6. Do you agree with the requirements of punishment? Why or why not? To what extent do you agree that punishment should be meted out within the legal system?
7. Describe and explain the three theories of punishment. Which do you think is most valid? Why?
8. Which is the more important principle in punishing: giving people what they deserve or punishing only if you can bring about good consequences? Why?
9. What should be emphasized in punishment: the deterrence and rehabilitation of the offender, the deterrence of others, or the protection of society? Why?

Discussion Questions

1. Whenever you have had occasion to reward or punish someone, which of the three theories have you drawn upon, and why?
2. How do we in America generally reward, punish, or distribute good or bad, and which theories do you think we basically follow? Give specific examples and illustrations to support your main points.
3. How effective do you feel our judicial and penal systems are in punishing or rehabilitating criminals? Why? Again, give specific examples and illustrations.
4. To what extent do you feel that the purpose of punishment is to (a) protect society, (b) punish criminals, or (c) rehabilitate and reform criminals? Why? Answer in detail.
5. When you have had occasion to distribute good or bad to others, which of the many ways described have you used? Why? Have you found yourself using different ways for different situations and people? Which, and why? Answer in detail.
6. What method of reward and punishment is used in your family, and how does it fit in with the three theories? Does it work? Be specific.
7. Analyze any group or institution of which you are or have been a member (e.g., church, school, the military, sports team, or honorary club or society in school or out of it), and describe what theories are or have been used in distributing good and bad and in rewarding and punishing. Do you believe that the methods are fair and just? Why or why not?
8. To what extent do you feel that as a country and a people we should take care of our less fortunate and “needy” members, and why? How should this be done—through private donations, government support, or both? If private donations are not sufficient, should we through government taxation ensure that these people are cared for? Why or why not?
9. In his historic acceptance of his party’s nomination for President of the United States, Sen. Barack Obama (D. IL) stated that it is every American’s birthright to have a college education. Is this a basic human right? What basis can Obama cite for such a claim? What are the implications of this declaration?

Ethics Problem

Who Gets to Stay on the Lifeboat?

Ecologist Garrett Hardin (1915–2003) proposed the metaphor of a lifeboat to help us think about resource distribution in a world fast approaching limits.25 Hardin’s view, called “Lifeboat Ethics,” looks at trends such as population increase, resource depletion, and the carrying capacity of land to make a case against helping the poor. Although we all have basic needs, some people must be denied. Lifeboats, metaphorically, refer to wealthy nations.

Consider the example of a lifeboat with a capacity of 50 persons. The ship is sinking and there are not enough lifeboats. You are safe on a lifeboat filled to capacity, but there are still 100 people in the water. What do you do? All need to get in the lifeboat, or they will not survive. But, the lifeboat is full. Who should stay and who should go, and why? What criteria do we use to make decisions in a world of limited resources? Do an Internet search on lifeboat ethics and also see Alfred Hitchcock’s film Lifeboat.
Notes

2. Ibid., 1060.
5. Ibid., 246–47.
6. Ibid., 259–66.
12. Ibid., 331.

"The Declaration of Independence," Thomas Jefferson (*Note: Final Version)
"Is There a Torturous Road to Justice?" Alan M. Dershowitz.

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Setting Up a Moral System: Basic Assumptions and Basic Principles

At this point in a course in ethics or in most texts on ethics, students usually throw up their hands in frustration, saying, “If all of the ethical theories and systems are so full of problems, then perhaps there is no such thing as a workable and meaningful moral system. Perhaps morality is relative to whoever sets it up and to no one else.” Too often teachers of ethics courses and authors of ethics books do very little to alleviate these frustrations, except to say that perhaps students ought to take another course or simply try to do the best they can with the “broken” theories or systems to which they have been exposed. Jacques Thiroux (1928–2006) believed that we can attempt to show the way toward building a moral system that is workable not only for many individuals but also for most, if not all, human beings. Accordingly, Thiroux’s theory of Humanitarian Ethics marks an important contribution to the study of morality and the entire field of ethics.

OBJECTIVES
After you have read this chapter, you should be able to

1. Identify, define, and explain the major conflicting general moral issues in setting up a moral system.
2. Present, describe, and discuss basic assumptions about what characteristics or attributes any meaningful, livable, and workable moral system or theory should contain.
3. Try to resolve the central problem areas of morality—which are how to attain stability, unity, and order without eliminating individual freedom by the establishment of basic ethical principles.
4. Establish and justify the priority in which the five basic principles should be applied.

In order to build a workable and meaningful moral system, we need to point toward the reasonable synthesis. We must try to combine what is best in all of the ethical systems and theories we have examined—religious, nonreligious, consequentialist, nonconsequentialist, individualistic, and altruistic—to arrive at a common moral ground, while at the same time dealing with or eliminating their problems and difficulties. We must search for a larger meeting ground in which the best of all these theories and systems can operate meaningfully and with a minimum of conflict and opposition.

Before doing this, however, it is important to state Thiroux’s reasons for writing this chapter: First, Thiroux sought to develop his own ethical system as an important part of his own philosophy of life, and second, to try to show readers how they might go about constructing their own ethical systems.