

9.14 | *Honesty*

A wide diversity of moral traits are treated here under the heading of honesty. As the quotations indicate, the word has been applied to truthfulness of statement, to fairness in dealing with others, to keeping one's promises, to trustworthiness, to repaying one's debts, and to a general rectitude of intention and action. Such things as lying, deceiving, cheating, bearing false witness, stealing, and defrauding are—obviously—instances of dishonesty.

It would appear, at first glance, as if "honesty" were another name for justice, since the examples given above of honest and dishonest actions are also examples of just and unjust conduct. However, there are some unjust actions—for example, murdering another man or enslaving him—that

would not be called dishonest. Honesty seems to be confined to that area of conduct in which truthfulness or fairness in dealing with others is called for as a matter of justice. For the treatment of justice as a moral virtue, the reader is referred to Section 9.7 on RIGHT AND WRONG. The reader will also find some quotations concerned with truthfulness and lying in Section 6.3 on TRUTH.

All of us know and most of us repeat the oft-quoted maxim "Honesty is the best policy," thinking it to be morally sound. But, according to Kant, it is the maxim of a dishonest man—one who refrains from dishonesty only because it is expedient, not because it is just to do so. The maxim about honesty, Kant suggests, should be "Honesty is better than all policy."

1 Thou shalt not raise a false report: put not thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness.

Exodus 23:1

2 Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked.

Exodus 23:7

3 If a soul sin, and commit a trespass against the Lord, and lie unto his neighbour in that which was delivered him to keep, or in fellowship, or in a think taken away by violence, or hath deceived his neighbour;

Or have found that which was lost, and lieth concerning it, and sweareth falsely; in any of all these that a man doeth, sinning therein:

Then it shall be, because he hath sinned, and is guilty, that he shall restore that which he took violently away, or the thing which he hath deceitfully gotten, or that which was delivered him to keep, or the lost thing which he found,

Or all that about which he hath sworn falsely; he shall even restore it in the principal, and shall add the fifth part more thereto, and give it unto him to whom it appertaineth, in the day of his trespass offering.

And he shall bring his trespass offering unto the Lord, a ram without blemish out of the flock, with thy estimation, for a trespass offering, unto the priest:

And the priest shall make an atonement for him before the Lord: and it shall be forgiven him for any thing of all that he hath done in trespassing therein.

Leviticus 6:2-7

4 Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?

He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.

Psalms 24:3-4

5 A false balance is abomination to the Lord: but a just weight is his delight.

Proverbs 11:1

6 *Odysseus*. Take it to heart, and pass the word along:

fair dealing brings more profit in the end.

Homer, Odyssey, XXII, 374

7 *Darius*. Whether men lie, or say true, it is with one

and the same object. Men lie, because they think to gain by deceiving others; and speak the truth, because they expect to get something by their true speaking, and to be trusted afterwards in more important matters. Thus, though their conduct is so opposite, the end of both is alike.

Herodotus, *History*, III, 72

- 8 *Creon*. Time is the only test of honest men, one day is space enough to know a rogue.
Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, 614
- 9 *Envoys of the Mitylenians*. There can never be any solid friendship between individuals, or union between communities that is worth the name, unless the parties be persuaded of each other's honesty.
Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, III, 10
- 10 He who claims more than he has with no ulterior object is a contemptible sort of fellow (otherwise he would not have delighted in falsehood), but seems futile rather than bad; but if he does it for an object, he who does it for the sake of reputation or honour is (for a boaster) not very much to be blamed, but he who does it for money, or the things that lead to money, is an uglier character (it is not the capacity that makes the boaster, but the purpose; for it is in virtue of his state of character and by being a man of a certain kind that he is a boaster); as one man is a liar because he enjoys the lie itself, and another because he desires reputation or gain. Now those who boast for the sake of reputation claim such qualities as win praise or congratulation, but those whose object is gain claim qualities which are of value to one's neighbours and one's lack of which is not easily detected, e.g. the powers of a seer, a sage, or a physician. For this reason it is such things as these that most people claim and boast about; for in them the above-mentioned qualities are found.
Mock-modest people, who understate things, seem more attractive in character; for they are thought to speak not for gain but to avoid parade; and here too it is qualities which bring reputation that they disclaim, as Socrates used to do. Those who disclaim trifling and obvious qualities are called humbugs and are more contemptible; and sometimes this seems to be boastfulness, like the Spartan dress; for both excess and great deficiency are boastful. But those who use understatement with moderation and understate about matters that do not very much force themselves on our notice seem attractive. And it is the boaster that seems to be opposed to the truthful man; for he is the worse character.
Aristotle, *Ethics*, 1127^b9
- 11 No type of injustice is more glaring than that of the hypocrite who, in the very instant of being
- most false, makes the pretence of appearing virtuous.
Cicero, *De Officiis*, I, 13
- 12 Let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.
Matthew 5:37
- 13 A certain man named Ān-ā-nī-ās, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession,
And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.
But Peter said, Ān-ā-nī-ās, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?
Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why has thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.
And Ān-ā-nī-ās hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.
And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.
And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in.
And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much.
Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out.
Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.
Acts 5:1-10
- 14 *Solon*. Men keep their promises when neither side can get anything by the breaking of them.
Plutarch, *Solon*
- 15 If you want to be Somebody, these days,
Have the nerve to commit an act that rates jailing or exile:
Probity merits praise—and has to starve on the highways.
Juvenal, *Satire I*
- 16 Never value anything as profitable to thyself which shall compel thee to break thy promise, to lose thy self-respect, to hate any man, to suspect, to curse, to act the hypocrite, to desire anything which needs walls and curtains.
Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, III, 7
- 17 External conduct has the character of honesty, in so far as it reflects internal rectitude. For this rea-

- son honesty consists radically in the internal choice, but its expression lies in the external conduct.
Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, 145, 1
- 18 Because fraud is a vice peculiar to man, it more displeases God.
Dante, *Inferno*, XI, 25
- 19 Anyone who does not feel sufficiently strong in memory should not meddle with lying.
Montaigne, *Essays*, I, 9, Of Liars
- 20 In truth lying is an accursed vice. We are men, and hold together, only by our word. If we recognized the horror and the gravity of lying, we would persecute it with fire more justly than other crimes. I find that people ordinarily fool around chastising harmless faults in children very inappropriately, and torment them for thoughtless actions that leave neither imprint nor consequences. Only lying, and a little below it obstinacy, seem to me to be the actions whose birth and progress one should combat insistently. They grow with the child. And once the tongue has been put on this wrong track, it cannot be called back without amazing difficulty.
Montaigne, *Essays*, I, 9, Of Liars
- 21 Lying is an ugly vice, which an ancient paints in most shameful colors when he says that it is giving evidence of contempt for God, and at the same time of fear of men. It is not possible to represent more vividly the horror, the vileness, and the profligacy of it. For what can you imagine uglier than being a coward toward men and bold toward God? Since mutual understanding is brought about solely by way of words, he who breaks his word betrays human society. It is the only instrument by means of which our wills and thoughts communicate, it is the interpreter of our soul. If it fails us, we have no more hold on each other, no more knowledge of each other. If it deceives us, it breaks up all our relations and dissolves all the bonds of our society.
Montaigne, *Essays*, II, 18, Of Giving the Lie
- 22 There are rules both false and lax in philosophy. The example that is proposed to us for making private utility prevail over our pledged word does not receive enough weight from the circumstance that they introduce into it. Robbers have seized you; they have set you free again after extracting from you an oath to pay a certain sum. People are wrong to say that an honest man will be quit of his word without paying, *once he is out of their hands*. Nothing of the sort. What fear has once made me will, I am bound still to will when without fear. And even if it has forced only my tongue without my will, I am still bound to make good
- my word to the last penny. As for me, when my tongue has sometimes thoughtlessly run ahead of my thoughts, I have scrupled to disavow it for all that. Otherwise we shall come by degrees to overthrow all the rights that a third person obtains from our promises and oaths. . . . In this alone does private interest have the right to excuse us for failing our promise, if we have promised something wicked and unjust in itself; for the rights of virtue must prevail over the rights of our obligation.
Montaigne, *Essays*, III, 1, The Useful and the Honorable
- 23 *Falstaff*. Lord, Lord, how this world is given to lying!
Shakespeare, *I Henry IV*, V, iv, 148
- 24 *Verges*. I thank God I am as honest as any man living that is an old man and no homester than I.
Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, III, v, 15
- 25 *Nym*. You'll pay me the eight shillings I won of you at betting?
Pistol. Base is the slave that pays.
Shakespeare, *Henry V*, II, i, 99
- 26 *King Henry*. A good leg will fall; a straight back will stoop; a black beard will turn white; a curled pate will grow bald; a fair face will wither; a full eye will wax hollow: but a good heart . . . is the sun and the moon; or rather the sun and not the moon; for it shines bright and never changes, but keeps his course truly.
Shakespeare, *Henry V*, V, ii, 168
- 27 *Touchstone*. Honesty coupled to beauty is to have honey a sauce to sugar.
Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, III, iii, 30
- 28 *Hamlet*. To be honest, as this world goes, is to be one man picked out of ten thousand.
Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, II, ii, 178
- 29 *Iago*. The Moor is of a free and open nature That thinks men honest that but seem to be so, And will as tenderly be led by the nose As asses are.
Shakespeare, *Othello*, I, iii, 405
- 30 *Comwall*. This is some fellow, Who, having been praised for bluntness, doth affect A saucy roughness, and constrains the garb Quite from his nature. He cannot flatter, he, An honest mind and plain, he must speak truth! An they will take it, so; if not, he's plain. These kind of knaves I know, which in this plainness

- Harbour more craft and more corrupter ends
Than twenty silly ducking observants
That stretch their duties nicely.
Shakespeare, *Lear*, II, ii, 102
- 31 *Duncan*. There's no art
To find the mind's construction in the face.
He was a gentleman on whom I built
An absolute trust.
Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, I, iv, 12
- 32 *Menenius*. His nature is too noble for the world.
He would not flatter Neptune for his trident,
Or Jove for's power to thunder. His heart's his
mouth.
What his breast forges, that his tongue must vent;
And, being angry, does forget that ever
He heard the name of death.
Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, III, i, 255
- 33 *Autolycus*. Ha, ha! what a fool Honesty is! and
Trust, his sworn brother, a very simple gentle-
man!
Shakespeare, *Winter's Tale*, IV, iv, 605
- 34 *Autolycus*. Though I am not naturally honest, I am
so sometimes by chance.
Shakespeare, *Winter's Tale*, IV, iv, 731
- 35 It will be acknowledged, even by those that prac-
tise it not, that clear and round dealing is the
honour of man's nature; and that mixture of false-
hood is like alloy in coin of gold and silver; which
may make the metal work the better, but it
embaseth it.
Bacon, *Of Truth*
- 36 Winding and crooked courses are the goings of the
serpent; which goeth basely upon the belly, and
not upon the feet. There is no vice that doth so
cover a man with shame as to be found false and
perfidious.
Bacon, *Of Truth*
- 37 He who counterfeiteth, acts a part; and is as it
were out of himself: which, if long, proves so irk-
some, that Men are glad to pull of their Vizards,
and resume themselves again; no practice being
able to naturalize such unnaturals, or make a
Man rest content not to be himself. And therefore
since Sincerity is thy Temper, let veracity be thy
Virtue in Words, Manners, and Actions.
Sir Thomas Browne, *Christian Morals*, III, 20
- 38 To tell the truth is useful to those to whom it is
spoken, but disadvantageous to those who tell it,
because it makes them disliked.
Pascal, *Pensées*, II, 100
- 39 Although people may have no interest in what
they are saying, we must not absolutely conclude
- from this that they are not lying; for there are
some people who lie for the mere sake of lying.
Pascal, *Pensées*, II, 108
- 40 On th' other side up rose
Belial, in act more graceful and humane;
A fairer person lost not Heav'n; he seemd
For dignity compos'd and high exploit:
But all was false and hollow; though his Tongue
Dropt Manna, and could make the worse appear
The better reason, to perplex and dash
Maturest Counsels: for his thoughts were low;
To vice industrious, but to Nobler deeds
Timorous and slothful: yet he pleas'd the eare.
Milton, *Paradise Lost*, II, 108
- 41 Lying is so ready and cheap a cover for any mis-
carriage, and so much in fashion among all sorts
of people, that a child can hardly avoid observing
the use is made of it on all occasions, and so can
scarce be kept without great care from getting
into it. But it is so ill a quality, and the mother of
so many ill ones that spawn from it and take shel-
ter under it, that a child should be brought up in
the greatest abhorrence of it imaginable.
Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning
Education*, 131
- 42 *Scandal*. He that first cries out stop Thief, is often
he that has stol'n the Treasure.
Congreve, *Love for Love*, III, iv
- 43 Honesty hath no fence against superior cunning.
Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, I, 6
- 44 As universal a Practice as Lying is, and as easy a
one as it seems, I do not remember to have heard
three good Lyes in all my Conversation, even
from those who were most celebrated in that Fac-
ulty.
Swift, *Thoughts on Various Subjects*
- 45 A Wit's a feather, and a Chief a rod;
An honest Man's the noblest work of God.
Pope, *Essay on Man*, Epistle IV, 247
- 46 Sometimes, in his wild way of talking, he [Yorick]
would say, that Gravity was an errant scoundrel,
and he would add,—of the most dangerous kind
too,—because a sly one; and that he verily be-
lieved, more honest, well-meaning people were
bubbled out of their goods and money by it in one
twelve-month, than by pocket-picking and shop-
lifting in seven. In the naked temper which a mer-
ry heart discovered, he would say there was no
danger,—but to itself:—whereas the very essence
of gravity was design, and consequently deceit;—
'twas a taught trick to gain credit of the world for
more sense and knowledge than a man was worth;
and that, with all its pretensions,—it was no bet-
ter, but often worse, than what a French wit had

long ago defined it,—viz. “A mysterious carriage of the body to cover the defects of the mind”;—which definition of gravity, Yorick, with great imprudence, would say, deserved to be wrote in letters of gold.

Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, I, 11

- 47 It is impossible to see the long scrolls in which every contract is included, with all their appendages of seals and attestation, without wondering at the depravity of those beings who must be restrained from violation of promise by such formal and public evidences, and precluded from equivocation and subterfuge by such punctilious minuteness.

Johnson, *Rambler No. 131*

- 48 *Johnson*. Why, Sir, if the fellow does not think as he speaks, he is lying; and I see not what honour he can propose to himself from having the character of a liar. But if he does really think that there is no distinction between virtue and vice, why, Sir, when he leaves our houses let us count our spoons.

Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (July 1763)

- 49 I asked him whether, as a moralist, he did not think that the practice of the law, in some degree, hurt the nice feeling of honesty. *Johnson*. “Why no, Sir, if you act properly. You are not to deceive your clients with false representations of your opinion: you are not to tell lies to a judge.” *Boswell*. “But what do you think of supporting a cause which you know to be bad?” *Johnson*. “Sir, you do not know it to be good or bad till the Judge determines it. I have said that you are to state facts fairly; so that your thinking, or what you call knowing, a cause to be bad, must be from reasoning, must be from your supposing your arguments to be weak and inconclusive. But, Sir, that is not enough. An argument which does not convince yourself, may convince the Judge to whom you urge it: and if it does convince him, why, then, Sir, you are wrong, and he is right. It is his business to judge; and you are not to be confident in your own opinion that a cause is bad, but to say all you can for your client, and then hear the Judge’s opinion.” *Boswell*. “But, Sir, does not affecting a warmth when you have no warmth, and appearing to be clearly of one opinion when you are in reality of another opinion, does not such dissimulation impair one’s honesty? Is there not some danger that a lawyer may put on the same mask in common life, in the intercourse with his friends?” *Johnson*. “Why no, Sir. Everybody knows you are paid for affecting warmth for your client; and it is, therefore, properly no dissimulation: the moment you come from the bar you resume your usual behaviour. Sir, a man will no more carry the artifice of the bar into the common intercourse of society, than a man who is paid for tumbling upon his hands will continue to tumble

upon his hands when he should walk on his feet.”

Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (1768)

- 50 *Johnson*. It must be considered, that a man who only does what every one of the society to which he belongs would do, is not a dishonest man.

Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (April 6, 1772)

- 51 While we were at breakfast, Johnson gave a very earnest recommendation of what he himself practised with the utmost conscientiousness: I mean a strict attention to truth, even in the most minute particulars. “Accustom your children (said he,) constantly to this; if a thing happened at one window, and they, when relating it, say that it happened at another, do not let it pass, but instantly check them; you do not know where deviation from truth will end.” *Boswell*. “It may come to the door: and when once an account is at all varied in one circumstance, it may by degrees be varied so as to be totally different from what really happened.” Our lively hostess, whose fancy was impatient of the rein, fidgeted at this, and ventured to say, “Nay, this is too much. If Mr. Johnson should forbid me to drink tea, I would comply, as I should feel the restraint only twice a day; but little variations in narrative must happen a thousand times a day, if one is not perpetually watching.” *Johnson*. “Well, Madam, and you ought to be perpetually watching. It is more from carelessness about truth than from intentional lying, that there is so much falsehood in the world.”

In his review of Dr. Warton’s *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope*, Johnson has given the following salutary caution upon this subject:

“Nothing but experience could evince the frequency of false information, or enable any man to conceive that so many groundless reports should be propagated, as every man of eminence may hear of himself. Some men relate what they think, as what they know; some men of confused memories and habitual inaccuracy, ascribe to one man what belongs to another; and some talk on, without thought or care. A few men are sufficient to broach falsehoods, which are afterwards innocently diffused by successive relaters.”

Had he lived to read what Sir John Hawkins and Mrs. Piozzi have related concerning himself, how much would he have found his observation illustrated. He was indeed so much impressed with the prevalence of falsehood, voluntary or unintentional, that I never knew any person who upon hearing an extraordinary circumstance told, discovered more of the *incredulus odi*. He would say, with a significant look and decisive tone, “It is not so. Do not tell this again.” He inculcated upon all his friends the importance of perpetual vigilance against the slightest degrees of falsehood; the effect of which, as Sir Joshua Reynolds observed to me, has been, that all who were of his *school* are distinguished for a love of truth and accuracy,

which they would not have possessed in the same degree, if they had not been acquainted with Johnson.

Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (March 31, 1778)

52 We talked of the casuistical question, Whether it was allowable at any time to depart from *Truth?* Johnson. "The general rule is, that Truth should never be violated, because it is of the utmost importance to the comfort of life, that we should have a full security by mutual faith; and occasional inconveniences should be willingly suffered that we may preserve it. There must, however, be some exceptions. If, for instance, a murderer should ask you which way a man is gone, you may tell him what is not true, because you are under a previous obligation not to betray a man to a murderer."

Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (June 13, 1784)

53 The honest man, though e'er sae poor,
Is king o' men for a' that!

Burns, *A Man's a Man for a' That*

54 [A man] finds himself forced by necessity to borrow money. He knows that he will not be able to repay it, but sees also that nothing will be lent to him unless he promises stoutly to repay it in a definite time. He desires to make this promise, but he has still so much conscience as to ask himself: "Is it not unlawful and inconsistent with duty to get out of a difficulty in this way?" Suppose however that he resolves to do so: then the maxim of his action would be expressed thus: "When I think myself in want of money, I will borrow money and promise to repay it, although I know that I never can do so." Now this principle of self-love or of one's own advantage may perhaps be consistent with my whole future welfare; but the question now is, "Is it right?" I change then the suggestion of self-love into a universal law, and state the question thus: "How would it be if my maxim were a universal law?" Then I see at once that it could never hold as a universal law of nature, but would necessarily contradict itself. For supposing it to be a universal law that everyone when he thinks himself in a difficulty should be able to promise whatever he pleases, with the purpose of not keeping his promise, the promise itself would become impossible, as well as the end that one might have in view in it, since no one would consider that anything was promised to him, but would ridicule all such statements as vain pretences.

Kant, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*, II

55 He who is thinking of making a lying promise to others will see at once that he would be using another man *merely as a mean*, without the latter containing at the same time the end in himself. For he whom I propose by such a promise to use

for my own purposes cannot possibly assent to my mode of acting towards him and, therefore, cannot himself contain the end of this action.

Kant, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*, II

56 Though this proposition, "*honesty is the best policy*," announces a theory, too frequently, alas! contradicted by experience; yet no objection will ever overthrow this: honesty is better than all policy, and is even an essential condition of it.

Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, Appendix, 1

57 In this kingdom of illusions we grope eagerly for stays and foundations. There is none but a strict and faithful dealing at home and a severe barring out of all duplicity or illusion there. Whatever games are played with us, we must play no games with ourselves, but deal in our privacy with the last honesty and truth. I look upon the simple and childish virtues of veracity and honesty as the root of all that is sublime in character. Speak as you think, be what you are, pay your debts of all kinds. I prefer to be owned as sound and solvent, and my word as good as my bond, and to be what cannot be skipped, or dissipated, or undermined, to all the *éclat* in the universe. This reality is the foundation of friendship, religion, poetry, and art. At the top or at the bottom of all illusions, I set the cheat which still leads us to work and live for appearances; in spite of our conviction, in all sane hours, that it is what we really are that avails, with friends, with strangers, and with fate or fortune.

Emerson, *Illusions*

58 Absolutely speaking, Do unto others as you would that they should do unto you is by no means a golden rule, but the best of current silver. An honest man would have but little occasion for it. It is golden not to have any rule at all in such a case.

Thoreau, *The Christian Fable*

59 Speaking truth is like writing fair, and comes only by practice; it is less a matter of will than of habit, and I doubt if any occasion can be trivial which permits the practice and formation of such a habit. To speak and act truth with constancy and precision is nearly as difficult, and perhaps as meritorious, as to speak it under intimidation or penalty; and it is a strange thought how many men there are, as I trust, who would hold to it at the cost of fortune or life, for one who would hold to it at the cost of a little daily trouble. And seeing that of all sin there is, perhaps, no one more flatly opposite to the Almighty, no one more "wanting the good of virtue and of being," than this of lying, it is surely a strange insolence to fall into the foulness of it on light or on no temptation, and surely becoming an honourable man to resolve, that, whatever semblances or fallacies the neces-

sary course of his life may impel him to bear or to believe, none shall disturb the serenity of his voluntary actions, nor diminish the reality of his chosen delights.

Ruskin, *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, II, 1

60 *Father Zossima*. The man who lies to himself and listens to his own lie comes to such a pass that he cannot distinguish the truth within him, or around him, and so loses all respect for himself and for others. And having no respect he ceases to love, and in order to occupy and distract himself without love he gives way to passions and coarse pleasures, and sinks to bestiality in his vices, all

from continual lying to other men and to himself. The man who lies to himself can be more easily offended than anyone. You know it is sometimes very pleasant to take offence, isn't it? A man may know that nobody has insulted him, but that he has invented the insult for himself, has lied and exaggerated to make it picturesque, has caught at a word and made a mountain out of a molehill—he knows that himself, yet he will be the first to take offence, and will revel in his resentment till he feels great pleasure in it, and so pass to genuine vindictiveness.

Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, Pt. I, II, 2

9.15 | *Wisdom and Folly*

Of all the qualities of mind or character that are called virtues, excellences, or perfections, wisdom is, perhaps, the one most universally admired, as it is also, perhaps, the one that is generally thought most difficult to achieve. Socrates is famous for his unwillingness to accept the oracle's judgment of himself as the wisest man in Greece, declaring that only God is wise and that men show some semblance of wisdom only if they realize how little they know. According to Socrates, the philosopher must not be thought of as a wise man, but rather as a lover of or seeker after wisdom.

Some of the quotations below define philosophical or speculative wisdom as the highest form of attainable knowledge, consisting in an understanding of first principles or ultimate causes. The greatest praise that has been given to philosophy is accorded to it by those who identify it with wisdom. For other quotations that express this view or quotations questioning it, the reader is re-

ferred to Section 17.1 on PHILOSOPHY AND PHILOSOPHERS.

Wisdom and folly are often thought of by the poets and the historians, as in books of the Old and the New Testament, not as consisting in profound knowledge and abysmal ignorance; rather the wise man is one who knows how to manage all the affairs of life well, while the fool stumbles and blunders and goes astray. This treatment of wisdom overlaps the discussion of prudence or practical wisdom, which the reader will find in Section 9.13. It also touches on the same fundamental question that is raised there—whether or not it is possible to be a wise man without being a man of good moral character.

The quotations below include not only the praise of wisdom, but also the praise of folly, especially the kinds of folly that, upon examination, emerge as wisdom in disguise. They give us examples of fools who speak wisely about matters concerning which pre-