

Lesson 9

Justice and The Good Society

Justice is that which is most primitive in the human soul, most fundamental in society, most sacred among ideas, and what the masses demand today with most ardour. It is the essence of religions and at the same time the form of reason, the secret object of faith, and the beginning, middle and end of knowledge. What can be imagined more universal, more strong, more complete than justice?

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

Morals and Society

The Greeks had a saying: “To live a good life one must live in a great city.” What counts as a “great city,” of course, is always a matter of considerable dispute: New York or Omaha, Los Angeles or Austin? But what the Greeks had in mind, of course, was the idea that, to live a good life one had to live in a good community—one in which people respected one another and obeyed the rules, one that flourished and was not overwhelmed with problems of crime and poverty, one in which the happiness of one person was not to be gained at the expense of others. Aristotle’s *Ethics* described the ideal citizen of such a community, and Bentham’s and Mill’s utilitarianism provided one description of the ultimate goal of such a community—the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people. Indeed, even Kant, in his final formulation of the categorical imperative, suggests that one should always act in such a way as to bring about a “Kingdom of Ends,” an ideal community. There seems to be no doubt about it: for almost all of us, the good life presupposes residing in a good place to live with other people, and our ability to be a good person depends at least in part on those with whom we share our world and the society in which we live.

But although we can perhaps imagine a society in which everyone is wealthy and healthy, in which everyone at least respects everyone else and there is no crime and no poverty and plenty of everything for everyone, the world we live in is just not like that. It is worth noting that the imaginary perfect societies that some of the great philosophers and social thinkers have dreamed of and written about have been called **Utopia**—derived from Greek roots, meaning both “good place” and “nowhere,” and referring to an imaginary, ideal place. Human life as we know it is burdened with misfortune and tragedy. There is not plenty for everyone, and sometimes there is not even enough to go around. People are born into poverty while others are born into riches. Some people are born with physical or mental disabilities, and most of us become seriously ill at some time or another. People of one race or religion look down on people of other races and religions, and crime runs rampant, not just in the streets of the city but all over the country, and not only because of poverty or need.

So the question of living in an ideal society remains but a dream; meanwhile, we have to figure out how best to live in the world we actually do inhabit. Given the fact that people are born into very different circumstances and enjoy or suffer very different fates during their lives, how should society take this into account?

What should we do with those who break the law and intentionally, or irresponsibly harm others? How should we organize society, and who should have the power to run things? Just as we asked in Lesson 8 how we ought to live as individuals, we must now ask how we ought to live as a society. Of course, the questions can never be kept wholly apart.

We will pursue these questions first by noting the fact that philosophers have typically sought to justify the organization of their own societies, then by discussing various conceptions of who should rule. We will then consider challenges to the idea that any government is necessary. In light of the fact that the nature of justice is, perhaps, the central question of social-political philosophy, we will devote the majority of the lesson to this topic, addressing the question of what justice is, the meaning of equality, and the theory of the social contract as the origin of justice. We will then consider issues of justice in connection with those beyond our own society, and different philosophical views of individual rights. We will conclude with a brief discussion of African-American and feminist critics of conditions within the status quo, both in social practices and in their philosophical underpinnings, suggesting that their insights might help us rectify past injustices and reshape our institutions accordingly.

The Nature of Society

People have always lived in groups, in large families or tribes that evolved into great cities and nations. “Man is a social animal,” wrote Aristotle 2,500 years ago. If some caveman 25,000 years ago had been asked his opinion, he probably would have said pretty much the same thing. Apart from an occasional (usually fictional) hero alone in the wilderness, we are mutually dependent creatures. We need to live together. And with the exception of that one noisy neighbor, we usually *like* to live together. But any group of people, no matter how large or small, needs some form of organization, and organizations of people have not implausibly been compared to living organisms, in which a collection of individuals happen to live in one place. Every society has its own structures, its own culture, its history, its mode of organization, its rules. The questions are what kind of structures and rules these ought to be and what kind of people we are, such that we need these structures and rules.

The nature of the societies people have built and grown up in vary enormously, from the peasant and family-based agrarian cultures we still find in many parts of the world to the bewilderingly mobile and fast-paced cities of New York, Paris, New Delhi, and Beijing. In some of these societies, a person is viewed strictly in terms of his or her place in the society—as a member of a certain family, as a member of a certain class, as one who will be trained to be a soldier, a shoemaker, a farmer, or a diplomat. In others, the concept of “the individual” is all-important, and a person’s self-identity is to be distinguished from all of these “accidents” of birth and functions. In some societies, it is taken for granted that some people are “better” than others, by virtue of their birth or their abilities or their accomplishments; in others, it is said that everyone is equal and due equal respect and consideration.

The nature of society and the role of the person in society are essential considerations in social philosophy. It is not surprising that, as one reads the different philosophers who have written about the nature of society, philosophers tend to reflect or project the perceptions, preferences,

and dissatisfactions with their own societies. Plato's imaginary Republic is easily recognizable as a variation on Greek society, and the philosophers of the late Middle Ages who lived under monarchies defended the "divine right of kings." The philosophers of eighteenth-century England—living during the Industrial Revolution and the boisterous birth of capitalism—not unnaturally defended the right to private property that capitalism presupposed. And most contemporary social philosophers in America defend first and foremost the rights of the individual, such as freedom of speech and religion. This is not necessarily because of any cowardice or lack of imagination on these various thinkers' parts, but rather because we are, no matter how free thinking and imaginative, a part of the society in which we were raised. Our conception of the good society and its structure is usually based on values we digested along with our mothers' milk. There will always be the occasional conversion—the repentant communist who turns into a vehement anticommunist and the successful capitalist who devotes the rest of his life to advocating socialism—but these are special stories just because they are so rare. Sometimes an entire society may undergo such a conversion—China rebelling against its Confucian heritage and embracing communism in the 1940s—but the enormous difficulties that such societies face in carrying out their conversion just goes to show how deep-set the old ideas will always be.

Who Should Rule? The Question of Legitimacy

What kind of a society do we want? Who should run things? Since prehistoric times, it seems that someone—usually the strongest or the wisest of the group—has taken charge, given orders to the others, and taken on certain privileges and status himself or herself. Looking beyond ourselves to the rest of nature, we can see similar high-status roles. A wolf pack is led by the strongest, smartest wolf, and without such a leader the pack usually perishes. A hive of bees or a nest of ants each has its queen, without which there could be no hive or nest. So it is easy to presume that the emergence of a leader in human society is just as "natural." Who the leader is, of course, will depend on the nature of the society. In a warrior society, it will probably be the best soldier; in an intellectual society, it may be the wisest scholar. In a society where money is power, the rule will be by the rich (a **plutocracy**). In a society that depends on certain specialized skills (for example, intimate knowledge of computers), power will depend on merit and ability (a **meritocracy**). In some societies, religion rules and those who hold power are the most powerful religious people (a **theocracy**; literally, "rule by God"). In some societies, those who rule come from the highest caste or class in society (an **aristocracy**; literally, "rule by the best")—whether one is born into this position or comes to adopt it by virtue of certain credentials, such as a sufficiently prestigious university degree. In some societies, the ruler will be one person (a **monarchy**); in others, it will be a few (an **oligarchy**); in others rule is shared, at least in theory, by everyone (a **democracy**).

But we are not, we keep telling ourselves, just animals. We are rational as well as social animals; we can figure things out although most animals cannot. Perhaps it is true that every society needs some authority and organization, but why should such power and direction be in the hands of one man or woman? Why not a group? Why not everyone, working and thinking together? And if there is to be some governing body, why should we simply let nature "take its course" rather than design it ourselves?

Even in ancient times, the idea that the strongest deserve to rule was hard to swallow. To be sure, one had to accept such a leader if one wanted to survive oneself. But the idea that such power was **legitimate**, that such power was justified—that was a different matter. And throughout history, when those who have the power abuse it (**tyranny**, from ancient Greek, means such abuse of power), some people have banded together (the ruler's own inner circle, a popular uprising) to “throw the bums out” (in our distinctively American political vocabulary). Legitimate power—or **authority**—is not just a matter of strength or cleverness; it is a matter of justified power. That is why, for many centuries, monarchs claimed to rule by “divine right.” In a religious society, who could provide a more powerful, more unassailable justification?

What makes a government **legitimate** (that is, justified)? It used to be thought that rulers were justified by God. But although our own politicians may often invoke God in support of their own positions (see “Which Side Is God On?” Lesson 3), we no longer think that God alone justifies a government; in any case, one has to prove God's support by winning an election or two. So, too, it may have once been the case that **might makes right**—that those who were strongest or otherwise most superior would rule—but we do not accept the idea that the fact that one has and can hold power gives one the right to power—that is, legitimate power or authority. We believe, in short, that governments are supposed to serve the people, and the legitimacy of a government depends on this.

But even here, there are hard questions. Does serving the people mean making them prosperous? Is a rich society therefore a good society? And is the ruler who makes people rich therefore a legitimate ruler? Or is there another consideration here—that it is not the overall wealth or well-being of a society that counts first and foremost but rather the prevalence of *justice* in society (an important concept that we will discuss shortly)? Is a legitimate government one that protects not only the rich but also the very poor as well? Or is a legitimate government one that defends justice in a different sense, by enforcing the various rules and customs of the society, by punishing wrongdoers and thus protecting the values of the culture? Or is the legitimacy of a government not at all dependent on what the government does *for* the people, but rather how the government is formed *by* the people? For example, is legitimate government first and foremost one that has been properly elected in a fair political contest?

Anarchism, the Free Market, and the Need for Government

One possible, and in one sense not unappealing, suggestion is that no one should run things. We all know that governments typically make a botch of things, often assume too much power, and provide their citizens too little in return. The *Dao De Jing* (*Tao Te Ching*) of ancient China suggests that aggressive measures to reform things often end up making things worse, and the *Dao De Jing* encourages rulers to refrain from intervening in the day-to-day operations of the state. It claims that the best ruler would be just a shadowy presence to the people, for, having appointed competent ministers to run things, he could just sit back and watch the state's affairs unfold in good order.

A more radical response to the failures of governments would be just to let everyone do what they want, a state of affairs more pejoratively called **anarchy**—a state of confusion and social

disorder. Not having a government would create certain obvious problems of organization (for example, establishing rules for safe driving and ensuring that essential goods and services are provided). But it is not at all obvious that a reasonably sized group of intelligent planners could not design an organization (for instance, a set of traffic rules and regulations, a system of supermarkets and service stations) that would be generally agreeable within the society. We generally accept the convention of driving (in the United States) on the right-hand side of the road, not because the government forces us to but because we all agree that we must agree to drive on one side or the other, to drive safely, to drive sober. To be sure, there will always be those who refuse to comply with such agreements, but one might ask whether we really need a government (a highway patrol, traffic courts, judges) to enforce such mutually agreed-upon rules. And, to be sure, the absence of any higher power to delegate responsibilities might cause certain temporary shortages of goods—if it happens that no one at the moment is producing such goods—but must we assume that governmental authority is the only means for preventing such shortages?

One of the most powerful arguments of our times insists that, indeed, we do not need government to organize society, at least with regard to our economic affairs. In a sense, we can just let each person do what he or she wants. It is the idea of the **free market**—that people will do what they need to do without being forced to do so by any law or government. If essential goods and services are needed, enterprising people will provide them—at a profit to themselves, motivated by self-interest. And if there are mutual agreements that must be made to make society better or safer, we will accomplish this ourselves, in our own interest, without the interference or the authority of anyone else. Of course, there may still need to be rules and restrictions (for example, regulations to ensure “fair play”)—but there need be and should be no government interference or organization where freedom of the market is concerned.

However, free markets have not shown themselves capable of solving some very pressing social problems. We need not question the value of individual freedom or the efficiency of the free market to satisfy at least some of our needs and desires in order to argue that certain basic needs are not well-served by such a market. Health care is one example much in the news today. The demand for health care is simply not like the demand for most consumer goods. When a person becomes acutely ill, he or she is in no position to “shop around,” or to consider whether the services in question are affordable. And with the advances in medical science, the cost of effective care is now prohibitively expensive for even the reasonably well-to-do. Moreover, because illness is often a consequence of other deprivations—malnutrition or lack of adequate shelter—illness often strikes hardest at those who can least afford it.

The free market has also shown too little ability to care for the poor. There is an old bit of market wisdom: the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer. There seems to be no correction built into the market to handle such increasing inequality, and so there is a need for some countervailing force—notably government—to ensure that the very poor are adequately protected and provided for. Some people get extraordinarily rich, and some people sink into a cycle of poverty from which there seems to be no escape without considerable outside assistance. There is always charity, perhaps, but what if it isn’t adequate? What we are discussing here, of course, is that enormous political concept called **justice**. Insofar as the purpose and the legitimacy of

governments is to promote justice, we want to know—as Plato asked long ago in his great book *The Republic*—“What is justice?”

What Is Justice?

Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought.

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 1971

Life is never fair . . . And perhaps it is a good thing for most of us that it is not.

Oscar Wilde, *An Ideal Husband*, 1895

In a good society, there will be something more than prosperity; there will also be justice. For example, one might insist that people who are good will be rewarded, while those who are bad will be punished. One might insist that people who work hard will be held in esteem and paid well for their work. One might insist that people will get to keep what they have, without fear that it will be taken away, and that those in need are taken care of. The problem of justice arises when *all* these various demands cannot be satisfied, when there is not enough to go around, or when the demands simply contradict one another. How can we make sure that the needy are taken care of if there are no taxes on the rich? How can we make sure that innocent people are protected without letting go some of the guilty? Justice, accordingly, is concerned with the priority of these various concerns and their implementation in a society that is, we admit, something less than perfect.

Justice is often divided into two parts, one concerned with punishment and the other with the distribution of goods and responsibilities. The first is called **retributive justice**, coming from the word *retribution*; criminal courts and prisons are society’s instruments of retributive justice, and in a just society criminals are caught and sentenced fairly. A harsh sentence for a minor crime is an injustice, but so is a light or a suspended sentence for a heinous crime. If the guilty party “gets off easy” because he or she is rich and powerful, justice is particularly ill-served, for one of the presuppositions of justice is that it is “blind” to particular individuals, their status, and their power. (That is why the Western depiction of justice traditionally shows a *blindfolded* woman holding balanced measuring scales.)

The other kind of justice is **distributive justice**—the distribution of goods— which includes salaries and bonuses for well-done work and education and medical care for the public. Distributive justice continues to be a source of deep controversy in contemporary life. For example, there is vehement disagreement, to say the obvious, over Karl Marx’s famous suggestion: “From each according to his abilities; to each according to his needs.” This is a summary of one theory of justice, but notice that it says nothing about what people *earn* or about their right to what they already have. It does not suggest that people might ever deserve more than they need, and some would find this in itself grounds for rejecting the theory. On the other hand, a great many people are outraged that some shiftless playboy can lead a life of luxury just because his father worked himself to death, leaving his fortune to this wastrel.

Such entitlement plays no role in the Marxist conception of justice, in which serving people’s needs is the main concern of justice. Yet most Americans would say that the young man is

entitled to the money, if only because his father was entitled to do what he liked with his earnings. The American sense of justice is more concerned with making sure that people get and keep what is theirs. In a Marxist society, justice would demand that the playboy be disinherited and sent out to work for a living. His unearned fortune would be distributed among the needy. In our society, the young man gets to keep his money, even though we think he doesn't deserve it, because he is entitled to what has been left to him by his father.

Of course, matters of justice are not so simple. Marxist societies find it necessary to reward people for their work, if only to give them *incentives* to work harder. The Marxist view does not grapple with problems of ensuring motivation. In our society, the shiftless young man may get to keep a substantial part of his fortune, but we can be sure that the government will take a good chunk of it for its own redistributive purposes (whether these are to assist the needy, to build bombers, or to build roads). Indeed, every line on a tax return is in effect a miniature theory of justice—stating what people deserve and what activities are considered particularly worthy. Having children is rewarded with tax deductions; gambling losses are ignored. Return on investments may be rewarded with a low tax rate, lower than taxes on salaries. (What does this say about our concept of justice?) Distributive justice is an all-pervasive concern in our society: in every salary negotiation, in every commercial transaction, and in every grade assigned by a professor.

Our concern for justice, however, is a never-ending balancing act among a number of very different and sometimes antagonistic factors. Most Americans probably agree with Marx that people should work up to their abilities and have their needs served, but we do not put these two considerations at the forefront of our sense of justice. Our system shows our concern that people get what they earn (just as, in criminal cases, we think they should get what they deserve). We also assume that taking risks and shouldering considerable responsibilities should be highly rewarded. And we apparently think—a matter worth pondering—that it is perfectly just that the highest paid, most honored and celebrated members of our society are those who entertain us—in sports, on film, or on the stage, for example.

The American sense of justice also insists, above all, on that sense of entitlement—that people deserve to keep what they have, no matter how little they have done to earn it, no matter what we may think of them. This makes our sense of justice largely conservative, as opposed to the radical redistribution of wealth urged in many revolutionary countries. Indeed, many prominent social theorists have argued that, whatever our emphasis on hard work and merit, our capitalist system of justice depends first of all on this conservative sense of entitlement (the inviolability of private property, for example) and only afterward on these other concerns.

The Meaning of Equality

The law, in its majestic equality, forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread.

Anatole France, 1844–1924

What is most important for justice, however, in both Marxist societies and our own, is the concept of **equality**. On the one hand, it is obvious to everyone that all people are *not* equal in

every sense. Some are born healthy, wealthy, and smart; others are born wretched, impoverished, and disabled. People have different talents, different looks, different capacities. Nevertheless, justice insists that they are all equal. What does this mean?

It means, first of all, that they are all equal *before the law*. Again, the blindfolded figure of justice signifies that justice does not recognize individual differences in rank and privilege; justice sees everyone as equal. In theory, at least, the same laws apply to everyone and in the same way. A judge is obliged to hand out the same sentence to a rich man as to a poor man, to a homeless person as to a movie star, if they have committed the same crime. Two people doing the same job deserve the same salary, and it does not matter if one is male and the other female, if one is black and the other white, if one is tall and the other is short. Indeed, this sense of “same job, same pay” is defended in American courts because it is so important to our sense of justice and the good society.

But many writers have argued equality cannot mean that everyone should be made equal in a more general sense. In a story by Kurt Vonnegut, the author talks about a society in which everyone is made equal by handicapping the advantaged. Strong people are made weak by being forced to carry heavy weights all the time; smart people are made dumb by wearing noisemakers that distract them from thinking; graceful people wear lopsided weights to keep them off balance. The outrageousness of the story is its suggestion that *inequality* is inevitable in any society. According to this view, some inequalities reflect real differences in accomplishment and make our whole society richer. People who work hard ought to live better, and people who can but refuse to work shouldn't have those same advantages given to them. And so the argument is that—above a certain subsistence level necessary for human existence—inequality should be tolerated as inevitable and, in certain ways, as desirable and advantageous to everyone.

But should there be *so much* inequality? (This is the very question that Marx raised when he complained that laborers were alienated even from a sense of their own accomplishment when the fruits of their labors were not theirs to sell but belonged to someone else, for example, a factory owner.) And even though we can understand why virtue and productiveness should be rewarded, why should we therefore accept the very different thesis that mediocrity and failure—or just plain bad luck and misfortune—should be punished? Could we not have incentives for hard work and productivity that nevertheless coexisted with material equality?

What equality means, many writers say, is **equal opportunity**. But here, too, there are problems. When we try to insist that everyone should be equal, we run up against the unavoidable fact that people are from birth unequal in abilities and advantages, and even the most radical and topsy-turvy restructuring of the society would leave this largely so. Besides that, our feeling that people ought to be rewarded (and punished) for what they do and our sense that people should get to keep what they have result in further inequalities among individuals. There is no equality of opportunity because the same circumstances that give some people ample advantage over others give them much greater opportunities, too. “It takes money to make money” goes an old piece of wisdom, and no one can doubt that even a mediocre, lazy child who goes to a first-rate prep school has a better chance at opportunities for the future than bright, energetic, but disadvantaged children in an inner-city school. Equal opportunity seems as elusive as equality.

One might think that such complications would be enough to render an ideal impractical, but that is to miss the point of moral ideals in society. There has probably never been a perfectly just society; perhaps there never will be. But what our ideals of justice and equality do is to remind us, all the time, of what we believe in and what we stand for. An overall scheme for assuring equality or equal opportunity might escape us, but we can, by virtue of our insistence on equality, be aware of *inequalities* that exist around us and do what we can to correct them. It is “natural,” one might argue, for people to associate with people of their own age, race, religion, and political persuasion; nevertheless, when this “natural” inclination interferes with fairness—for example, when an employer is hiring, firing, or promoting, or when some workers are forming a union, or when a club is being formed—our sense of justice intervenes and reminds us (perhaps with the help of the law) that such discrimination is not fair. It is unsurprising, one might similarly argue, that in a complex corporation different people doing the same job with the same title might find that they have different salaries; but our concept of equality comes once again to the rescue, for it is under the power of that concept that we feel compelled—and the corporation will too—to make sure that people doing substantially the same job are paid the same salary. However difficult and controversial our concepts of justice and equality may be, they serve an invaluable purpose in our society. We may argue for another two centuries on exactly what they mean and how they apply, but in the meantime they will be the instruments we use to improve our society.

One notion of equality, however, should stand in front of all these other notions. It precedes equality before the law and is more important than equality of incomes and even opportunities. And that is the notion of *equality of respect*—the presumption that we will view everyone we meet with the vague but immensely meaningful idea that he or she, like ourselves, is a human being with feelings and thoughts, hopes and worries, affections and concerns. It is not a political or even a social sense of equality as much as a deeply felt personal one, taught to most of us in the United States from childhood as an essential part of being a citizen of a classless society, whatever the inequalities in income, wealth, and power among us. But if we fully appreciate the importance of such mutual respect, perhaps some of the other inequalities in our social lives will gradually be corrected.

The Origins of Justice and the Social Contract

Outside of civil states, there is always a war of all against all.

Thomas Hobbes, 1588–1679

Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1712–1778

Where does justice come from? And why should considerations of justice have any binding authority over us? Why do we have states and governments, and why (apart from fear of punishment) should we obey them? The most popular modern answer to these questions—which has come down to us primarily from the great social thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (especially Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau)—is that justice and the whole of society as well have been produced by a general social agreement, a **social contract**. We are obliged to obey the rules of justice—and the governments that enforce them—because we (in some sense) *agreed to do so*. It is as if we made a contract with the state—or, more properly, with everyone

else in (what is now) our society—to live together according to certain rules that, according to our best calculations, are in everyone’s interest, including our own. In return for our obedience to the rules, everyone else will obey them too (or be threatened and forced to do so).

Just think of traffic rules alone to see how well this idea works as an account of both why there should be such general rules and how it is in our interest to obey them (at least most of the time) ourselves. And in return for our agreement to be fair and to support and participate in fair institutions—in particular the justice system but also the tax system (by willingly paying our “fair share”), the market system, and the system of contracts and ownership—others will participate as well. Society will be orderly and more or less peaceful; property will be safe and secured and our personal lives protected. Justice thus results from a mutual agreement according to which we all agree to abide by certain rules and principles.

We ourselves have signed no such contract, of course; although one can argue (as even Socrates did in the *Crito* almost 3,000 years ago) that one has made an implicit agreement with the society in which one lives simply by “choosing” to (continuing to) live there. And in the United States, in particular, there actually is something like a “social contract,” an actual written document signed by representatives from the various then-existing states in order to set up a government and a set of general laws—our Constitution. But the appeal of the social-contract view, whether or not one believes that there ever actually was or is such a contract, is that it makes government conditional on our (collective) interests and dependent on our (collective) decisions. (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, one of the leading defenders of this theory, referred to our collective demands as the **General Will** of the people.) Governments, on this view, don’t just appear “by nature” and impose themselves on us. We are in effect the ultimate source of their rules and laws, and it is our “will” that becomes the law of the land. As Rousseau profoundly put it, we collectively impose the laws on ourselves.

What was there before people got together to form society? Why did they get together? The most famous theory of the prior “state of nature” (that is, before the formation of society) is that of Thomas Hobbes, who argued that human life before society and justice was “a war of all against all” and, consequently, “nasty, brutish, and short.” He suggested that people are naturally selfish and, in a world with too scarce resources, we would literally kill one another if there were no laws and governments to force us to behave ourselves. So why would we join a society and agree to such laws? Because each of us would be quite afraid of being hurt or killed by the others. And in return for our promise not to harm them, they agree in return not to harm us. Not a bad deal.

The implication, of course, is that human nature is still much the same and, without laws and governments, we too might return to that same brutal, mutually murderous situation. In *Leviathan*, published in 1651, at the time of the English Civil War, Hobbes regarded civil discord as the worst evil that could befall a society. The only way to avoid it, he argued, was for power to be given to a strong central authority, which could be either an individual or a collective body. On this view, the members of society voluntarily give up their rights to the sovereign power; but Hobbes believed this was a price worth paying in order to ensure peace.

A somewhat more cheerful theory of the social contract was defended by Hobbes’s successor, John Locke. Locke suggested that in the state of nature we were basically hardworking creatures

who tried to build things and cultivate the soil and by doing so claimed ownership of that property with which we had “mixed our labor.” But ownership in the state of nature would be a tenuous business. For although one had earned the right of ownership through one’s work, protecting what one owned was quite a different matter. We got together to form societies with laws and governments, therefore, to protect our hard-earned property. Locke’s theory, needless to say, places a high premium on the importance of private property both in justice and in the workings of society.

An even more benign theory was defended by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who saw society and justice (as we mentioned earlier) as the expression of the General Will of the people. But Rousseau did not see the state of nature as a brutal war, as Hobbes did, nor did he see it primarily as a world of hardworking individuals. Rousseau instead imagined a world of plenty, in which our presocietal ancestors could easily survive picking berries off the trees and sleeping in natural shelters. They left one another alone, and even felt pity for others in need. “Natural man,” Rousseau argues, was happier and healthier than most of us. Why, then, did people in the state of nature ever decide to form societies? Well, much of the evolution of society, Rousseau tells us, is something of a tragedy, a product of our inventiveness but also our gullibility. Whereas nature finds us naturally good and happy, society, he says, “corrupts” us. Nevertheless, society properly conceived will not only restore something of our natural vitality and utilize our inventiveness but will actually make us into something more than merely “natural.” Society will make us moral. Society will change a mere man or woman into a **citizen**.

These three thinkers’ views of human nature differ considerably, but they all point to the same conclusion. For whatever reason, we got together and formed society, with laws and justice as its central feature. It is an exciting vision. And whether one gives any credence to its historical claims—either the theories of human nature presupposed or the story of the social contract itself—the vision exemplifies many of our most treasured demands regarding ourselves and the society we live in.

Justice beyond Our Borders

The topic of justice raises questions not only about how one should treat one’s fellow citizens, but also about how members of other societies should be treated. Some philosophers, in addressing this concern, have challenged some of our everyday assumptions about what it means to be a good member of society.

Being patriotic probably seems to most of us as an obvious virtue. But how does this seeming virtue square with the virtue of being just? The question becomes clearer when we translate the idea of patriotism into the attitudes that compose it. Does patriotism imply preferring the wellbeing of members of our own society to that of foreigners? If so, is that really fair? Leo Tolstoy analyzed patriotism along these lines and concluded that it is immoral because the preferential attitude it takes toward one’s own society or nation is at the expense of all others. But is this really the right way to look at what we mean by being patriotic? Might we not say instead that patriotism is being loyal to the society that has supported us in many ways over our lifetime, as well as being loyal to the particular members with whom we have interacted?

How should we define “patriotism”? Does it just mean that we identify with our country? This seems too weak a definition. One can identify with one’s country and be ashamed of it, and many people would consider such shame to be incompatible with patriotism. Others might say that shame under certain circumstances—when one’s nation is not living up to its ideals, for example—is a manifestation of patriotism. If patriotism is a virtue, it is surely something other than mindless agreement with everything done by one’s leaders, one’s government, or one’s compatriots. Patriotism, to be meaningful, involves participation in a larger community or society, and most defenders of patriotism would agree that patriotic participation sometimes may involve criticizing the very nation to which one maintains allegiance.

In any case, mere identification with one’s nation falls short of patriotism. As most of us use the term, “patriotism” seems to require enthusiasm for one’s nation and putting its interests first. Members of the military, who risk their lives on behalf of the nation, are often seen as the epitome of patriotism. But this idea of putting the interests of one’s nation first brings us back to the question of whether such partiality can be morally justified.

One argument in defense of patriotism is that citizenship imposes special moral obligations on the citizen. This is the argument that Plato’s Socrates gives to his disciple Crito when he claims that he has obligations to the state because it nurtured and educated him, and that by living in it he has made an implicit contract with it that require him to obey its laws. Seemingly, Socrates would see the partiality of patriotism as justified in that it is an outcome of this implicit contract with the state.

Some thinkers have denied that any kind of partiality is legitimate. The ancient Chinese philosopher **Mozi** (also Mo-Tzu) contended that any kind of preferential treatment, even that based on family ties, is immoral and also harmful to society as well as one’s family members. Surely, he claimed, we would be more confident that our parents were well cared for if we lived in a society in which everyone cared for everyone’s parents, not just their own.

The Confucian philosopher **Mencius** (Mengzi) countered that this approach would lead to a leveling of the concern we showed to a lowest common denominator, and (like Socrates) he argued that we have special obligations to those who have tended to us since our birth. It is natural that we have special concern for those who are closest to us, and the family is the context in which we first learn to care for others besides ourselves. While we have particular obligations to care for those who are closest to us, the cultivation of our natural sympathy for others naturally expands in a widening circle of concern for others. Contemporary communitarians such as Alasdair MacIntyre, while focusing on the community instead of the family, similarly argue that partiality toward those among whom one has developed one’s sense of morality is not only acceptable, but morally required.

Situations in which one’s country goes to war particularly raise questions about the moral standing of patriotism. When our nation declares war on another, it is targeting other human beings on the basis of their national affiliation, so partiality is evident in the extreme. The question of whether war is ever justified is a philosophical issue of long standing. In the Hindu scripture the Bhagavad Gita, Arjuna, the person who has the responsibility to give the order to commence the battle, has difficulty bringing himself to do so. He reflects on the fact that his

order will lead to the deaths of kinsmen and others on both sides. (He ultimately does give the order, for reasons we will consider in Lesson 10.)

At the very least, war involves killing other human beings, perhaps the paradigm case of a type of action that is wrong (at least the vast majority of the time). Most people would claim that there are cases in which killing people is not wrong, and many would include killing combatants in war among these exceptions. But if they are right, is this true of any war, no matter whether or not it is provoked or how aggressively or cruelly it is waged? And how does one ensure that one kills only combatants and avoids killing civilians (often chillingly and euphemistically referred to as “collateral damage”). Most philosophers think there must be at least some restrictions on when killing in war is morally acceptable (if it ever is).

Just-war theory tries to establish the circumstances under which it is morally permissible to go to war and what actions are acceptable when war is undertaken. Most just-war theorists take a nation’s self-defense when attacked to be a just reason for going to war; there is more disagreement about whether a nation can legitimately go to war to protect innocent people who are not citizens. The questions become more complicated when a multinational alliance is involved, particularly when it goes to war to protect innocents in nations that are not part of the alliance. Some have argued that a first strike can be a form of defense against a looming threat, but this raises the question of when an attack is so obviously impending that this could be fairly called defensive. The notion that war should be undertaken only as a last resort, after efforts at negotiation have been attempted, is also an important principle in just-war theory. (Interestingly, although famous for his ingenious analysis of military strategy within war, the ancient Chinese military theorist **Sunzi** [or Sun-Tzu] is in agreement with justwar theorists on this point, although his grounds are prudential, not moral.) At every phase of war, just-war theorists insist that a party to the conflict is morally obligated to limit the amount of force employed to what is necessary to achieve its legitimate goal.

Qualms about the legitimacy of partiality motivate many who adopt the position called **cosmopolitanism**. Cosmopolitans (in the sense of those who hold this view, not the colloquial sense of being well-traveled or at home everywhere) take seriously the idea of global community. Typically they hold that we have moral obligations to all other human beings. They promote the idea of international political arrangements that would facilitate the welfare of all human beings, regardless of their national citizenship. Philosopher-economist **Amartya Sen** and philosopher **Martha Nussbaum**, for example, defend a cosmopolitan view according to which policies should be developed that help people develop their natural capabilities to thrive and provide them the freedom to make use of these capabilities.

Cosmopolitans differ with respect to the nature of the international institutions they defend and how much power such institutions should have, as well as on the extent (if any) to which citizens of specific nations have special obligations to their fellow citizens. Nevertheless, they concur that national sovereignty should be weakened at least to some extent so that neither the policies of particular states nor national borders should interfere with the satisfaction of human needs.

Rights and the Self

One of the most important ingredients in most contemporary theories of justice— some authors would insist it is the definitive ingredient in justice—is the notion of **rights**. A right, essentially, is a kind of claim. Employees have a right to their salaries, for example, by virtue of a prior agreement with the company. Students have a right to an A if they have done excellent work in a course. To say that a person has a right is to say that someone else (perhaps the whole society) has a duty or an obligation to that person. For example, if a child has a right to a decent education, society has an obligation to make such an education available. Needless to say, there may be considerable disagreement about who should be responsible for this and how it will be paid for. Nevertheless, the right exists, with the corresponding obligation. To be a self in a society is to have such rights, as well as the corresponding obligation (for example, to help see to it that others get an education, by paying taxes, by sending your children to school, perhaps by teaching school).

There are different kinds of rights and duties. For example, some are **contractual rights**—the right to be paid for one’s work, the obligation to pay for what you buy, or the duty to keep one’s promises. Some are **legal**—such as the right to drive (with certain reasonable restrictions) and the duty to drive (more or less) under the speed limit. Other rights and duties are **civil**, whether or not they are written into law—such as the right and the duty to vote or the right and the duty to speak one’s mind about topics of political concern. Finally, there is the general category of **human** (or “natural”) rights, which apply to every human being on earth, no matter what the society or the circumstances—for instance, the right not to be tortured and not to be imprisoned without reason, the duty not to torture and not to imprison without reason.

This conception of rights, however, gives rise to some notorious political problems about their scope and nature. For example, we can all agree that the right not to be tortured is a global human right, but what about the right to free medical care? Or the right to keep what one has earned, however one has earned it? How much power should society (through government, or the state) have over individual citizens? Indeed, how much of one’s self is defined by citizenship? How much is one a self quite apart from one’s membership in society? A broad spectrum of answers to these difficult questions has emerged over the past several hundred years, as concern for the individual has increased and as the size and power of societies has increased. We may mention, for instance, three possibilities: libertarianism, liberalism, and communitarianism.

Libertarianism

Libertarianism is the view that people are defined as selves by a strong set of natural rights as individuals, including the right to be left alone and not to be interfered with, the right to keep what one has, or has earned, and the right to be free from government interference in all things except when absolutely necessary to the general good. Libertarians tend to be strongly against taxes and big government and strongly for individual freedoms of all kinds. For the libertarian, the self is largely independent, and people establish themselves as selves by what they do with this freedom. **Robert Nozick** defends a libertarian position in his *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*.

Liberalism

The view of **liberalism** also holds that people are defined as selves by a strong set of natural rights, but that set of rights is quite different from the rights defended by libertarians. At the same time, libertarians emphasize the right not to be interfered with and the “negative rights” that this implies (for example, the right not to be prevented from speaking one’s mind); liberals emphasize people’s “positive” rights to the benefits of society (decent housing, education, food, health care, security). Whereas libertarians stress minimal, local government (“That gov’t is best which governs least”), contemporary liberals tend to support a strong, centralized government to administer social programs. (This is in contrast to the “classical liberals” of the eighteenth century and beyond, whose focus was negative liberty and defense of private property.) For the contemporary liberal, the self is the bearer of rights to a decent life, which becomes society’s obligation. **John Rawls’s** *A Theory of Justice* presents a vision of the just society that is premised on liberal ideas. A cosmopolitan variant of liberalism holds that the rights of all human beings, regardless of citizenship, should be promoted and defended on an international basis. In 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted along these lines a Universal Declaration of Human Rights that called for international justice and the defense of the dignity of every human being through the protection of both civil liberties (negative rights) and freedom from want (positive rights).

Communitarianism

The **communitarian** view rejects the one-sided liberal and libertarian emphasis on rights and instead stresses the concept of duty. What defines a citizen is not his or her rights but rather his or her duties (“Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country”). In the communitarian view, the self sometimes becomes a function of society rather than an independent entity. G. W. F. Hegel, for example, attacked the very idea of a social-contract theory because such a theory claims that there are individual selves who are capable of entering into a contractual agreement before the origins of society in which such agreements are possible. This, he insists, is nonsense. The self must be defined by society; there is no self outside of society. At its extreme, this view sometimes leads to **totalitarianism** (or **fascism**), which holds that the individual self is literally nothing, that the whole self is defined by—and is the property of—the state. (Hegel himself rejected this conclusion.)

Justice Denied: The Problem of Race

[I]t doesn’t mean that we’re anti-white, but it does mean that we’re anti-exploitation, we’re anti-degradation, we’re anti-oppression. And if the white man doesn’t want us to be anti-him, let him stop oppressing and exploiting and degrading us. . . .

Malcolm X, 1964

Each of us is a citizen of our nation, but this has not always guaranteed that our rights have been protected, particularly if we are members of a minority group. In the United States, African-Americans constitute one of the most important marginalized groups. The problem of institutionalized racism has been of crisis proportions in this country ever since the drafting of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, and even before, when the first slaves were brought over from Africa to toil in the fields of Virginia and the Caribbean Islands. Racism has become, over the last fifty years, an inescapable problem that threatens the very moral integrity as well as the social harmony of life in America. The question of how we are to resolve the injustices

perpetrated against racial minorities is pressing, and political philosophy should help us to address it.

Philosophy itself, however, has been accused of collaborating with racist society in downgrading people of color. The fact that African-American writers, for instance, have traditionally been left unread and out of the curriculum in American universities has been challenged as a continuation of “cultural slavery,” the marginalization of one people’s ideas by another’s. In this respect, we can ask whether our tradition’s approach to intellectual history has itself been unjust in its neglect of African-American thinkers and its failure to attend to their (often political) concerns. The rise of African-American philosophy over the past half century represents a step toward redressing this unfairness and toward acknowledging the role that racial prejudice has played not only in our social practices, but even in our philosophical theories. The fact that African-American philosophy has emerged into greater prominence in the last half century is thus a step toward greater justice within the field and ideally a sanguine development for redressing past injustice.

We do not have the space here to go into all the various contributions of African-American thinkers over our country’s history. But two African American thinkers from the 1960s have become extremely influential—**Martin Luther King Jr.** and **Malcolm X**—and so it may be helpful to devote our attention to them. The two men—who knew each other and both worked throughout their lives to enhance the position of blacks both in America and elsewhere in the world—held widely different political philosophies.

Martin Luther King Jr. advocated civil disobedience in the tradition of Gandhi and Henry David Thoreau. In other words, he sought to advance the position of African-Americans in this country through peaceful political protest. Such protest included breaking unjust laws and suffering the consequences, but never violence. King was also an integrationist, meaning he believed that racial equality required mixed neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools. His goal was full integration and the equal recognition of civil rights for black and white Americans, to be achieved through peaceful and ultimately “color-blind” means.

Malcolm X, on the other hand, was generally regarded as a revolutionary, and he advocated Black Nationalism. Black Nationalism was a separatist movement that sought a unification of African-descended people all over the world into a separate society. Malcolm X is somewhat notorious for his claim that the interests of blacks throughout the world should be advanced “by any means necessary,” meaning that violence was appropriate where peaceful means failed. And in general, Malcolm X believed that peaceful means had failed during the hundreds of years of white oppression of blacks. During much of his active life, Malcolm X was a Black Muslim, that is, a member of an American Islamic black separatist movement. The Islamic religion, the Black Muslims believed, lent itself particularly well to the project of worldwide unification for blacks. Although Malcolm X later qualified his strong views about violence and separatism, he defended them in much of his writing, and because he died young, he is largely remembered for them.

Although Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. disagreed in their political orientations and analyses, they were both committed to advancing the cause of African Americans. Both,

however, made enemies, some of whom were not content to continue the conversation through words and symbolic actions. Malcolm X was assassinated in 1965, and Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968.

African Americans have sought to take the premise that all men are created equal to mean what it says. Still, most whites in America in the latter 1960s, including many persons of good will, took equality to mean roughly some measure of improvement. Even now, white America does not seem organized (even psychologically) to close the gaps, but instead seems concerned only to make the situation less painful and obvious. It is worth asking which orientations and policies would really make a difference and which are, perhaps with window dressing, geared to retain the status quo.

Sexual Politics: The Rise of Feminist Philosophy

Remember all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation.

Abigail Adams, 1776

The exclusion of thinkers from the philosophical canon based on race is paralleled by exclusion based on gender. When we look at the list of major figures within the Western philosophical tradition, we should ask: Where are all the women? We know of female students in Plato's Academy and female thinkers in the Middle Ages, but why are they not part of the official canon of philosophy? The short answer, perhaps, is that most of them never got the opportunity to run their own schools, found it hard to have their ideas preserved in writing, and have been, for whatever reason, "written out" of the official history of the tradition.

According to recent critics, there has been an effort among philosophers and scholars to create and preserve an exclusively male, white, largely European Western intellectual tradition, which has marginalized or ignored the contributions of thinkers who were not male, white, and of European descent. Throughout the development of the current university curriculum in Europe and the United States, according to these critics of the university canon, the political interests of Europe—essentially a mixture of colonialism and industrialized capitalism—have influenced and distorted intellectual life throughout the world, as well as within the university curriculum. They have argued that the traditional canon is propaganda for the industrialized world and its particular ideas of culture and philosophy.

Women have been largely excluded from philosophical history. With only a few exceptions, they were long deprived of the chance to study, the opportunity to participate in philosophical discussions, and the venues for publishing their ideas. They and their ideas were not taken seriously, or they functioned, as the queen of Sweden did for René Descartes, as a good student who helped sharpen *his* philosophy and provided an easy foil for *his* ideas. Because politics and inferior social status have kept women out of philosophy, it is natural and understandable that feminist philosophy should, first of all, be social and political philosophy.

Since the 1960s, and even since the early suffragettes, feminists have sought, first and foremost, political equality for women. But political equality presupposes philosophical equality. A turning

point in modern feminist political philosophy was **Simone de Beauvoir's** *The Second Sex*. Beauvoir's work was a groundbreaking analysis of the experience of women in Western society, in which men are taken as the norm, and women are viewed as "other." The book motivated women worldwide to reflect on their social and political positions and to work to improve them.

There have always been women. They are women in virtue of their anatomy and physiology. Throughout history, they have always been subordinated to men, and hence, their dependency is not the result of a historical event or a social change. It was not something that occurred, . . . but it might seem that a natural condition is beyond the possibility of change. In truth, however, the nature of things is no more immutably given, once for all, than is historical reality. If woman seems to be the inessential which never becomes essential, it is because she herself fails to bring about this change. . . . [W]omen do not say "We," except at some congress of feminists or similar formal demonstration; men say "women," and women use the same word referring to themselves. They do not automatically assume a subjective attitude. . . . (Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 1949)

Following Beauvoir, **Kate Millett** claimed in her *Sexual Politics* that the political domination of women by men is evident in every institution, every economic relationship, every work of literature, every personal relationship, of our society, both currently and throughout history. Millett called this pervasive system of male domination "**patriarchy**," and gave analyses of how patriarchy was the norm in every arena of our lives.

A disinterested examination of the situation between the sexes now, and throughout history, is . . . a relationship of dominance and subordination. What goes largely unexamined, often even unacknowledged (yet is institutionalized nonetheless) in our social order is the birthright priority whereby males rule females. Through this system a most ingenious form of "interior colonization" has been achieved. . . . Sexual domination obtains nevertheless as perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power.

This is so because our society, like all other historical civilizations, is a patriarchy. The fact is evident at once if one recalls that the military, industry, technology, universities, science, political office, and finance—in short, every avenue of power within society, including the coercive power of the police—are in male hands. (Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*, 1970)

One of the most controversial arenas of the current debate has to do with the question of whether femininity and masculinity (as opposed to the physiological categories "male" and "female") arise from biology or upbringing, "nature or nurture." Many feminists hold that the categories of gender (that is, "feminine" and "masculine"), unlike the categories of sex ("male" and "female"), are created and defined by culture. They are not "natural," much less obligatory. Culture creates these categories and the social and political status that goes along with them, and culture can change those categories and their status. Beauvoir makes the point that gendered roles are culturally constructed when she announces, "One is not born a woman." Beauvoir is suggesting that to call someone "a woman" is not just to claim that she is anatomically female, but to project on her the various socially imposed roles and behaviors that serve as standards for judging women. (Philosophers such as Kwame Anthony Appiah make similar arguments about the

category of race, contending that there are no biological “facts” that differentiate races; race is entirely culturally constructed.)

Feminist philosopher **Sherry Ortner** has argued that the distinction between nature and culture is not itself a natural distinction but a distinction made in language and therefore within culture. She points out that “nature” has often been associated with women, while “culture” has been associated with men. Women are and have long been represented as “closer” to nature, as the bearers and caretakers of children, the cooks of food, the domesticators of households. At the same time, “culture”—the context of political power and distinctively human achievement—is mainly the domain of men. The nature-culture distinction itself—or at least what counts as “nature” and “culture”—should not be taken for granted, but instead should be recognized as a means by which women are deprived of power.

Other feminists, however, have celebrated the difference between feminine and masculine characteristics. Some have argued that the feminine virtues of nurturing and caring are far preferable and more conducive to a harmonious, peaceful civilization than are the abstract, more warrior-like virtues of masculine thinking. They do not deny the differences but instead insist that women should have more say in society—in part because women have something distinctive to say.

Women and the Body

The idea that women are more often represented as part of nature than men comes in part from the idea that women are more closely identified with their bodies. Culture is then defined as the domain of men. In earlier lessons, we studied the philosophical problem of mind and body. Ever since Plato, philosophers have found it important to distinguish the mind—as that with which we think and reason— from the body—as that with which we move and sense our surroundings and take up space in the world. It is also the body that is so easily injured, gets sick, disintegrates with age, and eventually dies, so it is not surprising that so many philosophers have tried to separate and protect the mind from similar calamities. In particular, seventeenth-century philosopher Descartes claimed that the mind was a separate substance from the body and that only the mind can be known for certain to exist. The body, according to Descartes, is a separate substance known by inference.

In several recent articles and books, however, various feminist philosophers—notably **Susan Bordo** and **Genevieve Lloyd**—have taken philosophers such as Descartes and Plato to task on feminist grounds because, they claim, these thinkers dubiously associate the mind or reasoning faculty with masculinity and the body with femininity. In this way, Descartes and Plato can be understood, on one level, to justify male authority over women. Not only in Descartes’s metaphysics, but also in his theory of the passions, he puts mind or reason in authority over everything having to do with the body. This implicitly endorses the authority of men (the “specialists” in reason) over women (the “specialists” in bodily matters). Because Descartes and Plato are crucially important philosophers in the Western tradition, these feminists attribute some responsibility to them for the Western world’s bias against women and the celebration of the supposedly more masculine virtues of pure thinking.

Aristotle, too, gives philosophical support to sexism, according to many feminist thinkers. In sexuality in particular, the roles of men and women seem to some extent to be biologically defined. But the obvious differences between men and women and their biological roles, particularly in the act of procreation, can be understood in various ways. In his *Generation of Animals*, Aristotle (fourth century BCE) argued:

For there must needs be that which generates and that from which it generates . . . and in those animals that have these powers separate in two sexes the body and nature of the active and the passive sex must also differ. If, then, the male stands for the effective and active; and the female, considered as female, for the passive, it follows that what the female would contribute to the semen of the male would not be semen, but material for the semen to work upon.

Thus, Aristotle suggests that by nature women are more passive and men more potent, that the essence of reproduction comes from the male while the female provides mere matter. His analysis makes the woman's contribution akin to a blob of clay. It has the potential to become a statue, but it is inert matter that must be acted upon by the sculptor. In the creation of a human being, the activity that brings about the change is the male contribution, according to Aristotle. Aristotle seems to extend to ethics as well his association of men and women, respectively, with activity and passivity, for he implies that the male is more fully able to actualize his potential as a human being than is the female.

This association of masculinity with action and femininity with passivity did not end with Aristotle. It is evident in many doctrines of the Christian church and in many religions. We find these associations also in Sigmund Freud's theories about men and women, and in many other theories of human nature, for example, in the ancient Chinese Confucian tradition. (They occur in Daoism, too, where the female is associated with passivity, although in that tradition the image of "female" passivity is held up as an ideal for everyone.) Many feminists have taken issue with these tendencies—and in philosophy Aristotle comes under particular scrutiny. Because Aristotle's worldview set the tone for both Christian theology and modern metaphysics, it must be considered a profound problem if he held a mistaken belief about women and femininity. There, as elsewhere, his views held sway for nearly 2,000 years, and many of them persist today.

Plato: Patriarch or Early Feminist?

Although Aristotle's views of women and femininity were fairly clear, those of his teacher Plato are much disputed among feminists and among philosophers in general. In some ways, Plato seems to have been radically egalitarian for his time, particularly regarding women. In *The Republic*, for instance, Plato has Socrates argue for the complete equality of women in the ideal city. The important class of rulers ought to be open, argues Socrates, to women as well as to men, and promising girls should be educated accordingly. And he further claims that any two people who do the same job, whatever their sex, ought to be educated, brought up, and treated in the same way. In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates (fourth century BCE) argues:

There is therefore no pursuit connected with city management which belongs to a woman because she is a woman, or to a man because he is a man, but various natures are scattered in the same way among both kinds of persons. Woman by nature shares all pursuits . . . All things . . . should be done in common.

These and similar claims in Plato's dialogues have led some feminists to the conclusion that Plato was sympathetic to their cause. One noted scholar of ancient philosophy, **Martha Nussbaum**, for instance, calls Plato "the first feminist."

Other feminists, such as **Elizabeth V. Spelman**, however, have taken these claims of Plato's to be only minor gestures in an otherwise typically "masculinist" Platonic philosophy. Plato's repeated claim, for instance, that reason ought to rule over the passions in the healthy soul indicates to many Plato's accession to the gender-imposed opposition between mind and body. This is reinforced by his tendency to identify women, along with slaves and animals, as beings in whom reason does not rule the soul. Because reason, as these feminists see it, is arrogantly associated with masculinity and passion with femininity, Plato's concept of the harmonious soul is basically that of a male soul.

Feminist Epistemology and Feminist Science

Some feminists are also asking whether the very notion of knowledge, as it has traditionally been understood, is sex- or gender based and whether women and men might view the world in fundamentally different ways. In the same vein as Gilligan, Beauvoir, and Millett, some feminist thinkers have claimed that scientific methodology and standards for knowledge have employed masculine models throughout their Western history. Some of them believe that a feminist model of scientific method—or at least the inclusion of women's observations—would yield a very different body of scientific knowledge as well.

Evelyn Fox Keller argues in her "Feminism and Science":

To see the emphasis on power and control so prevalent in the rhetoric of Western science as a projection of a specifically male consciousness requires no great leap of the imagination. Indeed, that perception has become a commonplace. Above all, it is invited by the rhetoric that conjoins the domination of nature with the insistent image of nature as female, nowhere more familiar than in the writings of Francis Bacon. For Bacon, knowledge and power are one, and the promise of science is expressed as "leading you to nature with all her children to bind her to your service and make her your slave . . ."

One might imagine how this could be so. We often **anthropomorphize** (that is, personify or understand in overly human terms) scientific concepts to understand them. You may have had a chemistry teacher who described a molecule as "seeking" another hydrogen atom, for example. But sometimes such anthropomorphisms make their way into scientific hypotheses. For example, a biologist talks about dominant and recessive genes, and these descriptions have been made to carry the same gender connotations of "activity" and "passivity" that some feminists have opposed in more general Aristotelian discussions of reproduction. There are also, of course, "male" and "female" fittings in electrical circuits, and various other oppositions used in modern science that lend themselves to feminist interpretations. One of the strongest feminist arguments, however, is that the topics that become the agenda in the various sciences can reflect a male bias. Feminists have pointed, in particular, to the relative neglect of women's health in medical research, an expression of the tendency to take the male to be the norm for the species. The concerns of serious science, particularly in medicine and the social sciences, are predominantly men's concerns.

Feminist Philosophy of Language

Keller's mention of the impact of rhetoric and vocabulary on the way we think recalls our earlier discussion of the **Sapir-Whorf hypothesis**, which claims that the patterns of one's native language structure the way one understands the world. Feminists have sometimes criticized linguistic practices on the ground that they support a sexist view of reality. For example, the allegedly gender-neutral use of male pronouns (such as the use of *he* to refer back to "the student," even though the student may be female), the use of terms like *chairman* or *policeman* to refer to individuals of both sexes, and the use of *man* to refer to humankind at large strike them as further instances in which the male case is presented as the norm. In response to the counterargument that English speakers recognize that such terms refer as much to women as to men, these critics point out that most people visualize a male when these terms are used and are at least momentarily startled when "he" or "the chairman" turns out to be female. In practice, these terms are not really gender neutral.

One solution to this problem is to avoid such dubiously "gender-neutral" usage, the strategy we have applied to this book. But this approach can be difficult. What if one wants to refer back to the individual student? One can, of course, say "he or she," but if one repeatedly refers with such pronouns, statements can become painfully convoluted. A common solution is to use a plural pronoun (for example, *they or their*) even when the referent is singular (for example, "the student"), but this is ungrammatical. Another possibility is to alternate between using *he* and *she* in examples.

Fortunately for feminists, language evolves. American English usage has started to reflect more sensitivity toward inclusion. Terms like *chair* have replaced *chairman* in many contexts, and *humankind* is beginning to sound natural, even if at first it seemed an odd substitution for *mankind*. Perhaps the most effective way to make language less sexist, however, is to change the reality that it is used to track. If women more routinely appear in roles of power and authority, language will need to reflect this.

Feminist epistemologists and feminist philosophers of science and language all draw attention to how the perspectives of the politically dominant majority become enshrined in our beliefs about the world. In this, they join African-American philosophers and other thinkers concerned about how racism has narrowed our outlooks. The analyses of these philosophers can help correct injustices in the past and present by undermining the self-serving theories that the powerful have used to support their privileged positions. More positively, they can enrich all our lives by helping us to make our society more just, something that can only happen if we recognize and acknowledge the women and members of minority groups among our fellow citizens.