

J2 – Introduction to Justice & Morality

Dear: In this chapter, I want to begin to show you what is meant – or, better, what *should* be meant – by ‘justice’. As I’ll be trying to show you, the word ‘justice’ is almost right up there (or, maybe better, *down there*) with ‘existence’, which in an earlier chapters I called a “base word”, not definable in terms of other words, defined only operationally or phenomenologically. Let me try to explain.

At the outset, I should mention that, just as the word ‘freedom’ needs an adjective or a modifying phrase to convey more meaning (such as “freedom of speech”, “freedom from want”, etc.), so, too, the word ‘justice’ is more meaningful if modified. Therefore, what I want to begin to show you in this chapter is what should be meant by the concepts of “natural justice” and “personal justice”. In later chapters in this group, I’ll address the concepts of “interpersonal justice” and “social justice”, which are essentially the same except for the size of the society (i.e., a society of two people in the case of “interpersonal justice” and more than two in the case of “social justice”).

Before delving into these different types of justice, however, let me show you that the concept of ‘justice’ seems to be important in our society (and in all societies). Thus, as I tried to show you in the previous chapter, the essence of the principal religions of our culture (and of all major religions of all cultures during the past 5,000 years or more) is that there’s some giant Jabberwock in the sky who has defined ‘good’ and ‘evil’ (i.e., morality – a topic that I’ll soon address), and on some “final judgment day”, this giant Jabberwock (or his son or other relative) will judge people, passing out “suitable justice”. From this fanciful stuff (which doesn’t have a single shred of evidence to support it), I hope that you agree with the conclusion that the concept of ‘justice’ seems to be important to many people.

Next, recall some less-fanciful stuff. For example, in this country, there’s the “Pledge of Allegiance”, which politicians required your parents to recite every day in school. (I’m not sure if it’s still required.) As you know, this Pledge includes the phrase that, in this country, there’s “liberty and *justice* for all”. Also, recall the wonderful Constitution of this nation, which starts with

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish
Justice,...

And as a final illustration, let me quote No. 51 of the *Federalist Papers* (which you can find on the internet, which I'll be referencing later, and which was written either by Alexander Hamilton or James Madison – the specific author not having been identified):

Justice is the end of government. It is the end of civil society. It ever has been and ever will be pursued until it be obtained, or until liberty be lost in the pursuit...

From the above examples, I trust that you agree, Dear, that 'justice' seems to be important. Yet, before you agree that in this country there is "liberty and justice for all", or if you disagree with that claim, then before you consider yielding your liberty in the pursuit of justice (as politicians suggest you will), and certainly before you consider steering your entire life in directions influenced by your concern about justice to be doled out when you're dead by some giant Jabberwock in the sky (as clerics would have you do), I hope you think it reasonable to try, first, to understand what 'justice' means!

And in case your immediate reaction is similar to "Who needs it; I already know what 'justice' means; it means fairness", then let me pose a few questions for you. Is it 'fair' that a baby is born blind? Is it 'fair' that you were born as a white, middle-class American rather than a lower-caste Hindu in India? Is it 'fair' that some wonderful person (for example, the person who discovered a vaccine for a terrible disease) is killed by lightning while someone who does enormous harm to humanity (for example, as I'll be showing you, any clerical leader) lives in luxury? Do you agree "there's no justice for a black man in a white man's world"? Well, then, do you agree that, in this country, there's "liberty and justice for all"?

Such questions are important – and some of them are rather difficult to answer. For some, I'll delay my responses until later chapter. In this chapter, I want to show you "just" some basic ideas about natural and personal justice. In subsequent "**J**-chapters", I'll address "interpersonal justice"; I'll delay until the "**P**-chapters" some of the (complicated) problems dealing with "social justice" – and delay some it even until the **X**-chapters!

In this chapter, also, I want to repeat one of the main "messages" in this book, namely: please be careful with words. It's especially important to be careful with "supercharged" (emotive) words (such as freedom, liberty,

justice, morality, love, and similar), because especially religious and political con-artists “love” to use such words to manipulate “the masses”, e.g., you and me! One potential danger of such words is derived from their ambiguity. In turn, the cause of this ambiguity is that these words (these symbols – for all words are just symbols) have no corresponding “objective reality”.

To see what I mean, Dear, suppose one person says that some “thing” in the backyard is a tree while another person says it’s a swimming pool. Then the one in error will either get quite wet when he tries to climb such a “tree” or hurt himself quite badly when he tries to dive into such a “pool”! That is, Dear, corresponding to words such as ‘tree’ and ‘pool’, there is some “objective reality”.

In contrast, words such as freedom, liberty, justice, morality, etc., aren’t symbols for real objects but are symbols for still other words: they’re abbreviations for (in some cases) quite complicated concepts. As a result, we end up with problems such as those described by Ralph Waldo Emerson: “one man’s justice is another’s injustice”. That is, having no objective reality, concepts such as ‘justice’ and ‘morality’ can be (and are) interpreted differently by different people, the concepts can then be little more than the opinions of different people, and there’s no pool to dunk them in, or tree to bang their head against, to remove the ambiguity.

Further, Dear, please don’t underestimate the importance of removing such ambiguities: millions of people have died in revolutions and wars whose causes can be traced to such ambiguities. For example, the American Revolutionary War was waged because of the “injustices” documented in the Declaration of Independence – “injustices” that the British Government obviously thought were “just”. As another example, three months after the 9/11 attack on the U.S. by Islamists led by Osama bin Laden, he stated (in his December 2001 video tape): “Terrorism against America deserves to be praised because it was a response to injustice...” Subsequently, the Christian leader of America, President G.W. Bush, stated (in a 16 May 2003 press conference): “...we’ll find them [the terrorists]. We’ll bring them to justice.” As Emerson said: “One man’s justice is another’s injustice.”

Now, if Emerson is right – and so many revolutions and wars suggest that he is – then humanity obviously has an enormous problem: how can wars ever be eliminated if humans can’t agree about the meaning of ‘justice’? Well, of

course I plan to address that question (in the **X**-chapters), but it'll take me a while before I can "do it justice". To start on this long trek, in these **J**-chapters, I want to try to show you what "justice" should mean, starting by trying to eliminate some ambiguities.

To try to minimize ambiguities about words, a first step that can be taken is to consult a dictionary. But, as I'll now try to show you, sometimes this step doesn't help much. For the following list of words, in some cases I quote only the principal definitions given in my copy of Webster's dictionary – in part because these principal definitions already cause sufficient difficulties!

justice, noun (from the Latin *justus*, meaning lawful, rightful, proper...) **1.** the quality of being righteous; rectitude **2.** impartiality; fairness **3.** the quality of being right or correct **4.** sound reason; rightfulness; validity **5.** reward or penalty as deserved... **6.** the use of authority and power to uphold what is right, just, or lawful **7.** the administration of law; procedure of a law court...

legal, adjective (from the Greek *legein*, to collect) **1.** of, created by, based upon, or authorized by law...

Synonyms: **legal** implies literal connection or conformity with statute or common law or its administration [as in "legal rights"]; **lawful**, a more general word, may suggest conformity to the principle rather than to the letter of the law or may broadly refer to that which is not contrary to the law [as in "a *lawful* but shady enterprise"]...

moral, adjective (translated from the Greek *ethikos* [also translated, I assume, as "ethics"!]) **1.** relating to, dealing with, or capable of making the distinction between right and wrong in conduct...

Synonyms: **moral** implies conformity with the generally accepted standards of goodness or rightness in conduct or character...; **ethical** implies conformity with an elaborated ideal code of moral principles, sometimes specifically with the code of a particular profession...; **virtuous** implies a morally excellent character, connoting justice, integrity, [etc.].

morality, n... **1.** moral quality or character; rightness or wrongness, as of an action...

right [vs. wrong], noun (akin to the Latin *rex*, meaning "king") **1.** what is right, or just, lawful, morally good, proper correct, etc.

Now, Dear, if those definitions looked reasonable and unambiguous to you, then please look at them again. They're circular: justice means "righteousness", morality is related to "right and wrong", and "right" means

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“what is right [!], or just, lawful, or morally good!” Thanks a lot Mr. Webster!

Actually, Dear, it’s quite common to find dictionary definitions to be circular. This follows because, in the end, all words given in any dictionary can be defined only in terms of other words – save for words such as ‘dictionary’, ‘book’, ‘pages’, and ‘ink’, for which the dictionary’s reader can be directed to examples – but rarely does! In contrast, wouldn’t it be a treat if you looked-up the word ‘book’ in a dictionary and it stated something similar to: “What you’re looking at, idiot!”

Instead, my dictionary defines ‘book’ as follows:

“1. a) a number of sheets of paper, parchment, etc. with writing or printing on them [What if there are just pictures?], fastened together along one edge [What if they’re fastened in the middle? What if they’re not fastened but have only holes and guides?], usually between protective covers [What if the covers aren’t protective? What if there are no covers?]. . .”

Nonetheless, a dictionary can help readers understand a word’s meaning by providing a synonym already understood, a context that makes the word’s meaning clear, or an indication of the word’s origin from which readers might be able to deduce its meaning.

For example, notice in the above quotations that ‘justice’ is “from the Latin word *justus*, meaning lawful, rightful, proper”, that the principal meaning of ‘morality’ is “rightness or wrongness, as of an action”, and that the noun ‘right’ is “akin to the Latin *rex*, meaning ‘king’.” This hints at something horrible: during the time our language developed, the meaning for ‘right’, ‘moral’, and ‘just’ was whatever the king (or ruler) said was ‘right’ and ‘moral’ and ‘just’!

This hint is consistent with one of the oldest and most enduring principles of interactions among humans. As much as we might wish it weren’t true, and as much as people have tried to correct its undesirability, the principle continues in “full force” in many parts of our society and in societies throughout the world: “might makes right”. And unfortunately, Dear, the majority of people in this country seem to continue to accept the definition of ‘right’ to be: whatever the mightiest says is ‘right’. And whereas, in their view, the “mightiest” and therefore the “most righteous” is God **ALMIGHTY** himself, then at least it’s consistent that they accept as ‘moral’

whatever is written in their “holy book” and preached by religious con-artists. It’s similarly consistent that these people “believe” that, after death, the **ALMIGHTY** will dispense his “perfect justice”.¹

But actually, Dear, these ideas about ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ (or ‘morality’) and about ‘fair’ or ‘unfair’ (or ‘justice’) are wrong: our dictionaries have made colossal errors, because primitive people made colossal errors identifying the root source of the concepts of morality and justice. I will devote many chapters in the “excursion” **Yx** (dealing with “Your Indoctrination in the Mountainous God Lie”) to try to show you the source of this monstrous error, to expose how political leaders and their henchmen (religious con-artists) have profited from the perpetuation of these mistakes, and to show you how these mistakes should be corrected. But because I certainly don’t want to keep you in suspense (as if this book were some mystery novel!), let me give you the essence of these chapters right here, even though it may seem too terse.

Dear, the source of the current, worldwide “screw up” in understanding of justice, morality, and similar concepts, is the failure of people to see that these concepts are “defined” not by humans (especially not by religious and political con-artists), and certainly not by “the gods” (as the politicians and clerics would have people “believe”), but by Mother Nature, herself (i.e., by natural “laws” such as the “principle of causality” and the “principle of natural selection”). To correct the errors, the first and the most important step is simply to expose the errors and the lies – the task to which I now turn (but won’t finish trying until the “excursion” **Yx**).

Let me start with the concept of ‘justice’. To break out from the dictionary’s “circular definitions” for ‘justice’, I’ll apply a few *general principles*, which I hope that you’ll find useful also in other cases:

¹ Actually, Dear, as I’ll show you in more detail in a later chapter, rather than ‘right’ having a Latin origin related to ‘king’, it may have an Indo-European origin, exemplified in the word ‘Ritam’, which is used in the “Hindu Bible” (the Vedas, written in about 1500 BCE, about 1000 years before the Old Testament was put in its current form). As stated by in an excellent article on Philosophy of Ethics in the Encyclopedia Britannica: “The Vedas are, in a sense, hymns, but the gods to which they refer are not persons but manifestations of ultimate truth and reality. In the Vedic philosophy, the basic principle of the universe, the ultimate reality on which the cosmos exists, is the principle of Ritam, which is the word from which the Western notion of right is derived. There is thus a belief in a right moral order somehow built into the universe itself. Hence, truth and right are linked; to penetrate through illusion and understand the ultimate truth of human existence is to understand what is right...” Subsequent religions (Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam,...) “personified” (or “deified” or “anthropologized”) this principle as a god.

- 1) *Be careful with words,*
- 2) *Using common sense, simplify,*
- 3) *Look at the limits, and*
- 4) *Try to discern the objectives.*

In what follows, I'll try to illustrate what I mean.

I've already tried to emphasize the need to be careful with words. Now, let me turn to the task of attempting to simplify, using a little common sense. Thus, Dear, whereas dictionaries just give "common usages" for words and whereas, in its most common usage, 'justice' means 'fairness', let me address the question: what do people mean – or better, what *should* people mean – when they describe something as 'fair' vs. 'unfair' (or 'just' vs. 'unjust')? To simplify further, let me start with the *limiting case* of an infant, and then slowly add some of the complexities most people experience as they become adults.

Now, Dear, of course the total transformation from an infant to an adult is far more complex than just changes in experiences with (and understanding of) 'justice'. Transitions in physical form are the most obvious changes in becoming an adult, but actually, there are probably the least important: many "big people" still behave as if they were children. In contrast, one of the most important changes to accomplish in becoming an adult is this: when you were a child, everything you received was free; when you are an adult, essentially everything you receive must be earned. Other important changes in becoming an adult are to learn to constrain your ideas with data and to channel your imagination into creativity. But acknowledging these other transitions, let me focus, here, just on changes in experiences with (and understanding of) 'fairness' or 'justice'.

A baby knows very little – except what "he" wants; that is, "he" knows his objectives! (I choose to assume the baby is male, Dear, because I will want to imagine the baby interacting with his mother, and if I assume the baby is female, then the "she" vs. "she" could become confusing!) And actually, it gives me support for my own understanding of human objectives to see that even babies know that their prime objective is to survive. How babies are born with this astounding "sense" is, of course, because of the "principle of natural selection": those DNA molecules that didn't inculcate in their newborn hosts the knowledge of what they want, who didn't train them to seek food and warmth and all other essentials for survival, didn't! This

illustrates the essence of Darwin's "theory of natural selection": if offspring possess some characteristic that gives a "competitive edge" to their survival (such as the desire to survive!), then that characteristic will more likely be passed on to the next generation, slowly leading to Nature's "natural selection" of characteristics that promote the host's survival.

But beyond knowing what he wants, an infant soon learns by himself one of the most important lessons in life: the "principle of causality" – by which is meant (as I've described in an earlier chapter) that all effects have their causes. Thus, very early in life a baby learns that when there is a discomfort in his stomach, all he need do is start crying, and (quite amazingly!) almost always, some big warm "thing" comes and provides him with something that soothes his discomfort. Who knows, the baby might even see that one cause and effect can be linked to another cause and effect: baby's discomfort causes crying, crying causes "the warm thing" to come, "the warm thing's" coming causes discomfort to disappear, etc.

Soon after his first experiences with the principle of causality, every baby not only experiences but also begins to understand some "natural justice", that is, that Mother Nature's law of causality "justifies" outcomes. Thus, if he pushes his food off his high chair, the food splatters on the floor. At first, maybe this outcome seems amazing, but again and again he tests the hypothesis, and never once does the hypothesis fail. What a wonderful result – although maybe the poor child becomes discouraged upon learning that his mother doesn't seem overly enthusiastic about his discovery.

Now, Dear, let me delay (until later in this chapter) what a child will eventually learn about "interpersonal justice", while his mother tries to train him not to dump his food on the floor. Here, let me emphasize his lessons in "natural justice". For contrast, imagine how badly the poor baby's confidence would be shaken in "natural justice" if he were taken on a space ship: then, upon pushing his food off his high chair, his food would move exactly in the direction pushed – toward a wall! For us (knowing Newton's or Galileo's or Aristotle's first principle of motion, that things continue to move in a straight line unless acted upon by a force), the outcome would be perfectly understandable and perfectly "justified"; for the baby, however, his confidence in "natural justice" would be shaken – and, who knows, with his confidence shaken in the principle of causality, he might start thinking of "miracles", the "supernatural", and the crazy idea that some giant Jabberwock in the sky controls the motion of plates pushed off high chairs!

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But if a baby's world is not dramatically distorted (for example, by removing gravity), and if all mind-warping drugs are kept away (including the mind-warping drugs sold by religious con-artists), then as he explores more and more of his world, he develops complete trust in the principle of causality and in the concept of "natural justice". To be sure, he learns that sometimes the linkages between cause(s) and effect(s) can be complicated, but every experience in life teaches him that all 'outcomes' are "justified" by their causes. In this way, through every experience in life, all humans learn about Mother Nature's justice – and learn that her justice is always perfect: all outcomes are perfectly justified.

And as trivial as this "limiting case" may seem to you, Dear, I hope that you'll not dismiss the result as trivial. Actually, it provides the key to understanding all types of 'justice' ("natural justice", "personal justice", and "interpersonal and social justice"). The key is simply that, with her principle of causality (that is, by showing us that all outcomes have their causes), Mother Nature teaches humans the meaning of 'justice'. In this way, everyone experiences, for example, the "natural justice" of one's birth. We experience this, but certainly as babies we don't understand it – and even as adults, most people don't seem to understand it.

To explain what I mean, let me address some of the questions that I asked earlier: Is it 'fair' that a baby is born blind? Is it 'fair' that you were born into a white, middle-class American family rather than, for example, into a lower-caste Hindu family in India?

As a case in "natural justice", Dear, every outcome is justified by its causes. Again, the linkages between cause(s) and effect(s) can be complicated – so complicated that it's essentially impossible to discern them – but every experience teaches us that the principle of causality is valid. Thus, maybe the prime reason why you were born into a white, middle-class American family was that, while our ancestors were wandering out of Africa, they heard a tiger roar on the path that led northeast (and eventually to a lower-caste Hindu family in India); in contrast, being afraid of tigers, our ancestors turned northwest – leading to you!

Similarly, no doubt there is a cause for a baby born blind: maybe the coding in some ancestor's DNA was damaged by a cosmic ray; maybe, when he was still in his mother's womb, she ingested some damaging chemical; and

so on. The important point to see, Dear, is that all outcomes have their causes – even outcomes such as human feelings of ‘injustice’ are perfectly justified! Therefore, Dear, in so far as all outcomes are perfectly justified by their causes, Mother Nature’s justice is perfect.

One could argue that there’s nothing more to ‘justice’ than “natural justice”. Every outcome is perfectly justified by its causes – including all the horrible outcomes of this world that are too numerous (and too horrible) to mention. Further, one could argue that, whereas humans are just another manifestation of nature, all human acts (and feelings) are natural (including all acts and feelings of injustice!); therefore, all human acts and feelings are perfectly justified. But, although one could argue in this manner, I won’t, because the conclusion is “too barren” – which I’ll now try to explain.

What sets humans apart from the rest of nature (at least in this part of the universe!) is our volition: our ability to think ahead, to identify choices, to choose, and to act according to our choice. [Volition is from the Latin *volo*, in turn from *velle*, to be willing or “to will” (as in “will power”).] With our “will power”, although no one has yet (as far as I know!) been able to break Nature’s principle of causality (i.e., although all outcomes still seem to be linked to their causes), we are able to influence causes; therefore, we’re able to influence outcomes

As a result, rather than describe all outcomes as perfectly justified by their causes (as they are!), it’s useful to distinguish three types of outcomes and their associated justices and appropriate judges:

- 1) Outcomes with which humans aren’t involved, which are “cases in natural justice” as judged by Mother Nature (or the principle of causality),
- 2) Outcomes that have been or could have been influenced by an individual, which I’ll call “cases in personal justice” and in which (although Mother Nature is still the final authority!) the individual can make some “justifiable” claim to be an important judge – and certainly the individual is the most important judge of what actions to take to try to influence the outcome, and
- 3) Outcomes that involve interactions among people, which I’ll call “cases in interpersonal and social justice” and in which appropriate judges

include sometimes a host of other people (parents, friends, acquaintances, bosses, judges of our courts, and so on).

Let me try to explain what I mean by returning to the limiting case of the baby in the high chair.

It's common that infants begin to experiment with their volition during their "terrible twos". At this age, many acts become tests of will power between child and mother (or other "primary care giver", but let me continue to use the word "mother"). Then, many cases of "personal justice" can arise, for both mother and child. Perhaps it would be better to focus on those cases of "personal justice" for the mother, because two-year olds are just stumbling with the concept of volition, without yet applying much thought. (The child knows only what it wants, not why; i.e., the child has not given the matter sufficient thought – which, unfortunately, is also the case with many adults.) But to keep this analysis simple, let me focus first on the "personal justice" learned by the child.

When an infant learns to crawl, a huge number of new "outcomes" are available to him. Maybe the first stimulation for his crawling is a teddy bear lying on the floor on the other side of the room. Some other warm person brought that teddy bear into the house; it was his favorite; it seemed to belong to him; he wants it now. He waits and waits and waits – and it doesn't come to him.

Not getting what he wants, he starts to cry. The big "warm thing comes" and pulls at his diapers. "How insulting!" insists our baby, "there's nothing wrong with my diapers. Can't you see that my teddy bear's over there?" The "warm thing" disappears; the teddy bear just sits there, grinning!

"Be damned", says our baby, "if that mountainous bear won't come to baby, then baby will go to the bear!" And staining with every poorly coordinated muscle in his body, he begins his trek to the bear. The outcome? An absolutely-wonderful, absolutely-perfect, absolutely-essential lesson in "personal justice": when we as individuals (even as babies!) can influence an outcome, *we generally get what we deserve*.

I'm sorry to have dragged that analysis out so long, Dear (in part I was just fooling around), but please see that this simple (even "trivial") analysis provides the essence of 'personal justice'. With essentially every experience

in life, Mother Nature (i.e., the principle of causality) teaches us this same lesson, over and over again: if we can influence an outcome, it's "personal justice" to get what we deserve – based on our best analysis of what should be done, our best efforts to accomplish what we have decided to do, and thereby, based on our success in influencing the outcome.

With thousands and thousands of "cases", Mother Nature teaches each of us the same lesson. If baby wants some bright and shiny object on a table and so struggles to stand, he learns the lesson again; if he wants something that's farther down the table and so tries to move while standing, he learns the lesson again; if he wants something still farther away, say on another table, and so tries to walk, he learns the lesson again; and so on throughout life, through learning how to run, dance, play with a ball, ride a bike, read, etc., etc. – including earning a college degree, finding a job, starting his own family, and including maintaining his health, helping his grandchildren, and becoming old without being a burden on others. That is, Dear, Mother Nature never stops teaching us that if can influence the outcome, then generally we'll get what we deserve.

Now, Dear, some care is needed to say exactly what is meant by "personal justice". Let me list some examples that might lead to the correct wording.

- It's not "personal justice" to get what we want! We may want to be rich and famous, but if we do nothing to try to achieve these goals, it's not "unjust" that we don't achieve them. And actually, if we don't do anything to influence the outcome, then it could be said to be an example of "perfect personal justice" that we don't get what we want (i.e., that we get what we deserve – which, in such a case, is to get nothing).
- If we want an outcome that violates the "laws" of nature (for example, to fly by flapping our arms, to jump to the moon, to live forever, etc.) – and yet try – then again we'll get what we deserve (i.e., nothing), because we should have been able to discern that what we wanted could not be achieved; i.e., that we had no influence over such outcomes.
- In many, many cases, a person gets what seems undeserved. A baby doesn't "deserve" to be born blind – but it's not a case in personal justice, because the baby wasn't capable of influencing this outcome. A child doesn't "deserve" to go to bed hungry – but it's not a case in personal justice, because the child wasn't capable of influencing this outcome. A

youngster doesn't "deserve" to be sold into some bonded service (essentially, into slavery) – but again, it's not a case in personal justice, because the youngster wasn't capable of influencing this outcome. These are cases of "natural justice" (to be born blind is justified by its causes) or cases in "social justice" (or, in the cases mentioned, social injustice), which I'll get to in a later chapter.

We therefore might say that "personal justice" is Nature's lesson that, if you can control the outcome, then you'll get what you deserve – but there's a problem with this wording, because there seem to be very few (if any!) outcomes that we can completely control.

It therefore appears that some "weasel words" are needed in a useful definition of "personal justice". For example, we might say that, if an outcome depends only on the influence of a single person (plus Mother Nature) and the individual acts appropriately, then it's "personal justice" for the person to get what he or she wants. In this definition, though, much is hidden in the concept of "acting appropriately". For example:

- For some 'wants', there is no appropriate act. For example, if you want to fly by flapping your arms, you'll never get what you want – though you will always get what you deserve. That is, your wants must be consistent with some general principles that Nature demands (the "law" of gravity, the finiteness of resources, and so on).
- Some outcomes depend on a huge number of variables, some of which may be random (e.g., the weather), essentially out of our control, and some of which may depend on the wills of other people (although, if so, the outcome should be considered not as a case in "personal justice" but as a case in "interpersonal and social justice" – which I'll get to, shortly). In such cases, even our best efforts at "influencing" the outcome can be futile; that is, again, there can be essentially no way to act "appropriately".
- Some outcomes can be the result of such a complicated process (linking a huge number of causes and effects) that again it's essentially impossible to discern "appropriate actions". For example, it may be a case in "personal justice" that I have a bad leg, but to this day, I still don't know what I did wrong. (Actually, though, it may be a case in "natural justice"; that is, the problem may be genetic.)

- And finally, although it doesn't fit very well within this list, I want to mention another important point. When we were children, life was usually fairly simple: if we wanted the teddy bear, that was probably the only "want" on our mind. As adults, we commonly have a huge number of goals tugging at us – all at the same time (including, if we're not careful, some conflicting goals, such as the famous "wanting to have our cake and eat it, too"). Therefore, the "appropriate" effort that we apply to influence a particular outcome must "appropriately weigh" all the other efforts that we're simultaneously applying to achieve other outcomes. That is, the meaning for "appropriate effort" (to achieve a particular outcome) can depend on how much effort we expend trying to influence other outcomes.

In summary, Dear, what I plan to do is try to incorporate some "weasel words" in my definition of "personal justice". Thus, if an outcome depends only on an individual's ideas and efforts (plus, of course, Mother Nature's principle of causality), then by "personal justice" is meant one *generally* gets what one deserves. Alternatively, "personal justice" means that one *always* gets what one deserves, including some cases of exceedingly bad luck and some cases of grave disappointments – because of failure of the individual to see that the outcome was so tenuously related to the individual's influence.

Now, Dear, you may want to work on improving the above definition of "personal justice", but I think that it contains enough to permit me to make some points that are important for what follows.

- First, in cases of "personal justice", you're the appropriate judge to decide what acts are "appropriate" – though Mother Nature will always be there as a "superior court judge", to dole out her justice. I'll return to this in a later chapter.
- Second, it's not parents or teachers or clerics or some giant Jabberwock in the sky but Mother Nature who teaches us the meaning of both "natural justice" and "personal justice".
- Third, by learning from Mother Nature the meanings for "natural justice" (outcomes are related to causes) and "personal justice" (we generally get what we deserve), we can then bring meaning to the concept of "interpersonal and social justice".

This last point is extremely important: the fact that Mother Nature steadily teaches each of us what ‘justice’ means, ever since the time when we were babies, gives us the basis for seeking (and even demanding) justice in our interactions with others.

Now, Dear, there are a huge number of aspects of interpersonal and social justice, and many of these aspects are enormously complex. Meanwhile, I have neither the expertise nor the desire to describe these details in depth. Instead, let me just mention a few general topics that individually are important and that collectively may lead you to see why all people will seek justice in their societies, and if unsuccessful in their search, will sometimes act to destroy the existing society to create one that promises more justice. It is, however, not so much that we seek ‘justice’ for its own sake, nor that we hold ‘justice’ as one of most prized values. Instead, we seek our trio of survival goals (of ourselves, our extended families, and our values), and we discern that lack of justice can be an enormous threat even to our own and to our family’s survival.

Setting those complications and generalities aside until later chapters in this group, let me give some examples by returning to the baby in his high chair – still busy investigating “natural justice”, testing the hypothesis that all outcomes have causes. He’s just about to dump his food on the floor for the eleventh time when his mother yells: “Stop that! How many times have I told you not to dump your food on the floor?”

Not yet having conquered speech, baby responds with a smile (his way of saying: “Well, mommy, I’ll need to check my records, but I’m fairly confident that this will be the eleventh test of the hypothesis under investigation”) – and just as he was about to push his food on the floor for the umpteenth time, his mother snatches his plate away from him, leaving him speechless, foodless, and screaming. The crying and yelling that ensues muffles the actual discourse:

“Mommy, what’s going on? You stole my plate! Gimme it back!

“Child, use your head. You dump your food on the floor to test your hypothesis that all outcomes have causes, but I ask you: who is going to clean up the messy outcome? Further, look at what you have done: your father earned the money at his job to buy food for you to eat, not

to dump on the floor. And besides, it's my job to see that you eat well, so you will be healthy – and you're not going to eat off the floor.”

“Those are interesting concepts,” says baby, “but kindly explain why you stole my food.”

“Use your brain, child. I have the responsibility for keeping our house clean, for seeing that the money your father earns is wisely spent, and for ensuring your health and welfare. Now, by even the most elementary application of logic, you can see that I can't be responsible for anything – even theoretically – unless I also have the necessary authority to discharge that responsibility: authority must be commensurate with responsibility. Therefore, to discharge my responsibility not to have you dump your food on the floor, I have the authority to make sure you don't. You should be thankful that I took that ‘good-parenting’ class; otherwise, rather than my just taking your plate away, I would probably have slapped the hand that was going to push the plate on the floor.”

“Well, certainly I'm pleased to learn that you're not into ‘baby abuse’,” replies baby “and I grant you that your argument seems quite logical. Actually, though, currently I'm involved more in the study of justice than logic – and yet, I see here a fundamental principle of justice: no one should be held responsible (or accountable) for any outcome unless he also has the authority to control the outcome.”

So much for the imagined conversation. In reality, a crying baby is put on the floor, his world suddenly turned against him. Fortunately, though, he sees his favorite teddy bear across the room, as warm and friendly as ever. Lunging forward in his fastest crawl, he heads for the comfort of a big bear-hug. Almost there and – oh no: his big brother, who had come to learn what all the crying and screaming was about, grabs the bear and runs. Whereupon baby screams at the top of his voice – muffling his exclamation: “The injustice of it all!”

Fortunately for baby, mother witnessed the entire affair. She yells at big brother to give the teddy bear to baby, and with her now holding baby, and baby holding the teddy bear, he's quite prepared to engage in a discussion about the episode:

“Poor baby, you really love your teddy bear.”

“Well, actually, I’m not prepared at this time to discuss the concept of ‘love’. As I already mentioned, currently I’m more interested in the concept of ‘justice’, and I must admit that this was a most illuminating experience. First, I’m interested that you said “*your* teddy bear” – from this I infer the existence of a social contract that might be called “property rights”.”

“Yes, baby, it’s your teddy bear.”

“Most interesting. And furthermore, apparently you have the responsibility (and, as we discussed earlier, the necessary authority) to ensure the protection of property rights.”

“Yes, baby, it wasn’t right of your brother to take your teddy bear.”

“So apparently what we have here is the rudiments of a legal system, including social contracts, property rights, adjudication of disputes, and if necessary, police power to enforce the ruling of the judiciary.”

“Okay, baby, but mommy has to work now.”

Baby is content, but not big brother – who is smarting from his mother’s reprimand and who “unjustly” blames baby. Checking that this time his mother can’t see him, he walks over, kicks his baby brother, and then disappears. Baby screams “Baby Abuse!”, mother comes, and once again, baby inquires about the “justice” in his world. This time, though, because mother (“the judge”) had no proof of the big brother’s guilt, she misidentifies the cause of baby’s crying, once again checking his diapers. “Oh the injustice of it all!” cries baby.

After mother leaves, baby assesses his predicament, making a mental list of new concepts:

1. “Big brother has apparently adopted a principle that is obviously to his advantage, namely, ‘might makes right’.”

2. “My animal instincts tell me that I have two options, either fight or flight. Of these two options, since I’d obviously lose all fights, the better would seem to be withdraw from this society. What I could do, for example, is what a certain grandfather used to do: having three older brothers, he would arise from bed hours earlier than they, play alone, and then sleep when the others arose.”
3. “But my human intellect can detect additional options: a) accept the injustice of this relationship (appease him while degrading myself), b) seek justice on my own (for example by outsmarting him – showing him the meaning of “brains over brawn”: he may be surprised to learn how many times “an innocent baby” can break his big brother’s favorite toy, throw up on his best clothes, urinate on his homework, etc. Wars are won not by the mightiest but by the brightest!), or c) try to introduce some justice in this relationship, by educating him in some basic concepts of morality.”

So now, Dear, with that lead in from “baby” (!), let me turn to some elementary concepts about morality.

But before I begin, Dear, and although it’s probably of little concern to you, I feel compelled to apologize again for jumping directly from topics in justice (in these “**J**-chapters”) to the topic of morality, pushing until later chapters (namely, **K** and **L**) topics dealing with kindness and love. As I mentioned in an earlier chapter, normally when I’m walking I don’t review “morality” until “**M**” (because I already know what I mean by morality!), but if I delay this explanation to you until **M**, some quite simple ideas will likely appear quite (and quite needlessly) complicated. Therefore, I’ve broken free from the “alphabetic straight jacket” of earlier chapters.

In the above, I used a “limit argument” (i.e., I looked at some limiting cases) to begin to try to show you the meaning of ‘justice’. The value of such an argument is that, with a simple case (such as with the imaginary baby), essential features are usually more obvious; otherwise, for complicated concepts such as ‘justice’, details can overwhelm. There is, however, the ever-present danger of any limit argument that, by focusing on a simple case, some essential features may be eliminated by the focus!

Such was the case for the “limit argument” chosen to investigate the concept of ‘justice’. That is, although for the limiting case chosen the baby could

* Go to other chapters *via*

experience justice and injustice, it was difficult to imagine how the baby could *seek* justice – because seeking justice commonly requires thought (difficult for a baby in any case!), and in particular, thoughts about morality, which have been found to be too difficult for most grownups! Therefore, Dear, what I want to do, now, is examine another limiting case, to continue the exploration of the meaning of ‘justice’ and to begin an exploration of the meaning of ‘morality’.

As I already tried to show you, dictionaries aren’t very helpful in explaining the meanings of either ‘justice’ or ‘morality’. In particular for ‘morality’, dictionaries emphasize distinctions between what’s ‘right’ vs. ‘wrong’, but when the meanings for those words are pursued, a strong hint appears that ‘right’ is whatever some king (e.g., the boss man in the “kingdom of heaven”) says is ‘right’! To get off this circular (and horrible) track, let me again apply the principles that I already advocated: 1) using common sense, simplify; 2) look at the limits, and 3) focus on objectives. Thus, to start, whereas dictionary definitions just give “common usage” and whereas, in its most common usage, ‘morality’ means judgments about ‘right’ versus ‘wrong’, then the question posed is: how do we (or better, how *should* we) decide what’s ‘right’ vs. ‘wrong’?

Now, if that question is pursued in all its generalities, details could quite quickly overwhelm, with an enormous number of “for instances”. For instance (!), when is it ‘right’ to have an abortion? When is it right to kill someone? When is it right to...? Therefore, to avoid being overwhelmed, I’ll start by examining another limiting case. In particular, Dear, if you want to understand something about the basis for guiding your actions (for instance, your interactions with other people), first consider the limiting case wherein you would be the only person on Earth! Later, as you might expect (☺), I’ll look at the next more complicated case, namely, with only two people on Earth.

So, Dear, if you were the only person on Earth, then how would you decide what’s ‘right’ vs. ‘wrong’? Well, for this case, a number of observations seem obvious. If you were the only person on Earth, ‘right’ vs. ‘wrong’ or ‘good’ vs. ‘bad’ – and all shades in between! – would depend on what you wanted: if you were hungry, it would be ‘good’ to find some food; if you were a little cold, it would be “quite good” to find shelter (after you had eaten); if you were full (or ‘satiated’) it would be “somewhat bad” to eat more; and so on. Therefore, Dear, I hope that you totally agree with (and

even find trivially obvious) the following concept, which is fundamental [and therefore, I've put it in italics]: *as with all 'values', moral values (i.e., distinctions between 'right' vs. 'wrong') can be judged only with respect to some objective.*

For the above examples, your imagined objectives (to eat, find shelter, and so on) were just illustrations of (or sub-objectives of) your obvious prime objective: to survive. Therefore, if your prime goal were to survive, then I trust that you would also agree with the obvious statement that “the good” – the “moral thing” to do – would be whatever helped you to survive. Further, Dear, I hope you totally agree (and again find trivially obvious) that if you choose to survive, then the best thing you can do – the act of highest “moral value” – is: *use your brain as best you can.*

Now, Dear, right here at the start of this analysis of what is perhaps the simplest possible case (with you the only person on Earth), I want to put up some warning lights, danger flags, and if necessary blaring horns and screeching sirens, warning you of extreme danger. There is a seemingly bottomless pit, here, into which some of the most brilliant people who have ever lived (including Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Thomas, Descartes, Spinoza, Newton, and many others) as well as an enormous number of more recent people (including Karl Marx, Ayn Rand, and even your father) have fallen. I, too, fell into this pit, and it took me at least 10 years to claw my way out. The pit – the danger – the error – is to conclude that the act of highest moral value is to think, rather than *to use your brain as best you can.*

If my dear grandchild just said “Huh?”, then good! One of the great dangers of this seemly bottomless pit, Dear, is that its entrance is very difficult to detect! But I trust that you agree that your brain can do much more than just think: it provides you with abilities to see, hear, smell, taste, and feel (that is, it provides you with sensory perceptions). In addition, the brains of other people have provided us with a huge number of instruments to extend our sensory perceptions (from detecting just a single fluorine molecule in the presence of about 10^{18} other molecules, to detecting electromagnetic waves from the edge of the universe). That is, Dear, besides thinking, our brains can provide us with data – and to use our brains as best we can, then we must *evaluate our thoughts against data.*

Now, Dear, if you were the only person on Earth, you wouldn't need some silly old grandfather to tell you this, and you wouldn't need to examine the

* Go to other chapters *via*

mistakes of brilliant people of the past to discern that your thoughts should be evaluated against data. You would quickly find that it's totally obvious. You think that a certain little berry would be good to eat? How about first collecting some data: eat some; see if they make you sick! You think that all roots are edible? Well, Dear, may I suggest that (after you wash the dirt off) you just take the smallest nibble! You think that you could catch a fish by clapping your hands and having it jump out of the water? Okay, collect what data (and fish) that you can using that method, but maybe you'd also like get some data (and some fish) with a stick fashioned into a spear! You think that a mountain lion would be a nice pet, like a big pussy cat? Dear, be careful: sometimes collecting data can be quite dangerous!

The root problem – and the resulting great danger – is that thinking is too easy! Everyone thinks all the time! Even the minds of small children (and clerics and other schizophrenics) are busy thinking, flying off in various flights of fancy, imagining they are Superman or Wonder Woman or that there's some giant Jabberwock in the sky, or imagining visits of aliens from outer space. Similarly, as I'll show you in later chapters (e.g., **R**, dealing with Reason), huge errors with horrible consequences have resulted from famous people (from Plato, Aristotle, and “Saint Paul” to Karl Marx and a string of Popes) who just thought – and never got around to evaluating their thoughts against data. In contrast, a string of brilliant people [the most famous historical figures being Hippocrates, Euclid, Archimedes, Galileo, and the two Bacons, Roger (~1214 – 1294) and Francis (1561 – 1626)] saw that thinking is insufficient – that our thoughts must be evaluated against data.

I'll try to explain all this more completely in later chapters, Dear, but maybe, already, you can better understand something I tried to convey to you when you were ten. In an earlier chapter, I already reminded you of what happened – but the concept is so important that I want to remind you again.

You were visiting us for a week, and you and I were walking in the desert (maybe you remember: we were near that pile of bones of dead cattle). We were talking about the different states, in part because we were standing in Arizona, looking at Nevada, with Utah just over the mountains. I took the opportunity to say to you something close to the following:

“Dear, let me tell you the most important lesson that I've learned in life. It's my motto. Maybe you know some mottos, such as those on the

license plates of cars. Nevada is called “The Silver State”; Arizona is “The Grand Canyon State”; Utah has a motto something like “The Greatest Snow of Earth”; Washington is “The Evergreen State”; I think Florida is called “The Sunshine State”. Well, Missouri has by far the best motto: “The Show Me State”. The famous and wonderful line that Missourians use is: “I’m from Missouri; show me!” Well, Dear, my motto – the most important lesson I’ve learned in life – is just a variation of Missouri’s motto: *Show me the data!*

And of course I remember that you quickly saw what I meant. Later that day, I returned home when you were playing double solitaire with your grandmother. I told you that I had been “collecting some data” at a local casino, and after I had finished my story, you (you little scoundrel!) said: “Show me the data!” And you wonder why I’m rather fond of a certain grandchild!

Sorry, Dear, I’m drifting away and repeating myself; old people have a tendency to do that; we do it to try to develop patience in you youngsters! Anyway Dear, my point is that already at the start of this analysis (in this simplest case, with you assumed to be the only person on Earth), I hope you get a strong hint of “the act of greatest moral value”, namely, to use your brain as best you can: test ideas with data, and then decide and act as the data dictate. For myself, through the years, the more I have thought about this result – and evaluated it against data! – the more strongly I have become convinced that it’s the correct choice.

An alternative description of this “act of highest moral value” is just apply *the scientific method in your daily life*: obtain data, try to make sense of the data (viz., think!), formulate hypotheses that succinctly summarize the data and that have predictive capabilities, perform experiments to test the predictions, obtain more data, and so on, without end. That’s how we humans gain understanding. If you were the only person on Earth, how – except by using the scientific method – would you learn which berries and roots to eat, how to catch fish, and which animals do and do not make good companions?!

But actually, Dear, there’s a major problem, here, which I bet you’ll wish I hadn’t brought up, which I’ll quickly push aside as if I hadn’t brought it up [“So, then, why bring it up?!”], but which is a real problem that needs to be addressed – and I will address (again and again) in later chapters. The

problem is this. When you make “moral judgments” about your own behavior, sometimes you judge the morality of your acts (especially if you do something without thinking about it: “Oh, I’m sorry; I didn’t mean to do that”), but mostly you judge the morality not of your acts but of your goals (“Oh, I really shouldn’t have tried to do that”). On the other hand, because we can never be sure of another person’s goals (no matter what they say!), then we judge the morality of their acts, not their goals (“I don’t know why you tried to do that; all I know is that...”). Therefore, when addressing the concept of morality, we should address the question: Who’s talking about whom?

Now, that might seem fairly clear [“What’s the big deal?”], but I’m sorry to tell you that it gets more complicated. Let me try to explain by listing the steps that people normally take before performing a particular act.

- First, a person feels some *need*, e.g., a physiological need, such as thirst or some sexual pressure. Most sane people do not judge the morality of such *needs* – but many insane religious people do. An example is the stupidity in Old Testament’s Commandment #10, attributed to Moses: “Thou shalt not covet...” In contrast to that stupidity, Dear, I guarantee you that if you or Moses or anyone else went without water for a week, then you or Moses or anyone else would covet (i.e., “ardently desire”) a companion’s water.
- In response to some need, normally a person next feels some *desire*, e.g., to quench his thirst, relieve his sexual pressure, whatever. Rarely do sane people judge the morality of such *desires*, but again it’s easy to find examples of insane religious people who do. An example is the stupid statement written by some cleric and attributed to Jesus (e.g., at *Matthew* 5, 27): “If a man looks on a woman with a lustful eye, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” That’s a perversion, all right – a perversion of language, concepts, and humanity!
- In response to some desire (in turn in response to some need), a person normally then sets *goals* to attempt to attain what’s desired. Here’s where people normally apply their own “sense of morality” (a set of values that they have acquired in a host of ways – which I’ll get to in later chapters): by superimposing or applying their moral values on their desires, they turn their desires into what they consider to be “acceptable

goals” (acceptable to their own sense of morality).² For example, Dear, you may have a strong desire to obtain a million dollars, but I’m sure that you’d restrict the goals (or methods) by which you would be willing to acquire it. On the other hand, infants, some small children, and unfortunately even some adults are ‘amoral’ (not ‘immoral’, Dear, ‘amoral’, meaning, “without morals”): they feel some need (to have their diapers changed, to have a certain toy, or to have a million dollars), and such needs and associated desires are directly transformed into goals, without application of any moral judgment.

- Finally, with goals adopted, a person normally *takes actions* to achieve adopted goals, to satisfy desires (including their desire to act morally, whatever that means to the person), and thereby, to satisfy some need. And it’s when a person take actions, that others finally have an opportunity to judge the person’s “morality”: we don’t know other people’s needs, desires, sense of morality, and goals, but we can observe and judge “the morality” of their acts.

Therefore, Dear, I would agree with you if you complained that I am being “sloppy” when I state that “the act of highest moral value is always to use your brain as best you can.” What I mean is that I would judge the morality of your acts most favorably if I was convinced that you always used your brain as best you can, and furthermore, I would encourage you to accept the “moral principle” that to turn your desires into goals, you should always use your brain as best you can.

In later chapters [especially in **O** (dealing with Objectives), **P** (dealing with Policies), and **V** (dealing with Values)], I’ll *need* to keep coming back to trying to resolve the problems sketched above, because whereas I have a *desire* to help you, I have set myself the *goal* of trying to help you evaluate the morality not just of your *acts* but also of your goals. This is the same “mind twister” that I mentioned in an earlier chapter (**B**): the need to evaluate the morality of one’s morality; to assess the value of one’s values! And whereas this book isn’t intended to be a mystery (believe it or not!), let me just hint at the resolution of what may seem to be a mind twister: as with any value, morality has meaning only with respect to some objective, and using my brain as best I can, I reach the conclusion that the only sound

² And though you almost certainly don’t want to learn about this now, Dear, I’ll add that, thereby, morality is seen to be a second-order tensor, with which we turn our vector *desires* into our vector *goals*.

objective with which to judge the morality of all one's goals is one's dual survival goals (of oneself and one's extended family).

Similar conclusions have of course been reached by others. Using his brain as best he could, the humanitarian Albert Schweitzer (1875 – 1965), winner of the 1952 Nobel Peace Prize, concluded: *“Reverence for life affords me my fundamental principle of morality.”* Many people find that to be a brilliant clarion call. Yet, as I'll be trying to show you in later chapters, perhaps the phrase “reverence for life” is too general. Instead, perhaps the more-restricted term “reverence for accomplishments” would be better. Alternatively, some humanist might prefer: “The goal of helping intelligence to expand provides humanists with their fundamental principle of morality.” Meanwhile, maybe a more general statement would be better: “The goal of always using my brain as best I can, applying the scientific method in daily life, provides me with my fundamental principle of morality.”

And now that you see why I suggested that you would wish that I hadn't brought it up, let me set it aside – at least for a while – and try to move on by addressing the question: if applying the scientific method in daily life is the act of highest moral value, what's the morality of other acts?

In response, Dear, my first point is the silliness of considering only what's “morally right” and “morally wrong”. When people (especially clerics and politicians) start talking this way, I begin to wonder if they have an “on-off switch” instead of a brain! Seriously, Dear, I hope that you'll protect yourself against people who think only in terms of “on vs. off” or “black vs. white” or “right vs. wrong” or “moral vs. immoral”. Such people – people who seem incapable of seeing shades of gray, or all colors of the rainbow, or that there's more to morality than ‘right’ vs. ‘wrong’ – can be extremely dangerous. Representatives are the terrorists, the Nazis, the “skin heads”, and the clerics of the world.

Dear: Even in this simple limiting-case analysis, in which you are assumed to be the only person on Earth, I hope it's clear that morality is simply a measure of how a particular act promotes or hinders your objectives. And as a “measure”, surely an “on-off switch” is so crude as to be ridiculous! Instead, suppose you chose a measuring scale (or “metric”) that ran from minus 10 (for some act that was definitely “morally wrong” – such as jumping off a cliff, if your objective was to survive and there wasn't a

cougar chasing you) to plus 10 (for some act that was definitely “morally right” – such as formulating hypotheses from analyses of data, testing their predictions against more data, and not acting on your hypotheses until they’ve passed appropriate experimental tests!). With such a “morality scale”, you could more rationally judge the morality of any act (i.e., its value relative to your objectives).

Of course, if you were the only person on Earth, you might become so discouraged that you decided to change your prime objective. Thus, suppose you decided that your objective was not to be the only person living on Earth. Then, if you were absolutely certain that you were the only person alive and that there were no other options (e.g., clone yourself or travel to another planet), you would correctly conclude that the moral thing to do – the only right thing to do – a +9.9 on the morality scale – would be to kill yourself. (And note, Dear, that you’d need to leave “applying the scientific method” as a +10 on your “morality scale”, not only because you were thinking when you came to the conclusion to commit suicide but because you’ll need to collect and evaluate some data to decide how to do the deed!)

Now, Dear, in case you’ve jumped ahead of me and are now thinking that, similarly, it would seem “morally right” to commit suicide, and therefore, that laws (and customs and “moral sanctions”) against prohibiting suicide are wrong, please be careful. Applications of ideas about morality can be complicated: a lot of these applications are neither black nor white, but within a huge gray area. To illustrate for the gray area of suicide, let me jump ahead to another chapter in this group to grab a potential moral code: *Be kind, when you can, but with keenness...* If this were chosen as the basis of society’s “moral principles” or “judicial principles” (that is, one of the principles adopted for guiding interactions among people – and it’s a fairly good choice, especially if ‘kindness’ is applied with ‘keenness’), then its application to the case of suicide might be similar to the following.

Experience has shown (i.e., data show) that, in essentially all cases of proposed suicide, the individual has later agreed that it would have been a mistake to have committed suicide. [For some strange reason, interviews with those who successfully committed suicide have not yet been reported – in spite of the widely held “belief” in “life after death”!]³ Therefore, Dear, if

³ Well, actually, that’s not quite correct. There is a reported case of a fellow who committed suicide and then was later interviewed. His name is reported to be Jesus “the Christ”. That he committed suicide is obvious from the stories told about him in the New Testament: he allegedly knew he would be killed for

a group of people adopts the principle to be kind to one another, it seems quite consistent and “moral” (e.g., to help our genetic code to continue) if we choose to impose constraints on suicide, to try to give the individual the option to reconsider what is otherwise an irrevocable action. My own opinion is that if, after reconsideration, the person still wants to commit suicide (and if in that “reconsideration” the person talks to all people who might suffer from the person’s suicide), then it’s certainly within the person’s right to make the stupid (and usually unkind) move to abandon existence.

Further, others have expressed their opinions that the decision to commit suicide sometimes may not be stupid. For example, in his essay *Studies in Pessimism*,⁴ the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) wrote:

Pliny says: “Life is not so desirable a thing as to be protracted at any cost... The chief of all remedies for a troubled mind is the feeling that among the blessings which Nature gives to man, there is none greater than an opportune death; and the best of it is that everyone can avail himself of it.” And elsewhere the same writer declares: “Not even to God are all things possible; for he could not compass his own death, if he willed to die, and yet in all the miseries of our earthly life, this is the best of his gifts to man.”

And incidentally, Dear, please ignore the inconsistent assessments by all Christian (and Mormon) clerics that suicide is immoral: as Voltaire argued (as you can find on the internet), if there’s any truth in the New Testament (which, as I’ll show you later, is a questionable assumption), then obviously the clerics’ Jesus committed suicide – as did Socrates: they both chose to act in ways that they knew would lead to their executions. On the other hand, as I’ll be showing you, I consider suicide to be immoral not just because it may be unkind to others but simply because it’s stupid (except in extremely rare circumstance, such as being diagnosed with an incurable disease for which pain suppression is unavailable).

The above aside illustrates a number of ideas that I would like to enumerate. First, it again illustrates the principle that morality can be judged only relative to an objective. Second, it hints at a useful principle (which I call

his actions, and yet he proceeded to do them. On the other hand, though, many people question if the reports of his being interviewed after he died are reliable, suggesting that the reports are part of a monstrous clerical con-game, designed to gain control over people (and their money).

⁴ Available at <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/0/7/3/10732/10732-8.txt>.

one of my “judicial principles”, more of which I’ll show you later in this chapter and the next): *Be kind, when you can – but with keenness*. Third, it illustrates that sometimes the application of the principle that morality can be judged only relative to objectives can be quite complicated. And fourth, it illustrates another one of my “judicial principles” that I may never get around to explaining to you adequately, because its source has been data from a number of isolated examples during my life. That is, many times when the application of this idea (that morality can be judged only relative to our trio of survival goals) has revealed significant complications, I have found that the following “judicial principle” was valuable: *if in doubt, let the system go free*. Thus, with respect to the morality of someone committing suicide, my conclusion is: if in doubt, promote the person’s freedom.

Let me add a few comments about my “judicial principle” *if in doubt, let the system go free*. At the outset I’ll admit the obvious, namely, that a fundamental requirement of all societies is that many freedoms of its members (e.g., to say what they want, to do what they want, to take what they want, etc.) must be limited (through self constraint or through social constraints such as customs and laws). Consequently, please notice that the proposed principle deals only with cases “at the margin”, i.e., “if in doubt, let the system go free” or “when in doubt, yield to freedom.” In contrast, I’m certain that people shouldn’t be permitted to inappropriately yell “Fire!” in a crowded theater – but other cases are not so clear.

Recently, I heard the economist and Nobel prize winner Milton Friedman (when he was 93 years old!) promote a similar “judicial principle”. He added something close to: “I don’t know why I believe that, I just do.” It seems to me that three obvious reasons why such a “judicial principle” is valid are the following. 1) Freedom is the natural state of all animals, including humans; humans accept social constraints on their freedoms in exchange for other benefits gained from belonging to society; consequently, if evaluations lead to a result “too close to call” (including evaluations of influences on our “social contract”), then I think that “the edge” should be given to the idea “follow your instincts”. 2) Freedom is also the “normal state” for our minds: we are always free to choose what to think, regardless of external circumstances, even though sometimes it’s a struggle to adequately account for ideas in which we were indoctrinated (especially when we were children); consequently, when again our evaluations lead to results “too close to call” (i.e., “if in doubt...”), then I’d again tend to adopt

policies that are consistent with our mind's natural state, i.e., free. And 3), simply experience: that is, my experience has been that the principle "if in doubt, let the system go free" usually does yield desirable outcomes.

But all that aside, I trust that the answer to the question initially posed is obvious: once you have chosen your prime objective and ordered your lower-priority goals, *the morality of any act is merely a measure of how the act promotes your goals*. For example, again for the limiting case in which you are assumed to be the only person on Earth, if your prime objective is to survive, then depending on your current state (i.e., depending on how hungry, thirsty, cold, etc., you are), then you could order the 'morality' of any act: e.g., thinking and evaluating your thoughts against data (i.e., applying the scientific method), +10; getting food, +4 (you just ate!); getting water, +6 (you're kinda thirsty); finding some flint to start a fire, +5 (you're not particularly cold, but the fire might scare off the beasties); finding a cave, +3 (you don't particularly like caves); finding a tree to sleep in, +7; crying because you're alone, -5 (what's the point - although it might help clean out your sinuses); believing in Superman, the fairy godmother, and some giant Jabberwock in the sky, -9 (maybe not quite a -10, because such delusions may lower your level of anxiety, which can be deleterious to your health); and so on.

Let me add, Dear, that of course I'm not the first person to reach the conclusion that, on such a "morality scale", using your brain as best you can scores +10 and "belief in God" scores close to -10. In particular, in one of her books, Ayn Rand reached a similar conclusion about thinking. She stated: "If you choose to live, choosing not to think to the best of your ability is the height of immorality." But I would caution you, Dear, about Ayn Rand's conclusion: her identified "hero" was Aristotle, and similar to Aristotle, she apparently didn't see that, before we act, it's critical to evaluate our thoughts against data. Similarly many other people (including Bertrand Russell, Robert Ingersoll, and many, many others), have concluded that "belief in God" scores close to a -10, but then, many other people (such as your mother and your other grandparents) disagree.

But whatever other people have decided, Dear, guess what: it's up to you to decide where all your goals and actions reside on your own "personal-morality scale". It's impossible for anyone else to make this decision for you, Dear. Sorry about that - it's called life. Yet, maybe I can be of some value to you, by helping you see some of your options. Toward this goal, let

me turn, now, from “personal morality” to comment on what “personal justice” would mean if you were the only person on earth.

I trust you agree that, if you were the only person on Earth, you’d soon learn to live by all of Nature’s “laws” (as did the baby, imagined earlier). On occasion, you might try to defy gravity, the principle of conservation of energy, requirements such as minimum moisture content of wood for it to burn, and even the principle of causality – but Mother Nature would rather quickly reprimand you (or even punish you) for any transgressions. You would learn her “laws” through experience (observations, data analysis, hypotheses, tests,...), i.e., through application of the scientific method. You could think as you please, you would have freedom to choose your actions, but Mother Nature would always be there as the perfect judge of your actions: perfectly honest, unbiased, incorruptible, and disinterested. She would teach you that “natural justice” means all outcomes have causes, and she’d teach you that “personal justice” means that, if you have the ability to influence an outcome, then generally, you’ll get what you deserve.

In times of weakness, maybe you would complain about the ‘justice’ you experienced. For example, associated with a frightening experience, you might wail: “It’s not fair that rattlesnakes can kill me!” But when you had time to reflect on the matter, I’m sure you would conclude that what exists is always perfectly “justified” by its causes. Besides, if you had the option, what would you choose to be: a rattlesnake with the ability to kill a person or a person with the ability to kill a rattlesnake?! And you would probably also see the “personal justice” in dealing with rattlesnakes: taking suitable care, you could reduce the probability of being bitten. In contrast, if you didn’t take suitable care, you would increase the risk; i.e., when you have the ability to influence any outcome (such as in your dealings with rattlesnakes), then you generally get what you deserve.

And in contrast to this perfect “natural justice” and perfect “personal justice” that Nature would teach you if you were the only person on Earth, the clerics of our culture preach absolute absurdities. They have managed to convince simple-minded people that there’s some giant Jabberwock in the sky who, on some distant “day of reckoning”, doles out “suitable justice” appropriate to one’s “morality” (as defined by the clerics). In reality, nothing could be further from the truth. In reality, “personal morality” is a measure of how an act influences your goals, and in reality, it isn’t the giant Jabberwock who judges you, it’s Mother Nature. For example, Dear, there’s a high moral

value in taking appropriate care when you're in rattlesnake country, and if you act immorally (that is, stupidly), then you'll increase the chances that you will be bitten, i.e., you'll increase the chances that Mother Nature will quickly dispense appropriate justice for your immorality.

More generally, Dear, think about the number of "significant" personal moral-judgments that each of us makes every day. Although I've never given the estimate much thought and although the number certainly depends on what qualifies as "significant", yet if a reasonable meaning is used, I wouldn't be surprised if we each make somewhere between 10 and 100 (say, on average, 30) "significant" personal moral-judgments per day. These are judgments about what we think are the best ways to promote our trio of survival goals (judgments from our decision to brush our teeth to protect them, to our decision to speak kindly to an acquaintance whom we know is having trouble, and from our decision to go for a jog to get some exercise, to our decision to pay dues to the ACLU to promote civil liberties). In sum, if on average we make 30 significant moral decisions per day, that amounts to about 10,000 such decisions per year, or somewhere close to a million "significant moral judgments" that each of us must make during our lifetime! And for every single one of these "moral choices", Mother Nature is always there, ready to dispense her justice: rewarding us for using our brains as best we can and punishing us for our stupidity; rewarding us for acting morally and punishing us for our immorality.

Now, Dear, for contrast – for astounding contrast – think about the craziness of the concept that some giant Jabberwock in the sky is "waiting in the wings" to judge us on how well we made these million or more moral decisions! It's mind boggling in its stupidity! Some giant Jabberwock will give us eternal bliss in heaven because, in fact, we did choose to brush our teeth and go for a jog?! Some giant Jabberwock is going to sentence us to eternal torture in hell because one day we didn't eat an apple to ease our next bowel movement?! Except for the horrible harm to humanity that such crazy ideas have caused, they could be the source of the longest, most enduring, and most widespread belly laugh that the world has ever known! Absolute absurdity!

But just for fun, imagine the preposterous "day of reckoning" when the giant Jabberwock passed out judgment:

“Well now, little girl, although I’m getting awfully tired of this (for your case has already consumed several milliseconds of my time), it’s time to pass judgment on your moral choice #435,616. On this particular Thursday at 7:08 PM, when you were 16, you chose to eat some garlic bread.”

“Oh I remember that: I ate too much, had a stomach ache, couldn’t sleep, and the next day, my boy friend said my breath smelled terribly.”

“Yes, yes – never mind that – the point is: your mother told you not to eat that garlic bread, one of my commandments is that you were to honor your parents, and the immorality of your act gets you one step closer to eternal damnation.”

“Well, yes, she told me not to eat it – but she also told me why: because I’d get a stomach ache, because I would have trouble sleeping, and because my breath would smell bad.”

“Enough talking! I’m of a mind that ‘suitable justice’ would be that, for eternity, every time your toe nails grow back, they would be pulled off while you screamed in agony.”

“Really. Well, I think that ‘suitable justice’ would be that, when I wake up from this nightmare, you would totally disappear!” Poof!

And if you wonder what that “poof” is about, Dear, let me wander off again, to recount (probably poorly) a “koan” that I once read, probably in one of the books by the Bagwan Rashneesh (a con artist from India who, with the money he conned from mostly rich Californians, set up a “commune” in Oregon, not far from where we used to live). A “koan” is a problem that a “Zen master” gives to an aspiring student who, upon solving the problem, will attain “enlightenment” or at least a “greater awareness of reality”.

The koan given to a particular student was to explain how a model ship encased by a bottle could be removed from the bottle without breaking the bottle or disassembling the ship. After years of worrying about how to solve the problem, the wandering student returned to the Zen master and admitted that he had failed to solve the problem. The master said: “Oh, that problem; it’s easy to solve.” “Watch”, he said, and he clapped his hands loudly while exclaiming: “Poof!” “There”, added the master, “the problem is solved.” The student complained that he didn’t understand. The master explained: “Your problem was only a ‘word problem’; you have failed to reach enlightenment because you have not yet learned to distinguish real problems from those that are nothing but ‘word problems’.”

“Word problems” and the associated nightmare of the giant Jabberwock aside, there’s no doubt that many times we humans have real problems with the justice that Nature dispenses. The source of one problem is that the linkages between cause and effect are frequently so complicated that they are barely discernible; therefore, frequently we don’t see that appropriate ‘justice’ was served. As one of literally millions of examples, Dear, you might take a huge number of precautions against being bitten by a rattlesnake and yet be bitten, while others may seem to purposefully endanger themselves and yet never be bitten. And though the crazy clerics may then mutter the absurdity that “God works in mysterious ways”, the reality is that (stated mathematically) with so many relevant “variables” so poorly defined, we must deal with only the probabilities of various outcomes (also known as “luck”), and the best we can do is act appropriately so that the probabilities are weighted in our favor (i.e., try to improve our luck).

Similarly, although our experiences with Mother Nature are the closest we humans will ever come to being judged by the perfect judge, yet many times we still have real problems with her judgments and wish for a “kinder” judge. Thus, although all available evidence supports the assessment that, as a judge, Mother Nature is totally honest, trustworthy, objective, unbiased, incorruptible (attributes desired of all our judges), yet apparently she’s also totally disinterested in the outcome, i.e., she doesn’t care. In contrast, in most instances, we humans wish that our judges would care: that they would understand and make allowances for human frailties and failures (such as misjudgments, confused thinking, and various other human weaknesses and passions). But, of course there’s no point in whining about it: natural justice “just is”! And besides, although Mother Nature’s judgments sometimes seem “cruel”, in contrast to humans or their gods, she’s never evil, malicious, spiteful, or hateful.

And while it’s on my mind, Dear, please permit still another aside – added in part to mention to you one of the great pleasures of my life. As a scientist in a large organization (in fact it was the world’s biggest contract research organization), I was unfortunately exposed to and involved in an enormous amount of “in-house politics”, which always caused me substantial pain (probably because I’m not a good politician, always preferring to “tell it like it is”, and probably “telling it” too plainly and too bluntly). But (consistent with the “connectedness of opposites”), this political pain provided me with an even greater pleasure of engaging in science, for in science, there was zero “in fighting”, “back stabbing”, and other political perversities.

In science, Dear, one deals only with the total honesty, total truthfulness, and total disinterest of Nature. Sometimes I would struggle for months (in some cases, for years!) trying to solve some problem – struggling to the utmost of my mental abilities – and Mother Nature would just sit there, quietly smiling, never once with any political intrigue or dishonesty, ready to dispense perfect justice when I finally presented my case to her. When she judged that I was wrong, it hurt – it really hurt – but when she judged that I was right, it was absolutely wonderful! And it wasn't just the “survival signals” that I picked up from co-workers around the world when I showed them my solution at some conference or in some publication; in addition, it was some “deep satisfaction”, like creating a beautiful sunrise by myself, for my own enjoyment and for the enjoyment of anyone who would rise early enough to feel the glow and beauty that proclaims a new day.

But enough of my musings. In the next chapter, I want to begin to show you the meaning of *interpersonal* justice and morality. But to make sure you understand personal justice and morality, why don't you now consider the personal morality and justice of getting some exercise – and then get some!