



What Do We Deserve?

A Reader on Justice and Desert



LOUIS P. POJMAN

OWEN MCLEOD

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Dedicated to our parents

Mary Adelia and Mac McLeod

Louis A. and Helen Pojman

PREFACE

Every little action deserves a reaction.

Bob Marley, "Satisfy My Soul"

In 1965 Brian Barry predicted that desert would disappear from the moral scene. For a while, it looked as if his prediction would come true. In 1971 John Rawls argued that the concept of desert has no place within the theory of justice. Earlier that same year, John Kleinig had already acknowledged that "the notion of desert seems . . . to have been consigned to the philosophical scrap heap."

It appears that philosophers have been rummaging around in the scrap heap lately. In the past two decades, there has been a steady revival of philosophical interest in desert. It is not surprising that this should happen. The concept of desert has a venerable tradition in the history of philosophical ethics. More important, perhaps, is the fact that desert is pervasive in commonsense morality. And, as the epigraph suggests, commonsense morality's position is that desert itself is pervasive.

It is astonishing, then, that up till now no anthology has been dedicated to the concept of desert. This volume remedies that conspicuous lack. It contains thirty selections from the classical and contemporary literature on desert. It is divided into two main parts: Part I, Historical Interpretations, and Part II, Contemporary Interpretations. Part II is divided into four sections: A. The Concept of Desert, B. Desert and Responsibility, C. The Rawlsian Debate, and D. The Role and Significance of Desert. Abstracts precede each reading, and a bibliography appears at the end of the work. We have tried to produce a balanced book, offering the best representative articles of both prodesert and antidesert positions that we could find.

Our own interests in desert developed independently. Owen McLeod wrote a doctoral dissertation on desert at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, in 1995 and taught a seminar on the subject at Yale that same year. Meanwhile, Louis Pojman was thinking and writing about desert at the University of Mississippi and, more recently, at the United States Military Academy. Each was entertaining the possibility of an anthology on desert. A third philosopher, Shelly Kagan, brought the two of us together. This book is the result. Our sincere hope is that it will foster an even wider debate over the nature and significance of the concept of desert in moral and political philosophy, as well as in ordinary life.

We have received encouragement and helpful advice from many people. We are especially grateful to Fred Feldman, Shelly Kagan, Wallace Matson, Larry Temkin, and several anonymous reviewers for Oxford University Press. Special thanks are due also to our editor, Robert Miller, to his assistant, Liam Dalzell, and to Karen Shapiro of Oxford University Press, for their enthusiastic support and exemplary professionalism.

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PART I

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF DESERT

DESERT: AN HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

The Homeric king does not gain his position on the grounds of strength and fighting ability. He belongs to a royal house, and inherits wealth, derived from the favored treatment given to his ancestors, which provides full armor, a chariot, and leisure. Thus equipped, he and his fellow *agathoi* [nobles], who are similarly endowed, form the most efficient force for attack and defence which Homeric society possesses. Should they be successful, their followers have every reason to commend them as *agathoi* and their way of life as *arete* [virtuous]; should they fail, their followers have every reason to regard this failure, voluntary or not, as *aischron* [shameful]. A failure . . . in the Homeric world must result either in slavery or annihilation. Success is so imperative that only results have any value; intentions are unimportant.

(A. W. H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility: A Study of Greek Values*, 1960, p. 35)

An impartial spectator can never feel approval in contemplating the uninterrupted prosperity of a being graced by no touch of a pure and good will, and consequently a good will seems to constitute the indispensable condition of our very worthiness to be happy.

(Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 1781; trans. H. J. Paton)

It seems to be one of the fixed points of our considered judgments that no one deserves his place in the distribution of native endowments, any more than one deserves one's initial starting place in society. The assertion that a man deserves the superior character that enables him to make the effort to cultivate his abilities is

equally problematic; for his character depends in large part upon fortunate family and social circumstances for which he can claim no credit.

Even the willingness to make an *effort*, to try, and so to be deserving in the ordinary sense is itself dependent in practice upon happy family and social circumstances.

(John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 1971)

The Classical and Contemporary Attitudes on Desert

In these three quotations we see three different attitudes toward desert and merit, representing three different periods of social and political philosophy. In the first quotation, characterizing ancient Greek Homeric society (900–800 B.C.) and reflected in Homer's *Iliad*, we encounter an attitude that judges value in terms of success, particularly military success, or failure. One is *agathos*, that is, good or noble, because of one's class together with the results of one's action. "To be *agathos* one must be brave, skillful, and successful in war and in peace; and one must possess the wealth and (in peace) the leisure which are at once the necessary conditions for the development of these skills and the natural reward of their successful employment."¹ Whether or not one had good or bad intentions, whether or not one was responsible for the success or failure is irrelevant. We want to know only whether your track record (or, in some cases, your family's track record) indicates prospects for success or failure. We may call this a *strict meritocracy*. One of its corollaries is the idea of strict liability. Regardless of your intentions, if you did a heinous deed, you are guilty. This is reflected in Sophocles' *Oedipus The King*, in which the City of Thebes is cursed with plague and drought for the deeds of a wise and righteous King Oedipus. Oedipus has brought pollution to the city by unwittingly committing parricide in self-defense and marrying Jocasta, who turns out to be his mother. Reward and punishment are tied to the objective features and consequences of the deed, not to the inner workings of the heart. Although by the time of Sophocles the Homeric values inherent in the play had ceased to be dominant, a sense of the potency of these features is present. Though the Athenians recognized personal responsibility and intentions, they were still haunted by the thought of strict liability, of fate as a valid basis for praise and blame. Note in this regard the Athenian judgment of the eight generals at the Battle of Arginusae (403 B.C.), who, though they won the war and did everything reasonably to be expected to protect the lives of their men, still incurred unacceptable losses (four thousand men and twenty-five ships). They were condemned to death for what was most likely beyond their control.

It wasn't always your actual deed that counted, but who you were. The *agathoi* were seen to be intrinsically more meritorious than everyone else, good by pedigree. An instance in which this custom is in conflict with actual outcomes is narrated in the twenty-third book of the *Illiad*. The Achaians held a horse race in which Achilles was to award two prizes. First prize went to the actual winner. Antilochus, son of Nestor, came in second, but Achilles decided to give second prize to Eumelius because he was of a nobler rank, even though he had come in last. Antiloches complained, saying, in effect, "If it is preordained that some other criterion than merit is to count for the award, why should we have a race at all?" Achilles was moved by this logic and gave the prize to Antilochus, offering Eumelius a treasure of his own. Merit there is—two kinds—one related to class and the other to achievement. But one looks in vain for anything like moral desert.

In the second quotation, from Immanuel Kant's (1724–1804) *Groundwork*, we see that intention has replaced outcome as the decisive criterion of worth. For Kant, moral goodness is the paramount value, and the conscientious will the essence of moral goodness. Conscientiousness is “a jewel that shines in its own light.” Success and failure, those values lauded in a strict meritocracy, are now said to be of no moral importance, for one can not be held responsible for what one has no control over. This view represents a thick concept of moral desert, which in turn assumes a thick concept of personal responsibility for one's actions, which in turn presupposes a deep notion of free will. Accordingly, if we do not have free will, we are not morally responsible for our actions and, hence, would not deserve rewards and punishment. We may call this a *desert-based system*, where natural or preinstitutional desert defines our moral worth. It presupposes a common human nature and a natural moral law that transcends cultural diversity, by which all people should be assessed. It is our intentions that count, how well we live within the light we have, our natural light. We can find versions of this theory in Socrates, who held that virtue is knowledge, so that virtue and happiness are correlative. “No evil can come to the good man” (*Apology* 40C), and no one would do evil voluntarily, for wisdom teaches us that it is the good that is good for us. Not only did the virtuous *deserve* to be happy; a lawlike universe ensured that they *got* what they deserved. The Stoics carried on this legacy, but perhaps it first becomes prominent within a whole culture in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), where motive, the good will, becomes tantamount to goodness itself: “Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart” (I Sam. 16:7), and in the New Testament: “If readiness to give is present, it is acceptable according to what a man has, not according to what he has not” (II Cor. 8:12).

Happiness is the reward of moral goodness, unhappiness the reward of moral badness. Again, in the Hebrew Bible we read that the righteous person “is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.” The wicked are doomed, “like chaff which the wind drives away” (Psalms 1). Similarly, we read in Obadiah 1:15, “As you have done, it shall be done to you, your deeds shall return on your own head.” This may be called the reciprocal Golden Rule: As you do, you shall be done by. In the New Testament we read that “he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (II Cor. 9:6). In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus tells the Parable of the Talents, in which a Master, about to depart on a journey, gives five talents to one servant, two to another, and one to a third and instructs them to improve on these endowments. The servant with five talents proceeds to use his talents to make five more talents, the servant with two talents uses his talents to make two more, but the single-talent servant hides his talent, fearing that he might lose it. Upon the master's return, the servants are called to give an account of their stewardship and are rewarded and punished in proportion to what they have done with the talents. The master praised and rewarded the two servants who doubled their talents for their fidelity. He punished the man who hid his talent in the ground, accusing him of wasting a precious gift (Matt. 25:14–30). The parable is instructive in providing a paradigm of desert. We are stewards of our talents and will be judged by an Infallible Impartial Judge on the basis of what we do with them. Those who use their talents wisely and industriously deserve to be rewarded, while those who neglect their talents deserve reprobation.

The Parable doesn't elaborate on exactly which criterion (merit or desert) is the proper basis for reward. Results don't tell the whole story. One could imagine the five-talent servant investing his money but having bad luck and the one-talent servant finding a talent along the road and so doubling his output. But this is only a parable and

should not be expected to yield a definitive distribution scheme. Nevertheless, the overall thrust of the Old and the New Testaments inclines toward identifying *effort* as the decisive criterion of merit, what I have called the paradigm notion of desert. "If readiness is there, it is acceptable"—a sentiment similar to Kant's later thesis that the good will is the only intrinsically good thing, "a jewel that shines in its own light." Moral effort is a necessary condition for judgment, and may properly be so since we are responsible for our deeds. We have free will.

And because we are responsible beings and because a Cosmic Justice reigns, we may rest assured that judgment is certain. Justice will be done. Paul writes, "[God] will render to every man according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury" (Rom 2:6–8) and, again, "Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7).

The same idea is present in the Hindu and Buddhist doctrine of *karma*. Cosmic justice ineluctably rules the world, so we will inevitably get what we deserve, being reincarnated in a form appropriate to our deeds in this life. The doctrine of heaven and hell in Christianity set forth this idea in an even more vivid fashion: The vicious deserve their eternal punishment and the virtuous (or at least the faithful) eternal bliss. According to Dante's *Inferno*, there are several different levels of hell, so that one's punishment for sin is to spend eternity with people exactly like one's self.

Leibniz put the matter thus:

Thus it is that the pains of the damned continue, even when they no longer serve to turn them away from evil, and that likewise the rewards of the blessed continue, even when they no longer serve for strengthening them in good. One may say nevertheless that the damned ever bring upon themselves new pains through new sins, and that the blessed ever bring upon themselves new joys by new progress in goodness: for both are founded on the *principle of the fitness of things*, which has seen to it that affairs were so ordered that the evil action must bring upon itself chastisement.²

The scales of cosmic justice will be balanced.

And even as God ruled the world through the adherence to an objective moral order, giving each what he or she deserved, so the State's duty was to attempt to do the same on earth. Justice was, in the words of ancient Greek poet Simonides (see reading 1), rendering each person his or her due (*suum cuique tribuere*). As the ancient Roman jurist Ulpian interprets the idea:

Justice is a constant and perpetual will to give every man his due. The principles of law are these: to live virtuously, not to harm others, to give his due to everyone. Jurisprudence is the knowledge of divine and human things, the science of the just and the unjust. Law is the art of goodness and justice. By virtue of this [lawyers] may be called priests, for we cherish justice and profess knowledge or goodness and equity, separating right from wrong and legal from illegal.³

The classic idea of *justice as desert* underlies our concept of punishment as retribution, "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life." The sociologist Emil Durkheim once noted, "There is no society where the rule does not exist that the punishment must be proportioned to the offense."⁴ It also holds place in at least a core sense of property acquisition. We observe this fittingness in the Lockean notion of property rights. In fact, Desert and Natural Rights, as opposed to institutional rights, are closely related to each other. Desert is typically based on what we have done (or what has been done to us), whereas basic or natural rights signify claims we make. I have a natural

right to life (or, more accurately, a right not to be killed), but we would not say that I deserve not to be killed (though we might say I didn't deserve to be killed when someone murders me or the State executes me by mistake). A Lockean notion of property rights seems to be closer to a desert claim than to a standard entitlement. I have a natural right to my own body (which I own but do not deserve—nor do I not deserve it—the concept simply isn't relevant here), but I extend my property right to natural objects by mixing my labor with them. By tilling the soil, planting crops, cutting down a tree, and making a chair, I come to own the land, the fallen tree, the chair. I have added value to the external object, so I own it. This process resembles a desert claim more than a typical natural right claim.

Karl Marx seems to hold a theory of desert based on labor derived from Locke's theory via Adam Smith. His Labor Theory of Value holds that the carpenter who creates the chair, investing ten hours of labor in the process, creates ten units of value and so deserves all ten units of remuneration. If the carpenter works for an entrepreneur, the entrepreneur can deduct for the tools, investment, and minimal profit but must not steal what is the carpenter's lot. The carpenter deserves the value of his product minus the overhead. Marx, of course, believed that the means of production ought to be made into common property, but, at least in his *Critique of the Gotha Program*, he attacks Lasallian socialists' uncritical notion of ownership, in which "the instruments of labor are common property and the proceeds of labor belong undiminished with equal right to all members of society." Marx notes the socialist ideal of distributing goods equally but rhetorically asks, "To those who do not work as well? What remains then of the 'undiminished proceeds of labor'? Only to those members of society who work? What remains then of the 'equal right'? Of all members of society?"⁵ Rejecting equal distribution of goods, Marx argues that the first phase of the communist society will adhere to the labor theory of value. The worker will receive in accordance with his production, "with an equal performance of labor, and hence an equal share in the social consumption fund, one will in fact receive more than another, one will be richer than another, and so on." Only in the "higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labor, has vanished," in the more abundant society, will society "inscribe on its banners: from each according to his ability, to each according to his need." Until that time, the formula for justice must be from each according to his ability, to each according to his contribution.

So Locke and Marx both hold to a theory of natural property rights that is desert based.

In our third quotation at the head of this essay, from Rawls, a contemporary skepticism about free will and responsibility has replaced both meritocracy and desert-based systems. A liberal system of values, influenced by the social sciences, which tend to explain our actions in terms of heredity and, especially, environment, holds that we don't deserve our talents or even our conscientiousness. Our talents and abilities are the products of the Natural Lottery (heredity, family, and environment). We don't deserve our talents, including the talent to be moral or make an effort to learn and work. So, the argument proceeds, we don't deserve what our talents produce. "Even the willingness to make an *effort*, to try, and so to be deserving in the ordinary sense, is itself dependent in practice upon happy family and social circumstances." Moral and intellectual excellence and superior ability to perform important tasks are, from a moral point of view, arbitrary and must not be used as bases for differential distribution of primary goods, especially economic goods, social status, and the bases of self-respect. These goods be-

come ours, not because we deserve them, but because we have a right to them. They are our entitlements. The notions of merit, which characterizes Greek culture, and natural or *preinstitutional* desert, which characterizes desert-based systems like Kant's, evaporate. Justice now is defined in terms of what reasonable people would agree to in a hypothetical contractual position, such as Rawls's veil of ignorance. Justice, as the tendency toward equal distribution of primary goods, replaces the classical notion of justice (from the Greek Simonides to Kant) as giving each person what he or she deserves. Desert is transformed into *institutional* arrangements, entitlements, and sanctions, which create expectations of rewards and punishments. The net result is that the idea of *justice as desert*, a thesis held for centuries as constitutive of sound moral and political theory, is in our day rejected out of hand by the dominant political philosophy. Desert, once enjoying the endorsement of philosophers and kings, in word, if not in deed, now suffers as a pariah in an age cynical about individual responsibility.

As Sam Scheffler has argued (see reading 22), most contemporary political philosophy, especially liberal political philosophy, the dominant contemporary form, has renounced or greatly undermined the notion of desert.⁶ I think it has also underemphasized the notion of merit. Besides Rawlsian liberals, Utilitarians, like J. J. C. Smart, tend to emphasize maximizing utility, not desert or the responsibility on which desert depends. Recall Smart's famous retort, "The notion of the responsibility [for an outcome] is a piece of metaphysical nonsense."⁷ Libertarians like Nozick, who trust in market forces and invisible hands to bring about utility, ignore these concepts. Communitarians and Socialists largely reject desert and merit as reflecting an overly individualistic view of social reality. To quote Brian Barry, these concepts flourish in a society "where people are regarded as rational independent atoms held together in a society by a 'social contract' from which all must benefit. Each person's worth (desert) can be precisely ascertained."⁸

Time and space prohibit an extensive discussion of the causes of the present skepticism over desert and merit, but it is in part due to the attenuation of religious explanations of the world. Most contemporary political philosophers doubt that cosmic justice rules the universe or that an ultimate judgment will produce a Kantian outcome where the people are happy in proportion to their deserts. This skepticism regarding the validity of desert is partly attributable to the explanatory power of the social sciences, which offer social and psychological causes for our behavior that tend to diminish responsibility. Related to this factor is the appeal of philosophical determinism, which undermines the idea of responsibility, and hence of desert, altogether (see the readings in Part II, B). Another factor is the sheer impracticality of distributing goods according to desert. As Sidgwick notes in reading 7 and as Rawls, Young, and others note in Part II, which focuses on contemporary views, even if we admit desert as an ideal, it is exceedingly difficult, and in some cases impossible, to measure how much people deserve various goods. All of these claims can and will be challenged in our readings, but I must leave the discussion there, merely observing that we have come full circle from the Homeric Greeks, who also did without a notion of desert. Their culture was one that lacked a concept of desert; they were predesert, while our political culture tends to be postdesert.

Here we might pause to note the difference between the two related notions *desert* and *merit*, which I have been discussing, and which are often used as synonyms. "Merit" is a broader notion, corresponding to the Greek work *axia* and referring to any quality or value that is the basis for differential behavior, such as praise, rewards, and income (and the negative *demerit* refers to the basis for negative attributions). Grades are an example of a merit-based distribution scheme. We grade students on objective qualities,

not on the student's needs, pedigrees, or even deserts. Merit refers to external factors, such as results. "Desert," on the other hand, at least in central historical uses, is connected with the internal, the voluntary, with what we intend, with the strength of our effort. The Good Samaritan deserved gratitude from the assaulted Jew whom he helped, not simply because he succeeded in helping him but because he intended to help him. His goodness would have deserved reward even if he hadn't succeeded. More will be said in the articles about various desert-bases (e.g., there is *compensatory desert*, which doesn't fit this pattern), but I suggest this as at least one significant difference. I discuss this further in my article at the end of this anthology.

Let me turn to our readings.

We begin with two selections from Plato's *Republic* (Books I and IV). In the first, Polemarchus quotes the Greek poet Simonides to the effect that justice is "rendering to each his due." Socrates drives Polemarchus into a corner, but the significance of the dialogue is that (1) this is the first place we find the formula that will be used as a definition of justice for millennia and (2) it becomes an abbreviated version of Plato's own theory. Exactly what the phrase means is another question. What is one's due? The metaphor suggests property—giving back what another already owns, what I have borrowed, found, or promised, what one has a title to or is entitled to. Jesus' statement, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (Luke 20:25) reflects this interpretation. But what about *unowned* goods? Others have interpreted the formula more widely as having to do with what is appropriate or fitting, so that, for instance, we respect the laws of the country we are visiting, even though we don't believe in those laws ourselves. The Kantian interpretation narrows the notion of "rendering to each his due" to what one morally deserves. By itself, "render to each his or her due" seems a formal definition, which lacks content. It is substantive theories of justice that fill in the missing content—whether it be essential worth based on some feature of human beings (e.g., our rationality or possessing the image of God), our capacity to carry out various social functions, contracts we have entered into, or our moral character.

Plato goes on, in the second part of this reading, to identify justice with a hierarchical harmony in the soul and the community at large in which each entity does what it is best at doing. His definition of justice, an elaboration of the one given by Polemarchus, is "the having and doing of one's own and what belongs to oneself."

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.), in our second reading, defines formal justice in terms of equality: Treat equals equally and unequals unequally. Injustice, it follows, is treating equals unequally and unequals equally. Like Simonides' definition in Plato's dialogue, this is a purely formal definition, for by itself the formula doesn't tell us what the criterion of assessment is. Aristotle offered the notion of *merit* (Greek *axia*) but allowed that what was deemed meritorious could differ from society to society—for an aristocratic society, excellence of mind; for a plutocratic society, wealth; for a democratic society, equal resources; and so forth. The significance of Aristotle's thought is that he uses the ambiguous Greek word *isos* (which means both "fair" and "equal") to define justice, so that an adventitious connection occurred between these two different concepts, justice being seen as a kind of equality, as a kind of egalitarianism. If this is correct, then an accident of the Greek language may account for some egalitarian tendencies in the history of political philosophy. But Aristotle was no egalitarian himself and thought that a hierarchical meritocracy was the best social arrangement.

The significance of Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) is that he reduces desert or merit to one's power to influence others, especially the power to procure market value (how society rates one under different contingencies). Hobbes distinguishes this kind of merit

or worth from one's *worthiness*, one's inherent merit, one's innate capacities. How does social justice work? Social justice, rendering one's due, is simply doing what you have contracted or promised to do for another, for, unless there is an enforceable contract, no such thing as justice arises.

In our fourth selection, from Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, we encounter the hypothesis that the sense of merit or desert is a judgment arising from the feelings of gratitude and resentment. When we are intentionally harmed, we resent it and want to punish the guilty. When we are intentionally benefited, we want to reciprocate and reward our benefactor. We proceed to project our feeling onto other people and universalize the judgments that those who benefit others should be rewarded in proportion to their good deeds and those who harm others should be punished in proportion to their bad deeds.

We turn to Kant's theory of desert with its normative notion of being weighed on the scales of deontological morality. In Kant we find a paradoxical tension between the inherent merit or dignity of a human being as a member of the kingdom of ends (never treat a human being as a means only but always withal as an end in himself) and the differential value that is earned by one's moral integrity, the degree of one's commitment to duty. With regard to our inherent worth, we are all equal, but with regard to our moral worth, we are unequal. In fact, people can actually annihilate their inherent worth through immoral acts. Although it is a contradiction to act morally in order to gain a reward, one can hope to be worthy of the deepest reward, happiness, by being moral. Justice, according to Kant, consists in being happy or unhappy in exact proportion to one's moral character.

John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), the most important utilitarian of the nineteenth century, saw desert as the heart of justice and justice as the handmaiden of utility. In Section V of his *Utilitarianism* he characterizes justice as the moral principle that requires us to give to each what he or she deserves. "We should treat all equally well . . . who have deserved equally well of us, and . . . society should treat all equally well who have deserved equally well of it. . . . This is the highest abstract standard of social and distributive justice." Here Mill seems to be a rule utilitarian, holding that abiding by the rule of justice as desert will in the long run result in the highest aggregate utility.

We come to Henry Sidgwick's (1838–1900) *The Methods of Ethics*, a neglected classic in moral and social philosophy. Sidgwick, developing ideas found in Adam Smith, characterizes desert as based on primordial feelings of gratitude and its opposite, resentment. "Good desert" (rewarding) is gratitude universalized, and "ill desert" (punishment) is resentment universalized. These primitive instincts (gratitude and resentment) are so basic that any philosophy that ignores them is doomed to be defeated as ignoring a fundamental posit of human nature (even of animal nature). This selection is important for its discussion of determinism. Sidgwick points out more perspicuously than anyone before him, even Kant, that if determinism is true, responsibility vanishes and with it our notion of desert. If reason compels us to accept determinism as true, all would not be lost, for we would then have to become utilitarians, rewarding on the basis of expected consequences, rather than on the basis of effort or contribution. Sidgwick also points out the impossibility of a fine-grained analysis of individual deservingness, so the concept, especially Good desert, is useful within a "very limited range."

We conclude our historical readings with a selection from W. D. Ross (1877–1971). Ross is the one ethical intuitionist in these readings, though his conclusion regarding desert is similar to Kant's, namely, that it is self-evident that the good deserve to be happy and the bad unhappy in direct proportion to their degree of virtue and vice. Ross offers the following thought experiment: Imagine two worlds with equal populations

and equal amounts of happiness. In World A the virtuous are all happy and the vicious all miserable, while in World B the virtuous are miserable and the vicious happy. Would you not agree, Ross asks, that World A is the better world? Isn't it obvious that there is natural or preinstitutional desert based on moral character?

Although there is great variety of opinion as to what constitutes desert, the formula "to each his or her due" was held by almost every philosopher examined in this historical section. Plato and Aristotle gave that formula a meritocratic criterion, in terms of the more excellent types of human beings, but others gave it a distinctly moral criterion (Aquinas, Smith, Kant, Mill, Sidgwick, and Ross). All held that desert was in the nature of things (*physis*), not merely conventional (*nomos*). Hobbes alone gave it a purely transactional, contractual interpretation, devoid of preinstitutional content. Now, in the late twentieth century, in the era of postdesert, Hobbes's position on desert is close to the dominant one in political philosophy. All desert is institutional. The question is, Is this really true?

Notes

1. A. W. H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility: A Study in Greek Ethics* (University of Chicago, 1960), p. 32f. A reviewer states that the three quotations present answers to different questions. My point is that they reveal different overall assessments of the values of desert and merit. Homeric society valued merit over desert and equality, Kant valued desert over merit and equality, and Rawls and modern Liberalism tend to value equality over desert and merit.
2. G. W. Leibniz, *Theodicy* (trans. E. M. Huggard), 1698.
3. Ulpian in the *Digest* of the Roman book of law *Corpus Juris*, ca. 200 B.C.
4. Emil Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method* (Oxford University Press, 1952).
5. Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program*, published in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. D. McLellan (Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 566f.
6. Sam Scheffler, "Responsibility, Reactive Attitudes, and Liberalism in Philosophy and Politics," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 21 (Fall 1992).
7. J. J. C. Smart, "An Outline of a System of Utilitarian Ethics," in J. J. C. Smart and Bernard Williams, eds., *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 54.
8. Brian Barry, *Political Arguments* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), p. 112f.