Introduction

What is the right thing to do in given moral situations? What is the best life for a human being? For the particular human being one is?

To entertain these questions is worthwhile only on the premise that human beings possess freedom of appropriate kind and measure. If what each of us shall do and become is without alternative, the notion of choice is illusory, and it is upon the opportunity to choose that the meaningfulness of the above questions depends. That most of us presuppose the reality of choice is evident in the conduct of our daily lives. We take seriously a host of decisions, ranging from such life-shaping ones as which vocation and avocations to pursue, and whether to marry, and whom, to the plethora of lesser choices that fill our days, such as whether to accept a particular social invitation or read a particular book. In this presupposition we are supported by moral philosophers, and a moral philosophy that denied it would be self-contradictory.

However, the experiment that this book represents rests upon the real opportunity of a more radical choice—the choice by human beings of the basic terms in which they conceive of themselves and accordingly conduct their lives—that is denied by many persons including some moral philosophers. I will not directly attempt to rebut their views, or defend by arguments the presence in persons of the opportunity to choose their self-conceptions. Instead, this introduction will seek to set forth the eudaimonistic conception of personhood in such a way that the reader can experimentally adopt it as his or her self-conception. Readers who are
successful at this will have taken decisive steps toward answering for themselves the question of the possibility of choosing their self-conceptions—first, because the self as conceived eudaimonistically is very different from the modern conception of the self in which most of us have been conditioned, and second, because the experimentally adopted self-conception includes the opportunity of chosen self-conception, and moreover holds it to be every person's responsibility.

Our aim in this introduction, then, is to "get inside" the eudaimonistic conception of personhooood in order to see what it makes of our experience. For our initial access we will employ as our vehicle the ancient Greek myth of creation.

In the myth, the Deity fashions the earth and everything upon it by combining formless matter and immaterial forms and then assigns to a subordinate, Epimetheus, the work of distributing to the newly made creatures the attributes that will outfit them for survival. Obediently Epimetheus bestows upon the tiger its teeth and claws, upon the fox its williness, upon the fish its fins and gills, and so on down the list. But when Epimetheus arrives at the human being he discovers that his bag of attributes is empty, leaving this creature fatally naked and unequipped for survival in the world. To the rescue comes Epimetheus's daring brother, Prometheus, who mounts to the heavens and steals from the gods their most precious possession, fire, by which to rectify the oversight of Epimetheus and outfit humankind for living in the world. But this "fire" is not to be understood as physical fire (for it has been identified—we rely here as did the Greeks upon Hesiod—as the gods' most precious possession; and had they need to keep warm, or cook their food, or smelt ores to make tools?). It is spiritual fire by which humanity is compensated; and this is nothing less than the power of creation, namely Eros.¹ With it humankind is equipped to complete the work left unfinished by the Deity and Epimetheus together, the work of fashioning itself.

All other beings unalterably are what they are by metaphysical necessity, but human beings lack metaphysical necessity thanks, in the mythical account, to Epimetheus' oversight. This lack is both humanity's freedom and its predicament. What Plato is symbolizing in his famous image of the human soul as chariot, charioteer, and two contrary-minded horses (Phaedrus) is that, distinctively, human being is problematic being; to be a human being is to be at bottom a problem to oneself, specifically an identity problem. It is the problem of deciding what to become and endeavoring to become it. The problem of deciding what to become is
the problem of learning to recognize ideal goods and choosing among them which good to aim at as the goal of one's self-fulfilling and objectively worthy life. The problem of becoming the person one chooses to become is the problem of acquiring the resourcefulness and force of character to overcome external and internal obstacles.

Knowledge of ideal goods is wisdom and must be acquired by education, both formal and experiential. Knowledge of the particular ideal good that represents the fulfillment of the given individual is self-knowledge, which must be the paramount goal of education. Just as there are countless vocations that, though worthy, would not afford intrinsic rewards to a particular individual, so also with ideals of personhood. Self-knowledge begins in the discovery of the course of living (of which vocation is but a significant part) that affords intrinsic rewards to the particular individual. The Greek explanation of this relationship is framed in terms of innate potentialities within persons; the course of life that actualizes an individual's innate potentialities is experienced by him or her as intrinsically rewarding. It affords the kind of happiness or satisfaction that is peculiar to self-fulfilling conduct, for which the Greek term is *eudaimonia*. According to eudaimonism, persons innately possess not only potential excellences (the *aretai* that inhere in their ideal personhood, or *daimons*), but aspiration to actualize these excellences. In the definition proposed by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, human beings are "lovers of the good," seeking the completion that is denied them, in the myth, by Epimetheus's oversight.

Eudaimonia denotes both a condition and a feeling. It identifies the condition of living in truth to oneself, where the true self is one's daimon, and living in truth to it means discovering it—the self-discovery with which self-knowledge begins—and progressively actualizing it. As was noted above, the feeling can be termed happiness, but it is the distinctive happiness that attends self-fulfilling conduct. It is not, for example, the "happiness" of net desire-gratification, for people who lack self-knowledge will desire for themselves the wrong (dysdaimonic) things and experience pleasure nonetheless at the gratification of such desires. Nor is eudaimonia-as-feeling the proper aim of living, in the Greek view (which is to say that eudaimonism is not a form of hedonism). The proper aim is worthy living of a particular kind, realizing the particular values that constitute the individual's daimon. Eudaimonia is the necessary condition of such a life. As a feeling, it is the confirming sign that one is on the right course, the self-actualizing course. One is living in truth to oneself.\(^2\)
And what of evil? In the Greek account, no one deliberately seeks evil, for to desire something it is psychologically necessary for a rational being—a being that has an idea of what it desires—to believe it good. The knowledge of what is truly good is wisdom and must be painstakingly acquired. Meanwhile the bad or evil may be mistaken for the good, and mistakenly sought. And it may be achieved, for while the innate potentialities of persons are good and not otherwise, nevertheless all persons are full of possibilities other than their potentialities, including possibilities for every kind of evil conduct. As here conceived, then, the task is that of education in the good, with special attention to self-knowledge, and accordingly moral education is the backbone of Greek pedagogy. To cite a modern example, Emerson's admonition, "Trust thyself" is warranted by the potential worth that is within every person innately, but to his words must be added the developmental imperative, "and strive to make yourself trustworthy."

Profound as it is, the ancient Greek account of evil leaves untouched the evil will, understood as the deliberate ambition to destroy goodness. For this reason the Greek account required supplementation and gained it in Friedrich Nietzsche's theory of resentment. Nietzsche analyzes the evil will as a reactive phenomenon resulting from thwarting or frustration of innate aspiration to the good by obstacles in the world or in the self. Instead of simply giving up, some stronger-willed persons respond to thwarting by resolving to avenge themselves. Nietzsche perceives in resentment a virulent psychological corrosive that, when it gains foothold, can work within to transform the thematic motivation of a life from good to evil intent. (Plato's analysis of envy moves in this direction, but stops short of the evil will.)

But the contingency of the resentment response is demonstrated by countless persons who meet with comparable obstacles and frustrations but are not diverted from their aspiration to worthy living. The eudaimonistic strategy adopted by Nietzsche is to strengthen the good will to meet the adversity, both without and within, that it will certainly encounter. In their variety of ways, all of Nietzsche's writings are teachings in the cultivation in the self of the resourcefulness that worthy living requires, thereby to resist the temptation to resentment. Comparable dedication to the same purpose is evident in the writings of Henry Thoreau, whose thought remarkably parallels Nietzsche's in deep respects. Both Nietzsche and Thoreau recognize that the absence in human beings of metaphysical necessity must be compensated for by a necessity that requires to be self-supplied. Because it is the product of
the will of the individual, and not conversely, it is termed moral necessity. Persons in whom it is lacking are described by Thoreau as "thrown off the track by every nutshell and mosquito's wing that falls on the rails." 

Recently John Kekes has sought to rectify what he perceives as the inadequacy of the eudaimonistic theory of evil by presenting an extended account of "unchosen" evils. He holds that in its most pervasive form, the evil that humans do is attributable neither to evil will, nor to the ignorance that mistakes for good what is in fact evil. He argues that most evil is unchosen, and most unchosen evil results from the enactment by persons of the character and habits of conduct that were formed in them in childhood. Such enactment is not chosen because the character and habits of conduct were not chosen; they were formed in the dependent child by social influences.

But this is precisely why Socrates advised that "The unexamined life is not worth living." Thanks to the necessary socialization of children, the unexamined life is the thoughtless perpetuation of a conferred identity. It is not one's own life, and it defaults upon the moral responsibility of the individual to discover and actualize his or her distinctive innate potentialities for objective worth. The place for self-discovery is subsequent to childhood: it requires that a person bring the terms of his or her conferred identity to reflective awareness, as the first step toward the formation of the identity that he or she will bear in adulthood.

In summary, I think Kekes's valuable account of unchosen evil is mistakenly offered by him as a corrective to the Greek account. In fact he explicated the Greek "evil as ignorance" thesis, with special reference to ignorance of self. And the correctives he proposes are recognizable as implementations of the Greek imperative, "Know thyself."

According to eudaimonism, high moral character should as far as possible live by its own inherent self-demands, which measurably surpass the requirements of conventional morality. But because high moral character is a developmental outcome, external regulations are required for persons who have not attained it. The regulations, we propose, are of three kinds.

First, conduct is required to be generally law-abiding in the interest of social order. At the same time the intended outcome of self-directed living provides a criterion for distinguishing good laws from bad: laws must as far as possible conduce to, and not obstruct, the development of moral character. The second constraint is the universalizability-principle: each individual's chosen course of self-actualization must respect others'
chosen courses. At this level of generality, universalizability does not suppress individuation by legislating uniform conduct in similar circumstances. Finally, chosen courses of life must hold reasonable prospect of issuing in objective values, recognizable as values by (some) others who are themselves leading objectively worthy lives. This is forecasting, and makes sound sense of the seemingly occult "prophesy" that Plato esteems in the *Phaedrus*.

In addition to the above-indicated modification in its theory of evil, Greek eudaimonism requires to be modified in the direction of open-endedness. The teleology of Aristotle, in particular, invites an understanding in which all human beings who live as they should are bound to converge on a single form of life, namely a life centering in the rational activity of detached contemplation. This has been termed by W. F. R. Hardie the "dominant end" interpretation of Aristotle, and Hardie initiated ongoing scholarly debate by contrasting it with an "inclusive end" interpretation, according to which the use of reason serves to organize the lives of individuals so as to achieve their differing aims. My intent here is not to enter into the debate over the correct understanding of Aristotle, but rather to indicate that a eudaimonism that is viable today must be open-ended, recognizing a multiplicity of kinds of self-actualizing lives directed toward a multiplicity of ends. The varieties of value that can be actualized by human beings is unmeasured if not measureless, and it signifies innumerable possibilities for self-actualizing, objectively worthy living. Theoretical reduction of this variety to one or a few kinds is conspicuously Procrustean.

In the interest of deepened understanding, we may usefully speak now of what eudaimonism is not.

In the first place it is not an elitist theory, though it was indeed elitist in its Greek presentation and has sometimes subsequently received elitist formulation. Eudaimonism is coupled with democratic equality in the presupposition that to be a person is to be invested innately with potential excellence: all persons are alike values-bearers. This presupposition requires theoretical acknowledgment of the varieties of human value, as noted just above, and will be vindicated by training in the recognition and appreciation of this variety. Such training is the corrective to the parochialism that attends the human fatality of commencing life in a particular place at a particular time. The Aristotelian contention, on the "dominant end" interpretation, that abstract reasoning is the universal end of human life is inherently elitist because it favors those who by the "natural lottery" of birth are endowed with exceptional
intelligence. But few will argue that the capacity to love, for example, or the virtues of fidelity, compassion, and integrity, are closely correlated with native intelligence, and by extension neither is worthy living of many kinds. In sum, connection between eudaimonism and elitism is historical and contingent, not logical and necessary.

Next, eudaimonism is not a form of egoism. It posits as the native motivation of persons the desire (Eros) to live a worthy life. The worth that is aspired to is objective worth, which is to say it is of worth, not solely or primarily to the individual who actualizes it, but also to (some) other persons—specifically to such others as can recognize, appreciate, and utilize the distinctive kind of worth that the given individual manifests. The music of Beethoven, for example, has enriched the lives of thousands of persons and may be supposed to have been intended by Beethoven to enrich lives other than his own. To be sure, most worthy lives find far fewer appreciators. Eudaimonism is not an invitation to court fame. But the terms are no less applicable: we want to be of worth to others, beginning in most cases with those we love. Critics who recognize that eudaimonism is not a morality of altruism have sometimes concluded that therefore it is a form of egoism ("long-range," "prudential," etc.), but this conclusion follows only on the supposition that conduct and intentions must be either altruistic or egoistic. This is a modern disjunction that eudaimonism denies. The objectively worthy life, as is its intention, will be of worth alike to others and to its agent.

Third, while eudaimonism is a variety of moral individualism, unlike some forms of individualism it does not conceive of individuals as "atomic," that is, as inherently asocial entities. Atomic individuality is associated with modern social contract theory, the classical forms of which hold that individuals antedate society and agree to associate by something resembling explicit or tacit contract. On this understanding their essential nature as individuals is what it is before they agree to the terms of the contract. It is presocial, prepolitical, and unaffected at bottom by the terms of association. Social relations are conventional and contingent, affecting individuals "externally" but not "internally." By contrast eudaimonism recognizes persons as inherently social beings from the beginnings of their lives to the end but contends that the appropriate form of association undergoes transformation. As dependent beings, persons in the beginning of their lives are social products, receiving not merely material necessities but their very identities from the adult community. The principle of association is the essential unifor-
mity of associates, usually expressed in terms of basic needs. Subsequent moral development leads to self-identification and autonomous, self-directed living, but is associative as an interdependence based in a division of labor with respect to realization of values. The self-fulfilling life of each person requires more values than he or she personally realizes and is dependent upon others for these values. The principle of this form of association is the complementarity of perfected differences. Accordingly the meaning of “autonomy,” if the term is to be applicable, must be consistent with interdependence. As we will use the term it means, not total self-sufficiency, but determining for oneself what one’s contributions to others should be and what use to make of the values provided by the self-fulfilling lives of others. To follow the lead of another person in a matter he or she understands better than we is not a lapse from autonomy into heteronomy but a mark of wisdom.

“Individualism” has lately been under mounting attack by communitarians for allegedly precluding social relations that are essential to the well-being of persons. In chapter 6 we will argue that eudaimonistic individualism entails community and offer a description of that community. The typical error of current communitarian attacks is their failure to recognize distinctions among kinds of individualism.8

Finally, eudaimonism is not ethical subjectivism. It is true that it exhibits great concern for the subject—the self of each person—for example, by insisting upon the importance of self-knowledge and self-development. But the self is here conceived as a task, a piece of work, namely the work of self-actualization. And self-actualization is the progressive objectivizing of subjectivity, expressing it into the world. This recognition exposes as a fallacy the modern use of “objective” and “subjective” as mutually exclusive categories. Every human impulse is subjective in its origin and objective in its intentional outcome, and because its outcome is within it implicitly from its inception, there is nothing in personhood that is “merely subjective,” that is, subjective in the exclusive sense. Narcissism (with which individualism is sometimes charged) is a pathology that tries to amputate from subjectivity its objective issue. It is real enough, and was a propensity of some romantic individualisms that judged experience by the occasions it affords for the refinement of the individual’s sensibilities. But the supposition that individualism is narcissistic subjectivism represents (again) a failure to recognize divergent kinds of individualism. For eudaimonistic individualism, it is the responsibility of persons to actualize objective value in the world.
From the foregoing conceptualization of individuality and worthy living, politics—understood as the art or science of government—arises at three points.

First, the mature, self-responsible, self-actualizing individual is self-governing, and this self-government requires strategies, techniques, and acquired, organized skills. In short it is obliged to be an art or science. This self-government is for eudaimonism the paradigm of good government, and the primary purpose of good collective government is to generalize the opportunity and the occasions of it among the constituency. In the development of individuals it is preceded by two stages of life—childhood and adolescence—which in differing measure as yet lack the capacity for self-government in the above meaning and therefore require to be externally governed in the manner appropriate to each. We propose that the form of government appropriate to childhood is unilateral authority, and the form appropriate to adolescence is collective self-government. In each case the paramount criterion of good government is that its exercise shall facilitate further development in the governed. Thus a unilateral authority, for example, that works to perpetuate or increase the dependence of its subjects thereby attests to its own illegitimacy. Similarly a collective self-government that fails to contribute to increasing capacity for individual self-government in its constituents is in default of its function.

The second point of origin of politics in the foregoing picture is recognizable in the fact that, as a developmental outcome, self-directed individuality has preconditions, some of which cannot be self-supplied by individuals. If persons are morally responsible for self-discovery and self-actualization, then by the logic that “ought” implies “ought to be able to,” they are entitled to these necessary preconditions.* Here are persons’ primary moral rights. Where the conditions are such as cannot be self-supplied by individuals, responsibility for provision is (we will argue) social. In cases of universal entitlement to necessary, non-self-suppliable conditions (e.g., of children to an appropriate education), responsibility for supply is not a community option and requires to be institutionalized by the state. In this limited respect the state is required to be what Michael Oakeshott identifies as a corporate enterprise association—that is, an association organized to achieve specified ends—and politics is management of this enterprise. But what is thus

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*This is a modification of my original attempt to derive rights by “ought implies can,” for which I am indebted to Gilbert Harman and George Mavrodes. Refinements will be offered in chapter 5.
provided to persons is not “benefits” or “satisfactions” but conditions of the exercise of individual responsibility.

Because an extended society includes persons at all stages of development, there can be no prospect of the state “withering away.” But it would be erroneous to suppose that external government is eliminable for the third stage of development—the stage of autonomous, self-directed living—considered alone. This is because in this stage autonomy, although manifest, is a growing but imperfect capacity. Therefore the social principle of the third stage, the principle of the complementarity of perfected differences, can never be more than imperfectly manifested through the initiatives of individuals, and requires institutional supplementation. There can be no utopian reliance on an “invisible hand” of complementarity to protect rights, settle disputed claims, enforce the law, defend the nation, and so forth.

The third point of origin is the requirement of social order. But politics neither invents nor merely imposes order, for achievement of order depends upon enlistment of volition and can only within limits condition the volitions on which it depends. In Oakeshott’s words, “Government . . . does not begin with a vision of another, different and better world, but with the observation of the self-government practiced even by men of passion in the conduct of their enterprises.”9 In the worst state the principles of order are calculated to serve the ends of evil-doers; in the best state they are principles of self-discipline that worthy persons have recognized and adopted as conditions of self-actualization; in intermediate states they are principles that preclude the worst but are unconnected to the best, and by resting with minimally acceptable conduct contribute to what Mill perceived as “the general tendency of things throughout the world . . . to render mediocrity the ascendant power among mankind.”10

Our primary theoretical problem in what follows presents itself as the horns of a dilemma. On one side lies the recognition that “morality cannot be legislated,” because law can regulate conduct but not motives. On the other side lies the recognition by Greek eudaimonists that worthy living by individuals requires a conducive social context. An opening between the horns begins to appear upon examination of the Greek recognition.

In the first place it is not impossible for given individuals to demand more of themselves than prevailing conceptions of acceptable moral conduct include, but such persons will be too rare to make an appreciable difference. It is in the problem of generalizing self-actualizing living
with its inner requirement for continuous moral growth that the need for a conducive social context arises. If, as eudaimonism contends, all persons possess innate incentive toward worthy living, a "conducive social context" becomes one that provides opportunity to all associates to discover and live by their innate moral incentive. John Dewey speaks on these lines when he says that, "Democracy has many meanings, but if it has a moral meaning, it is found in resolving that the supreme test of all political institutions and industrial arrangements shall be the contribution they make to the all-around growth of every member of society." But given that the contributions to growth that Dewey speaks of refer to the growth of individuals that is dependent upon their own initiatives, the first concern of a eudaimonistic society must be to afford to individuals the types of experience that will engage these initiatives. This is "self-discovery," and we shall address it directly in chapter 3. By the inner logic of development the place for it is adolescence, and a conducive social context will recognize this developmental work of adolescence and supply its conditions. Because it as yet lacks self-knowledge and the strength of character that is built upon it, adolescence is highly vulnerable to misdirection, and the advisement is acute, "What is honored in a country will be cultivated there" (Pericles).

Next we will inquire into how and why the problem of self-knowledge came to be abandoned, and the aspiration to moral excellence eclipsed, in the modern conception of the self.