

## CHAPTER ONE



# The Nature of Morality

## I. WHAT IS ETHICS?

Although she was driving through torrential rains, Sandra Mendenez barely noticed the weather. The chaos of water washing down her windshield seemed like nothing compared with the turmoil she felt swirling inside. Sandra, the director of an adult English as a second language (ESL) program meeting at a local school, was returning home from teaching her regular Friday evening ESL class. Her favorite student, José, had seemed particularly anxious and distracted throughout the evening, and Sandra had asked after class whether he was okay. At that, José had broken down completely. Piecing his story together, Sandra learned that José was an illegal immigrant from Honduras and had lived thirteen months in the United States. According to José, his troubles started when he had refused to join one of the street gangs that controlled his Honduran hometown. From that time on, he had been repeatedly threatened, robbed, and beaten. After somehow managing to get out and make his way to New York, José had met Edgar, a Guatemalan who had come to the United States two years ago from a similar background. They had become friends, pooled their resources, and begun working to establish a better life for themselves in the United States. Just a few weeks ago, however, Edgar had been deported back to Guatemala. Then, last night, José heard that Edgar had been murdered by a street gang soon after his return. Grief stricken and terrified, José felt he had nowhere to turn.<sup>1</sup>

Beside the heart-wrenching emotions this was causing Sandra, it was also beginning to dawn on her that José put her in a real predicament. Because she received government aid for her ESL program, she was occasionally asked to fill out a report or provide documentation on her students. However, she could hardly imagine reporting José as an illegal. That could not only jeopardize her program,

<sup>1</sup> This story is based on an Associated Press article by Jennifer Kay, "Fleeing the Gangs of Central America, U.S. Denies Asylum to Desperate Youths," *The Star Ledger*, May 25, 2006. The article reported that the United States currently does not grant asylum to those fleeing from such gangs. Edgar Chocoy, a Guatemalan teen, was killed by his former gang shortly after being deported back to his homeland.

but it might also lead to José's deportation—a consequence that she found unthinkable. Nor could she ask José to drop the program, for he clearly needed her friendship and support now more than ever. On the other hand, how could she submit a fabricated report to the government? That would also jeopardize her program. Worse, it would be lying. Despite her turmoil, Sandra felt sure about one thing: it was extremely important that she do the *right* thing. She just didn't know what that was.

\* \* \*

As Sandra discovers, work, relationships, and everyday experiences can present ordinary people with challenging moral problems. Although Sandra's predicament includes legal concerns, her various professional responsibilities, and even her own personal feelings, what Sandra ultimately seeks is a *moral* solution to the question: *What should she do about José?* But how does one go about discovering the right answer to such a question? Is there anything else to rely on besides our personal feelings or the advice of others and their personal feelings? For that matter, can we be sure that there even *is* some morally correct answer to Sandra's predicament? And if there really is some correct answer, could there be any *rational* means for determining what that answer is?

Sandra's story represents just one example of a moral problem that ordinary persons can encounter. Here are some others.

- Suppose a close relative of yours suffers a severe stroke and is placed on life support for her breathing. The doctors say she will never regain consciousness and can only be kept alive with the machine's help. You remember that your relative once expressed a desire to "go quickly," but you aren't sure what she would have wanted in the current situation. It turns out that the decision lies with you. Should you tell the doctors to "pull the plug"?
- While renewing your driver's license, you are asked whether you would like to designate yourself as an organ donor at the time of your death. There is, in fact, a serious shortage of organs, and many people die while waiting for a needed organ to become available. Should you become an organ donor?
- You have a favorite "first person shooter" computer game you like to play in your spare time.<sup>2</sup> The trouble is that lately this pastime has developed into a bit of an obsession—you even dreamed last night that you were in a dark tunnel taking down sharpshooters. You also think that your five-year-old brother may be playing the game when you aren't looking. Although it has all seemed harmless enough, you now are beginning to feel a little anxious about the game and its effects on you and your brother. Should you switch your entertainment?

<sup>2</sup>A first person shooter game is a computer game in which the computer represents the game character's view of the world; the character is typically equipped with a hand-held gun, and the game's object is to stay alive as long as possible while destroying one enemy after another.

Even as individuals struggle with their own moral problems, our society as a whole wrestles with questions about the morality of capital punishment, late-term abortions, stem cell research, cutting back on welfare, cloning, and armed interventions against foreign dictators—to mention just a few of today's pressing issues. When we consider such problems, our ultimate question again comes down to: *What is right?* And this question, in turn, naturally leads to others: *How we can determine what is right? Can there be more than one right answer? What makes something right or wrong in the first place?* These are the kinds of issues addressed by *ethics*. Roughly, **ethics** is the systematic and reasoned study of morality. Among other things, ethics reaches beyond mere personal opinion or feelings and instead adopts a rational approach to determining what is morally right.

And what is *morality*? Actually, it is quite difficult to formulate any precise definition of morality itself. Just as our understanding of the natural world depends largely upon the scientific study of nature, it may likewise be true that we can come to an adequate understanding of the moral world only as we engage in ethics, the disciplined study of morality. Still, we have all had our personal moral beliefs and values shaped from a very early age by our parents, friends, and our own experience. Like Sandra, furthermore, we have all encountered many occasions in which we have had to think through various sorts of moral concerns. As a result, we all have a fairly good intuitive understanding, at least, of moral claims and the nature of moral issues. Staying on this intuitive level, then, let's say that morality is that which imposes responsibilities upon us because we are persons and not because we live under a particular set of laws or within a particular society, etc. Putting this just a bit more carefully, **morality** has to do with what all rational persons, simply because they are persons, should be like and how they ought to act toward others.<sup>3</sup>

### Summary

*Ethics adopts a systematic, carefully reasoned study of morality and addresses such questions as: What is right? How can we determine what is right? What makes something right or wrong? Can there even be a single right answer to a moral question?*

### Key Terms

- **Ethics:** *the systematic and reasoned study of morality and its claims.*
- **Morality:** *has to do with what we (simply because we are persons) should be like and how we should act.*

<sup>3</sup>Although we have offered this intuitive distinction between morality and ethics, we must observe how very often these terms are used interchangeably. The terms "moral" and "ethical" are interchanged even more often.

## II. MORAL CLAIMS

In discussing any moral problem, people will sooner or later advance some sort of moral claim. There are two kinds of moral claims: *moral value claims* and *moral prescriptive claims*. We shall talk more about these in a moment, but first, *what is a moral claim?* **Moral claims** serve to guide, regulate, and assess persons and their behavior. More simply, moral claims make assertions about good and bad, right and wrong. Here are some moral claims (note that we are not currently concerned with whether any of these are actually true!) that Sandra might consider as she reflects upon her predicament.

Moral value claims:

- Human life is fundamentally valuable.
- It is a virtue to remain loyal to one's friends.
- Only a bad person would refuse to help someone in trouble.

Moral prescriptive claims:

- Everyone has a moral duty to obey the law.
- I should not lie.
- Always act toward others as you would have them act toward you.

Moral claims are **normative**; they establish or refer to some standard or *norm* by which other things are to be evaluated. As the preceding examples illustrate, any normative claim does this in one of two ways: it may identify or apply a moral value, or it may *prescribe* how one *should* or *should not* act.

**Moral value claims** say that something is morally good or bad. A moral value claim might make some claim about certain people; for instance, Sandra might say that the gang members are bad. Alternately, a moral value claim might describe certain kinds of character traits (e.g., being loyal, sympathetic, or stingy) as desirable or undesirable. Moral value claims always have to do with persons or personal character traits.

**Moral prescriptive claims**, meanwhile, make assertions about what sorts of acts are right or wrong and what one should or should not do. A prescriptive claim prescribes or prohibits some kind of action or behavior. The most common way to state a prescriptive claim is with expressions like “should” and “should not,” “ought” and “ought not.” However, it is also possible to express prescriptions by stating an obligation or duty to act in some particular way (e.g., “Everyone has a moral duty to obey the law”).

It is also important to distinguish between normative claims and *descriptive claims*. As just observed, a normative claim either makes a value claim or prescribes (or prohibits) some action. As such, **normative claims** have to do with the way the world *ought* to be. In contrast, a **descriptive claim** appeals to no norm or standard; it simply describes the way the world *actually* is (or was, or will be, or even could be—as opposed to what *should* be). For instance, compare the

following descriptive claims with the corresponding normative claim provided just below.

Descriptive claims:

- It is hard to see when you are driving in the rain.
- José was feeling grief and fear.
- Sandra's program could run into a lot of trouble if she lies to the government.

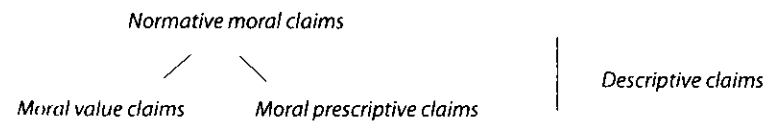
Normative claims:

- You should not risk driving in the rain.
- José has a right not to have to fear for his life.
- It would be wrong for Sandra to lie to the government.

Again, descriptive claims have to do with the way things actually are in the world, but are neutral with respect to any norm or value. Normative claims (whether moral or not) appeal in one way or another to a value-laden standard regarding how things ought to be. The distinction can be quite important—for as we are all aware, the way things are is not always the way they should be.

### Summary

Our discussion so far has largely been limited to moral claims. Moral claims are normative—and consist of either value claims or prescriptive claims. Normative claims refer to some standard or norm and tell us what the world ought to be like. Normative claims contrast with descriptive claims, which instead simply describe the way the world is. The relationships between these categories can be represented as follows.



### Key Terms

- **Moral claims:** serve to guide, regulate, and assess persons and their behavior. Moral claims make assertions about good and bad, right and wrong.
- **Normative:** something is normative if it establishes or refers to some standard or norm by which other things may be evaluated. A normative claim either makes a value claim or prescribes (or prohibits) some action.
- **Moral value claims:** assert what persons or personal character traits are morally good or bad.
- **Moral prescriptive claims:** assert what sorts of acts are right or wrong and what one should or should not do.
- **Descriptive claims:** describe how the world actually is or could be.

### III. NONMORAL NORMATIVE CLAIMS

Although you probably have a good intuitive understanding of moral claims already, it may still be helpful to distinguish moral claims from certain other types of normative claims that also sometimes use words like “good” and “ought.” Here are some of the more common types of *nonmoral normative claims*.<sup>4</sup>

**Claims of etiquette** have to do with what is acceptable social behavior. For instance,

- You ought to say “please” when you ask someone for something.
- Kevin should not loudly slurp his soup.
- The ESL students shouldn’t talk loudly among themselves while Sandra is teaching.

It seems that etiquette arises, in part, from practical considerations such as efficiency, safety, and hygiene. For instance, all human societies follow certain formalities in greetings—probably because our initial assessment of another person as friend or foe can be a matter of great importance. Etiquette also forbids talking with your mouth full, resulting, no doubt, from the inevitable loss of clarity, not to mention the disadvantages of having food fall out. However, because societies can differ over what they regard as acceptable, etiquette is also a matter of convention. The values and prescriptions of etiquette accepted within a particular society help define the standard of etiquette for that society. This conventionality, however, does not diminish its importance. The rules of etiquette often play a crucial role in ensuring smooth social interaction and avoiding unnecessary conflict. Still, one does not usually morally wrong another person by belching out loud or by attempting to eat peas with a knife.

Nevertheless, etiquette *can* raise moral issues. When I commit a breach of etiquette with the deliberate intention of insulting or demeaning another person (e.g., by deliberately talking out loud while another is speaking), my act also has moral implications. What is important to see, however, is that the breach of etiquette is simply the *means* by which the insult, say, is expressed. What makes the breach a moral concern is the accompanying intent to insult or demean the other person. After all, the very same sort of rude act might, in a different context where there is no hostile intention, merely create embarrassment. Claims of etiquette, in themselves, must therefore be distinguished from moral claims.

**Prudential claims** comprise another category of normative claims that must be distinguished from moral claims. Prudential claims say *what would be in our interest to do*—what would be *prudent*.<sup>5</sup> For instance, it would be prudent for José

<sup>4</sup>There are other types of nonmoral normative claims as well, including, for instance, aesthetic claims (“You shouldn’t paint the room green and purple”) and certain claims from professional codes of conduct (“Sandra should keep personal facts about her students in strict confidence”).

<sup>5</sup>The norm or value referred to by a prudential claim is that which would be prudent for someone to seek (i.e., would be in that person’s interest) under those circumstances.

to lay low and avoid getting sent back to Honduras. It would also be prudent for Sandra to not risk ruining her reputation by submitting a fabricated report to the government. Here are some other examples.

- Everyone should brush their teeth daily.
- You shouldn’t associate with shady characters in dark alleys.
- If Sandra wants to make it safely home in that heavy rain, she should slow down.
- If you want to do well in your ESL class, you should study hard.

Since many of our interests are so obvious as to not seem worth mentioning, we often express prudential claims as simple prescriptions for action, as in the examples about brushing teeth and avoiding dark alleys. This is because nearly everyone would recognize that it is in their interest to care for their teeth and keep themselves from getting mugged. Other sorts of actions, however, may only be called for in certain circumstances. The prudent course of action (i.e., the action that is most appropriate for someone in those circumstances) will then depend on whether we find ourselves in those circumstances. For this reason, prudential claims are *best* expressed with “if” and “then” (e.g., “If Sandra wants to make it safely home in the rain, *then* she should slow down” or “If you want to do well in your ESL class, *then* you should study hard”). Stated in this way, these prudential claims clearly tell us what would be prudent for us to do *if* we find ourselves in the circumstances each describes. Of course, it is also true that *if* someone desires healthy teeth, then it will be in his interest to brush daily—although having this desire goes without saying for most people. On the other hand, those who are not in such circumstances may have no need to act as prescribed. For instance, if I’m not taking any classes, then it may not be necessary for me to study hard, and if I’m rushing someone to the hospital, it might not be wise for me to drive too slowly. It is even true that if I *don’t* want to keep my teeth healthy, then I don’t really need to brush daily.

It has often been claimed that living a moral life is in a person’s best interests. As sayings like “Honesty is the best policy” suggest, for instance, it is prudent to make a practice of honesty. Although this may be true, however, it must be admitted that acting morally can sometimes be to our disadvantage. A morally right action like telling the truth or attempting to protect a threatened child *could* result in serious personal harm. There is no guarantee that doing the morally right thing will always be in one’s personal interests. For this reason, we cannot maintain that all moral claims are prudential. Further, many prudential claims clearly are not moral claims (e.g., while brushing regularly is certainly prudent, there is nothing unmoral about ~~failing to do so~~).

**Legal claims** resemble moral claims more closely than claims from any of our other categories. In fact, many laws (such as the laws against assault, murder, and burglary) simply restate important moral claims. Further, we probably have a *moral* responsibility to obey the law, at least in most situations.

Despite the close relationship between many legal and moral claims, the law still differs from morality. Laws derive from civil authority; without such authority,

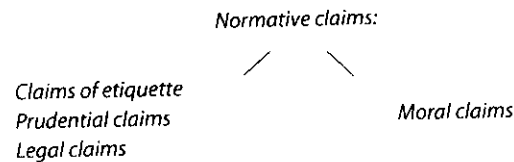
there would be no laws. For this reason, laws come into existence (and sometimes go out of existence) at specific points in time; in contrast, general moral claims tend to appear much more timeless. Even in situations where no laws apply, furthermore, it is still possible to act rightly or wrongly, morally speaking. For instance, we normally have a moral duty to be honest with other family members within our own homes—although no law requires this. There are also plenty of laws that reflect nothing of any moral significance at all: for instance, neither of the following laws is *morally* better than its alternatives:

- All drivers should drive on the right rather than the left side of the street.
- All drivers should stop for red lights rather than for yellow lights.

Most importantly, there can be *immoral* laws. Laws establishing apartheid or slavery, for instance, violate basic moral rights.

### Summary

*Normative claims are not limited to moral claims; there are other categories of normative claims as well. Like moral claims, these other kinds of claims include both value claims and prescriptive claims—and so use expressions like “good,” “should,” etc. Because people sometimes confuse these with moral claims, it is important to understand how these other kinds of claims differ from moral claims and from each other. Nonmoral normative claims include (but are not limited to) claims of etiquette, prudential claims, and legal claims.*



### Key Terms:

- **Nonmoral normative claims:** *normative (value or prescriptive) claims that differ in their purposes and origins from moral claims.*
- **Claims of etiquette:** *normative claims that have to do with what is acceptable social behavior.*
- **Prudential claims:** *normative claims that say what would be in our interest or prudent to do.*
- **Legal claims:** *normative claims that derive from civil authority.*

## IV. CHARACTERIZING MORAL CLAIMS

Having seen something of what moral claims are *not*, let's now try to be more precise about what they *are*. Although we will have much more to say about a couple of these points in later chapters, here is a brief characterization of moral claims.

• **Normative:** As we have seen, moral claims are not descriptive. Instead, moral claims ultimately refer to some moral norm or standard. As such, they are either prescriptive or valuative. A moral prescriptive claim says something about what we should or should not do. A moral value claim talks about a person or some personal character trait like honesty or dishonesty, kindness or selfishness.

• **Truth claims:** Moral claims make assertions that are either true or false. This is important, because it places moral discussion within the domain of rational considerations and so allows us to assess moral claims on the basis of reasoned argument rather than, say, our feelings. Truth claims may be contrasted with ordinary questions (“Why did you arrive early?”) and pure expressions of emotion (“Oh no!”), which are neither true nor false. Truth claims may also be contrasted with commands (“Don’t lie”), which likewise cannot be either true or false. Nevertheless, any command can easily be converted into a prescriptive claim (“No one should ever lie”), which we can then assess as either true or false. Allowing for this and certain other special uses of language, it is fair to say that the content of any moral expression can always be re-expressed in the form of a moral truth claim.

• **Universalizable:** Moral claims can commonly be generalized; even when addressed to just one particular person, a moral claim can be extended to other persons in similar circumstances. It does not seem possible for one person to have a moral right or obligation that others could not also have. Similarly, it should not be possible to make a moral exception for one person that could not likewise be made for others. Since every person is on the same moral footing, so to speak, any general moral *principle* that holds for one person would likewise seem to have to hold for all people. In fact, the very notion of a **moral principle** (e.g., “Do not lie,” “Always act toward others as you would have them act toward you,” etc.) is that of a *general* moral claim that holds for everyone (universally) in the same way. The universalizability of moral claims helps distinguish them from both laws and claims of etiquette, which vary depending on governments and certain social conventions, respectively.

• **Overriding:** Although nonmoral prescriptive claims can be important in guiding our behavior, moral claims (whether prescriptive or valuative) tend to override or take precedence over other kinds of normative claims. For instance, Martin Luther King Jr. disobeyed certain civil laws because they conflicted with certain overriding moral principles of justice—implying that issues of justice override the law. The same seems to hold for

*Emotivism*, a longstanding viewpoint in ethics, maintains that although moral expressions appear to be truth claims, they in fact do nothing more than express a person's emotional approval or disapproval. Although influential, this viewpoint has not been accepted by the majority of philosophers.

conflicts that might arise between a moral claim and a claim of etiquette or even self-interest (prudence).

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As the story of Sandra and our other opening examples illustrate, we can find ourselves facing important moral issues at any time. When facing such issues, we may also find ourselves asking what the law has to say, as well as what would be in our own best interest. We might even find ourselves having to deal with some point of etiquette. While all of these considerations may figure into our thinking, however, conscientious persons will be particularly interested in the moral question, “What should I do?” This question often leads us into thinking about moral prescriptive claims—claims about what we should or should not do. Yet morality also has to do with questions about values, although these are somewhat less familiar to most of us. This will be the topic of Chapter Two.

### Summary

*Moral claims may be characterized as (a) normative, (b) truth claims, (c) universalizable, and (d) overriding. We have already seen that normative claims appeal to a standard of evaluation. These other terms are defined below.*

### Key Terms

- **Truth claims:** make assertions that are either true or false.
- **Universalizable:** can be generalized to hold for others in similar circumstances.
- **Moral principles:** general moral claims that hold for everyone in the same way.
- **Overriding:** moral claims tend to override or take precedence over other kinds of normative claims.

### For Reflection and Discussion

1. In your own words, explain what morality is and how ethics relates to morality.
2. What are some examples of moral problems that you have encountered in your life?
3. What do you think makes an act morally right or wrong?
4. Come up with some of your own examples of moral value claims, moral prescriptive claims, and descriptive claims, showing how they differ.
5. Come up with some of your own examples of claims of etiquette, prudential claims, and legal claims. How do these differ from each other and from purely moral claims?
6. Restate some of the prudential claims you came up with for Question 5 in an “if . . . then” form.

7. Can you think of other categories of nonmoral normative claims? Give examples.
8. Think of a moral disagreement you can imagine having with someone. In discussing your disagreement, would you expect the other person to offer you reasons in support of her view? Explain.
9. Think of some moral controversy (e.g., capital punishment, abortion, punishing young offenders as adults). What is your own view regarding this controversy, and what reasons can you offer in support of your view?
10. Suppose you have borrowed \$100 from a friend and have promised to pay him back. How is your promise universalizable?
11. What do you think about the idea that moral claims override all other sorts of claims? Why?

### For Further Reading

- Pojman, Louis P., and James Fieser. *Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong*. 6th edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 2008. See Chapter One, which provides another general introduction of the nature of ethics.
- Singer, Peter, Ed. *A Companion to Ethics (Blackwell Companions to Philosophy)*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1991, 1993. See Parts I and III for articles on the origins and history of ethics and Part II for articles on the major ethical traditions.
- Taylor, Richard. *Good and Evil*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000. See Chapters One through Four for a history of Western ethics extending from the Greeks.

### Case 1

#### The Real Price of Coffee

According to the National Coffee Association, half of all Americans drink coffee every day.<sup>7</sup> For instance, young adults drink an average of 3.2 cups of coffee per day (up from 2.5 cups in 2005), and in 2007 consumption of coffee actually surpassed consumption of soft drinks!<sup>8</sup>

Most of this coffee is produced in developing nations, yet less than 10% of the annual value of coffee goes back to the farmers.<sup>9</sup> Much of the rest ends up in the pockets of the companies that process, package, and sell it, such as Kraft (Maxwell House), Proctor and Gamble (Folgers), and Nestlé (Nescafé), among others. The low return on their investment is devastating for farmers in developing nations like Ethiopia (as well as Kenya, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, among others), where unemployment and poverty are high and coffee plantations represent a much-needed source of income. In Columbia, some coffee farmers have already converted their coffee farms to opium farms because opium yields better income.

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<sup>7</sup>National Coffee Association, <http://www.ncausa.org> (accessed March 1, 2009).

<sup>8</sup>These data represent 2008 consumption and production. “2007 National Coffee Drinking Trends Summary,” National Coffee Association of U.S.A., Inc., <http://www.ncausa.org> (accessed August 3, 2009).

<sup>9</sup>Brian C. Howard, “Grounds for Change,” *E: The Environmental Magazine*, November/December 2005, 26–37. Most of the information that follows is taken from this article.

**Case 1 (Continued)**

The way the coffee industry operates does not just present a problem for the farmers that grow the beans. Rather than using the traditional method of growing coffee in the shade of tropical trees, to increase yield most coffee is now grown in “full-sun” production. This change has brought on the destruction of tropical rainforests and, with that, a tremendous loss of biodiversity. According to Equator Coffee Roasters, this type of coffee production is “the second leading cause of rainforest destruction.”<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the trees that could be used to offer shade can often provide additional income for farmers by producing fruit, avocados, and wood. In addition, the ground underneath the coffee plants is a good place to grow vegetables and herbs.

Full-sun plantations also lack the natural fertilizers provided by plants and the natural pest control of the animals that live in the rainforest. As a result, coffee plants require chemical fertilizers and pesticides. These plantations are also prone to flooding and erosion, both of which could be avoided if the coffee plants were nestled between larger trees. Meanwhile, the runoff from the chemical fertilizers and pesticides pollutes the surrounding rivers. The chemicals also affect farm workers: many of the hired farmhands cannot read, so they do not know how to follow the instructions given for the use of the chemicals. Sometimes there is no protective gear available for workers, which can result in chemical poisoning.

The birds are yet another casualty of the full-sun method. More than 150 species of birds thrive in the rainforest of a traditional coffee plantation, which is more than twenty times the number of species that live on full-sun farms. Some of the species that depend on the rainforest for survival have declined by as much as 70%.

Many of these negatives can be avoided if consumers become more aware of what kind of coffee they buy—if they let their buying habits be guided by “eco-labels.” For instance, all organic coffee is shade grown, and very few pesticides are approved for use in organic farming. To avoid coffee from full-sun plantations, consumers should look for the label “organic.” An advocacy group from New York City, the Rainforest Alliance, also certifies coffee. The Rainforest Alliance prohibits certain chemicals, it requires that water and biodiversity be protected, and it also requires that new trees be planted. According to one farmer, following the Rainforest Alliance principles is “helping him farm in balance with nature, and greatly improve[s] worker productivity and morale.”<sup>11</sup> Consumers can look for the “Fair Trade” label, which guarantees farmers a certain minimum price for their coffee. A portion of the profits from the coffee is then reinvested into the community in the form of schools, buildings, etc.

**THOUGHT QUESTIONS**

1. Is this a moral or legal/economic issue? Could it be both? What are some of the most important value and prescriptive claims involved here? Should any of the relevant nonmoral claims override the moral claims? Why or why not?

2. How does the fact that this issue involves *international* trading policies affect this case?
3. It would not be acceptable in the United States for workers to be exposed to the kinds of risks these foreign coffee workers are being exposed to. Nor could any U.S. worker be paid such low wages. Can these sorts of things nevertheless be acceptable for workers in other countries? Relate your answer to the claim that moral principles should be universal.
4. If moral principles are indeed universal, could we justifiably criticize another culture for its farming practices and the way it allows its workers to be treated?
5. To what degree do you think the rest of the world could justifiably take action against foreign farming practices when these could potentially harm farmers and the surrounding people (via chemical poisoning or environmental damage, for example)? Formulate some moral and nonmoral claims to support your views.

**Case 2****Jurassic Kitty: Should I Clone My Cat?**

It has been a business failure: In December 2006, Genetic Savings and Clone, the company where, for a mere \$32,000, you could clone your cat, closed down. Apparently, there was no demand for a cloned cat. Not at that price, anyway.

Aside from not being a very profitable business venture, is kitty cloning ethical? Let's first look at what cloning actually is. The word “cloning” refers to the creation of a genetic copy of a living organism. Indeed, we routinely clone plants when we cut off a shoot from one plant to grow another one. But that way of cloning doesn't work for animals. Instead, scientists basically create a genetically identical twin by transferring the nucleus of the cell from the body of one animal into the egg of another. This process is called “nuclear transfer.”<sup>12</sup> The resulting embryo is implanted into the womb of a host animal who will, with some luck, carry the clone to term. Beginning with Dolly the sheep in 1996, sixteen different mammalian species have been cloned so far, but science is still far from even attempting to clone a human being.

The idea of cloning one's departed pet should perhaps give one pause. Isn't one's pet supposed to be irreplaceable, special, one of a kind? Well, as it turns out, that remains the case even if someone did clone their cat: only 99.8% of the animal's DNA is reproduced in the cloning process—the rest comes from the host egg. Given that the genetic difference between us and a chimpanzee amounts to less than 1%, the 0.2% genetic difference between a cat and its copycat could be significant. Also, the copycat would gestate in a different kitty womb, thus creating additional differences between it and the original. The surrogate mom's health and nutrition can affect the pattern of the clone's coat, despite the strong genetic disposition to look like the original. In addition, the environment in which the copycat would grow up would be different. So its personality could be very different as well.

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<sup>12</sup> For further reading on the science of cloning and its difficulties, look at Jose Cibelli, “A Decade of Cloning Mystique,” *Science Magazine*, May 18, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Howard, 30.

<sup>11</sup> Brian C. Howard, “What Do All Those Labels Mean?” *The Environmental Magazine*, November/December 2005, 37.

## Case 2 (Continued)

Adding it all up, the copycat and the original probably wouldn't be very much alike after all. And indeed, all the Web site of *Genetic Savings and Clone* promised was "resemblance," not identity. As one cloning scientist put it, "There's no such thing as resurrection. At least not in pets."<sup>13</sup> Add to this that the cloning process is fraught with technical difficulties: fewer than 10% of fertilized eggs implanted in a uterus result in live births. Many clones also die shortly after birth. The clones that live often have genetic abnormalities. Meanwhile, there are thousands and thousands of cats in animal shelters, waiting to go to a good home.

But although the moral of this story might be that there are better and more ethical ways to dispense with a superfluous \$32,000, there is another twist to animal cloning that is worth taking more seriously. With the steady decrease in biodiversity caused by our irreverent—sometimes downright ruthless—extension of our human habitat, some scientists have come to see animal cloning as the answer to preserving endangered species. In keeping with this sentiment, in 2003 the Audubon Center for Research of Endangered Species cloned a small African wildcat called *Ditteaux* (faux French for "ditto"). Thinking on a larger scale, Japanese scientists are working to resurrect the long-extinct woolly mammoth, so far without success. The San Diego gene bank already has frozen samples of over 450 different animal species. And one day, this "Frozen Zoo," as it is sometimes called, may be the last best hope for their survival.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. Formulate some moral value claims and prescriptive claims that you think are relevant to this case. Which of these do you think are most important? Which of these do you think would override other claims about this case?
2. Formulate some nonmoral normative claims that you think are relevant to this case. Do you think any of these override the moral claims? Why or why not? Which of the facts provided in this case (which descriptive claims) are most relevant to deciding whether pet cloning is moral?
3. Consider the differences between pet cloning and cloning an endangered species. What are some important descriptive and normative claims that apply to endangered species but not to pets? Do you think cloning an endangered species should be morally permissible? Is biodiversity a fundamental value that we need to promote?
4. One problem with trying to resurrect an extinct species is that we do not know what effects the resurrection would have on existing species. For example, think about trying to resurrect an extinct species of insect. What if that insect has no natural predator and is able to destroy other insects or crops? What problems do concerns like these raise for whether we should try to bring extinct species back to life?

<sup>13</sup>David Quammen, "Clone Your Troubles Away," *Harper's Magazine*, February 1, 2005. The facts in this case are drawn from this article.

## CHAPTER TWO



## Moral and Nonmoral Values

## I. THE ROLE OF VALUES

What is *really* important to you? What sorts of things do you live for, and what do you set your hopes upon? What guides your decisions, plans, and projects? When asked these kinds of questions, people give many different answers. Still, certain answers seem to surface again and again: friendship, love, family, faith, self-determination, life, health, loyalty, happiness.

These sorts of things are called values—and they are the foundations upon which we build our lives. We have, of course, encountered values already: they are the subject matter of *value claims*. In one way or another, any value claim refers to some value. Since we value what appears to us to be good and desirable, values are also often called *goods*—implying that they have genuine worth in themselves.

Furthermore, because we seek what we consider to be good, we commonly choose how to act in accordance with our values. This idea—that we usually act in keeping with our values—can be taken further. If something is genuinely *good*, then we presumably *ought* to act in ways that are consistent with our valuing that good. Thus, each genuine value supports—and thus can explain—one or more *prescriptions* for action.<sup>1</sup> For instance, if respect for the law is an important legal value, then people normally *ought* to act in keeping with what the law requires. If it violates the law to report false information on a government form, then Sandra has a *legal* responsibility, at least, to report the truth about José on that form. On the other hand, the value of life may call for Sandra to avoid actions that could lead to José being deported and possibly murdered in his home country. Yet again, the moral value of loyalty may oblige Sandra to protect José rather than put him at risk.

In these ways, each of the values relevant to Sandra's situation supports a corresponding prescriptive claim. These examples reveal a number of other interesting

<sup>1</sup>Acting "consistently with" one's valuing some good does not necessarily mean promoting or maximizing some sort of *consequence*. For instance, my act of showing respect toward another person is consistent with my valuing persons in themselves, but that respect is an aspect of the act itself, not something separable from it. Thus, no commitment to consequentialism is intended in what is being said here.



