



# ETHICS AND THE SEARCH FOR VALUES

edited by Luis E. Navia &  
Eugene Kelly

*A comprehensive anthology placing man's  
perennial search for ethical values in historical perspective.*

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Edited by Luis E. Navia  
and Eugene Kelly

Published 1980 by Prometheus Books  
1203 Kensington Avenue, Buffalo, New York 14215

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Library of Congress Card Number 80-82123  
ISBN 0-87975-139-8

Printed in the United States of America

**To Our Mothers,**

**Juanita Navia and Edna J. Kelly**

# Foreword

In editing the present anthology, our chief purpose has been to collect, in one single volume, some of the most important and decisive ethical writings of Western philosophy. In every instance, we have endeavored to include selections that retain in themselves some degree of completeness and uniqueness, so that in no case will the reader find fragmented pieces of philosophical writings that may leave him, so to speak, hanging in the middle of nowhere. We have opted for a historical approach and, beginning with the writings of Plato, we allow the reader and student to undertake with us the marvelous journey of the Western mind in its search for moral values.

Naturally, in choosing the different primary sources, an element of subjective judgment has been at work. Surely, someone else could have made different choices, as the degree of importance and pertinence of diverse ethical writings is estimated differently by different people; yet, we believe that the sources represented in this anthology are bound to be judged by most critics among the most important in the history of ethical thought. Moreover, their large number practically guarantees that every reader will find among them something revealing and meaningful.

Chapter one is a general introduction concerning the nature of ethics and ethical discourse. The ideas expressed in this chapter will shed abundant light on all subsequent ones. The glossary and the bibliography at the end of the book will help the reader to both understand the usual meaning attached to ethical terms and become acquainted with ethical literature.

In most cases, we have assigned a major philosopher to a separate chapter, and each chapter has been prefaced by a short introduction. The purpose of the introductions is not to summarize the primary sources, but merely to give a general sketch of the philosophers' historical context.

In our contemporary world, ethics appears to be mostly concerned with the analysis and examination of moral statements; its emphasis is, as they say, metaethical, a circumstance illustrated in our chapter eighteen. But while all this may be extremely valuable, we should still bear in mind that classical philosophers attached the greatest importance to those aspects of normative ethics that may teach us to live a better, more ethical, more meaningful life. For, after all, what advantage can there be in knowing a great deal *about* ethics and ethical discourse and in reaching conclusions *about* what ethical terms mean, if in ourselves we have not been able to develop an actual and living conception of how our own lives ought to be lived? In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle clearly stated his view concerning the purpose of studying ethics:

Our present study is not, like other studies, purely speculative in its intention; for the object of our enquiry is not to know the nature of virtue but to become ourselves virtuous, as that is the sole benefit which it conveys.

If, in studying the pages of this anthology, the reader can reach an adequate understanding of the import of ethical discourse and *also* improve in some sense the ethical texture of his or her life, then our efforts will not have been in vain.

We wish to thank our wives, Zuzana Kelly and Alicia S. Navia, for their patience and support, without which our work would not have been possible.

—L.E.N.

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# Chapter I — The Search for Values



# The Search for Values

## *Ethical Perplexity*

About halfway into *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoyevsky has two of his characters meet in a tavern for a long conversation. They are young men, brothers, who have not seen each other since childhood. Ivan, the older of the two, has spent several years studying philosophy and science at a university in the capital city, while Alyosha has been living at a monastery near his small provincial town; soon he expects to become a monk. Perhaps because Alyosha's innocence draws him out, or perhaps because his younger brother's simple Christian faith acts as an irritant to his atheism, Ivan begins to open himself to Alyosha. All Ivan's intellectual and emotional perplexities concerning God and his own place in God's world tumble out before the future monk, whose faith he wishes to challenge and—although he does not himself realize it—whose love he wishes to earn.

The conversation begins to crystallize about the theme of justice. Alyosha of course believes, and Ivan seems willing to presuppose, that the world has been created by a just and benevolent God, and that in His eyes, this world is good. But Alyosha has never considered the consequences of this belief, and, in short order, Ivan is able to bring him into intellectual confusion and moral perplexity. Consider the evils in the world, says Ivan, and let's confine ourselves to the evils done to children! A grown man or woman may somehow have earned suffering and death through their own sins, but a child of seven or

eight has not yet eaten of the tree of good and evil and, hence, cannot merit punishment; and yet children suffer so! Alyosha suggests, as apologists for God have done so often in the past, that in the next world divine justice will mete out rewards to the suffering children, and their tormentors will receive their exact measure of punishment in hell. But Ivan is not satisfied, and he raises the conversation to a level that it had not previously attained in the Western world: What if you, Alyosha, were God and were about to create the world? It would be a harmonious world in which sin would be punished and virtue rewarded according to their merits, and mankind would see with their own immortal eyes that those things that we considered to be evils during our lifetimes were necessary to the higher justice and goodness of the whole universe. Then everyone would cry Hosannah! and glorify God. But suppose now that you, in order to create such a world, had to allow a small child to be tortured to death, as so often happens in this world? Would you create the world, or would you not rather decide that at that price it would be better to have no world, no heaven, no hell, at all?

Judge for yourself! is one of Ivan's messages; mankind should stand up and condemn even God if the evils of the world cannot be justified before human eyes. And Alyosha, sick at heart, seems to join Ivan's rebellion against God by admitting that at such a price, he would not have created the world. Thus he reveals the paradox of his position: he desires a more-than-human justice that his ordinary sense of justice rejects! He, too, has only a human intellect; his faith in God cannot tell him how the terrible evils of this world could ever be merited by sin or repaid by joys in the next world. Who could redeem the sins of men? Are we to thank God for them because they served the universal harmony, the divine purpose? Ivan suggests that they *ought not* be redeemed: to do so would trivialize murder and genocide as human evils. Moreover, Ivan realizes that his own enjoyment of civilization, his bourgeois existence that permits him leisure to delight in life, is paid for by the labor of millions who know only hunger and toil. As a philosopher in this century, Karl Jaspers, has noted, the very liberty to pursue justice as a social goal is only possible if other persons are engaged in the daily struggle against scarcity. Even philosophers who trouble themselves about justice are the beneficiaries of social and political policies that could never be morally justified before any human eyes. Ivan's yearning for justice leads him, therefore, to reject not only God, but the world as well: he tells Alyosha that he has resolved to kill himself before he is thirty, so that his joy is owed to no one, and that his sufferings "do not manure the soil of harmony for anyone else."

But Alyosha has not lost his faith. He reminds Ivan of Christ, whose innocent blood was shed for the forgiveness of sins: in this way, mystically, by sharing in the sufferings of mankind, God forgives, and the justice of His ways is revealed, although as through a glass, darkly. Through faith in Him, the world is perceived in a new light, and we learn to accept the evils that our human sense of justice rejects. Ivan responds to Alyosha with his "little



poem”: the famous tale of the Grand Inquisitor, which depicts in the form of an allegory the spiritual distance that exists between those who wish to pursue values in purely human terms, and those who, through faith, take a religious standpoint and hope in a final justice that is beyond human ken. The story depicts Christ as having returned to earth. He visits Seville in the sixteenth century. The city has a powerful Catholic hierarchy, and the people are taught to adhere to the rites and dogmas of Christianity, but the structure of the society is socialist: in more modern terms than would have been possible for Dostoyevsky, we might say that the people there are assured the right to work, they are guaranteed a pension, there is socialized medicine, and they enjoy all possible social security in this life. In addition, the people are given something to believe in: they are taught that life has meaning and value, that if they err they will be forgiven—if not by the state, then in the next world—and that good works will be rewarded by God. The cost of this happy and simple life, with its three square meals a day, its low crime rate, and spiritual security, is political and intellectual freedom. Accordingly, the Grand Inquisitor, the leader of this society, orders Christ’s arrest as a threat to the social order: after all, was not Christ, in His own time, a disruptive social force? Did He not trouble sleepy men with His call to perfect themselves? But in this way, Ivan’s Inquisitor accuses Christ: You have betrayed the great majority of men, the simple folk who know nothing of spiritual perfection; happiness to them means peace, food, and a few pleasures that you regard as sinful. The message you have brought to us is that men must give themselves in free, loving faith to God and work out their own salvation with diligence, the Inquisitor thunders, but what of the great masses of men who are incapable of understanding such a message, and whose souls are too inconstant to be capable of true faith? Is not eternity beyond their achieving? But here in Seville, by using our civil authority to limit the range of possible human experience, we create a society in which there is less challenge, but less failure; less ecstasy, but less agony! You have granted mankind freedom to pursue the Highest, and for the sake of a few geniuses of the spirit, you have allowed the majority to live in spiritual uncertainty and social chaos. You deserve to be burned at the stake as an offering to human happiness!

Ivan merely laughs when Alyosha innocently asks him whether he is himself on the side of the Inquisitor and his dreams of an ungodly and unfree but humanly happy utopia. Is the service of man, then, a higher goal than the service of God? Dostoyevsky’s notebooks reveal that he had originally intended to portray Ivan as a cynical and unsympathetic atheist who denounces God and religion in favor of a half-hearted commitment to communism; yet in the final version, Ivan appears as a man whose soul genuinely longs for justice and honesty, and who merely hides his perplexity about what is truly valuable beneath a surface of cynicism and laughter. We cannot reject his Grand Inquisitor as the dream of a madman or an evil power-seeker; the values he seeks are great ones, and his commitment rings true.

Upon reading this long conversation between Ivan and Alyosha and its concluding story, someone might make the observation that some persons turn to God as the source of all values, while others insist on measuring the world by a human standard and, if possible, on remaking the world according to a human, rather than a divine plan. But what divides Ivan and Alyosha goes deeper than that. Both men are trying to orient the attitudes and feelings that well up inside them towards a realm of values that they dimly perceive, and that calls out to them. They respond to the complex facts they have experienced in life (the cruelty done to children, for example) by reference to these values, among which they perceive a certain order or priority: in Ivan's story, Christ believes the spiritual life attainable by free men has a higher value than the physical suffering attendant upon that freedom. They desire that their specific actions in life, both great and small, will be directed or guided by the priorities among values they have established for themselves: the Search for Values is intended to culminate in *action*—in Alyosha's case, the decision to become a monk; in Ivan's case, his decision to commit suicide, insofar as his longing for justice in this world seems doomed to futility.

In general, the sphere of ethics begins with the questions, "How ought I to live? What attitudes should I take toward life? What values should guide my actions?" asked in the light of known facts, dimly perceived values, and vague possibilities of action. This is only the starting point of ethics, of course, and the formulation of a question does not in itself promise an answer; with many persons these questions are asked repeatedly throughout life, and yet they are able to discover no single answer. Ivan and Alyosha are both perplexed by the obvious inadequacy of the answers they have been able to give to these questions, although they appear to be committed to the search for answers.

Now one might be skeptical that the formal study of ethics, such as the reader of this book is about to undertake, would have helped Ivan and Alyosha in their perplexity. And many eminent writers on ethics would tend to agree. I remember my own disappointment when, as a freshman at college, I began to read C. D. Broad's *Five Types of Ethical Theory*. What better way to seek guidance for my own life, I thought, than to study ethical theories, and choose the one that seems to bear the most truth! But then I read Broad's introduction. He confesses that he has no special moral experience to justify his writing a book on ethics, for he has had "few temptations to heroic virtue or spectacular vice," but that such a limitation is hardly to the point of ethics. For ethics, he says, is an abstract study, best conducted apart from the "white heat of moral enthusiasms," of how we argue in favor of a specific ethical point of view. Since that time, although I recognize the simple-mindedness of my original expectations, I have nevertheless found reason to believe that ethics cannot be divorced entirely from the kind of moral enthusiasms displayed by Ivan and Alyosha; but each reader, at the conclusion of his course of studies in ethics, will have to judge for himself to what extent the formal study