.g., instincts) and intellectual illusions. Unless the human soul is not liberated from the dark “cave” of natural necessities (e.g., instincts) and intellectual illusions, conscience cannot give rise to a just society. Justice is ultimately a matter of spiritual liberation, for which reason Jesus said: “If you remain in my word . . . you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”³⁰

The methexiological theory of justice, which I have just expounded, clearly clashes with secularism and, especially, with the most advanced form of secularism, which is the philosophy of action. The philosophy of action—either of the materialist type, such as Karl Marx’s dialectical materialism, or of the spiritualist type, such as Alasdair MacIntyre’s Roman Catholic Marxism and Oliver Davies’s *Theology of Transformation*—is an extension of the medieval West’s theology and of the modern West’s humanistic thought. The essence of the philosophy of action is the negation of God’s uncreated energies. Hence, “practice” contrasts not so much with “theory” as with “grace”; the conceptualizations of “practice” that I have in mind when I contrast “practice” with God’s uncreated grace are mainly those that have been put forward by Karl Marx,³¹ Alasdair MacIntyre,³² and Pierre Bourdieu.³³

The scholastics’ argument that divine grace (i.e., God’s energies) is created implies that the significance of beings and things is created, and, hence it reduces to practice. On the other hand, adhering to the

30. John 8:31–32.

31. Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach” (notes written by Karl Marx as a basic outline for the first chapter of his book *The German Ideology*).

32. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*.

33. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.

Hesychasts' doctrine of God's uncreated energies, methexiology emphasizes that God's grace is uncreated. The argument that God's grace is an uncreated gift of God to humanity implies that the significance of beings and things is never a practical issue, that is, it is never reducible to practice. In other words, from the perspective of methexiology, the purpose of existence is never derived from a historical or mechanical process.

The argument that the purpose of existence is not derived from any historical or mechanical process is corroborated by the fact that many people who had absolutely believed that the significance of beings and things was derived from practice, since they had identified a historical utopia (e.g., communism) with man's eschatological liberation, have been killed in social rebellions; their decision to sacrifice their lives for the sake of their beliefs indicates that they had never really adopted the argument that the significance of beings and things was a practical issue or a pragmatic truth. When one sacrifices one's life for "bread" or for an idea, he actually refuses to exchange the meaning of life for the practical experience of life. Hence, even in a negative way, a person who sacrifices his life for an ideal gives witness to the glory of God's uncreated energies. In other words, a person who sacrifices his life for his ideals—regardless of whether he is a supporter of a materialist ideology or not—proves that his spirit cannot be subjugated by any general law nor by any historical theory that aims at transforming human life into a practical process.

The philosophy of action *per se* produces two types of persons: bureaucrats and nihilists. On the other hand, the belief in God's uncreated grace underpins holiness, and, therefore, Hesychasm produces saints. In the context of any philosophy of action, justice is necessarily pursued through worldly means, and, therefore, it consists in a rational process according to which an institution collects fees/taxes (usually in a coercive way), and then, after keeping a portion of its proceeds for itself, it distributes goods to people. By contrast, a saint gives out everything. In particular, the difference between a communist and a saint is that the first needs to amass economic resources in order to distribute goods, whereas the latter wants everything to be given out in the context of a radical and metaphysically grounded kind of unselfishness.

The theories of justice that are derived from and underpinned by a philosophy of action can be categorized into the following three approaches:

Nihilistic theories of justice: From the perspective of nihilism, the theory of justice should be focused on individual rights and, especially,

on individual ownership. A paradigmatic representative of what I call a nihilistic theory of justice is Robert Nozick.³⁴ Nozick's theory of justice is based on his self-ownership argument, which has been summarized by Will Kymlicka³⁵ as follows: (a) people own themselves; (b) the world is initially owned by nobody; (c) one can acquire absolute rights over a disproportionate share of the world, if one does not worsen the condition of others; (d) it is relatively easy to acquire absolute rights over a disproportionate share of the world; therefore, (e) given that private property has been appropriated, a free market in capital and labor is morally required. The previous perspective is nihilistic because, in Nozick's intellectual universe, humanity is disconnected from its significance, which is to say that humanity is disconnected from the source of the significance of being. Moreover, even though Nozick defines human autonomy as "self-ownership," he does not explain why self-ownership is equivalent to such strong property rights. Self-ownership is equivalent to such strong property rights only if we assume that one's ownership of oneself is equivalent to one's ownership of the commodities that one produces and/or purchases—but this assumption degrades the human being into a commodity. If a man degrades himself and other humans into commodities, then, not only does he lose his autonomy, but also he can logically establish neither his superiority vis-à-vis other commodified human beings nor the legitimacy of his ownership claims over commodities, since he himself is a commodity.

Bureaucratic theories of justice: A paradigmatic representative of what I call a bureaucratic theory of justice is Jon Elster, a prominent scholar of "analytical Marxism" (an individualist reworking of Marx based on game theory) and "methodological individualism."³⁶ Elster's theory of social choice and his approach to distributive justice are based on his assumption that preferences are endogenous to rational choice models. According to Elster, individual preferences are formed through the process of political decision-making itself, and, therefore, individual preferences are not *a priori* or exogenous. However, Elster himself, in his later writings, admitted that rational choice theory is not as powerful as he had initially contended. In his book *Explaining Social Behavior*, Elster argues as follows: "rational-choice theory has less explanatory power

34. Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*.

35. Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, 172.

36. Elster, "The Market and the Forum: Three Varieties of Political Theory."

than I used to think. . . . *There is no general nonintentional mechanism that can simulate or mimic rationality.*³⁷ As I have already argued, truth transcends logic, and the significance of life transcends life itself. Therefore, every regime that is based on a bureaucratic approach to justice, regardless of its rationality claims, is to some extent compelled to resort to absolutism in order to subordinate truth and the significance of life to the rationality of the established system and its practical processes; the regimes of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia as well as the bureaucratic regime of the Eurozone during the first two decades of the twenty-first century are some of the most extreme examples of absolutism caused and underpinned by a bureaucratic theory of justice.

Mixed theories of justice: By the term “mixed theories of justice” I refer to any attempt to combine the egoistic voluntarism that underpins what I call a nihilistic theory of justice with the rationalism that underpins what I call a bureaucratic theory of justice. A paradigmatic representative of what I call a mixed theory of justice is John Rawls.³⁸ In his *Theory of Justice*, Rawls tries to find a balance between two goals: the goal of personal liberty (which is reflected in his first maxim³⁹ of justice and expresses the human attraction to life) and the goal of social equality (which is reflected in his second maxim of justice⁴⁰ and expresses human concerns about the sustainability of life). For this reason, Rawls resorts to Kant’s moral rationalism, whose defects I explained earlier in this chapter. Hence, Rawls’s theory of justice—his “Kantian constructivism”⁴¹—has inherited the defects of Kant’s moral rationalism. In addition, Rawls’s theory of justice has inherited many of the defects of utilitarianism due to Rawls’s hypothesis about the “original position” of humanity. In particular, Rawls assumes that, in their “original position,” people were not aware of any particular purposes in life, but they only knew that it would be useful to have various “primary goods,” which, according to Rawls, are “the principles that rational and free persons concerned to further their

37. Elster, *Explaining Social Behavior*, 5, 25.

38. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*.

39. Rawls’s first maxim of justice is the following: “each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others.” *Ibid.*, 60.

40. Rawls’s second maxim of justice is the following: “social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone’s advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all.” *Ibid.*, 60.

41. Rawls, “Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory.”

own interests would accept in an initial position of equality as defining the fundamentals of the terms of their association.”⁴² Given that Rawls’s hypothesis about the “original position” is actually based on a kind of utilitarianism, his theory of justice is susceptible to the criticism of utilitarianism that I put forward earlier in this chapter.

As I have already argued, the methexiological theory of justice starts from its refusal to put truth on the “Procrustean bed” of logic and from its refusal to put the significance of life on the “Procrustean bed” of history. Therefore, the methexiological theory of justice is substantially different from any secular theory of justice, since secular theories of justice are founded on practice, whereas the methexiological theory of justice is founded on the irreducibility of the significance of being to practice. Furthermore, methexiology implies that no one has a right to usurp a power which originates from God, and that no one is above his or her brother or sister, except by intellect, charity, and education. God has not authorized any human to replace and represent Him on earth, since God’s uncreated energies are directly available to humans. The true purpose of spiritual authorities is to guide and help people to participate in God’s uncreated energies and thus to be deified; any spiritual authority that pretends to be a substitute for God’s uncreated energies or an ontologically necessary vicar of God should not be believed. Our ignorance and selfishness alone give these usurpers the power that they wield in order to establish systems of spiritual and/or political despotism. As a conclusion, methexiology is an invitation to join a Crusade whose purpose is the reconquering of those “holy lands” that are known as freedom, love, and truth.

The secular perception of individual autonomy, which underpins Nozick’s theory of justice and classical political economy, envisages a time when each person will be doing what he or she wills. However, methexiology clashes with Nozick’s and the classical political economists’ perception of freedom of will, because, if the manner and the extent in which someone actualizes his or her freedom of will is determined by the commands of the instinct and/or of the established economic system, then, as I argued in chapter 6, human freedom of will becomes a shadow of itself. Moreover, methexiology clashes with both Elster’s and Rawls’s theories of justice, because Elster’s and Rawls’s theories of justice are founded on an “earthly” perception of justice, whereas methexiology is founded on a “celestial” perception of justice. By arguing that methexiology is founded

42. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 11.

on a “celestial” perception of justice, I do not mean that we should seek justice in the sky. The argument that methexiology is founded on a “celestial” perception of justice means that, when one has to distribute the “economic pie,” he must not cut the economic pie into pieces, unless he is really just, that is, unless conscience has primacy over the logic of historical or economic necessities. From the perspective of methexiology, justice never submits to any kind of necessity or law. Thus, the concept of justice that is derived from methexiology never dictates that you should coercively take another person’s coat in order to give it to someone else, but it dictates that you should give your own coat to someone else, in case you have a second coat. Hence, from the perspective of methexiology, real justice is a consequence of humanity’s spiritual freedom.

The aforementioned study of the methexiological approach to ethics and justice implies that methexiology has an important impact on policy analysis, too. Policy analysis underpins and informs political and economic decision-making, even if there is a lengthy lag between policy analysis and its gradual absorption into political and economic debates. Once established as common sense, a text of policy analysis becomes incredibly powerful, because it delineates not only what is the object of knowledge but also what it is sensible to talk about or suggest. If one thinks and acts outside the framework of the dominant text of policy analysis, he risks more than simply the judgment that his recommendations are wrong; his entire moral attitude may be ridiculed or seen as dangerous just because his theoretical assumptions are deemed unrealistic. Therefore, defining “common sense” and, in essence, what is “reality” and “realistic” is the ultimate act of political power. Policy analysis does not simply explain or predict, it tells us what possibilities exist for human action and intervention; it defines both our explanatory possibilities and our moral and practical horizons. Hence, ontology, epistemology, and ethics matter, and the stakes are far more considerable than at first sight seems to be the case.

Methexiology, as I have delineated it in the present book, underpins and implies the following ten, mutually equivalent, definitions of policy analysis:

1. A process for organizing information about the reality of the historical world as a repository of opportunities and about the reality of the historical actors’ consciousness as a repository of intentions, in order to help decision-making on the basis of methexiology

- (humanity's participation in a metaphysically grounded system of fundamental significations, or values).
2. The examination of questions related to the policy-making process, conducted with the intention to achieve an ontologically grounded overcoming of the antithesis between realism and idealism and, thus, to affect the policy-making process.
 3. Analysis that generates information in such a way as to improve the basis for policy-makers to historically manifest their experience of a metaphysically grounded truth (*mēthexis*).
 4. Analysis that assists policy-makers in understanding complex problems of policy choice in a historical environment characterized by a dialectical relationship between necessity and freedom.
 5. Analysis that assists policy-makers to develop, understand, select, and implement what should be done in an environment characterized by a dialectical relationship between necessity and freedom in order to change people's existential conditions according to their intentionality—and what consequences to evaluate.
 6. The systematic examination and comparison of alternative future policies by applying methexiology.
 7. The application of methexiology in order to solve problems an organization is called upon to do something about.
 8. Analysis that assists policy-makers to ameliorate the problems and manage the policy issues they face by applying methexiology, utilizing scientific and technological advances, considering the larger contexts and uncertainties that inevitably attend such problems, and giving witness to the spiritual freedom of the human being.
 9. Keeping policy-makers' consciousness constantly vigilant, warning them of the risks of leaving policy issues to the hands of any kind of "automatic pilot" and preventing them from confusing momentum with purpose.
 10. Smashing the illusion that policy-makers can avoid recourse to personal judgment and responsibility as the final concern of policy and attempting to bring about an environment that constantly produces new and not yet imagined types of performance (instead of simply performing the familiar).