

Moral Diversity: Asset or Liability for Liberty?

A DEBATE BETWEEN CRAIG BIDDLE AND MAX BORDERS

This debate was held at the “Liberty, Free Markets, and Moral Character” conference, cosponsored by the Clemson Institute for the Study of Capitalism and the Foundation for Economic Education, at Clemson University on May 25, 2014.

Moderator C. Bradley Thompson: The gladiators are now in the cage. Let the friendly fight begin. [Laughter from the audience.]

In many ways, the debate that’s going to take place, I think, is representative of what both the Clemson Institute for the Study of Capitalism and the Foundation for Economic Education stand for. We’re trying to expose you to ideas, and the big ideas are not simply those of capitalism versus socialism, right versus left. Within the broader liberty movement, there is a diversity of views on a whole range of issues. Just within the libertarian movement, there are all kinds of public debates. Within the Objectivist movement, there are all kinds of debates. And between libertarians and Objectivists, there are some very important, fundamental differences.

What we’d like to do today is flesh out one of the big differences between libertarians and Objectivists. I don’t think I need to introduce our two combatants today: Max Borders, from FEE, and editor of *The Freeman*; and Craig Biddle, editor of *The Objective Standard*. So we have the editors of two major liberty-oriented publications.

Craig Biddle is editor of *The Objective Standard* and author of *Loving Life: The Morality of Self-Interest and the Facts that Support It* and of the forthcoming *Thinking in Principles: The Science of Selfishness*. Max Borders is editor of *The Freeman*, director of content for The Foundation for Economic Education (FEE), and author of *Superwealth: Why We Should Stop Worrying about the Gap between Rich and Poor*.

I know Max and Craig have a lot that they agree on, and we're going to find out what they disagree about. And we're going to conduct this, of course, not as a cage fight, but as a civil discourse among friends.

Here's the format: Craig and Max will each be given fifteen minutes for opening remarks, then they will each get five minutes to either respond or make follow-up comments, and then they'll get another five minutes each to respond or make further comments. After that, we're going to open up the floor to you for questions. So we're going to have at least forty minutes for Q&A from the floor.

I don't have a coin, so to see who goes first, how about rock, scissors, paper? Gentlemen, go. . . . Craig, you're first.

Borders: Well, doesn't he get to choose whether he goes first? [Laughter from the audience.]

Biddle: I'll go first, but I don't think it's a big deal either way.

First of all, let me thank everyone who has made all of this possible. I'm delighted, both with this conference and with the opportunity to debate Max, who I've just recently met and have really come to like. We're buddies—even though we're about to tear into each other.

Max and I spoke a few weeks ago about the purpose of this debate and how we wanted to arrange it. We agreed at the time that the purpose is not for one of us to come out here and “win” or beat the other guy. The purpose of this debate is to put important ideas on the table so that we can all think more clearly and more deeply about how to defend liberty. So although we have very different positions on the question at hand, the goal here is not so much for somebody to come out triumphant but for you guys to hear opposing ideas so that you can think really clearly about this—and for us to do so too. I learn every time I engage in such discussions.

So that's our purpose here, and I know I speak for Max as well on this point.

Now, the essence of my argument, as I think you've probably already surmised to some extent, given my lectures, is that liberty and individual rights depend on a specific moral and philosophic foundation—that if you want to defend your freedom to act on your judgment, you need to be able to defend the idea that it is *moral* for you to act on your judgment—that you have a moral *right* to act on your judgment, to keep and use the product of your effort, and to live your life as you see fit.

As the Founders put it, you have the right to life—to take the actions you need to in order to live; the right to liberty—to act on your judgment, free from coercion; the right to property—to keep the product of your effort (which they didn't include in the Declaration but discussed in the Federalist Papers and

elsewhere); and to the pursuit of happiness—which means, to be *self-interested*, to go after the values and goals of your choosing.

How can we defend those rights if it's not *right* to do those things—if it's not *morally* right to do those things?

My argument is that the very principle of rights, the idea that you should be free to act on your judgment for your own purposes, which incorporates all of those specific rights, is actually an extension of a deeper principle: the principle of egoism.

Why *should* you be free to act on your judgment and for your own purposes? Because it's morally *right* for you to act on your own judgment and for your own purposes. That's a deeper point that gives rise to the principle of individual rights.

The principle of individual rights is, as a matter of fact, the principle of egoism raised to a higher level in the philosophic hierarchy. Egoism says you should act on your own judgment and you are the proper beneficiary of your own actions. That's the essence of egoism. And it says that *everyone* should do that—that we should all go after the things that make our life awesome, that we should gain these things by means of justice and rationality and the other virtues that are incorporated in this idea, and that we should respect the right of others to do the same.

The rights aspect is inherent in egoism, because if we *should* act on our judgment, we *need to be free* to do so—which means we need a principle that says we can protect that freedom.

The idea that you should act to make your life great and that you should be the beneficiary of your moral actions gives rise to the idea that we need a principle to protect your ability to do that. That's what the principle of rights is.

What I'm getting at here is that there is, in my view, a *single* moral foundation. It has multiple principles *in* it—so if you want to speak of a “diversity” of principles, there's more than one principle *in* egoism. There are lots of principles involved in it. For example, the principle that reason is our means of survival, the principle that justice is essential to good personal relationships and trade, and the like. There are all sorts of principles involved there. But it's a single moral code, and it stands in stark contrast to other moral codes. It stands in contrast to moral codes that, instead of *undergirding* freedom and rights, the way egoism does, *undermine* freedom and rights. If it is true that a moral code or aspects of a moral code undermine the principle of rights, and thus liberty, then clearly that moral code is to that extent and in that respect contrary to freedom and liberty and rights.

I think we can all agree that if you try to build a twelve-story building, and you make the second story out of cotton candy, it's not going to stand. Not going to happen. Likewise, we can all agree that if you have a tree and you sever it from

its roots, the tree is going to die. There's a reason certain things need foundations, a fully connected, integrated foundation, and liberty is one of those things. If you cannot morally defend liberty, then you don't really have a case for liberty.

So the question is: What are the competing moral codes that we're talking about? What are the alternatives? If not egoism, what are we going to defend liberty with?

Let me preface where I'm going next with this: We are here to discuss ideas. We need to have thick skins. We need to be willing to look into ideas, deep ideas, even when they rub us the wrong way given our worldviews and things we have believed in for a long time or were raised to believe in. So I'm going to talk about some ideas here that may to some of you be a little offensive. But I have to go there because if we want to defend liberty, we have to be willing to talk about such ideas.

Some of the alternatives to egoism are *altruism*, the idea that acting morally consists in self-sacrificially serving others. The philosopher who coined the term "altruism," August Comte, coined it because "alter" means "other"—so "altruism" literally means "other-ism"—and Comte's direct point was that we must "live for others." Comte was very clear in saying that this moral code is incompatible with the principle of rights. He said, in his own words, that the principle of rights "must be completely put away" if altruism is to be upheld. The principle of rights "must be *completely* put away."

The idea there is that if you have a moral duty to serve other people, then you can't very well have a right *not* to do so. A duty is an unchosen obligation—it's something you have to do. So if you're not going to do it voluntarily, the State has to be able to come in, or someone has to be able to come in, and *make* you do it. This is, in fact, how altruism has bred and given rise to statism across the globe for eons.

Another competing moral code is *utilitarianism*. This is a popular moral code among certain libertarians. The principle of utilitarianism is the idea that we must always act for the greatest good for the greatest number—or the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Well, as John Stuart Mill, one of the fathers of this idea, made very clear, that "happiness" is not your personal happiness; it's the greatest happiness of all, and if that doesn't make *you* happy, that's okay because it makes everyone else happy. Utilitarianism is so antithetical to individual rights that another utilitarian philosopher, Jeremy Bentham, said that the concept of rights is "nonsense upon stilts." The concept of an inalienable right to act on your own judgment and for your own sake is nonsense upon stilts. This is from the mouths of the philosophers who came up with these ideas.

Another morality that allegedly can somehow be used to uphold liberty is *egalitarianism*, which, as you probably know, is the moral code that the bleeding-heart libertarians are now embracing as a means of upholding liberty somehow.

With all due respect, this is absurd on its face. John Rawls, the father of egalitarianism, is so explicitly against rights that he says that, not only do you *not* have rights to the means of production, you can't even have a right to freedom of speech. Again, I'm just the messenger on these points; I'm not making this stuff up—and if you want the quotes, read my essay “Libertarianism vs. Radical Capitalism.”

Then, of course, there are various *religions*. Religion is a kind of philosophy that, in many respects, has tried to deliver certain kinds of spiritual values that people actually need. But the problem with the major religions, particularly Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, is that, whatever elements of truth you can find in them—and I quote Jesus sometimes, to the effect, “what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his soul?”—scripture is largely contrary to rights.

In the Koran it says explicitly that unbelievers are to be killed. What comes of freedom of conscience if that's the moral code we are going to try to use for upholding liberty? And it says that *repeatedly*. Christianity and Judaism, unfortunately, are in the same category. Read the Old Testament. Homosexuals are to be killed. Children who speak back to their parents are to be killed. Slavery is condoned. Is this a moral code we can use to uphold liberty? It's absurd on its face. If you look at the ideas, you just can't do it. It's a logical contradiction.

So we have a choice to make in the liberty movement: Do we want to ground rights and liberty in observational reality, in the factual requirements of human life—and are we willing to do that, even if it's controversial? Are we willing to be like the Founding Fathers and say, “If this be treason, make the most of it”—or not?

We might be able to meander toward liberty for a while without going to fundamentals, but if we want liberty sooner rather than later, and if we want *real* liberty, we need to undergird that goal with the actual, factual, demonstrably true moral code that supports it. We have this now, thanks to Ayn Rand—and Aristotle, whose shoulders she stood on. It was a long time getting here, but we now have it.

The Founders did a lot with the idea of rights being “natural” or “God-given,” and thank goodness they did. But they were thinking and acting *before* the positivists and utilitarians and “progressives” came along with arguments that annihilated the idea that rights could be “natural” (we know not how) or come from “God.” Now we have Bentham saying rights are “nonsense upon stilts,” and Alasdair MacIntyre saying that rights are “one with witches and unicorns,” and countless others mocking the ideas of rights.

They can mock them if we can't prove them. But if we can prove them, their mockery becomes a mockery of itself. Let's make that happen.

Borders: Thank you. I just want to say that I totally agree with the beginning of what you said in that we're not in an intellectual cage match to top one another but to get you guys thinking as deeply as possible about these issues so that you test your premises in the crucible of critical thinking. That's really our goal.

Now, I'm going to take perhaps a different tack. Obviously, I disagree with much of what Craig said, but I actually agree with quite a bit of what he said. And the fact of my agreement with what he said, or the degree to which I agree with him, *doesn't matter*—except in the following sense. This is why we need a pluralistic view of upholding the ideas of liberty.

There are two forces in this world that ultimately matter, and no others: Power, of one person to dominate or coerce another—and persuasion, my ability to get you to change your behavior or your opinions through some sort of discourse.

That is it, folks. If we take that as a rigorous algorithm for life, we have to look at this in different ways.

I might agree fundamentally with the entire argument that Craig makes about satisfying according to man's nature certain requirements of life, and so on. I happen to have some quibbles with that line of thinking, which I'll go into in a minute, but the big picture here is that it doesn't matter how much I agree; it's that I have to be able to persuade others to agree with me about some concept of freedom.

The way I do that, I'm submitting to you today, is to become conversant in multiple moral languages. What Craig wants to argue is that there is only *one*, that the tablets of truth are not handed down by God, because Objectivism is an atheistic enterprise, but that there is this independent truth out there for us to act on. And even if that were true, even if—I know this sounds really “meta”—but even if it were really true that there's some mind-independent moral truth out there that it's up to us to apprehend, it doesn't matter, because all that matters is this algorithm of power and persuasion.

So it is important for us, from the standpoint of keeping and having freedom, to become conversant in multiple moral languages because—you know what folks?—it doesn't matter whether Craig or I hold the same axiom or starting point. Other people have *other* starting points—other moral languages—and they will use them and hold them very dear.

In fact, some of those moral languages come from deep within their evolutionary programming, and to think that you're going to point to some mind-independent truth and tell them, “Look, there it is; I've proven it!” is simply chimerical, from my perspective.

In fact, people do come from very different starting points. Just look at the folks in this room. We all agree about liberty to some degree, and yet we come from radically different starting points. And, still, we come together here today in solidarity—and that, folks, is where the rubber hits the road. It’s the solidarity we can have around what I would call a “super-value”: political freedom. Otherwise, if we don’t band together for the sake of freedom, we will be weaker and we will be overwhelmed by powerful people who hold alternative views.

Now, this idea of a single foundation I would say is troubling for the following reasons: Given Craig’s single line of thinking, his column as it were—I don’t think it’s foundational in the sense of being a nice, broad base; I think it’s a column, a spindly one at that—and if we could chip away at that column and break it, then whatever it’s purporting to support will collapse.

So, for example, I happen to agree in solidarity with you about the ideas of life, liberty, property, and the pursuit of happiness. But I think these are epiphenomena, and I think that we can rally around them because we have an intersubjective agreement about our morality. But they are not an extension of the single principle that is egoism. Let me give you some reasons why.

First, there is the problem, and I hate to use this against you, because I really like the example—Brad’s [i.e., Brad Thompson’s] example of the Ring of Gyges [an example Dr. Thompson used in a lecture at this conference]. The Ring of Gyges suggests to us that if people are truly egoistic, and if there’s no chance that they are going to be found out, they will work in their own self-interest, to their own personal flourishing, against other people and violate the rights of other people. If they can put on the ring, metaphorically speaking, and steal from others and not be found out—if they can take something that is, maybe, one of the fundamental requirements of their own lives to meet some basic need, some Maslovian need—they will do it.

So I think there is a problem with egoism strictly speaking, and I think that Objectivists will try to do a dance to show why the Ring of Gyges example isn’t really true. Perhaps they’ll say it’s about developing certain kinds of habits or repeated interactions that develop a reputation. I don’t know. [Turning to Craig:] I’m curious to see how you’d respond to that. But a thoroughgoing egoism devoted to benefiting oneself depends on other, ancillary considerations, and it leads people to be in it for themselves, violating others’ rights for their own purposes, as in the Ring of Gyges example.

This is not contrary to man’s nature. Throughout history, we’ve seen ample evidence of men actually doing this consistently, and, in fact, if you read the work of Steven Pinker, it’s only recently that we’ve begun to do this less and less.

Now is this because we've discovered some independent moral truth that shines forth like a beacon of reason? Maybe. But I would submit to you that it's not this process of discovery that's causing that but other sorts of processes that are evolutionary and market-driven and so on. It's happening for some cultural reasons, such as having a notion of rights, but there are other reasons as well. It's not about this mass discovery of Ayn Rand's egoism.

Second, altruism gets a bad rap, and here's why: Altruism as such, as a personal value, and as distinct from political altruism—where you have duties that are enforceable and if you don't give me your money for the sake of my causes, then I'm going to throw you in jail—is good.

I'm talking about the kind of altruism where parents dive in front of cars to push their kids out of the way. I'm talking about the altruism where people in the clan group evolved—it's part of man's or humankind's actual nature to be giving or to have sharing instincts. We build moralistic language on top of this.

Consider the algorithm that allowed us to survive on the African Steppe during the Paleolithic period. If I saw someone with more, I felt envious; if I saw someone with less, I felt guilty; if I saw one person with more in the clan group and someone had less, I might feel indignation.

For them to have evolved that sensibility, that Stone Age trinity, that basic value set, actually brought a lot of advantage to the clan group because they had to cooperate in conditions of extreme scarcity—you couldn't put the kill in the fridge, and next time you might not bring home the kill. Now, you might call that, in some abstract sense, the idea that everybody is ultimately self-interested, and it's a form of slow trade. You can bend the language if you want to. But the idea here is that people have altruistic instincts and, for many, that is an axiomatic starting point.

It's not to say that it is a moral law; it's simply to say that we have to acknowledge that it exists in people, and we have to develop moral languages toward freedom that accommodate for the fact that people think altruistically. We have caring, sharing people in this world. We can't simply say, "Sorry that you're a caring, sharing person as part of your neurological programming—look at Ayn Rand's moral law of egoism." We're not going to win that way. We're not going to develop moral solidarity around the ideas of freedom if we do that.

This goes into egalitarianism. An egalitarian/altruistic moral sensibility in a clan group was absolutely vital to survival of the clan. Now we might argue some sort of paradox of egoism or altruism, that it was in their self-interest to be that way, to be clannish, to be sharing. And I would submit to you that in this day and age, we are *saddled* as human beings with the baggage of our clan-group instincts

in a modern society that flourishes more due to exchange behavior than due to altruistic instincts. But they both exist in people to varying degrees.

We are not, as Ayn Rand preaches, “blank slates.” That is simply false. We’re evolved creatures with all sorts of predispositions and predilections. We might share a lot more overlap in this room than people who are occupying Wall Street or who are in Congress, but we are different, one to the next, and that’s why it’s vital that we learn to speak in different kinds of moral languages in order to have more solidarity around the ideas of freedom.

I think when Bentham was saying rights are “nonsense upon stilts,” he was speaking from a metaphysical perspective—and, here, I agree with Bentham. There ain’t no such thing. Rights don’t grow on trees. They are socially constructed reality just like if I pulled out a dollar bill—which I can’t because I already spent it in the drink machine. I can hold up that dollar, and if I give it to you, we all agree in some sense that this dollar has value—intersubjectively we can agree to that.

You know, we had an agreement with Esso [a local restaurant where conferees met for dinner and drinks] that these drink tokens have value. But if I took that token over next door to some other bar, they wouldn’t have taken it. We had a socially constructed reality there. That’s a very different thing from a metaphysical reality that Ayn Rand refers to, so in that sense I agree with Bentham.

Now the language of Rawls is, for example, a language that many libertarians are embracing. I do to some extent—but only from a pragmatic perspective, in that I think the idea that the existence of inequality tends to work to the benefit of the least advantaged in society resonates with a lot of people.

For many people, that is a very powerful premise if you can show it—and I think we can. In fact, unequivocally we already have—Anne showed it earlier. [Dr. Anne Bradley had presented a Christian perspective of natural rights earlier in the conference.] For people with a Rawlsian disposition, showing them that economic freedom and personal freedom yield this benefit to the least advantaged makes their moral instincts start to tick—and then you bring them closer to liberty.

As for utilitarianism, yes, the greatest good for the greatest number, the idea of hedonic calculus, is ridiculous. I think Bentham and Mill were both wrong on that. But there is a sense in which we have to speak the moral language of the many and appeal to the benefit of all. I mean, there is a profound two-step if you are always an egoist, in every case an egoist; it becomes very difficult to make a two-step outside of that into any kind of language involving other people. So we have to talk about mutual benefit and mutual gain in these situations, and we have to talk about this benefiting people on net.

In fact, economics writ large is dependent in some sense on an ethics of consequentialism—on the idea that some policy *x* yields good consequences. And this kind of moral language resonates with people. We can't be prepared to throw the baby out with the bathwater because Ayn Rand said there's a single standard of the good and it's egoism.

As to that idea that we're God's special creatures, I happen to be an atheist along with Craig, and I disagree with that idea. But for a lot of people who are religiously inclined, the idea that we are God's special creatures is what gets them going. Basically, we've got to bring people into the fold of liberty, just like we want to bring you guys into this room to discuss these ideas. We have to become more and more conversant in these ways of interacting with other people; we can't depend on a singular axiom—because that axiom could be undermined.

Moderator: Five minutes to Craig.

Biddle: Like Max said about me, there's much in what he says that I agree with and much that I disagree with.

I certainly agree with him that power and persuasion matter and that, in a sense, they are *the* two things that matter. But are we going to persuade better if we can point to the facts that undergird liberty, or if we can't? If persuasion is important, shouldn't we have the best argument possible? Shouldn't we have the best, most rational, most observation-based argument possible? So I agree with him on that point, but I think it supports my side, not his.

Regarding the fact that people have multiple starting points, I don't think that objectivity eliminates the possibility of handling this effectively or even establishing solidarity. We are all here, we have different starting points, and we're having this conversation. My view that there's such a thing as objectivity, and the fact that there is such a thing as objectivity, doesn't mean that you guys won't come here and listen to what I have to say and see whether that's maybe the best way to start arguing. In fact, the proof is right here that we can have both solidarity and objectivity. So that goes to my side as well.

As for the Ring of Gyges, I love that that was brought up because it's interesting to observe that there are two ways that people will argue against egoism and Rand's philosophy in general. Of the two ways, one is dishonest and one is honest—and I'm delighted to see that Max is doing the honest one.

The dishonest way that many people argue against Rand is to present ideas that she didn't advocate, say they're her ideas, and then attack them. In other

words, they build a straw man and then they attack that. This is what the left does constantly with Rand's ideas.

Another way that people try to test Rand's ideas, and I think this is what Max is doing, is by using some kind of fantasy scenario and asking how her ideas hold up to it. Okay, we've got a Ring of Gyges that makes you invisible, and we're going to use that to see what an egoist would do. But why use a fantasy construction to test Rand's ideas? Let's use reality constructions to test them.

There is no guy who can go invisible and has no chance of getting caught, just like there's no such thing as a guy who has no spiritual needs so he can just go out and hack people up and rape and steal and just feel great about it all the time. Again, Bernie Madoff, who has been pointed out multiple times here [at the conference], was a miserable man *before* he was caught and thrown in jail. He's still miserable, but less so in jail. Why? Because psychologically and spiritually he was eating himself alive by being the wicked man that he was.

It's not the case that human beings don't have natures. Max mentioned that Rand says that we're a blank slate. She doesn't mean we don't have natures; she means we're not born with ideas in our heads. That's all she means by blank slate. We *do* have a nature. We have specific needs, and those needs give rise to a specific morality. There are certain ways we need to act if we want to live and prosper, and certain ways of acting that will mess us up. And because we have those factual needs, we also need a means of protecting our ability to act accordingly. That's what rights are.

It's not that there's some morality *out there*—that's the fallacy of intrinsicism (which I'll discuss in my talk later today). It's that there are factual requirements of human life. As Ian Scoble pointed out the other day, if you don't get enough folic acid and protein you'll die. There are factual requirements of human life. That's just the way the world is, and Rand's ideas are *acknowledgments* of those facts. She's not saying morality is out there; she's saying that morality is the acknowledgment of the facts, the relationship between our minds and the facts.

So morality is an abstract thing, but it can be right or wrong, and I think that hers is right.

Max talked about situations in which people help others and attributed those to altruism, but he borrowed from egoism to do that. When parents help their children, or save their children from some danger, they're acting *egoistically*, not altruistically. They're upholding their higher value. A parent sends his kid to college and pays the tuition instead of buying a Ferrari. Why? Because the child's education is more important to the parent. And if a child is about to be hit by a car and the parent jumps to push him out of the way and dies in the process, the parent

does that precisely because the parent is upholding his own personal hierarchy of values. I'm a parent, and I know Max is too. My child means everything to me *personally*, and I would do anything for her. That is not altruism; that is egoism.

The advocates of altruism—and if you ask me in the Q&A, I'll bring out quotes from the heavy-hitters on this—they do not agree that such actions are altruistic. They would say that it is egoistic if you're doing it for yourself, if it advances your values. So let's keep the categories clear and distinct here. If it's good for your life it's egoistic, and if it's not, if it's a sacrifice, then it's altruistic.

Moderator: Max.

Borders: So just launching from that last point, I think we could probably quibble all day and equivocate on the language of egoist and altruist, but I think the way we resolve that is by going back to what I said about the facts of reality.

The facts of reality are independent of our subjective moral take on things. The fact that Craig or I might “selfishly” or “egoistically” jump in front of a car to help my kid, or join with my clan group to raid another tribe or to make sure that someone in my clan group is ostracized and denied part of the surpluses of the kill because he was found to be hoarding, or whatever—whether you want to call such actions “altruistic” or “egoistic,” they're evolved dispositions. Whatever we call them, they're evolved dispositions that can give rise to certain other kinds of moral instincts and moral behaviors.

This goes to what I think is really problematic in the Objectivist view: It runs afoul of what is called the is-ought problem. The universe simply *is*. It does not come prepackaged with any sort of moral opinions. Tables are tables. Things are things. Energy is energy. Human beings are material and part of the universe. What is just is. But when we take on opinions about the state of affairs in the world and say it “ought” to be otherwise, this is thoroughly subjective, and we cannot stand outside of that subjective take. The idea that personal opinion about what “ought” to be is not just opinion—the radically perspectival view that we can check an independent reality on the matter—doesn't hold, because there's not one to check. So the idea of mind-independent facts that are not socially determined, I think, is problematic.

Another thing that I want to get down to is this idea about the requirements of human life. Let's use Warren Buffett, a real-world example. Warren Buffett has so much surplus, he could not possibly consume all that he has. Now I'm not saying that anyone is justified in taking Buffett's surplus, but there sure are a lot of people who would. How does his hoarding this surplus confer survival

advantage on Buffett? Is his keeping the surplus a requirement of his life? Let's assume that taking 10 percent of Buffett's surplus makes him somewhat less happy. Why should he be able to keep it? Because even though he can't possibly consume it—because grumble, grumble, why?—because, well, he just likes having all that money, he likes taking baths and swimming in it. How does that axiom about the requirements of human life go against another moral axiom that says that that surplus could go to helping people who are urgently and desperately poor—and who have no other alternatives? Ayn Rand would say, I think, Buffett should be able to keep the surplus because his life's happiness depends on it. We certainly can't say his survival depends on it. Taking 10 percent off the top of his fortune is not going to take away from his survival.

What we might want to argue, alternatively, is that Warren Buffett's assets are working to the benefits of all sorts of people—after all, he got rich because he is a good steward of capital; because he knows how to deploy resources to create value in the economy, which has all kinds of positive effects for other people, giving them jobs, giving them higher standards of living—uh oh, we just lapsed into utilitarianism. But Craig said we can't make that case, we can't speak in that moral language because we have to be rigorously devoted to the idea that Warren Buffett might be made slightly unhappy if someone dipped into his billions. I just don't think that that's going to easily and credibly be made to most people if we want to form more solidarity around the idea of freedom. So we've *got* to start thinking about other people when we talk about this.

From all this, I think we have to make the distinction between meta-ethics and ethics. Meta-ethics is the question of whether morality is real—like tables and chairs and quarks and atoms. Can I go find them in the universe? And I would say no, it's socially constructed. About first-order ethics, what you ought or ought not do, Craig and I would probably agree all day long. It's the meta-ethical problem that I think we're wrestling with here.

Now, finally, I want to touch quickly on this idea of fantasy-construction. We don't need to erect fantasy constructions to make this point. I simply used it because Brad did, and it's one that is commonly used in philosophy. But we could talk about political power and, in fact, there are politically powerful people who would gleefully, without any sort of harm to their spiritual health, as Rand would have it, take from Warren Buffett and Bill Gates and all the other value-creators in the world and redistribute it to the people they think need it most. There's no spiritual impoverishment there for them. By their lights, that is the right and the good. And that rationale can be extended very far until they start experiencing some sort of

spiritual anxiety like Bernie Madoff did 'cause Bernie Madoff was a fraud. These people think that they are moral paladins from their starting points, and we've got to convince them with all kinds of different moral languages that that is not the way.

Moderator: Back to Craig.

Biddle: All right. A couple things. First of all, I'm glad that Max brought up the is-ought dichotomy because that really is the lynchpin, in a sense, of this whole thing. The question of whether or not we can derive moral principles from the facts of reality *is* the question of whether rights can be grounded in the facts of reality, because rights are moral principles.

Ayn Rand did, in fact, bridge this so-called is-ought gap, and she did so by observing the fact that the only reason values can exist or are necessary is that living beings exist and must act to gain and keep certain things in order to remain alive and thrive as the kind of beings they are. If a tree doesn't reach sunlight and water in the soil, it dies. If a tiger doesn't catch its prey, it dies. And for human beings, if we are not free to act on our judgment, we die—unless we're *partially* free to act on our judgment, in which case we can stay alive, but we can't live *fully* as a human being. The kind of animal that we are is the kind that lives by the guidance of our reasoning mind. So to the extent that we're not free to act on our judgment, we can't live fully as a human being.

For more about Rand's bridging of the is-ought gap, read her essay, "Introduction to the Objectivist Ethics" or read the third chapter of my book, *Loving Life: The Morality of Self-Interest and the Facts that Support It*. Chapter two in that book, titled "The Is-Ought Gap," lays out in detail what that problem actually is, and then in chapter three we see Ayn Rand's solution to it.

As to an independent reality, there is an independent reality out there; it's the reality that we live in and that we have to correspond to cognitively if we want to be successful in it. We all know there's an independent reality, which is why we don't cross streets without looking and why [knocking on the table] you can hear that and you know it's because I just hit the table and it's here as a matter of fact.

Ideas are one thing, external reality is another, and the way that we have our ideas correspond to that reality is by observing it and using concepts and logic and the like correctly. So it's very important that we understand that the purpose of thinking is not to construct realities, but to correspond to the reality that actually does, in fact, exist.

I don't know how the idea that there's no independent reality can even be taken seriously, and it certainly is not an argument against my point that we need

a real foundation for rights, not just a bunch of conflicting ideas that undermine rights. That's just not going to serve us in defense of liberty.

Warren Buffett *earned* his money, and it's his *because* he earned it. If it's taken from him, it may not make him unable to live, but it does make him unable to live fully by the judgment of his own mind. He has ideas about what he wants to do with that money, and I disagree with some of what he does with his money, but that's *his* business—it's not my business—and he can't live fully as a human being if he can't decide where his earnings will go. That's the moral reason nobody has the right to touch Warren Buffett's money, regardless of the fact that he's got tons of it. There's also the economic argument, which is that when his money is directed by him, it goes to better economic use than it does when it is directed by some bureaucrat like Cass Sunstein. And that's an important argument too. But it's not the case that when you make economic arguments to try to prove that freedom is practical that you're using utilitarian arguments *per se*. A lot of economics today is infused with utilitarian ideas, but utilitarianism and economics are not the same thing.

I'm all for making economic arguments for why freedom works and why it's good. But they will not suffice alone. We also need *moral* arguments—and we need moral arguments that make sense, arguments that correspond to the external reality that we all know in fact [knocks the table again] is there.

So don't fall for this idea that there is no external reality. You know there is one. The question is, are there really factual requirements of human life or not? If there are, then those requirements constitute morality. What are those requirements? One of them is freedom, and what freedom protects is your ability to act on your judgment so you can live your life. In other words, it protects egoism.

This is an absolutely irrefutable hierarchy. Max pointed out that if you have this one argument and it can be taken out, then we're left with nothing. But how are you going to take out the idea that we've got to be able to act on our judgment in order to live as human beings and thrive? There's no taking that out. There are arguments that you can take out, when they don't make sense, but this is not one of them; this is something that we can see very clearly.

It took genius to discover these ideas—Aristotle and Ayn Rand and the like, they're kind of freaks of nature, in the positive sense of that term, in that they were able to think and abstract at a level that normal people are not. But when they do, and they arrive at these remarkable conclusions—whether inventing logic and biology or bridging the is-ought gap or the like—it may be that we couldn't have done that on our own, but we can see their arguments and see that they're

true. And if that's the case, if we do see that they're arguments are true, why not embrace them and share them with those who will listen?

We don't have to change everybody's mind. We just need to change some minds or get people on board with us to some extent—it doesn't have to be to the full extent in every case. We need to reach as many people as we can who are bright and active minded and energetic about trying to defend liberty and help them to understand the real, factual, moral basis for it. The more of those people who get on board, the better off we're going to be in defending liberty.

Moderator: Back to Max.

Borders: So, [to the moderator] forgive me, for I'm about to violate your rights—but this is a counterexample to what he just argued. [Takes the moderator's legal pad from the table.] I just violated your rights. I just deprived him of some of the requirements of his life. I deprived him of his property, and I deprived him of his being able to exercise the judgment of his mind.

Have I deprived him of his means of survival? No, I guarantee you if I take this home today and steal it from him, Brad [the moderator] will carry on. He will still be kicking.

Now, if you want to say, if we did this writ large and made this a moral first principle and *everybody* did it, then we're starting to talk like Immanuel Kant, and that is not egoism. You see the difference? So if strictly speaking, his argument is that it depends on the idea that depriving anyone his property deprives him of the ability to act on the judgment of his own mind and therefore the requirements of his life—that taking a dollar from Warren Buffett is going to kill him or make him less happy—I simply don't think that's true.

Maybe you're saying that's caricaturist. But this is what happens a lot in social democracies, in Denmark and so on, and people live a long time—they live just fine, and, if you ask them, some say they're very happy.

Now, I'm not saying that I want people to do that to me, and I don't agree that it contributes to human flourishing. I think we would have a much more flourishing society and more peaceful order if we did not make that the state of affairs. And the social democracies of Europe are starting to decline from an economic standpoint. But I can't make those arguments if I'm an Objectivist, because that's a utilitarian argument or it's somehow some tertiary case.

I'm speaking in other moral languages when I try to make those counterarguments, and I don't think that Objectivists, who depend on one

foundation, have this. Otherwise, if they do, they're making a two-step away from egoism.

Finally, I want to go back to the question of meta-ethics. Yes, there are facts of reality; I never said there weren't facts of reality. They're simply not moral facts. There are not moral facts as such. I agree that this table is here, and I'm not going to try to karate chop it or I'll break my hand. But find me rights under a microscope. Find me rights in a telescope. I have five senses, but what is my moral sense? Craig would say you have the ability, by virtue of your biological makeup maybe, to apprehend the moral truth; and that you have a moral sense to do this, to discover the "axioms." Whenever you hear that word from people who purport to be moral or ethical objectivists, just think of that as a circular argument.

So what about others who can't live a full life, because they're deprived of certain resources? This is what the egalitarian is going to say. "They can't live a full life because they don't even have the means to eat. The redistribution of surplus wealth is justified to help them." And the Objectivist answer to that is, "Well, because egoism. It's an axiom. If you take people's property, you're depriving them of their means to live." To which the reply comes: "Oh, you mean Warren Buffett?" People are not going to buy that.

What I'm saying is: Be prepared, if you want to be free, we all have to be prepared to use multiple moral starting points and moral languages in a constellation that hangs together much more powerfully—like a star system—if we're going to win and draw people into our orbits. Otherwise, we're just going to have our spindly column out there.

Moderator: Well, that was wonderful. [Audience applause.] I think that was really the model of what a debate ought to be and what a serious, high-minded conversation should be. In a fairly short amount of time, Craig and Max covered a lot of territory in a very deep and thoughtful way—and they did it in a civil and friendly way. I thought that was just fabulous. Well done.

So, [to the audience] now it's your turn. We've got two very clear views on the table. A lot of overlap, but clearly two very different positions on, in many ways, one of the most important, fundamental issues in the freedom movement.

With that, the floor is now open. [To an audience member:] Ben.

Ben (student 1): I have trouble with differences between objectivism and subjectivism. So this is for Max Borders probably. Do you think it's objectively true that each individual person experiences reality subjectively?

Borders: [Laughing.] No. I'm a Humean all the way down. I believe it. I strongly believe it. But there's no way I can stand outside my own perceptions to check that mind-independent truth. So, yeah, that takes us to philosophical depths very quickly, but no, I don't, I have to be honest about that.

Moderator: Mitch.

Mitch (student 2): Is there is sort of an accidental utilitarian argument, or inadvertent utilitarianism in egoism, in that egoism is best for individuals and it creates the most prosperity and therefore it generates the most happiness for the most people. Is that true? So, in a sense, utilitarianism isn't a principle, but it's inadvertently successful.

Biddle: Yeah, it's ancillary. The fact is that the individual, as we can see, is the independent unit of man. The group isn't a unit *per se*; it's made up of individuals. But the individual is sovereign—he's metaphysically sovereign, he's epistemologically sovereign, he's ethically sovereign, and he ought to be politically sovereign.

That is observationally true. And if we protect the individual's rights, then one of the consequences is that he gets to live his life in accordance with his judgment. Another consequence of it is that because everyone else gets to do that, too; all the individuals in "society"—which is just a group of individuals—prosper more than they would if people were being forced.

This even goes to the issue of the legal pad being taken from Brad [the moderator], which was a great example. Thank goodness that pad has been returned because [turning to Brad, who is writing on the pad] if Brad needs it [laughter from the audience] . . . And I mean that literally—because here's the thing: Degrees are real. The fact is that Brad might have needed that legal pad later today for a very important meeting, and if the legal pad hadn't been available—"Where'd that legal pad go?"—that could have messed up his life.

In other words, stealing that legal pad really could have, in some circumstance, botched his ability to act on his judgment in a way that really would have mattered to his life. It's not the biggest violation of rights imaginable, but it's real. If Brad's rights had been protected there, he would have been able to do with his legal pad whatever he had planned to do. And if he had the legal pad and sketched out that business plan over lunch today with the investor, and then started the business and offered jobs to people, then everybody would be better off. You see the connection?

Mitch: Yes.

Student 3: Another question for Craig. When I leave here, I'm going to walk to my car in the parking lot over there, but I don't know for sure that it has not been stolen or towed. But, beyond reasonable doubt, I can assume that's not going to be the case. So in what way do you think that in the case of the legal pad is it reasonable to think that lacking that pad would cause such a huge disruption in Dr. Thompson's life?

Biddle: For you and me to sit back and try to decide whether it's reasonable to think that he might have needed the pad or been harmed by its absence is not the way to go. We don't know what's going on in Brad's life, and his property is *his*. If you take somebody's property, you have no idea what damage you might do.

I'm acknowledging the degree difference here. I'm not saying it's the equivalent of kidnapping his child. I'm not saying that all violations of rights are equal. I'm not even saying that all violations of rights will necessarily have some deleterious effect on someone. But you don't know what effect it will have. This is Hayek's fatal conceit issue to some extent. You simply don't know what is going on in other people's lives and what their needs are and what they're going to do with their legal pads. And because the legal pad doesn't belong to you, you shouldn't take it. It belongs to him, and he may jolly well need it.

I needed my legal pad today. If I had come up here for a debate without my legal pad, I would have had to keep all these units that I wanted to respond to in my head. And given my extremely limited memory, that simply wouldn't have happened, and I would not have been able to respond. Degrees are real, and they matter.

Student 4: I think I'm right when I say that Craig is saying that there are certain rights that man needs in society in order to live and flourish. That doesn't mean that you can't violate them here and there, and that he might not withstand that. But the point is these are rules for society. You're not going to want to enter into a society without those rules because, at the end of the day, if there are no rights, you will die or you will live a miserable life. So my question is for Max: You called them "epiphenomena," right? I was curious if you could expand on that. I also want to ask whether there are certain rights that would be better than your epiphenomena—or if you think there ought to be.

Borders: Well, yes. So the second-order ethics, the normative ethics, would be that we ought to have rights, and I agree, we ought to. Can you repeat the first part of your question?

Student 4: Yeah. Could you explain why you think rights are epiphenomena and what that implies?

Borders: Right there you said in order to enter into society, which is a form of interdependence that Anne spoke of. I would say rights are relationships of interdependence in society whereby we can have material prosperity and flourishing, both personal and otherwise.

The moment that you speak of entering into that interdependent set of relationships, I think we have to, in our moralistic language, step outside of egoism. So that's an answer in a preliminary way to your first question.

But, yes, there are things we ought to do. We ought to have rights. We ought to enter into communities. I want to live in a free society. I want to be free. I believe it means flourishing for people. I care deeply about poor people, and I care about myself—both. And I think that societies that value freedom and make it primary, *make* it primary through intersubjective agreement, through banding together in solidarity around these ideas, are going to be societies that tend to bring about this for both myself and others.

So, in that sense, yes, we *ought* to have rights. My primary quibble is trying to make an argument based on a single axiomatic premise of egoism alone, or the idea of bridging the is-ought divide. That's my problem. Not that we ought not have rights, but the nature of those rights is where we disagree most.

We are all here together pretty much because we're interested in the ideas of freedom, we want to see a freer society, we want to see a freer world, and though we might not come from the same starting points, we're ending up at the same place. That, to me, is inspiring.

Student 5: My question is for Max, and I want to ask him through an analogy. We established yesterday with the “money is the root of all evil” lecture that there are two kinds of wealth. There's “hollow” wealth that's gained for the wrong reasons, and there's wealth that's deeper, that has foundation, and that's true wealth. Can you make that analogy with liberty? Is there “hollow” liberty gained for the wrong reasons, on the wrong foundations, and is that less, or is that right, compared to liberty that's gained on this moral foundation?

You could ask what are the wrong reasons for liberty, or how could that be possible? But regarding a foundation for liberty that contains an inconsistency that is detrimental to the idea of liberty itself, as we can agree on a definition, isn't that hollow? Doesn't that break down the strength of the liberty that you're fighting for? And should that be allowed if it's just fake, if it's just kind of like having hollow money?

Borders: This goes to the question of epiphenomena as well, and I forgot to unpack that definition by the way. I think Tom [Bell] touched on that a little bit in his talk.

With repeat interaction over time, we have evolutionary systems that generate these rules, good rules, and when the rules cease to be good in the environment, either people will stop preferring them or they'll pass away for whatever reason. This is, again, those dang ol' facts of reality that we have to reckon with.

So the extent to which morals are certain kinds of rules, in the sense that they direct our behavior in some way, I think they will be subject to these evolutionary processes. So, yes, some of the premises that people hold in a pluralistic view of freedom might be weaker than others and might pass away. They might simply not work.

You're not going to convince me, for example—no offense to the religious people in the room—that we're God's special creatures and that's why we need rights. I disagree with that. That's not going to be persuasive to me.

But there are going to be all sorts of sets of premises that can cohere in very interesting ways. Mitch [the second questioner] brought up a great example of it when he said you can have it benefit both self and others. And you have what Craig called ancillary benefits to others. *That* is, from a pragmatic standpoint, a very persuasive means to keep freedom alive *if* you value freedom. But we're starting with the value of freedom. It's simply the fact that we want there to be more freedom for all sorts of reasons that I may not share with you.

To answer the question and put a period on this paragraph, yes, there could be weak premises involved. I don't think it would be a hollow freedom. I think this is a constant process of exploration and intellectual engagement. And if we think we've found some mind-independent axiom, that we go out in the world and somehow find—and if that premise is wrong, then we're left in a kind of moral solipsism, a kind of very lonely universe, where we've already decided we can't speak to other sorts of premises and other starting points. I think that as human beings that's our condition. So, no, it's not “hollow” to me; it's actually really rich and diverse.

Student 6: This is to Craig Biddle, just to clarify your position. Do you think there could be some benefits to maybe not rejecting our first principles, but just to set them aside, and see the common ground that you might have with other people? Because I've noticed that you said that we definitely want as many people, whether we need a majority or not, we want as many people as possible. So could you see benefits in not rejecting or contradicting your values, but set them aside to see the commonality between different views? Or do you think that's worthless?

Biddle: That's a great question. I think it's definitely worthwhile getting together with people with whom you disagree and working toward common ends. I disagree with people who share my same philosophy on certain important things.

I'm not saying we shouldn't get together with people we disagree with. I'm saying that when we get together with people we agree with about an important goal such as liberty, we should take very seriously the question of what is the best way to achieve or defend it. And I think we should be open to questioning our deeply held fundamentals, especially if it can be shown that they are in contradiction to liberty. If we see that we are holding on to some deeper moral fundamental that actually undermines liberty, I think we should take that seriously. I'm not going to beat someone over the head because he takes a different view on those things. But logic matters.

So, in a sense, I think it's okay to set aside certain differences and work toward common ends even though we have differences. But I don't think we should set them aside if that means pretending they are not there and don't matter when we really know that they are there and do matter.

If we know that a given moral code says that you must sacrifice, that you have a "duty" to sacrifice, and that if you choose *not* to sacrifice, we can make you sacrifice—and if someone says, "Yeah, even so, I like this moral code and we're going to uphold liberty with it"—we need to recognize that that's a contradiction.

So all I'm saying is don't tuck away these kinds of premises and pretend they don't exist or don't matter when they really do. In a sense, I'm the one speaking for plurality here. Let's bring out *all* the ideas, and put them on the table, and see which ones make sense. Let's not tuck away the ones we think are special but might not stand up to scrutiny; let's bring them all out and see which ones *do* stand up to scrutiny.

I think we're going to have a stronger liberty movement if more people who advocate liberty can see and say that there are moral facts that support it. I know Max says there aren't moral facts, and we can't see them. But here's the thing: Moral facts are principles. I know you can't see them. But can you see the principles of agriculture? Can you see the principles of economics? Is supply and demand real? Is Say's Law real? In the sense that it's an identification of facts of reality, it *is* real. Can you see the principles of nutrition? You can't *see* that you need protein, but we *know* that you need protein. Morality is in the same category.

Moral principles are real in that they are identifications of facts of reality regarding the requirements of man's life. So it doesn't matter that you can't see them. And that doesn't place them in the same category as "God" or the like, because there is real evidence for this, which is why we don't say, "I don't think there really are principles of agriculture." Nobody doubts that they exist because there's real evidence for them; it's just that the evidence is not the kind of evidence that's the equivalent of, well, [pointing to a cup] is this cup here? It's not perceptual in that sense.

In another sense, though, it is perceptual, because how do we arrive at the principle that man survives by the use of reason? We observe man doing that over decades and eons.

So morality is complicated. I'm not saying it's simple. But it's wrong to say that if it's not simple, we can't have it or I won't accept it. We don't do that with other things. We don't say physics is not simple, so we just won't have it. We have to accept that some things are complicated, but that complexity doesn't mean that they're not real.

Moderator: We have time for a couple more questions. I want to take questions from students, and if we have enough time at the end, I will go to Professor Bradley for the last question. So more questions from students, please. Yes?

Student 7: You mentioned principles of agriculture and nutrition, but those principles have developed in a certain evolutionary way, which Max was talking about, through seeing what succeeds and what doesn't succeed. You know, if someone consumes a terrible diet and they die, then people come to find out what succeeds and what doesn't. It isn't necessarily axiomatic; it's just from experience.

Biddle: Moral principles are derived exactly that same way. We observe reality; we see that if you act rationally and pursue your values, you can live and achieve happiness; and we see that if you act irrationally and don't pursue your values, or you sacrifice your values—or you *give up* the values on which your life and happiness depend—you will not achieve life and happiness.

It's exactly the same kind of thing. It's empirical. And what makes it a science, ultimately, is the discovery of an objective standard of moral value. This is how Ayn Rand fundamentally changed the field. By asking the question, "What are values and why does man need them?," Rand burrowed down into an area of thought where people just hadn't gone before, and what she discovered is that the only reason the concept of value even comes into existence is that we observe the fact that living things must act to gain and keep things to remain alive.

So "value" in that very basic sense applies to plants and animals of all kinds. When you get to man, it's the same thing except that volition comes into play. We have to act to gain and keep things—and we have to do so for the same reason that other living things do: If we *don't*, we can't live, and if we *do*, we can live. Values are things that we act to gain and keep in order to sustain and further our lives. That's the fundamental purpose of values.

Now, because we have volition, we can act to gain and keep things that will mess up our life. We can shoot heroin into our arms; we can advocate Marxism; we can do all sorts of things that are bad for our life, but they really are bad for our life. It's a

scientific fact. Once you have an objective standard of value, which we now have—the requirements of man’s life—morality becomes a science, just like all the others.

Student 8: What you learn through scientific experimentation or through experiences doesn’t always hold up, though. Like some elements of chemistry have not held true over time by us finding out new things. So I have an issue, I guess, with saying that one person has now discovered the end. There’s going to be other people who are going to develop philosophy, so I think you do have to be a bit subjective like Max was talking about. If we don’t, then we could possibly turn away the next development in philosophy.

Biddle: You make a good point, but let me ask you a question: Would we tell Elon Musk, “Look, don’t make electric cars yet, because people might figure out other physics principles that trump the ones you’re working with now”? We don’t do that. We work with the knowledge that we have. And it’s an improper epistemological approach to doubt things that you have no reason to doubt.

If you can see that something appears from all available evidence and every angle to be true—such as that there are factual requirements of human life and that we need to uphold them in order to live—and if you then say, “but maybe it’s not true and I’m just missing the ball here,” that’s an improper epistemological technique, and it will undermine your ability to think in every area of life. If you used that as a general principle in life, if you doubted all ideas regardless of not having any reason to doubt them, you would not be able to function. So I urge you not to do that.

We should always use the best knowledge we have at any given time, and if somebody comes along with a demonstrably better idea, we should embrace that. Look, if somebody a week from now comes to me and demonstrates to me that there is a more sound philosophy, or a more sound argument for the philosophy that I uphold, and if I can see that this is the case, I will adopt it. My advice is, go with the evidence and the best ideas you have, and don’t doubt arbitrarily.

Moderator: Dr. Bradley.

Anne Bradley: [To Biddle] Just to tell you where I’m coming from here, I actually overwhelmingly agree with most of what you are saying here. Where I disagree, I’m wondering if some of it is about how we are defining our terms. So that’s where I’m coming from with this question.

Can you engage in sacrifice absent coercion? Because we just told this story about a parent jumping in front of a car, and it’s an empirical reality—[turning to the students] you don’t have kids most likely, but you will and you’ll know this; and your parents will do that for you—[back to Biddle] and you made a good,

strong case for how that is actually egoism. I agree with you. But, I'm wondering, can you be sacrificial without being coerced and, if so, what does that look like?

Biddle: Excellent question. First of all, before I forget, let me plug this: I have a video on YouTube titled "Why 'Sacrifice' Means Loss, Not Gain," and that's worth watching on this count. Here's the thing: Yes, people can act sacrificially. The other way of saying this is that people are not automatically egoistic. It's not true that we automatically act in our best interests all the time, and we can see this by looking at reality and seeing that people do things that they know are going to mess up their lives. Nobody thinks that if he keeps drinking and drinking and drinking, his life is just going to get better and better and better. An alcoholic knows it's going to mess up his life, but he keeps doing it. The same is true in many areas of life.

At a more important level, people do, in fact, act in accordance with moral codes that they choose to accept. So if you accept a moral code that says you should sacrifice, you are, to some extent, going to sacrifice—and, by sacrifice, I mean give up a greater value for the sake of a lesser value, give up something that is *more* important to your life and happiness for the sake of something that is *less* important to your life and happiness.

How do we know this? Well, we know, for instance, that sometimes as kids are growing up, they get through high school and they go off to college, and their mother says, "I want you to be a lawyer," and the kid says, "I don't want to be a lawyer; I want to be in a band." But the mother says, "No, no, no, be a lawyer; it's better prestige for the family," et cetera. And sometimes, on the premise that self-sacrifice for others is moral, a child tragically will kowtow to his mother's request and will sacrifice; he will give up what he really wants to do and instead do something that he really doesn't want to do and that he knows will not make him happy. That's sacrifice without coercion.

People can and sometimes do act selflessly—especially when they accept the idea that that's what it means to be moral. If you went to Mother Theresa and said to her, "Mother Theresa, you have been so selfish, I want to give you an award for your selfishness," she would have looked at you like you had three heads. Why? Because she was not acting self-interestedly, and she knew it. If you told her she was, it would have been offensive to her; she was working very hard to be selfless in accordance with her moral code, which says she *should* be selfless. I think she would have been legitimately astounded if you called her a selfish person.

So, yes, we can act selflessly. And we will act selflessly, in so far as we accept a moral code that says we should, which is precisely why I think it's very important that you all read *The Virtue of Selfishness* and my book *Loving Life: The Morality of*

Self-Interest and the Facts that Support It and see whether or not you agree with the ideas. You might read them and say, “Nah, this doesn’t make sense to me”—and that’s fine. Then don’t accept it. But if you see that the arguments are valid and the ideas are true, then you can start living your life with the idea that, “You know what, I really should make my life the best it can be, that’s the *right* thing to do”—which, not surprisingly, is a pretty great thing to discover.

Moderator: Well, we’ve come to the end of our time, and let me just repeat what I said a few minutes ago, which is that I really think this has been an extraordinary conversation between the two of you. I had no idea what to expect. I was prepared to separate you if necessary, to use physical coercion, but that was obviously not necessary. This was absolutely, I think, a model of what a debate ought to be. And so, I’d like all of you to join me in thanking Craig and Max. [Audience applause.]



real challenges.
real answers.SM

show your best side

The challenges you face are complex, and solutions require more than a one-size-fits-all legal strategy. When you tap outside counsel, you should expect responsive business partners who grasp the impact surrounding each legal decision you encounter.

The lawyers at Polsinelli have your back, so you can strut your stuff.

polsinelli.com

Mike Conger, mconger@polsinelli.com

The choice of a lawyer is an important decision and should not be based solely upon advertisements. Polsinelli PC, Polsinelli LLP in California.