

# Teaching Ethics through The Sage Train



## Nietzsche and Chesterton: The Unlikely Pair

Chesterton and Nietzsche don't seem to get on. Both were writers, thinkers and intellectuals. They lived at roughly the same period in history and probably read many of the same books. And yet in *The Sage Train* they are poles apart.

### *Suggested Exercises*

1. Throughout the book Chesterton and Nietzsche habitually disagree. See if you can summarise their different approaches to the following:

***Faith in man***

***Faith in God***

***Freedom***

***Immortality of the soul***

***The pursuit of pleasure as a worthwhile goal***

***What is virtuous***

2. "That wheeze you're making sounds more like a snake than a man" Chesterton says, as Nietzsche demonstrates his Dionysian wildness and tries to laugh. In real life Chesterton had once said 'Hope is the power of being cheerful in circumstances that we know to be desperate'. Dionysus was the Greek god of drunkenness and revelry – and Nietzsche revered the excess. Which approach to life least appeals to you and why?

3. Chesterton's virtues could be summarised as

***Generous***

***Open hearted***

***Conciliatory***

***Cheerful***

***Faithful***

Nietzsche's might be summarised as

***Thoughtful***

***Responsible***

***Honest***

***Brave***

***Kind despite appearances***

On the face of it which character's virtues do you prefer? Do your views change as the book progresses?

4. When the pair meet after the story of **Aquinas and Friar Luc**, Chesterton talks about Aquinas' 'sense of purpose'. How is the purpose or *telos* of a person related to Natural Moral Law?
5. Chesterton dismisses **Aristippus**, not because he's a puritan or because he disapproves of the sex but for another reason entirely. What is it?
6. Both Chesterton and Nietzsche are taken with Evangeline in **JS Mill's** tale. But Nietzsche accuses Mill of intellectual dishonesty. What is it about Mill's assessment of 'pleasure' that makes him say this?
7. Chesterton agrees with **Kant** that some things are just right or wrong – universally so because based on Reason. Nietzsche hotly disputes this claiming that **Kant's** 'noumenal world' is the slipping in of another metaphysical notion a) Was the idea of a metaphysical realm more acceptable to Plato or to Aristotle? b) What does Nietzsche think about the possibility of universal truths?
8. **Ayer's** use of the naturalistic fallacy on which to construct emotivism causes great delight to Nietzsche – whereas Chesterton's common sense prevents him from seeing it as linguistic nonsense. In your own words explain Moore's naturalistic fallacy. Do you think it matters for ethics?
9. Having seen **Hobbes**, Nietzsche accuses Chesterton of 'following a mad man' and faith based on fear. Divine Command Theory states that man must follow whatever God decrees. What are the drawbacks of such a theory?
10. Like Hobbes, **Spinoza** is a determinist believing that our actions are caused by hidden chains of events that we don't take into account. Why would Chesterton not be a determinist? Is Nietzsche more or less likely to consider himself one?
11. When **Nietzsche** helps the boy on the battlefield, he doesn't act out of fear of God or a sense of duty. Suggest other reasons why he might still wish to help. Now look at the reasons you've come up with. Can they ever be really free of God and/or duty?
12. **Nietzsche** finally joins the Sage Train whilst **Chesterton** continues on his journey. Suggest one person either living or dead whom you would next like him to meet and explain your choice to your class.

# Thomas Aquinas and the Friar: Natural Moral Law

## Aquinas and Friar Luc – the story

The Franciscan Friar Luc has just returned to his Priory in 13<sup>th</sup> century Paris. A wounded girl is brought to him; his birth sister – Tantou . The wounds are so horrific that Luc knows she will die. To take away her pain, he administers a fatal cocktail and she dies in relative ease. He is tormented by the experience and visits the scholar Aquinas.

There are several statements in the story that throw light on Aquinas' ideas.

- *'That's because you are a mystic'* Aquinas says to Luc when the latter is talking about the body being the charnel house for the soul. *'At heart, you want to dissolve yourself in the Infinite, whereas I see God as essentially Other'.*

This sentence epitomises the gulf between the emerging Aristotelian ideas and the Platonic one more familiar to Luc. The Otherness of God (although he wouldn't have phrased it like that) was important to Aquinas; the goal of life being the Beatific Vision where God is seen face to face. The Platonic idea was more monist in expression – and interestingly this gives rise to a tension in Christianity that is still present between the resurrection of the body and the immortality of the soul. For Luc - with his mystical sense of union with the Divine - there is an understanding that the 'real self' is something quite other to the body that houses it. The 'real self' is the soul – the shadowy thing that survives death and needs no body to express it, whereas for Aquinas the body and soul are one.

*'And I find that great pagan mind of his can still speak to us even today, telling us that we all have a final cause. A purpose, if you like, more unique and compelling than that given to any other of God's creations'*

Another cornerstone that Aquinas takes from Aristotle, is the idea of everything having a number of causes. Everything answers the question 'why?' So if we say "why is this lump of metal a statue?" we could identify four stages in its becoming. The **material** cause is its 'metal-ness', the **formal** cause is the sculptor's notion of what it is he/she wants it to become, the **efficient** cause is the way that change is effected (the process) and the **final** cause is the statue itself. Supremely teleological, working towards an end or telos, the human soul is no different and there are causes or stages en route to receiving its Prize – the Beatific Vision – or final sight of God.

- *'My brothers tell me you deny evil?'*  
*'I do not deny evil – that is a charge so paupered it turns dangerous.'*

When Aquinas was attending a Royal feast, he was surrounded by food and frivolity. Frequently silent, no one took much notice of the fact that he was quiet. Then – from nowhere – he issued a bellow; 'And that will finish the Manichees' . Bemused but tolerant, the king is recorded to have sent over a scribe to take down Aquinas' thought before the great man forgot it.

The Manichees were a heretical sect who thought that evil exists in the world because of an alternative force to God – an evil demiurge. Aquinas did not - and could not - believe this without being heretical himself. When Luc accuses him of ‘denying evil’, he is referring to Aquinas’ idea of the Simplicity of God. If God is the first cause then everything stems from him. If this were to include evil, it would undermine the Perfect Goodness of God. If a Devil exists (as per the Manichees) then the *omnipotence* of God is threatened. Aquinas’ solution is simple. Evil exists but it has its roots not in God, but in human freewill. Evil is what happens when a man follows the wrong path and mistakes God’s will, or just ignores it. Following from Adam’s Original Sin, all subsequent errors are manmade- a deliberate turning away from the tools of conscience and right reason that God has implanted in us. God is exonerated and the Devil kept in his box.

Aristotle’s works were on a number of books banned by the Church because they denied a personal God. Aquinas circumnavigated this ruling and did more than anyone to introduce Aristotle to Europe.

- *‘You must never do a wrong action even for a good consequence’.*

Aquinas taught that there are different types of sin. If a man is so drunk that he sleeps with another man’s wife by mistake, that is a material sin. It was wrong – but he didn’t know it was wrong, so is not too much to blame. If, on the other hand, he did know that the woman in the bed was not his wife, then he is definitely in the wrong – a formal sin. The intention of the act matters; as much as the act itself.

- *Luc’s administering of the fatal cocktail.*

This is a classic example of the doctrine of Double Effect. If you do something such as give a drug to take away pain where the intention is good, that remains a good act, even though it had unintended consequences. Foreseen but unintended consequences do not change the nature of the act – whether good or bad.

This is in sharp distinction to Situation Ethics and Utilitarianism.

Natural Law	Good Act + Bad Consequence = Right thing to do
	Bad Act + Good Consequence = Wrong thing to do
Situation Ethics	Loving Act + Bad Consequence = Wrong thing to do
	Loving Act + Good Consequence = Right thing to do
Utilitarianism	The act is measured by its outcome

This really goes to the heart of the differences between Natural Law and the ‘younger’ systems. Natural Law could be called teleological in that it starts out as seeking an end or goal

(purpose). But to get there it hardens into deontology. Acts are good or bad in so far as they serve the purpose of getting to the goal. Note the fundamental difference with the genuinely teleological Situation Ethics where a bad act is transformed into a good one if 'it were the most loving thing to do' and Bentham's Utilitarianism where there is no such thing as an intrinsically bad act. Even the most glorious outcome will not change a bad act into a good one for Natural Law and even if the consequences are dire; the good act will still remain good.

### ***Suggested Exercises***

- 1. What different loyalties are at play in the story ? Write down the names of the characters and draw lines indicating the connections between each. Colour code them in terms of which seem strongest to you.**
- 2. Is there anything that you would never do – and if not, why not?**
- 3. Imagine yourself in Luc's position. Do you think he did the right thing?**
- 4. If an action can have two consequences it is known as Double Effect. Is there any difference between foreseeing a result of your action and intending it? Cite another example where an action has two or more effects – only one of which is intended.**
- 5. Is Aquinas' perception of evil more in tune with the Augustinian or Irenaen theodicy?**
- 6. For Aquinas who has ultimate responsibility for evil – God or man?**
- 7. Aquinas suggested that the via negativa is the only correct way to talk about God. Explain this.**
- 8. Aquinas remarks to Luc that he must follow his conscience. Do you think a man can do evil if he genuinely follows his conscience?**
- 9. In Aquinas' hierarchy of laws, is conscience more aligned to manmade laws or natural law  
a) for him? b) in your opinion**
- 10. Is belief in Natural Law dependent on belief in God?**

## Aristippus of Cyrene: Hedonism

Pleasure is a very old prize and the Greeks revered it.

Courtesans – or haetaerae – were high class prostitutes respected for their culture as much as their sexual allure. They made good livings amongst the amatory Greeks; even though homosexual love between an older and younger man was considered more noble and dignified. When we meet Dianthe she has come to the tranquil setting that Epicurus cultivated in which to meet friends and philosophers. Essentially, Epicurus would have agreed with Aristippus that Hedone (pleasure) is indeed the goal we seek. But Epicurus introduces a note of caution – and importantly the first hints of measuring pleasure that were later so important to John Stuart Mill. Epicurus says that pleasure can be sated and then become painful. In the story, there is a brief appearance from Zeno the Stoic who wants to add a religious dimension by saying that we must accept the lot thrown to us by the gods. Only resignation to whatever happens will bring us peace and calm. His argument will be repeated through the ages; that by living virtuously we are automatically living happily. Happiness is derived from living well – a by-product rather than a goal.

### **Exercises**

- 1. This story is a good basis on which to explore the concepts of absolutism and relativism. Today we would categorise Aristippus' actions as being a gross form of abuse. What is abuse? What essential freedoms does he ignore in the way he acts?**
- 2. Is there such a thing as something that is timelessly right or wrong – if so what?**
- 3. If cultures change then don't the virtues that the culture admires also shift and move?**
- 4. Draw a timeline of the differing responses to homosexual love from the Greeks to the present time. What extent has religion played in desecrating homosexuality? Research the texts or teachings that corroborate this view and others that offer an alternative against them.**

## John Stuart Mill and Evangeline: Utilitarianism

Raised by a father who was a devotee of Bentham, Mill had a famously fearsome childhood but it left him intellectually strong. As a young and ardent utilitarian Mill sought 'the greatest happiness for the greatest number' and this philosophy had practical implications; he was in jail for a night for writing a birth control leaflet. But later, Mill modified his version of utilitarianism and his liberal views became more rounded during his long relationship with the married Harriet Taylor. By the time he wrote *'On Liberty'* shortly before Harriet's death, Mill could dismiss Bentham's earlier claims that all happiness is the same. 'It is not' argues Mill 'because some happiness – such as freedom of speech and the right of a person to hold his own views – counts for more than other fleeting pleasures.'

This idea of quality over quantity of happiness is what marks Mill's version of utilitarianism out from Bentham's theory. And nowhere is this sensed more keenly than in Mill's perception of Justice. In

*The Sage Train* there is scene in which Mill is talking about the situation in Jamaica. The Morant Bay uprising of October 1865 had led to harsh reprisals by Governor Eyre in which large numbers of people were executed or flogged; including pregnant women and children. Eyre was feted when he returned to England by conservatives such as Charles Dickens and Ruskin whilst Mill and other liberals demanded that he be tried for murder. Governor Eyre never stood trial.

When we meet Mill in *The Sage Train* he is living in Avignon close to the grave of his wife, with her daughter Helen Taylor who had had a promising acting career. A young English girl – Evangeline – is having acting lessons, but it's not long before she takes lessons of a very different kind from the prominent philosopher. Unbeknown to Evangeline her adored father has his own moral dilemma – should he reveal his adulterous liaison and harm his wife and child, or should he keep it secret.

**Exercises:**

- 1. In 'On Liberty' Mill argues against the tyranny of the majority and paints a strong case for individual liberty – so long as a person's actions harm no one then they should be allowed to pursue those actions without censure. Are there any actions that are currently crimes but that actually harm no one? What are they? Should they be crimes? Or is such a thing not possible and these actions always harm someone?**
- 2. In Utilitarian terms how might Arthur have defended his decision to keep his liaison secret? Is he being honest in this?**
- 3. Why does Mill disagree with Evangeline's mother over the Jamaica Issue?**
- 4. How does Mill think that women should be treated?**
- 5. Summarise Evangeline's argument when she stands up against Mill in the town hall.**
- 6. When Evangeline's mother meets Mill, she is uncharacteristically robust in her disagreement with his views. Given her own situation, what is she actually saying is wrong with utilitarianism as such?**
- 7. What is Mill's response?**
- 8. Does everything come down to a split second decision as in Arthur's decision when the boat capsized?**
- 9. In 'On Liberty' Mill says, "...if any opinion is compelled to silence, that opinion may, for aught we can certainly know, be true. To deny this is to assume our own infallibility. Secondly, though the silenced opinion be an error, it may, and very commonly does, contain a portion of truth; and since the general or prevailing opinion on any subject is rarely or never the whole truth, it is only by the collision of adverse opinions that the remainder of the truth has any chance of being supplied. "What relevance has this message when thinking about radicalisation and fundamentalism? Do you agree that no opinion should ever be silenced?"**
- 10. Although he would not have used the term, Mill is recognisable as a Weak Rule Utilitarian. Using examples from the story, explain what rules he would put in place that are in line with his version of utilitarianism.**

## Immanuel Kant and his servant: The Categorical Imperative

Immanuel Kant lived his entire life in the (then) Prussian town of Königsberg, very rarely venturing outside the city. He was served by the devoted Martin Lampe who stayed with his master for many years and knew Kant's unstoppable routine. Although Kant was more sociable than he is portrayed in *The Sage Train*, he had a huge appetite for work. Kant wanted to distance ethics from the authority of a God and rely instead on something demonstrable shared by all human beings; their reason. His starting point was the good will – an impulse that cannot be corrupted without changing itself. Courage – for example – can be corrupted; it will quickly become foolhardiness, still with elements of courage but diluted beyond itself. Good will has no danger of this. As soon as the will is motivated by greed or ambition it ceases to be 'good'. The good will is the starting point for morality.

Kant assumed three things - which man is free, the universe is fair, and that God exists. These three assumptions underlie his argument. All moral actions depend on choice – a forced action is not a choice and is neither right nor wrong – so, in order to do a good thing, a man must be genuinely free. Everyone knows that the good are very rarely rewarded, but Kant thought that the logic of the moral law was inherent in the structure of things and that ultimately the universe was fair and would right itself of any imbalance. Accordingly, good men must be rewarded in some kind of afterlife – and hence God must exist to establish that life. But all these things are assumptions and are not in themselves the moral law.

Kant argued that there is a difference between commands that are obeyed in order to establish something, and commands that have simply to be obeyed. If the shopkeeper lowers his prices – he does it to shift stock. If I am tempted to steal but do not because I fear the consequences – I would be following a hypothetical imperative similar to the shopkeeper. But if I don't steal because of adherence to some innate moral code, I am obeying the categorical imperative which I have a duty to follow; and that would be a genuinely good act. The only good action is one done from duty to the categorical imperative. And any action that would be right in all situations, treats all people as ends in themselves and that I would actually want to be a law in a real life 'kingdom' would be a good action.

In *The Sage Train*, the lonely old servant Josef has the fright of his life when a vagabond arrives at Kant's door. She's a woman who has lost most of her family and is now in danger of seeing her one remaining child hang for theft. But the magistrate is known to be corrupt and can be bribed. Josef approaches Kant to see what his Master would do and is left in no doubt as to how Kant would react. But will that be enough for the compassionate servant?

### **Exercises:**

- 1. Describe all the hypothetical imperatives at work in the story – in other words, what actions are done as part of a 'deal'.**
- 2. Why is Kant so cross with the Countess Scheiffenberg?**
- 3. Kant thought that human beings had value above all else because they confer value on everything else. Think of your favourite things – pets, possessions, relationships even. In**

*what sense do you give them their value? Or do things have intrinsic value apart from you?  
If you didn't exist would that thing retain its value?*

4. *Whilst giving the lecture, Kant says he wants to 'keep God out of it'. Why?*
5. *What adjectives would you use to describe Kant in the story and similarly, how would you describe Josef? Do you think the philosophy he is known for is in keeping with Kant as he is portrayed?*
6. *As a reward for his service Josef has saved some money which he is about to blow on Ada. What possible motives could he have for giving her the money? Is his action right or wrong a) for Kant b) for Ada and her child c) for himself d) as a universalizable action?*
7. *What does Kant think about consequences? Is it possible to make a decision without thinking of the consequences?*
8. *If Ada bribes the corrupt magistrate to save her child she is not doing a good act because the action could not be universally replicated –the very notion of justice would go out of the window if it could be so easily corrupted. What would utilitarianism say about her action and on what grounds would it say it?*
9. *What would you have done?*
10. *Compose the brief note that Josef might have left behind for his master. And then imagine Kant's response!*

## **A J Ayer and the Murder in Cambridge: Emotivism**

Towards the end of his life Alfred Jules Ayer had a near death experience after which he wrote *'My recent experiences have slightly weakened my conviction that my genuine death will be the end of me, though I continue to hope that it will'*. A caustic wit, brilliant mind and withering conversationalist; A J Ayer was right at the heart of the analytic philosophy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that concerned the likes of Wittgenstein and Bertrand Russell. Meta ethics differs from normative ethics in that the latter is concerned with how people should behave in real life – and try to suggest systems and their rationale. Meta ethics gives no advice as to actual behaviour, but is concerned with the language of ethics – what normative statements think they are doing. So when someone like Mill says *'There is something in pleasure which is good. Therefore certain pleasures are legitimate as goals'* ( a normative statement), Meta Ethics would question the language that is used. Emotivism would assert that such language is meaningless.

Emotivism itself derived from the Intuitionism of GE Moore that in turn built on the work of Hume. Moore was concerned with the naturalistic fallacy – arguing that statements that appear to say what someone *should do* in the same breath as what *something is* are linguistically false. *'You can't get an ought from an is'* asserts Moore, because the statement, *'Honesty is good'* is different *in*

*kind* to the statement 'You should be honest'. 'Honesty is good' is not like saying 'The grass is green' which is based on our sense experience. Neither is it like saying 'Water is H<sub>2</sub>O' which is a logical definition – it would be a tautology to ask the closed question 'Is H<sub>2</sub>O water?' But, asserts Moore, this is precisely the kind of tight definition that would be needed if we were to assert that 'good is pleasure, or duty or whatever' in the way that normative ethicists assume we can. Instead he insisted that moral statements derive from hunch or intuition – meaningful and therefore valid even though they are not like factual assertions. Emotivism went one step further and denied that they were meaningful, hence denying their validity.

Ayer was an Oxford man but in *The Sage Train* he is visiting Cambridge and enjoying a particularly difficult dinner where a drunken don is at loggerheads with a visiting academic from the States. Little do the diners know that 'Ohio' aka Mini Ogilvy is not what she appears to be. She is far more interested in Ayer's assertions about meaningless moral statements than she is comfortable to reveal.

**Exercises:**

1. ***This story had to be pruned before it was deemed acceptable to a student readership. Is including sexual content – and Delroy's liaisons themselves – merely a question of taste or is there something more basic about how we should behave and expect others to behave?***
2. ***If so, are moral statements different to any other kind of statement?***
3. ***Align the right movement with the right description***

<b><i>Naturalism</i></b>	<b><i>Moral statements are not verifiable and are therefore meaningless</i></b>
<b><i>Intuitionism</i></b>	<b><i>Moral statements are not verifiable but do have meaning</i></b>
<b><i>Emotivism</i></b>	<b><i>Although not meaningful, they do have a function to perform</i></b>
<b><i>Prescriptivism</i></b>	<b><i>Moral statements are both verifiable and meaningful</i></b>
4. ***If we truly believe moral statements to be meaningless would we all turn out like Mini Ogilvy? If not, why not?***
5. ***Is it possible for something to be linguistically meaningless but meaningful to us nevertheless?***
6. ***AJ Ayer was trying to shine the light on what we do when we use the language of morality. Think about a recent conversation you've overheard in which people say – with gusto – 'they should do so and so....' and really believe it. Prescriptivism argued that although the language of morality is 'meaningless' it nevertheless springs from deeply held moral convictions. Is one man's moral conviction as valid as another's, even if that other is a terrorist? How do we judge between them?***
7. ***What part does reason have to play in moral discourse? When you use the word 'reason' which great philosopher – who you've recently met in *The Sage Train* – immediately comes to mind.***
8. ***Would emotivism be described as deontological, teleological or neither? If neither, why not?***
9. ***What stops you from killing someone who disappoints you?***
10. ***Is it meaningless for Blue the dog to talk in the story? If not, why not? See if you can extrapolate from this to criticise emotivism.***

## Thomas Hobbes and the Wiltshire lad: Social Contract theory

Hobbes – who was born when Elizabeth I was still on the throne and who lived through the turbulence of the English Civil War – was a landmark philosopher. In an age where the political and religious certainties were called into question, he sought to get to the heart of Governance. Who is in a position to protect the rights of others? We only have to imagine what life was like (Hobbes fled London during the Commonwealth, only to return later when his book Leviathan had angered the Royalists) to understand the intense atmosphere that led him to look at the nature of Authority – it was literally changing as he looked.

Hobbes' view of human nature was deterministic; he sees man as responding to desires and aversions – pushes and pulls over which he has little control. It is not surprising then, that men need to be governed. The deep sense of dread when a person thinks about his mortality means that man will stop at little to ensure his continued existence. Left unchecked, men would indeed live lives that are 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'. So... man surrenders some of his freedom to Authority, on the understanding that Authority protects his life and makes it a little less nasty. Authority itself is beyond the Law. Hobbes – who had tutored King Charles II when in exile in France – was an interesting mix of personal timidity and political boldness. He burnt all the papers that he thought would be incriminate him in a charge of heresy (Leviathan was deemed 'atheistic') but was not afraid to write that book itself. When we meet him in *The Sage Train*, he is an old man (he actually lived into his 90s) living in Fetter Lane, London and approached by John Aubrey – another Wiltshire man – who wants to include him in *Brief Lives*. Hobbes, thinking himself the victim of a crime – takes his companion to the law courts where they witness a trial in session. It is clear to everyone that it is something of a farce – the woman is tried on a spurious charge. But Hobbes' reaction is interesting – that Authority – in this case the Law – appears beyond reproach. Does it matter more that Authority exists than that it might sometimes make bad calls?

### **Exercises:**

- 1. *The story is set in a coffee house, after the Restoration of the Monarchy in an age of hot debate and an England relaxing after the puritanical rigours of Cromwell's Republic. What behaviour might be expected in that kind of environment?***
- 2. *Saddam Hussein was toppled from power in Iraq by the West, Colonel Gaddafi in Libya was removed by Libyan dissidents – which action would Hobbes have agreed with and why? Is it right to keep strong but unscrupulous men in power?***
- 3. *Hobbes believed that the people had a right to overthrow Authority when the latter was no longer serving its purpose and protecting them but that - while in power - the Authority was itself above the law. What dangers/advantages could you see in this arrangement?***
- 4. *Why are you reading these exercises? Is every action the result of another, prior event or is there genuine free choice?***
- 5. *Many have said that Hobbes had a pessimistic view of human nature and allowed little room for empathy to hold us in check. In your view is man's 'default position' as an aggressor as dangerous as Hobbes appears to think?***

6. *In the story the woman in the law courts is essentially a victim of gossip – one person's word against another. The Magistrate in this case panders to the mob in condemning her. Aubrey is disgusted. Hobbes too – although his views are more expedient. On what is the Law based if it's not the majority's view?*
7. *Of the Philosophers in The Sage Train, who would have been most appalled by the law court scene – on what grounds would they have condemned what happened there?*
8. *Could we live without government?*

## **Benedict Spinoza and Green Moses: the misuse of God**

Excommunicated from the Jewish community, Spinoza's crime was to challenge the old orthodoxies of his faith. His mathematical mind – unhappy with the contradictions and distortions of the God as portrayed in the Torah – set about constructing a geometrical framework on which to explore the idea of Essence. Spinoza's writings are dense and of necessity simplified in *The Sage Train* where his starting point is depicted as the Ontological Argument – a being which exists in reality is greater than that which exists in the mind alone, hence the greatest conceivable being must exist in reality, therefore God exists. But if God exists as infinite being, then he cannot react. There is nothing outside of himself to react to and everything is interdependent: – man, man's thoughts, the universe, evil, and God. For Spinoza, apparent separations and dualism are illusory; everything rests in the Reality that is God. Thought and extension arise from the essence that is God and there is no possibility of contradiction. Everything is part of the Infinite Whole.

Man thinks himself free because he is unaware of the forces to which he reacts. He does not have the infinite nature of God – or rather he does, but is unaware that he does. So the choices he thinks he makes were always going to be made – there is nothing outside what *is* in all its infinite possibility and this can give him peace of mind if he accepts that there is no God who can respond to appeal or be influenced by prayer. Evil is subsumed in the Reality of what is. It is no one's fault – neither man nor his God's and hence the problem of evil dissolves. Seen through the eyes of eternity 'Sub specie aeternitatis' there is nothing that man cannot bear.

Like Hobbes, Spinoza was a determinist but had less regard for Authority – either through Church or State thinking that laws were put in place by men to 'subdue and terrify other men'. The character of Green Moses, himself on the edge of society, was also not overly bothered by laws.

### **Exercises:**

1. *Spinoza is often described as a 'pantheist'. What is a pantheist?*
2. *The Ontological Argument attempts to arrive at a proof that God exists by the use simply of Reason. It argues from a premise rather than from experience of the real world. Is it a) an inductive or deductive argument b) a priori or a posteriori c) analytic or synthetic?*
3. *What would Spinoza say about the problem of evil?*
4. *Do you think that 'Seen through the eyes of eternity' there is nothing that man cannot bear? What is the problem with that?*
5. *Spinoza rejected the dualism of Descartes. What is meant by dualism?*

6. *In Monism everything is part of the Whole. From a monist perception what might happen to a person after death?*
7. *Would Spinoza's calm and solitary life have suited you? If not, on what do you rely to give you the life you want?*
8. *Spinoza's 'God or Nature' (Deus sive Natura) was different to the theists normal perception of God because he denies It (God) has consciousness or personality. It is not possible to conduct a 'relationship' with this God. How might a theist answer from a Jewish, Christian or Muslim perspective?*

## **Aristotle and Whale: Living with Virtue**

Aristotle had entered Plato's Academy whilst still a young man and had been deeply influenced by Plato. He disagreed with his teacher on some fundamental points, preferring to look to the world for his answers rather than some metaphysical realm like Plato's Forms. Aristotle assumed that the purpose of a human life was happiness – Eudaimonia – which is best translated as 'wellbeing'. This isn't an ecstatic joy but a feeling of contentment, aligned to living well. Aristotle proposed that the happy man is the virtuous man. Someone who is so well trained in the art of living that he habitually does the right thing. But it's important to realise that for Aristotle there is no real sense of a good or bad *individual* – only the good or bad act. And it is only good or bad in so far as it falls midway between vices. A virtue is something that holds its own between the vices of excess and deficiency – so courage is not courage if it is either foolhardy or cowardly. The theory of Virtue Ethics was explored by Philippa Foot, Elizabeth Anscombe and Alisdair MacIntyre in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In *The Sage Train* David is paralysed by multiple sclerosis but is presented as a brave man, getting on with his life under difficult circumstances and translating a forgotten Greek text. He is close to his father Paul – who, elderly now, is confused in his mind and thinks that David's illness are battle scars. Paul is alienated from his other son who has done nothing wrong, and to whom David remains close. As David translates the words of Aristotle's slave, it becomes clear to him what a good life might mean.

### **Exercises:**

1. *Aristotle famously put forward 12 virtues which are the 'mean' between the vices of excess and deficiency. What would the twin vices be for a) Courage b) Modesty c) Generosity*
2. *Aristotle has sometimes been criticised as being a middle aged sort of thinker – of no use to the hero or the saint. Think what characteristics either of those kinds of people might need – would they fit in with Virtue Ethics?*
3. *Why do you think Virtue ethics has had a resurgence? How far do you think this is related to multiculturalism, atheism and the complexities of day to day life?*
4. *Would Jesus or the Buddha have been a virtue ethicist? If not, why not?*
5. *Aristotle had a very strong regard for the polis – city state/community. His was a social ethic – you acted virtuously in relation to others. Is a virtuous action possible that does not relate others? Or is ethics essentially to do with relationships?*

6. *What do you consider the purpose of your life to be?*
7. *Thinking back to the story of Aquinas – why has Virtue ethics been called the flip side of Natural Law?*
8. *In The Sage Train, Anna has not divorced David. They are still married but she has a boyfriend. Which - in your opinion – is worse; divorce or infidelity?*
9. *If animals could communicate what do you think they might say? Construct a brief conversation between yourself and an animal of your choice.*
10. *David was acting rashly in blowing his money on the trip to South America but was he right to do so. Is that in keeping with Virtue Ethics – and if so, why?*

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**Please use these teaching notes in conjunction with *The Sage Train*.**