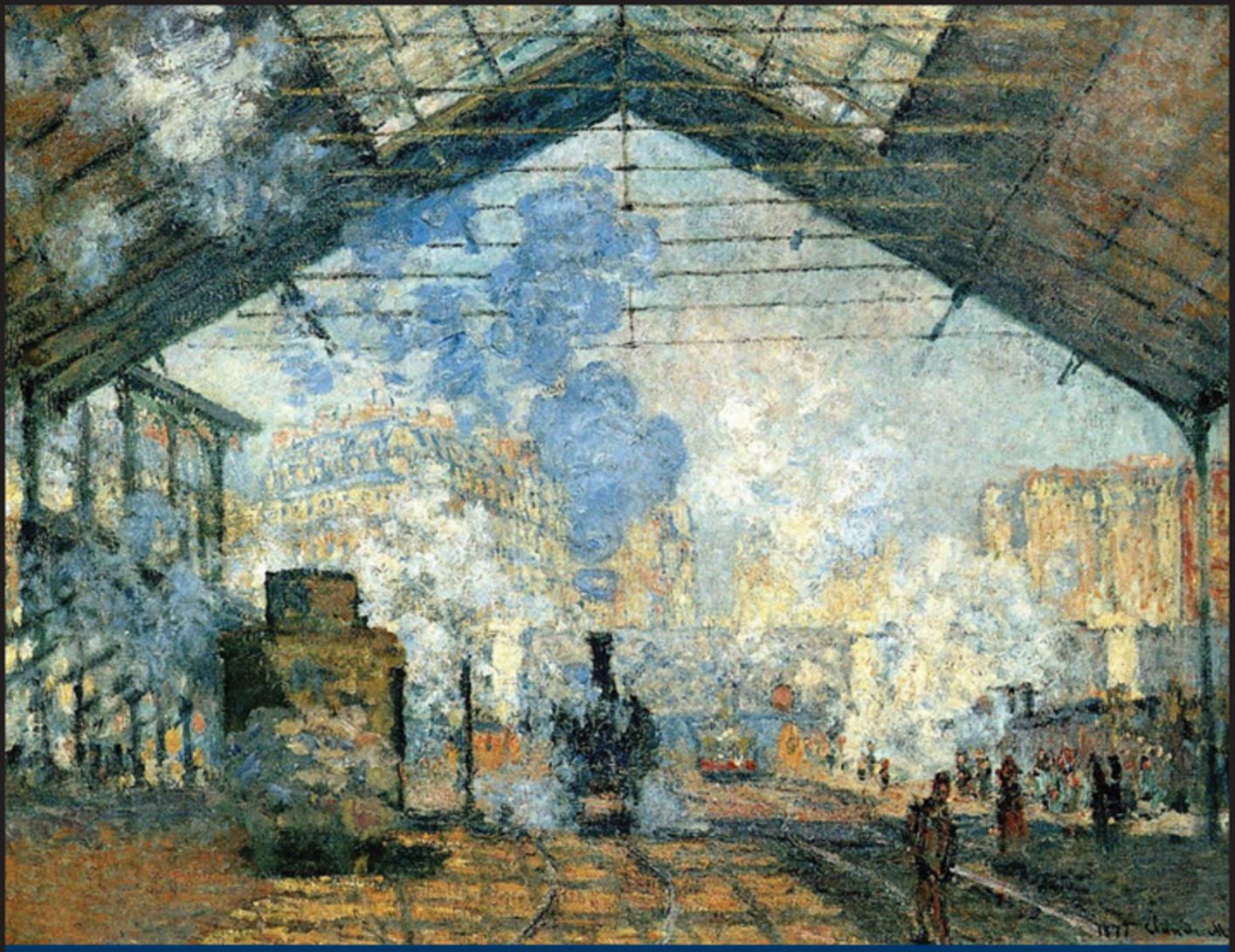

ETHICS *in* PRACTICE

AN ANTHOLOGY

FIFTH EDITION

EDITED BY HUGH LAFOLLETTE

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Ethics in Practice

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Edited by

Hugh LaFollette

University of South Florida, St. Petersburg

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Preface for Instructors

This anthology seeks to provide engagingly written, carefully argued philosophical essays on a wide range of important, contemporary moral issues. When I had trouble finding essays that suited those purposes, I commissioned new ones – twelve for this edition. I also invited a number of philosophers to revise their "classic" essays – seven for this edition. Altogether, well over half of the essays herein were written or revised specifically for *Ethics in Practice*. This edition includes five introductory essays, including a new one entitled "The Basics of Argumentation."

The result is a tasty blend of the old and the new, the familiar and the unfamiliar. I have organized the book into four thematic sections and fourteen topics to give you the greatest flexibility to construct the course you want. When feasible, I begin or end a section with an essay that connects the current topic to ones discussed in preceding or following sections.

Although I have included essays I think introductory students can read and comprehend, no one would believe me if I averred that all the essays are easy to read. We know many students have trouble reading philosophical essays. After all, many of these essays were written originally for other professional philosophers, not first-year undergraduates. Moreover, even when philosophers write expressly for introductory audiences, their ideas, vocabularies, and styles are often foreign to the introductory student. So, I have included a brief introduction on "Reading Philosophy" to advise students on how to read and understand philosophical essays.

I want this volume to be suitable for an array of ethics and moral issues courses. The most straightforward way to use the text is to assign essays on six or seven of your favorite practical issues. If you want a more topical course, you could emphasize issues in one or more of the major thematic sections. You could also focus on practical and theoretical issues spanning individual topics and major divisions of the book. If, for instance, you want to focus on gender, you could select most essays from two sections – ABORTION and DISCRIMINATION, RACISM, AND SEXISM – and many of the essays in the section on BIOMEDICAL TECHNOLOGIES. Finally, you can also give your course a decided theoretical flavor by using the section on ETHICAL THEORY, and then selecting essays that address, in diverse contexts, significant theoretical issues like the act/omission (or doing/allowing) distinction, the determination of moral status, the limits of morality, and so on. You can also direct your students to "Theorizing about Ethics" – a brief introductory essay designed to help them understand why we should theorize, and then giving them a snapshot of major theories.

The section introductions focus on theory and its role in moral deliberations. Some anthologies do not have section introductions. Most that do often use them simply to summarize that section's articles. The introductions in this anthology do indicate the main thrust of each essay. However, that is not their primary function. Their purpose is (1) to focus students' attention on the theoretical issues at stake, and (2) to relate those issues to the discussion of other essays in that section or essays on different moral topics. All too often students (and philosophers) see practical ethics as a hodgepodge of wholly or largely unrelated issues. These introductions should go some way toward undermining that view. They show students that practical issues are not discrete, but intricately connected. Thinking

carefully about any issue invariably illuminates (and is illuminated by) others. By expressly revealing these connections, these introductions fulfill an overarching aim to make this volume cohere better than many anthologies.

There are consequences of this strategy you might mention to your students. I organized the order of the papers within each section to maximize the students' understanding of that practical issue – nothing more. However, I wrote the introductions and organized the summaries to maximize the understanding of theoretical issues. Often the order of the discussion of essays in the introduction parallels the order of essays in that section; occasionally it does not. Moreover, I spend more time "summarizing" some of these essays. That in no way suggests that the essays on which I focus are more cogent, useful, or in any way superior to the others. Rather, I found it easier to use them as entrées into the theoretical debates.

Finally, since I do not know which sections you will use, you should be aware that the introductions will likely refer to essays the students will not read. When that happens, the introductions will not fully realize one of their aims. Nonetheless, they may still be valuable. For even if the students do not read the essays to which an introduction refers, they can better appreciate the interconnections between issues. It might even have the delicious consequence of encouraging some students to read an essay that you did not assign.

One last note about the criteria for selecting essays. Many practical ethics anthologies include essays on opposing sides of every issue. For most topics that is a laudable aim that an editor can normally achieve. But not always. I include essays that discuss the issue as we currently frame and understand it. Sometimes that understanding precludes some positions that would have once been part of the debate. For instance, early practical ethics anthologies included essays that argued that an individual should always choose to prolong her life, by any medical means whatever. On this view, euthanasia of any sort and for any reason was immoral. Although that was once a common and viable position, virtually no one now advocates or even discusses it. Even the author of the essay with serious misgivings about a "right to die" would not endorse it. The current euthanasia debate largely concerns when people might choose not to sustain their lives, how they might carry out their wishes, and with whose assistance. Those are the questions addressed by the essays on euthanasia.

Likewise, I do not have any essays that argue that women and African Americans ought to be relegated to the bedroom or cotton field. Although everyone acknowledges that racism and sexism are still alive and well in the United States, few people openly advocate making Blacks and women second class citizens. No one seriously discusses these proposals in academic circles. Instead, I include essays that highlight current issues concerning the treatment of minorities and women (sexual harassment, date rape, implicit bias, etc.).

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General Introduction

All of us make choices. Some of these appear to concern only ourselves: what to wear, when to sleep, what to read, where to live, how to decorate our homes, and what to eat. Under most circumstances these choices are purely personal. Purely personal concerns are beyond the scope of morality as ordinarily understood, and will not be discussed in this book. Other choices demonstrably affect others: whether to prolong the life of our comatose grandmother, when and with whom to have sex, how to relate to people of different races, and whether to support capital punishment or laws against cloning. These choices clearly affect others and are normally thought to be choices we should morally assess.

Upon closer examination, however, we see that it is not always obvious whether a choice affects only us. Is choosing to view pornography personal or does it support the degradation of women? Is eating meat purely personal or does it encourage and sustain the inhumane treatment of animals or the depletion of resources that we could use to feed the starving? Is choosing where to live purely personal or does it sometimes support racist practices that confine African-Americans or Hispanics or Asians to inadequate housing? If so, then some choices that *seem* purely personal turn out to affect others in morally significant ways.

In short, once we reflect carefully on our choices, we discover that many might profoundly affect others, and therefore, that we ought to evaluate them morally. By choosing to buy a new stereo rather than send money for famine relief, children in India may starve. By choosing to support political candidates who oppose or support abortion, tough drug laws, affirmative action, or environmental protection, I affect others in demonstrably significant ways. Of course knowing that our choices affect others does not yet tell us how we should behave. It does, however, confirm that we should evaluate those choices morally. Unfortunately many of us are individually and collectively nearsighted: we fail to see or appreciate the moral significance of our choices, thereby increasing the evil in the world. Often we talk and think as if evil resulted solely from the conscious choices of wholly evil people. I suspect, however, that evil results more often from ignorance and inattention: we just don't notice or attend to the significance of what we do (LaFollette, H. 2017). A central aim of this book is to improve our moral vision: to help us notice and comprehend the moral significance of what we do.

The primary means of achieving this end is to present essays that carefully and critically discuss a range of practical moral issues. These essays will supply information you likely do not have and perspectives you may not have not considered. Many of you may find that your education has ill-prepared you to think carefully about these issues. Far too many public schools in the United States neither expect nor even permit students to think critically. Many of them will not have expected you – or wanted you – to develop and defend your own views. Instead, many will have demanded that you memorize the content of your texts and the assertions of your teachers, only to regurgitate them on a test.

Ethics in Practice: An Anthology, Fifth Edition. Edited by Hugh LaFollette.

Philosophy professors, in contrast, do not standardly expect or want you to memorize what they or someone else says. Still less will they want you to parrot them or the texts. They require you to read what others have said, but not because they want you to recite it. Instead, these professors contend that critically reading the arguments of others will help you will better reach your own conclusions. For those of you who find that your high school education, with its premium on memorization and blind adherence to authority, did not prepare you to read philosophical essays, I have included a brief section on "Reading Philosophy."

I also include a brief introductory essay on ethical theorizing. Philosophers do not discuss practical issues in a vacuum. They place their discussions in a larger context that helps clarify and define the practical issues. They discuss not only the details peculiar to the issue, but more general features that are relevant to many practical moral quandaries. That essay will explain the purpose of "Theorizing about Ethics." The essay will also briefly describe some prominent ethical theories that you will encounter in these pages. You will see, as you read individual essays, that some authors provide detailed explanations of these theories.

Additionally, I include an introductory essay on "Writing a Philosophy Paper." Some of what I say will overlap themes from several of the earlier introductions. However, since I know not all teachers will assign, and not all students will read, all of the introductions, I think this is unavoidable. My aim is to briefly describe a variety of papers you might be asked to write, and talk about what you should do to make your papers as strong as possible.

Finally, to augment your familiarity with various theories, I will, in the introductions to each section, not only summarize the central themes of the essays but also spotlight some general theoretical questions and explain how these are relevant to other issues discussed in this volume. It is important to appreciate the myriad ways in which practical moral issues are woven together by common theoretical threads. Practical ethics is not a random collection of disconnected issues, but a systematic exploration of how we can most responsibly act in a variety of practical moral contexts.

Consequently, this is not a recipe book that answers all moral questions. Rather, it is a chronicle of how a number of philosophers have thought about these practical moral issues. If you absorb the information the authors' supply, attend to their arguments, and consider the diverse perspectives they offer, you will find, when the course is over, that you are better able to think carefully and critically about practical and theoretical moral issues. Since arguments play such a key role in these essays, and many of you may be unfamiliar with the best ways of understanding and critiquing arguments, I have included an introductory essay on "The Basics of Argumentation."

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Theorizing about Ethics

When deciding what to do, we are often uncertain of, confused about, or have conflicts between, our inclinations, desires, interests, and beliefs. These difficulties can be present even when we want to promote only our self-interests. We might not know what is in our best interests: we may have simply adopted some mistaken ideas of our parents, our friends, or our culture. For instance, were our parents Nazis, we might believe that maintaining racial purity is an extremely important personal aim. We may also confuse our wants with our interests: we want to manipulate others for our own ends and therefore mistakenly infer that caring for others always or usually undermines our interests (LaFollette, H. 1996: chapters 3 and 13). Even when we know some of our interests, we might be unable to determine their relative importance: we may assume that wealth is more important than developing character and having close relationships. Other times we may know our interests and desires, but be unsure of how to resolve conflicts between them: I might need to write a paper, yet want to hike the local mountain. Finally, even if I know the best choice, I may not act on it: I may know that it is in my best long-term interest to lose weight, yet inhale that scrumptious pie instead.

These complications show why I can best pursue my self-interests only if I self-critically and rationally deliberate about them. I must sometimes step back and think more abstractly about (a) what it means for something to be an interest (rather than a mere desire), (b) how to detect which behavior or goals are most likely to advance those interests, and (c) how to understand the interconnections between my interests (e.g., the ways that health enhances my chance of achieving other interests). Finally, I must (d) find a procedure for coping with conflicts between interests, and (e) learn how to act on the outcome of my rational deliberations. Abstraction from and theorizing about practice improves practice and helps us act more prudently.

Of course, many actions do not concern simply ourselves; they also affect others. Some of my actions benefit others while some harm them. The benefit or harm may be direct or indirect, intentional or unintentional. I might directly harm Joe by pushing him. I might push him because I am angry with him or because I want his place in the queue. I could indirectly harm Joe by landing a promotion he needs to finance nursing care for his dying mother. Or I might offend Joe by privately engaging in what he considers kinky sex. In the latter case, my bedroom antics affect him, although only indirectly and only because he holds the particular moral beliefs he does. Arguably it is inappropriate to say that I harmed Joe in these last two cases, although I did choose to act knowing my actions might make him unhappy or nauseated.

In choosing how to behave, I should acknowledge that my actions may affect others, even if only indirectly. In these circumstances, I must choose whether to pursue my self-interest or whether to promote (or at least not setback) the interests of others. Other times I must choose to act in ways that harm some while benefitting others. If I am fortunate, I might occasionally find ways to promote everyone's interests without harming anyone's.

Understanding these distinctions does not settle the question of how I should act. It only circumscribes the arena within which morality operates. Morality, traditionally understood, involves primarily, and perhaps exclusively, behavior that affects others. I say "perhaps"

because some philosophers (e.g., Kant) thought that anyone who harms him or herself, for instance, by squandering their talents or abusing their body, has done something morally wrong. For present purposes, though, we can set this issue aside. For what everyone acknowledges is that actions that indisputably affect others should be evaluated morally – although we might disagree about how that judgment should shape our action. We might further disagree whether and to what extent actions that affect others only indirectly should be evaluated morally. We may further disagree about whether and how to morally distinguish direct from indirect harm. Nonetheless, if someone's action directly and substantially affects others (either benefits or harms them), then even if we do not yet know whether the action is right or wrong, we can agree that we should evaluate it morally.

This discussion might suggest that most, if not all, moral decisions are complicated or confusing. Not so. Many moral "decisions" are so easy that we never think about them. No one seriously asks whether it is morally permissible to drug a classmate so one can have sex with them, whether one should steal money from co-workers to finance a vacation on the Riviera, or whether an individual should knowingly infect someone with AIDS. This is not the stuff of which moral disagreement is made. We know quite well that such actions are wrong. Rather than discuss questions to which there are obvious answers, we focus on, think about, and debate those about which there is genuine disagreement.

However, we sometimes think a decision is easy to make, when, in fact, it is not. This is an equally (or arguably more) serious mistake. We may fail to see the conflicts, confusions, or uncertainties: the issue may be so complicated that we overlook, fail to understand, or do not appreciate how (and how profoundly) our actions affect others. If we are preoccupied with our self-interest, we may not see the ways our behavior significantly affects others or else we give inadequate weight to their interests. Finally, our unquestioning acceptance of the moral status quo can blind us to just how wrong some of our behaviors and social institutions are.

The Need for Theory

We may think that an action is grossly immoral, but not know why. Or we may think we know, only to discover, upon careful examination, that we are merely parroting "reasons" offered by our friends, teachers, parents, or preachers. There is nothing wrong with considering how others think and how they have decided similar moral questions. We would be foolish not to absorb and benefit from other's deliberations. However, anyone even faintly aware of history will acknowledge that collective moral wisdom, like individual moral wisdom, is sometimes horribly mistaken (see Mill's "Freedom of Thought and Discussion," Chapter 32 in this volume). Our ancestors held slaves, denied women the right to vote, practiced genocide, and burned witches at the stake. I suspect most of these ancestors were generally morally decent people who were firmly convinced that their actions were moral. They acted wrongly because they failed to be sufficiently self-critical. They did not evaluate their own beliefs; they unquestioningly adopted the outlook of their ancestors, political leaders, teachers, friends, and community. In these ways they are not unique. This is a "sin" of which each of us is guilty. The resounding lesson of history is that we must scrutinize our beliefs, our choices, and our actions to ensure that we are informed, consistent, imaginative, unbiased, and that we are not mindlessly reciting the views and aping the vices of others. Otherwise we may perpetrate evils we could avoid, evils for which future generations will rightly condemn us (LaFollette, H. 2017).

To critically evaluate our moral views we should theorize about ethics: we should think about moral issues more abstractly, more coherently, and more consistently. Theorizing is not some enterprise divorced from practice, but is simply the careful, systematic, and thoughtful reflection on practice. Theorizing will not insulate us from error. However, it will empower us to shed ill-conceived, uninformed, and irrelevant considerations. To explain what I mean, let's think briefly about a matter dear to most students: grades. My grading of students' work can go awry in at least three different ways.

1 I might use an inconsistent grading standard. I may use different standards for different students: Joan gets an A because she has a pleasant smile; Ralph, because he works hard; Rachel, because her paper was exceptional. Of course knowing that I need a consistent grading standard would not reveal which standards I should have employed or what grades students should have received. Perhaps they all deserved the As they received. However, it is not enough that I accidentally gave them the grades they

deserved. I should have given them As *because they deserved them*, not because of some irrelevant considerations. If I employ irrelevant considerations, I will often give students the wrong grades, even if, in some cases, I give them appropriate ones.

2 I might be guided by improper grading standards. It is not enough that I have a consistent standard. I might have a flawed standard to which I adhere unwaveringly. For instance, I might consistently give students I like higher grades than students I dislike. If so, then I grade their work inappropriately, even if consistently.

3 I might employ the standards inappropriately. I might have appropriate and consistent grading standards, yet misapply them because I am ignorant, close-minded, exhausted, preoccupied, or inattentive.

I can make parallel mistakes in ethical deliberations.

1 I might use inconsistent ethical principles.
2 I might hold inappropriate moral standards.
3 I might employ appropriate moral standards inappropriately.

Let us look at each deliberative error in more detail.

1) **Consistency**. We should treat two creatures the same unless they are relevantly different – different in ways that justify treating them differently. Just as students expect teachers to grade consistently, we expect others (and hopefully ourselves) to be morally consistent. The demand for consistency pervades moral thinking. A common strategy for defending our moral views is to claim that we are consistent; a common strategy for criticizing others' views is to charge that they are not.

The argumentative role of consistency is evident in the discussion of every practical moral issue. Consider its role in the abortion debate. Disputants spend considerable effort arguing that their own positions are consistent while charging that their opponents' positions are not. Each side labors to show why abortion is (or is not) relevantly similar to standard cases of murder. Most of those who think abortion is immoral (and likely all of those who think it should be illegal) claim abortion is relevantly similar to murder, while those who think abortion should be legal claim it is not. What we do not find are people who think abortion is indisputable murder and indisputably moral.

Consistency likewise plays central roles in debates over FREE SPEECH and PATERNALISM AND RISK. Those opposed to censorship often argue that books, pictures, movies, plays, or sculptures that some people want to censor are relevantly similar to art that most people do not want censored. They further claim that pornography is a form of speech, and if we prohibit it *because the majority finds it offensive*, then we must censor any speech that offends the majority. Conversely, those who claim we can legitimately censor pornography go to some pains to explain why pornography is relevantly different from other forms of speech we want to protect. Both sides want to show that their position is consistent and that their opponent's position is not.

Although consistency is generally recognized as a requirement of morality, in specific cases it is difficult to detect if someone is being (in)consistent. Someone may appear to act inconsistently, but only because we do not appreciate the complexity of his or her moral reasoning or fail to understand the morally relevant features framing their action. Nonetheless, what everyone acknowledges is that *if* someone is being inconsistent, then that is a compelling reason to doubt their position.

2) **Correct principles**. It is not enough to be consistent. We must also employ the appropriate guidelines, principles, or standards, or make the appropriate judgments. Theorizing about ethics is one good way to discern the best (most defensible) standards or guidelines, to identify the morally relevant features of our actions, to enhance our ability to make good judgments. Later I discuss how to select and defend these principles: how we determine what is morally relevant.

3) **Correct "application."** Even when we know what is morally relevant, and even when we reason consistently, we may still make moral mistakes. Consider the ways I might misapply rules prohibiting (a) lying and (b) harming another's feelings. Suppose my wife comes home wearing a gaudy sweater. She wants to know if I like it. Presumably I should neither lie nor intentionally hurt her feelings. What, in these circumstances, should I do? There are a number of ways I might act inappropriately. 1) *I may not see viable alternatives*: I might assume, for example, that I must baldly lie or else significantly hurt her feelings. 2) *I may be insufficiently attentive to her needs, interests, and abilities*: I could over- or under-estimate how much she will be hurt by my honesty (or lack of it). 3) *I may be unduly influenced by self-interest or*

personal bias: I might lie, not to protect her feelings, but because I don't want her to be angry with me. 4) *I may know precisely what I should do, but be insufficiently motivated to do it:* I might lie because I just don't want the hassle. 5) Or, *I may be motivated to act as I should, but lack the talent or skill to do it*: I might want to be honest, but lack the verbal and personal skills to be honest in a way that will not hurt her feelings.

These are all failings with practical moral significance. We would all be better off if we would learn how to make ourselves more attentive, more informed, and better motivated. However, although these are vitally important practical concerns, they are not the primary focus of most essays in this book. What these authors do here is provide relevant information, careful logical analysis, and a clear account of what they take to be the morally relevant features of practical ethical questions.

Is it Just a Matter of Opinion?

Many of you might find talk of moral standards troubling. You may think – certainly many people talk as if they think – that moral judgments are just "matters of opinion." All of us have overheard people conclude a debate about a contentious moral issue by saying: "Well, it is all just a matter of opinion!" I suspect the real function of this claim is to signal the speaker's desire to terminate discussion. Unfortunately this claim implies more. It suggests that since moral judgments are *just* opinions, then all moral judgments are equally good (or equally bad). It implies that we cannot criticize or rationally scrutinize ours or anyone else's moral judgments. After all, we don't rationally criticize *mere* opinions ("I don't like French kissing" or "I prefer purple walls to blue ones").

However, even if no (contentious) moral judgment were *indisputably* correct, we should not infer that all moral judgments are equally (un)reliable. Although we may well have no clear way of deciding with certainty which actions are best, we have excellent ways of showing that some actions are morally defective. For instance, we know that moral judgments based on misinformation, shortsightedness, bias, lack of understanding, or wholly bizarre moral principles are flawed. Conversely, judgments are more plausible if they are based on full information, careful calculation, astute perception, and if they have successfully survived the criticism of others in the marketplace of ideas.

Consider the following analogy: no grammatical or stylistic rules will determine precisely the way I should phrase the next sentence. However, from that we should not infer that I may stylistically string together just any words. Some arrangements of words are not sentences; some grammatically complete sentences are gibberish. Other sentences are grammatically well formed, relevant, and minimally clear, yet may be imprecise. Others may be comprehensible, relevant, and generally precise, yet still be bereft of style. Some others might be grammatically well formed and even stylish, yet inappropriate because they are not connected to the sentences that precede or follow them. Still others may be wholly adequate, sufficiently adequate so that there is no strong reason to prefer one. A few may be brilliant. No grammar book will enable us to make all those distinctions or to identify a uniquely best sentence. Nonetheless, we have no problem distinguishing the trashy or the unacceptably vague from the linguistically sublime. In short, we needn't think that one sentence is uniquely good to acknowledge that some are better and some are worse. Likewise for ethics. We may not always know how to act; we may find substantial disagreement about some highly contentious ethical issues. However, that does not show that all moral views are created equal.

We should also not ignore the obvious fact that circumstances often demand that we act even if there is no (or we cannot discern a) uniquely superior moral action. Nonetheless, our uncertainty does not lead us to think that – or act as if – all views were equal. We do not toss a coin to decide whether to remove our parents from life support, whether to save a small child from drowning in a pond, or whether someone charged with a felony is guilty. We (should) strive to make an informed decision based on the best evidence and then act accordingly, even if the best evidence does not guarantee certainty. We should not bemoan our inability to be certain that we have found the uniquely best action; we must simply make the best choice we can. We should, of course, acknowledge our uncertainty, admit our fallibility, and be prepared to consider new ideas, especially when they are supported by strong arguments. However, we have no need to embrace any pernicious forms of relativism. That would be not only misguided, but morally mistaken.

The Role of Theory

Even when people agree that an issue should be evaluated by criteria of morality, they may disagree about how to evaluate it. Using the language of the previous section, they may disagree about the best principles or judgments, about how these are to be interpreted, or about how they should be deployed. Anti-abortionists argue that abortion should be illegal because the fetus has the same right to life as a normal adult, while pro-abortionists argue that it should be legal since the woman has the right to decide what happens in and to her body. Supporters of capital punishment argue that executions deter crime, while opponents argue that it is cruel and inhumane. Those who want to censor pornography claim it degrades women or offends some people's moral sensitivities, while supporters argue that it is a form of free speech that should be protected by law.

In giving reasons for their judgments, people cite some features of the action they think explain or support their evaluation. This function of reasons is not confined to ethical disagreements. I may justify my claim that "*Three Billboards outside Ebbing, Missouri* is a good movie" by claiming that it has well-defined characters, an interesting plot, and appropriate dramatic tension. That is, I identify features of the movie that I think justify my evaluation. The features I cite, however, are not unique to this movie. In giving these reasons I imply that "having well-defined characters" or "having an interesting plot" or "having the appropriate dramatic tension" are important characteristics of good movies, period. That is not to say these are the only or the most important characteristics. Nor is it yet to decide how weighty these characteristics are. It is, however, to say that we have *a* reason to think that a movie with these characteristics is a good movie.

You can challenge my evaluation of the movie in three ways: you can challenge my criteria, the weight I give those criteria, or my claim that the movie satisfies them. For instance, you could argue that having well-defined characters is not a relevant criterion, that I have given that criterion too much weight, or, that *Three Billboards outside Ebbing, Missouri* does not have well-defined characters. In defense, I could explain why it is a relevant criterion, why I have given the criterion the appropriate weight, and why the movie's characters are well developed. At this point we are discussing issues at two different levels. We are debating both the criteria of good movies and how to evaluate a particular movie.

Likewise, when discussing a practical ethical issue, we are not only discussing that issue, we are employing and investigating diverse theoretical perspectives. We do not want to know only whether capital punishment deters crime, we also want to know whether deterrence is morally important, and, if so, just how important. When theorizing reaches a certain level or complexity, we begin to speak of someone's "having a theory." Ethical theories are simply formal and more systematic discussions of second level, theoretical discussions. These are philosophers' efforts to identify the relevant moral criteria, the weight or significance of each criterion, and to offer some guidance about how to determine whether an action satisfies those criteria. In the next section, I briefly outline the more familiar ethical theories. But before I do, let me first offer a warning. In thinking about ethical theories, we may be tempted to assume that people who hold the same theory will make the same practical ethical judgments, and that people who make the same practical ethical judgments will embrace the same theory. Neither is true. It is not true of any evaluative judgments. For instance, two people with similar criteria for good movies may differently evaluate *Three Billboards outside Ebbing, Missouri*, while two people who loved it may have (somewhat) different criteria for good movies. Likewise for ethics. Two people with different ethical theories may nonetheless agree that abortion is morally permitted (or grossly immoral), while two supporters of abortion may embrace different moral theories. Knowing someone's theoretical commitments does not tell us precisely what actions he or she thinks are right and wrong. It tells us only how they think about moral issues; it identifies that person's criteria of relevance and the weight he or she gives to them.

Main Types of Theory

Two broad classes of ethical theory – consequentialist and deontological – have shaped most people's understanding of ethics. Consequentialists hold that we should choose the available action with the best overall

consequences, while deontologists hold that we should act in ways circumscribed by moral rules or rights, and that these rules or rights are defined somewhat independently of consequences (see Chapter 3 on "Rights"). Since this book includes a separate section on ETHICAL THEORY, this exposition will be brief. Nonetheless, these descriptions should be sufficient to help you understand the broad outlines of each theory.

Consequentialism

Consequentialists claim that we are morally obligated to act in ways that produce the best consequences. It is not difficult to see why this is an appealing theory. It employs the same style of reasoning we use in purely prudential (self-interested) decisions. If you are trying to select a major, you will consider the available options, predict which one will likely lead to the best overall outcome, and then choose that major. If you are trying to decide whether to keep your present job or take a new one, you will consider the consequences of each (working conditions, location, salary, chance of advancement, how the change might alter your personal and family relations, etc.), and then choose the one with the best overall consequences.

Despite these similarities, prudence and morality are importantly different. Whereas prudence requires that we wisely advance only our own personal interests, consequentialism requires us to consider the interests of all affected. When facing a moral decision, we should consider available alternative actions, trace the likely consequences of each for all affected, and then select the one with the best overall consequences.

Of course, a consequentialist need not consider every consequence of an action, nor must they consider them all equally. Two consequences of my typing this introduction are that I am strengthening the muscles in my hands and increasing my eye–hand coordination. However, barring unusual circumstances, these are not morally relevant: they are neither a means to nor a constituent of my or anyone else's welfare, happiness, or well-being. That is why they play no role in *moral* deliberation. However, it is not always clear whether or why some consequence is morally relevant. Many moral disagreements are at base disputes over whether or how much some consequence is morally relevant. That is why any adequate consequentialist theory must specify (a) which consequences are morally relevant (i.e., which we should consider when morally deliberating), and (b) how much weight we should give them.

Utilitarians, for instance, claim we should choose the option that maximizes "the greatest happiness of the greatest number." They also advocate complete equality: "each to count as one and no more than one." Of course we might disagree about exactly what it means to maximize the greatest happiness of the greatest number; still more we might be unsure about how this is to be achieved. Act utilitarians claim that we determine the rightness of an action if we can decide which action, in those circumstances, would be most likely to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Rule utilitarians reject the idea that moral decisions should be case-by-case. On their view, we should decide not whether a *particular* action is likely to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number, but whether a particular *type* of action would, if done by everyone (or most people), promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

This theory is discussed in more detail by Shaw in Chapter 1.

Deontology

Deontological theories are most easily understood in contrast to consequentialist ones. Whereas consequentialists claim we should always strive to promote the best consequences, deontologists claim that our moral obligations – whatever they are – are *in some ways* independent of consequences. Thus, if I have obligations not to kill or steal or lie, those obligations are not justified *simply* on the ground that doing these behaviors will always produce the best consequences.

That is why many people find deontological theories so attractive. For example, most of us would be offended if someone lied to us, even if the lie produced the greatest happiness for the greatest number. I would certainly be offended if someone killed me, even if my death might produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number (you use my kidneys to save two people's lives, my heart to save someone else's life, etc.). The deontologist claims that the rightness or wrongness of lying or killing cannot be explained wholly by its consequences. Of course deontologists disagree about which rules or standards are true, how we can determine

them, and whether they can ever be ignored because acting on them would have bad – even horrible – consequences. Some claim abstract reason shows us how we should act (Kant 2002/1785). Others talk about discovering principles that are justified in *reflective equilibrium* (Rawls, e.g., Chapter 55 in the selection on ECONOMIC JUSTICE), while some claim we should seek principles that an ideal observer might adopt (Arthur, Chapter 62 in GLOBAL JUSTICE).

These theories are discussed in more detail by McNaughton and Rawling in Chapter 2, as well as Rainbolt in Chapter 3 (ETHICAL THEORY).

Alternatives

There are numerous alternatives to these theories. To call them "alternatives" does not imply that they are inferior, only that they have not played the same role in shaping contemporary ethical thought. Two are especially worth mention since they have become influential in the past four decades; they also play pivotal roles in several essays in this book.

Virtue theory

Virtue theory predates both consequentialism and deontology as a formal theory. It was the dominant theory of the ancient Greeks, reaching its clearest expression in the Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. For many centuries it was neither discussed nor advocated as a serious competitor. But by the late 1950s, it was starting to reappear in the philosophical literature (the history of this re-emergence is traced in the essays reprinted in Crisp, R. and Slote, M. A. (1997).

Much of the appeal of virtue theory arises from the perceived failings of the standard alternatives. Deontology and consequentialism, virtue theorists claim, put inadequate (or no) emphasis on the agent – on the ways he or she should *be*, or the kinds of *character* the agent should develop. Relatedly, they fail to give appropriate scope to personal judgment and put too much emphasis on following rules, whether deontological or consequentialistic.

On some readings of deontology and utilitarianism, it sounds as if advocates of these theorists believed that a moral decision was the mindless application of a moral rule. If the rule says "Be honest," then we should be honest. If the rule says "Always act to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number," then we need only figure out which action has the most desirable consequences and do it. Ethics thus seems to resemble math. The calculations may require patience and care, but they do not require judgment.

Many advocates of the standard theories find these objections by virtue theorists telling and, over the past two decades, have modified their respective theories to (partially) accommodate them. The result, says Rosalind Hursthouse, is "that the lines of demarcation between these three approaches have become blurred. … Deontology and utilitarianism are no longer perspicuously identified by describing them as emphasizing rules or consequences in contrast to character" (Hursthouse, R. 1999: 4). Both put more emphasis on judgment and character. For instance, Hill, who is a deontologist, describes the proper attitude toward the ENVIRONMENT in a way that emphasizes excellence or character (Chapter 25), while Strikwerda and May (DISCRIMINATION, RACISM AND SEXISM), who do not generally embrace virtue theory, emphasize the need for men to feel shame for their complicity in the rape of women (Chapter 42). However, although judgment and character may play increasingly important roles in contemporary versions of deontology or consequentialism, neither plays the central role they do in virtue theory. This is evident, for instance, in Hursthouse's discussion of ABORTION (Chapter 14) and in her essay on Virtue Theory (Chapter 2 in ETHICAL THEORY).

Feminist theory

Historically most philosophers were men; most embraced the sexism of their respective cultures. Thus, it is not surprising that women's interests and perspectives played no role in the development of standard ethical theories. Does that mean these theories are useless? Or can they be salvaged? Can we merely prune Aristotle's explicit sexism from his theory and still have an Aristotelian theory that is adequate for a less sexist age? Can we remove Kant's sexism and have a non-sexist deontology?

In the early years of feminism, many thinkers thought so. They claimed that the standard ethical theories' emphasis on justice, equality, and fairness offer all the argumentative ammunition women need to claim their rightful place in the public world. Others were not so sure. Carol Gilligan (1982) argued that women have

different moral experiences and different moral reasoning, and that these differences must be incorporated into our understanding of morality. She advocated an "Ethics of Care," which she claimed best exemplified women's experience and thinking. However, other feminists claimed this view too closely resembles old-fashioned views of women. What we need instead, they claim, are theories that have a keen awareness of gender and a concern to develop all people's unique human capacities (Jaggar, A. M. 2000).

Observe the ways that issues concerning woman are discussed (DISCRIMINATION, RACISM, AND SEXISM, ABORTION, FREE SPEECH, and BIOMEDICAL TECHNOLOGIES). See whether the reasons used differ from those employed in other essays. If so, how?

Conclusion

As you read the following essays, you will see how these different ways of thinking about ethics shape our deliberations about particular moral issues. Be alert to these theoretical differences. They will help you better understand the essays. Also pay close attention to the section introductions. These highlight the theoretical issues that play a central role within that section.

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Reading Philosophy

Reading philosophy differs from reading a Twitter feed, the daily newspaper, or science fiction. The subjects are different; the purposes are different; the styles are different. A Twitter feed either informs us of some occurrence – ranging from trivial to significant – or broadcasts its author's quick thought or reaction. Sometimes it urges us to action. It typically achieves these ends with loaded language, splashed with a generous dosage of all capital letters or internet abbreviations, dotted with relevant emoji. Newspapers inform us of significant political, social, cultural, economic, and climatic events. Once we are informed, we can presumably make better decisions about our leaders, our finances, and our social lives. The media typically achieves these aims by giving us the facts, just the facts. They usually present these facts in a pithy writing style. Science fiction attempts to transport us imaginatively to distant worlds of larger-than-life heroes and villains. It aims to entertain us, to divert us from the doldrums of our daily lives, and perhaps even to empower us: having seen the glories or evils of worlds not-yet experienced, we may be better equipped to face everyday problems. Science fiction writers achieve these aims by spinning a convincing narrative of (often imaginary) creatures living in our current world or previously unknown worlds; it heightens our imaginative powers through expressive language.

Philosophers have neither the direct aims of the journalist nor the airy aims of the science fiction novelist. Their primary function is not to inform or to inspire, but to help us explore competing ideas and the reasons for them. The philosopher achieves these aims by employing a writing style that tends to be neither pithy nor expressive. The style likely differs from any with which you are accustomed.

Philosophical Language

While the reporter and the novelist write for the public, philosophers usually write for one other. Thus, while most newspapers and some science fiction are written for an eighth-grade audience, philosophical essays are written for people with university training. That is why you will need a more robust vocabulary to understand a philosophical essay than you will to understand the latest novel or a column in the local paper. Keep a dictionary handy to look up "ordinary" words you may not yet know. You will also face an additional problem with these essays' vocabularies. Philosophy, like all academic disciplines, employs specialized terms. Some of these are familiar words with specialized meanings; others are words unique to the discipline. To fully grasp philosophical writing, you will need to understand both. Do not despair. Often you can roughly determine the term's meaning from its context. If, after doing your best, you still cannot understand its meaning, ask your instructor. Most of these words can be explained in a clear, non-technical way. You can also consult on-line philosophical dictionaries or encyclopedia (see the link on this book's supporting web page: www.hughlafollette.com/eip5/).

Philosophical writing also tends to be more complex than the writings of reporters and novelists. Occasionally it is more complex than it needs to be: the author may not know how to write clearly. Sometimes the essay *seems* more complex than it really is since the author wrote decades or even centuries ago, at a time when most writers penned long, intricate sentences. You can often break down these long sentences into their component parts, for example, by treating a semicolon as a period. You may also need to reread the essay

several times to get a sense of the author's rhythm, much in the way that you may need to listen to a musician several times before you find it easy to appreciate her music and understand the lyrics.

Often, though, the writing is complex simply because the ideas expressed are complex. We cannot always render profound, complex thoughts into intellectual pabulum. The only way to grasp such essays is to generally improve one's reading skills, in large part by reading and rereading essays until you understand them.

The Centrality of Argument

Philosophical writing is complex also because it contains and evaluates arguments. Philosophers forward their own arguments and critique the arguments of others. "Arguments," in this context, have a particular philosophical meaning: An argument is a connected series of statements with a central claim the writer is trying to defend (the conclusion), supported by evidence (the premises) the author offers on behalf of the conclusion. Philosophers employ an array of evidence. They may proffer empirical data, forward imaginative examples, pose suggestions, and critique alternatives. (To better understand what arguments are and how to evaluate them, see the introductory essay "The Basics of Argumentation.") Make certain you have identified the author's conclusion and his or her premises before you evaluate their work. Do not fall into the trap of judging that an argument is flawed because you dislike the conclusion.

The human tendency to dismiss views we dislike helps explain philosophers' preoccupation with arguments. Each of us is constantly bombarded with claims. Some of these claims are true, some false. Some offer sage wisdom; some dreadful advice. How do we distinguish the true from the false, the wise from the inane – especially when the topic is a controversial moral, political, and social issue? How do we know the proper moral response to abortion, world hunger, same-sex marriage, or affirmative action? Do we just pick the one we like? The one our parents, preachers, teachers, friends, or society advocate? Often that is exactly what we do. (This is known as the confirmatory bias (Miller, R. W. 1987; Nickerson, R. S. 1998).) But we shouldn't. Even a cursory glance at history reveals that many horrendous evils were committed by those who embraced their views steadfastly and uncritically. Most Nazis, slave holders, and commanders of Russian Gulags did not think they were immoral; they assumed they were acting appropriately. They simply accepted their society's views without subjecting them to rational and moral scrutiny. That we should not do. At least not if we are responsible individuals (LaFollette, H. 2017). After all, people's lives, welfare, and happiness may depend on our decisions, and the decisions of people like us.

What is our option? We should seek conclusions supported by the best evidence. We should examine the *reasons* offered for alternative beliefs. Doing so will not insure that we make the best decision, but it will increase the odds that we do. It will lessen the possibility that we make highly objectionable decisions, decisions we will later come to regret. Philosophers offer arguments for their views to help themselves and others make better decisions.

Most people are unaccustomed to scrutinizing arguments. Since most of us were expected to believe what our parents, our priests, our teachers, and our pals told us; we are disinclined to consider opposing arguments seriously. We are not inclined to rationally criticize our own views. Moreover, although all of us have offered some arguments for our views, we have rarely done so with the care and depth that are the staples of good philosophy. Philosophers strive to offer a clear, unambiguous conclusion supported by reasons that even those disinclined to believe their conclusions are likely to find plausible. That is not to say that philosophers never make bad arguments or say stupid things. Of course we do. However, it is to say that the explicit aim of philosophy is a *clear, careful, assessment of the reasons for and against ours and others' views*. That is why a key to understanding philosophy is being able to spot arguments, and then to critique them. That is something you will learn, at least in part, by practice. It is something I explore in more detail in my introductory essay "The Basics of Argumentation."

Looking at Others' Views

Since part of the task of defending one's view is to show that it is rationally superior to alternatives, a philosopher standardly not only (a) provides arguments for their