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Second Edition

Edited by Hugh LaFollette and Ingmar Persson

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The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory

Second Edition

Edited by
Hugh LaFollette and Ingmar Persson

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Introduction

Hugh LaFollette and Ingmar Persson

Contemporary moral philosophers entertain theories about human nature, explore the nature of value, discuss competing accounts of the best ways to live, ponder the connections between ethics and human psychology, and discuss practical ethical quandaries. Broadly conceived, these are the same issues ancient philosophers discussed. However, the precise questions contemporary philosophers ask, the distinctions we make, the methods we employ, and the knowledge of the world and of human psychology we use in framing and evaluating ethical theories, often only faintly resemble those of our philosophical predecessors.

Nonetheless, current ethical theories are shaped by our predecessors. We wrestle with the questions they posed. We ask the questions we ask, in the ways we ask them, because of their philosophical successes and failures. Their debates were likewise shaped by the questions posed by their predecessors. The connection between our, their, and their predecessors' questions explains why we have a history of ethics, why we all participate in the same debate. The differences between their debates and ours reflect the ways ethics has evolved. This is as it should be: the debates are similar because we are all looking for better ways to relate to each other; different because with time and the benefits of hindsight, we should better understand ourselves, our place in the world, and our relationships to others.

We can divide their questions and ours into three broad categories: metaethics, normative ethics, and practical ethics. Here are examples of each.

Metaethics: What is the status of moral judgments? Are they statements of fact or expressions of attitudes? If they are statements of fact, are these facts subjective or objective? Are they statements about a normative or evaluative realm

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distinct in kind from the natural world? Is moral agreement possible or do we land in relativism?

Normative ethics: What is the best way, broadly understood, to live? Are there general principles, rules, guidelines that we should follow, or virtues that we should inculcate, that help us distinguish right from wrong and good from bad?

Practical (or applied) ethics: How should we behave in particular situations: when should we tell the truth, under what circumstances can or should we go to war, what is the best way to organize society, how should we relate to the environment and to animals?

The first part of this book contains essays in metaethics and moral epistemology: they discuss the nature and status of ethics and our knowledge of moral matters. The third and largest part contains essays in normative ethics: they offer competing accounts of how we should live. In-between them there is a part with essays on factual matters of relevance to ethics, such as how the psychology of beings must be if they are to be capable of developing and following ethical norms. It must arguably be such that they are capable of being responsible for their actions and being altruistically motivated. This book does not cover practical ethics.

The idea that ethics, like Gaul, is divided into three parts reveals the ways in which ethics as a discipline has evolved. For this is not a distinction the ancients made. Likely they would have seen it as a contrivance, carving nonexistent joints in the moral universe. Still, we can, without undue violence to their views, classify their discussions into these three camps. Plato's theory of the forms (as traditionally understood) could be seen as the first attempt at defending moral realism and offering an objective ground for moral truths. Aristotle's account of the virtues is an early example of virtue theory. And Plato's proposed structure of the state could be envisaged as an early exercise in practical ethics. As long as we use these distinctions as simply a convenient way of distinguishing the kinds of questions they asked, then likely they would not take umbrage.

In the middle of the twentieth century philosophers, however, did not see these distinctions as merely part of a useful classificatory scheme, but as separating ethics into three wholly distinct disciplines, where metaethics was the primary discipline and the only one which constituted "real" philosophy. Philosophy in the English-speaking countries had taken a decidedly "linguistic turn," and the analysis of language, in particular everyday language, was seen as the chief occupation of a philosopher. The British philosopher A.J. Ayer boldly proclaimed that "the propositions of philosophy are not factual, but linguistic . . ." (1946/1952: 57). This was a view of philosophy which originated in the Vienna Circle in the 1930s.

Accordingly, moral philosophers were almost exclusively concerned with the analysis of ethical terms. Typical titles of the period are Charles Stevenson's *Ethics and Language* (1944) and R.M. Hare's *The Language of Morals* (1952). Moral philosophers at the time thought they could fruitfully engage in metaethics without the slightest interest in or acquaintance with normative or practical ethics. Indeed, most would not even consider normative ethics as part of ethics. Not surprisingly,

virtually no one then would have envisioned practical ethics as we now know it. Still less would they be tempted to think of it as philosophy.

Present-day moral philosophers engage in activities that fall into all three categories. Unlike their mid-century predecessors, they reject the idea that moral philosophy is equivalent to metaethics. They also recognize the great relevance that some empirical matters have for ethics, as will be evident from the essays in Part II. Moreover, they are disinclined to think that the three ethical categories make up three wholly independent inquiries. For instance, Stephen Darwall rejects any clear separation between metaethics and normative ethics (1998: 12), while Shelly Kagan not only eschews the distinction between metaethics and normative ethics (1998: 7), he also renounces any firm distinction between normative and practical ethics (1998: 5). In addition, as you will notice when reading the essays, distinctions between the types of normative theory are likewise blurry and should not be taken as indicating more than a vague family resemblance.

The Essays

Metaethics and Moral Epistemology

Part I begins with two essays discussing the meaning of moral judgments: Are they true or false descriptions of states of affairs or expressions of noncognitive attitudes like desires and emotions? If they describe states of affairs, are these objective, or do they have to do with subjective attitudes? If they describe or express attitudes, will not moral judgments be relative to individuals or cultures?

Michael Smith takes "Moral Realism" to be the doctrine that (1) moral judgments are capable of being true and false, and that (2) some of those judgments are, in fact, true. Realism is best understood in contrast with two alternatives: nihilism and expressivism. Both alternatives agree that moral claims cannot be true: expressivists by denying (1) and nihilists by denying (2).

This way of characterizing realism is, however, problematic because there is a popular "minimalistic" conception of truth, according to which saying that a sentence is true is just expressing agreement with it. In this sense, expressivists can claim that moral claims are capable of being true. A better way of characterizing expressivism is by saying that it endorses *internalism*, the doctrine that there is a necessary connection between making a moral judgment and being motivated to act in accordance with it, for instance, between judging that it is wrong to torture babies and being averse to doing it. Although Smith rejects expressivism, he thinks expressivists are right about internalism. He accepts an internalist naturalistic moral realism which claims that judging an act to be right is judging that it is such that in conditions of ideal reflection it induces a desire that it be performed. Internalist naturalistic realism stands in opposition not only to externalist naturalistic realism, but also to nonnaturalistic realism, which takes moral judgments to refer

to properties that are distinct in kind and irreducible to the empirical properties investigated by science.

But will the desires of all of us converge under the conditions of ideal reflection? Smith thinks that a presumption to this effect is part of the meaning of our moral terms. So, he is to that extent a nonrelativist, but he admits that this presumption might turn out to be false. If so, relativism or nihilism will have the final word.

In "Relativism" Simon Blackburn agrees with Smith that, because of the psychological and cultural differences between human beings, relativism poses a threat to moral realism. The remedy Blackburn proposes is, however, to give up the realist idea that moral judgments purport to represent how the world is and an accompanying substantive conception of truth, according to which they are true when they succeed in so doing. Instead we should accept the expressivist claim that moral judgments express the speakers' desires and emotions and a minimalist conception of truth, according to which saying that moral judgments are true is merely to endorse the attitudes they express. Contrary to what many think, Blackburn believes that expressivism can give satisfactory sense to the idea that moral norms can be objective: they are objective if they are not biased or blind to relevant facts. They can also possess an appropriate authority if we regard it as not optional or permissible to embrace conflicting norms.

In "Moral Agreement" Derek Parfit also grapples with the question of whether in ideal conditions – in which we are all adequately informed about relevant empirical facts, thinking clearly, and not subject to any distorting emotions – our moral beliefs will tend to converge. Parfit accepts a form of nonnaturalistic moral realism, according to which we have intuitive knowledge of the basic norms of rationality and morality. (McNaughton and Rawling defend a similar kind of view in "Intuitionism.") This view would be dubious if even under ideal conditions there were deep and widespread divergences in respect of the norms that we endorse. But Parfit contends that this does not seem to be so. In many cases moral disagreements can be put down to differences as regards nonmoral beliefs, for example about matters of religion. In others they are due to distorting factors, such as when the selfishness of the rich makes them underestimate the extent to which they ought to aid the poor. But here, Parfit claims, people also disagree because they think that moral norms are more precise than they actually are. It is unlikely that there is a precise amount that the rich are required to give; in many cases it is indeterminate whether or not the rich have given as much as is required, just as in many cases it is indeterminate whether or not a man is bald. Parfit is thus hopeful that when we get a clearer picture of the reasons for moral disagreement, we could reasonably conjecture that the convergence of our moral belief in ideal conditions would be so substantial that his nonnaturalistic moral realism is not jeopardized.

In "Divine Command Theory" Philip L. Quinn offers another account of the grounds of the objectivity of morality. He defends the claim that morality depends on God. His aim is not to convince atheists of the truth of his view – that would depend on him first convincing them of the existence and nature of God. His aim

is more modest: to show that such beliefs constitute a defensible theory of ethics. Quinn offers and refines a version of the Divine Command Theory, and then responds to assorted criticisms which purportedly show that the very idea of a divine command ethic is indefensible. He ends by offering what he sees as a "cumulative case argument" for the suggestion that categorical moral requirements cannot exist unless there is a deity that intends them.

By a "moral intuition" Jeff McMahan means a moral belief or judgment that is not the result of an inference. He uses the term in a broader, metaethically neutral way rather than in any of the more specific ways it has been used by non-naturalistic moral realists like Parfit, and McNaughton and Rawling. In his essay "Moral Intuition" McMahan sketches a *foundationalist* moral epistemology which takes as its starting point our intuitions about particular moral matters – for example, that it is wrong to kill innocent human beings – and works its way bottom-up to more general moral principles. The principles extracted then need to be confirmed by a top-down procedure of checking how they square with other particular intuitions. This methodology may seem indistinguishable from what John Rawls famously called the search for a *reflective equilibrium*. But Rawls's procedure has usually been interpreted as a coherentist approach, whereas McMahan takes his proposal to be foundationalist. This is because McMahan believes that we have some moral intuitions that we regard as so certain that we would not be willing to surrender them to achieve greater coherence. What ultimately provides the justificatory foundation in his view are the general principles we abstract from our more particular intuitions, but we must have recourse to these intuitions in order to discover the principles: "The order of discovery is the reverse of the order of justification," as he puts it.

Factual Background of Ethics

Part II opens with an essay by Richard Joyce in which he approaches "Ethics and Evolution" from both an empirical and a philosophical perspective. The main issue of the empirical approach is the truth of *moral nativism*, the doctrine that moral judgments are not cultural products but products of a biological adaptation: an innate trait favored by evolution because it provides humans with a reproductive advantage. One problem confronting this hypothesis concerns what precisely "moral judgments" are. Joyce tentatively suggests that they are judgments that involve a notion of justification and that possess a "categorical" authority which gives them an independence of subjective attitudes. Another major problem concerns lack of evidence for this hypothesis that rules out competing hypotheses, such as the hypothesis that the disposition to make moral judgments is a by-product of other biological adaptations.

However, assuming that moral nativism has enough going for it, the philosophical question arises as to what implications it has for ethics. The implications can concern metaethics, normative ethics, or practical ethics, and they can be either

vindicating or debunking. Joyce ends by outlining some such implications and the objections they face.

In the second essay of this part Elliott Sober discusses a long-standing worry about "Psychological Egoism." Philosophers since Socrates have worried that all human motivation is ultimately self-interested. If this is the case, it seems that genuinely moral behavior is impossible because it presupposes that we are capable of being motivated by altruism, that is, by a concern about the well-being of others *for its own sake*. Sober argues that the philosophical arguments against psychological egoism, like the famous argument by Joseph Butler, fail. Nor do everyday or scientific observations settle the issue. However, Sober believes that an argument from evolutionary biology tells against psychological egoism, albeit not decisively. Humans can grow, learn, and flourish only if they are given suitable parental care and guidance. But a pure egoistic hedonist will be a less reliable parent than either a purely altruistic parent or a parent acting from a plurality of motives that includes altruism. This is so because altruistic parents are capable of being motivated to help their offspring *directly* by a belief that it needs help, whereas in order for hedonist parents to be motivated to help they must have an additional belief that the help would provide the parents themselves with some benefit.

It is customary in recent empirical research on moral judgment to distinguish between, on the one hand, "system 1" processes that are phylogenetically ancient, fast, unconscious, emotional, intuitive, and effortless and, on the other hand, "system 2" processes that are phylogenetically recent, slow, conscious, voluntary, and effortful. The claim of what Ron Mallon and John Doris in "The Science of Ethics" call *psychological intuitionism* is that system 1 processes exercise a dominating influence on the formation of moral judgment. This has nurtured skepticism about its rationality. Mallon and Doris critically review some arguments in favor of the dominance of system 1, such as the argument that this dominance is necessitated by our limited cognitive resources and the appeal to rationalizing confabulation that reasoning has been found to engage in. They suggest that psychological intuitionism makes the mistake of overlooking or downplaying the role of individual experience and transmitted culture in the shaping of our moral thinking.

It is a well-known claim that morality presupposes responsibility; that it would not make sense to hold there to be some acts that people morally ought to perform unless they could be responsible for their acts. It is also a well-known claim that people cannot be responsible because this is incompatible with determinism, the doctrine that everything that happens has a sufficient cause. In "The Relevance of Responsibility to Morality" Ingmar Persson rejects this incompatibility. He argues that what is necessary for responsibility is that we can conduct deliberation on the basis of reasons for action and that this only requires that we cannot reliably *predict* the outcomes of our deliberations because we are necessarily unaware of some of their causes, even if there are such causes. Apart from its relevance for deliberation, Persson claims that assumptions about responsibility are relevant for some of the *content* of commonsense morality: for deontological doctrines, such as the act–omission doctrine, and for ascriptions of desert. He argues that in both cases

mistaken assumptions about responsibility are involved; assumptions to the effect that responsibility is based upon causation and that it can be ultimate, respectively. His overall suggestion is that an exploration of responsibility can necessitate a revision of the content of morality, but it will not undercut all moral norms.

Normative Ethics

Large portions of the history of normative ethics have been dominated by two traditions: consequentialism and deontology. Accordingly, Part III starts with essays on approaches that firmly belong to one of these two traditions, two essays on consequentialism and three essays on deontology. However, in the course of time the line between these two traditions has become increasingly blurry and, for instance, contractarianism could incorporate features from either of them.

The most dominant forms of consequentialism have been utilitarian. Utilitarianism has played a pivotal role in the history of ethics. Not only has the theory enjoyed considerable support among philosophers, it has also played a central role as a foil for other theories. Many deontological theories were developed and refined through their attempts to distinguish themselves from utilitarianism. Historically the most widely advocated form of utilitarianism was "Act-Utilitarianism." R.G. Frey explains that the original appeal of act-utilitarianism was the belief that the theory offers a (1) relatively simple and (2) easily applied moral theory and, hence, could be used by most people to make everyday moral decisions.

Partly because of its once dominant role, act-utilitarianism was subject to fierce criticism by its detractors, and subsequent scrutiny and revision by its defenders. It became clear to both parties that the theory was neither simple nor easily applied. In its aim to avoid critics and satisfy adherents, the theory has undergone substantial change. One of most interesting developments was R.M. Hare's indirect utilitarianism, which distinguished between judgments at the critical and at the intuitive level. Utilitarianism is supposed to govern judgment at the critical level, but not at the intuitive (everyday) level. These modifications were supposed to bring act-utilitarianism closer to commonsense morality and, therefore, make it more defensible. Although this move is well motivated, in the end, Frey argues, it does not work. Nonetheless, it points in the right direction: utilitarians must distinguish between the theory as an account of the right and as a decision procedure. Act-utilitarianism, properly understood, is simply an account of right action, not a decision procedure. It recommends the adoption of such decision procedures and the development of such character traits that makes us most likely to act in ways that promote the greatest utility.

The second prominent form of consequentialism is "Rule-Consequentialism," which claims that actions are right, not because they have the best consequences, but because they spring from a set of rules that have the best consequences. Brad Hooker claims this sort of theory is more plausible than act-utilitarianism because it does not require us to break moral rules for the sake of only marginally better

consequences; nor does it demand exceedingly much in the way of self-sacrifice to aid others. Also, by taking the goodness of consequences to depend not merely upon how much utility is produced, but also upon how fairly it is distributed, Hooker avoids some of the objections that have traditionally been leveled at utilitarianism.

According to Hooker, rule-consequentialism is better understood as the doctrine that an act is right if it is in accordance with rules the *acceptance or internalization* of which has best consequences, rather than as the doctrine that it is right if it is in accordance with rules *compliance* with which has the best consequences. This enables him to answer the well-known objection that rule-consequentialism collapses into act-consequentialism. Hooker goes on to tackle the tricky problem of deciding how widely accepted the rule-consequentialist should assume the rules to be. We cannot realistically expect *everyone* to internalize the principles, but the rate of internalization has to be very high to justify the idea that the principles should hold good for the *whole* of society.

The contrast between consequentialism and deontology comes out starkly in F.M. Kamm's essay "Nonconsequentialism." She characterizes nonconsequentialism as (1) setting *constraints* on what we can do in our quest to pursue either the impersonal good or our own good – for example, we are not permitted to harm nonconsenting people as means to these ends – and as (2) granting *prerogatives* for each individual to set aside the goal of maximizing the good when this requires extensive sacrifices.

Nonconsequentialists differ on the question of whether constraints are to be regarded as absolute or as having thresholds to the effect that if the good produced is very much greater than the harm inflicted, it is permissible to inflict the harm – for example, to kill one to save thousands. Kamm claims, however, that *no* amount of *smaller* harms, such as sore throats, can be as morally important as a great harm, like death.

Another matter of controversy among nonconsequentialists is whether we are permitted to violate constraints in order to prevent more constraints being violated – for example, kill one to prevent five from being killed. Kamm's answer is that we have an *inviolability* which makes this impermissible – unless the number of deaths is above the threshold. The thresholds of constraints in conjunction with prerogatives give rise to a nontransitivity of permissibility which Kamm also tries to explain: it might be permissible to violate a constraint to promote a great good, and permissible to set aside this great good because it involves too great a personal cost, yet not permissible to violate the constraint to save oneself this cost.

Appeals to intuitions play an important role in Kamm's account of morality, as they do in many accounts. But "Intuitionism" usually designates a special form of nonnaturalist realism that was popular in England between the wars, but then fell into disrepute. Yet, in the last couple of decades it has made a theoretical comeback. Intuitionism always had one enormous asset: it appeared to accommodate ordinary moral thinking. Despite this asset, many philosophers thought (and still think) the theory plagued with insurmountable difficulties; most especially, that it

is burdened by belief in mysterious nonnaturalistic moral properties, is nonexplanatory, and wholly unsystematic. David McNaughton and Piers Rawling claim that these criticisms are unfounded. They trace the intuitionist's beginnings from the work of W.D. Ross, and show that Ross's work is much more systematic and sophisticated than most philosophers suppose.

In a full-blown intuitionism, like that defended by McNaughton and Rawling, intuition takes on a narrower sense than it has for McMahan. For unlike McMahan, McNaughton and Rawling claim that intuitions give us a priori knowledge of self-evident moral principles that are distinct in kind from other claims about reality. To say they are self-evident does not mean they are immediately obvious, or understandable by the most uneducated and morally unenlightened dolt. Rather, self-evident truths can be discerned only by intelligent and experienced people, who have appropriately reflected on moral matters. The correct moral theory is not a monistic theory which tries to derive our duties from a single exceptionless general principle, but a pluralistic theory. Ross lists a number of "*prima facie* duties" – in more modern terminology, moral reasons – which can conflict and have to be weighed against each other to establish what we ought to do. There is no algorithm or mechanical procedure for determining what wins out in this weighing. McNaughton and Rawling end by exploring the intricate relationship between Rossian intuitionism and the more recent theory known as *particularism*.

In the following essay, Thomas E. Hill Jr tries to disentangle the central elements of "Kantianism" from the more peripheral ones. Kant's moral writings are standardly studied as major works in the history of moral philosophy, but there was a period in which his moral theory was not taken to be a live option. More recently, however, Kantianism has reemerged as a prominent moral theory, in no small measure because of a string of commentators who have infused new life into his thought. The problem, Hill notes, is that Kant has often been interpreted as advocating rather radical ideas, including the ideas that (1) empirical evidence is irrelevant to moral deliberation and that (2) the only actions of moral worth are those done from duty and against the agent's inclinations. To many, such ideas seem psychologically untenable, epistemologically uninformed, and morally odious.

Perhaps Kant holds these views – although Hill is far from sure that he does. Nonetheless, they are not the core of Kant's thought. And that core should not be lost because of squabbles over Kant's more radical views. These core ideas survive intact. They are significant developments in moral thought: the important but limited role of the a priori method, the basic contours of Kant's account of duty, the nature of the Categorical Imperative, and the idea that his account of duty presupposes that we are autonomous agents.

Kant is also a pivotal figure in the history of "Contractarianism" (also called contractualism). Geoffrey Sayre-McCord chronicles the development of contractarianism from its ancient beginnings to the current day when it has again become popular through philosophers like John Rawls. In its beginnings the contractarian

approach was an attempt to justify the state and political legitimacy, and the appeal was to an actual contract between those governed by the state. As it soon became apparent that it was difficult to identify an actual contract, the appeal shifted to a *hypothetical* contract under more or less idealized conditions. But if the contractual circumstances become hypothetical, the distinctive contractarian idea that the justification for rules and institutions flows from a consent to them tends to be replaced by the idea that justification flows from the reasons there are to give consent. These can be utilitarian, for instance, and then the resulting theory basically becomes a sort of utilitarianism.

Sayre-McCord suggests that there are two main traditions of contractarianism: a Hobbesian version, according to which the contracting parties can be selfish; and a Kantian version, according to which they are constrained by some measure of morality. The chief problem of the Kantian version is that this reliance upon a measure of morality independent of contractarianism makes its contractarianism less than thoroughgoing. By contrast, the Hobbesian version offers to account for *all* of morality, but it is a morality that differs radically from commonsense morality. Sayre-McCord favors a Humean version which seeks to explain why and how morality would have naturally emerged in human society; how the sorts of creatures we are would develop the kinds of practices and employ the evaluative concepts that we do. Sayre-McCord surmises that such explanations of our practices can also generate justifications of them.

In the next essay, L.W. Sumner explores the leading role that “Rights” play in many deontological theories. Rights set constraints on attempts to maximize the social good, and they thereby safeguard individuals against the intrusive interests of society or other individuals. Rights focus on their possessors – on the agents whose interests they protect – rather than the agents who must respect those rights. This focus, Sumner argues, gives theories that accommodate rights a significance absent from theories without them.

Sumner provides a scheme for classifying rights, and tries to show precisely what rights require and what they protect. He condemns the popular tendency to assert rights to everything we want; a tendency that has led to a senseless proliferation of, and thereby a diminution of the significance of, rights. Rights are not moral toys we construct at will; they require a theory that explains and grounds them. The best ground for rights is provided – somewhat surprisingly – by a goal-based consequentialist theory rather than a deontological one.

Jan Narveson agrees with Sumner that rights are an important moral currency. But, unlike Sumner, “Libertarianism” holds that there is only one moral right – the right to liberty. And that right is (virtually) inviolable. Thus, libertarians share the basic presupposition of other nonconsequentialists, namely, that we should not override individuals’ rights to maximize the good. But libertarians think that most nonconsequentialists have too broad an understanding of right and wrong and, therefore, are too willing to override constraints against violating rights.

The central notion of libertarianism is self-ownership. The proper moral order has one aim: to protect individuals’ rights to themselves. Coercion is justified

only to control actions aggressing against others. Nonetheless, Narveson insists, libertarianism need not be seen as a selfish, narrowly individualistic theory. Libertarians can establish and support communities that urge their members to help others in need. Indeed, libertarians will not be averse to saying that each of us has a duty to provide mutual aid, as long as we understand that this is not an enforceable duty.

One of the most notable theoretical developments of the past three decades has been the emergence – or reemergence – of an alternative that challenges, and dramatically diverges from, consequentialism and deontology: "Virtue Ethics." Its roots go back to Plato and Aristotle. Still, after several centuries of oblivion it has only recently reappeared on the theoretical stage in the Western world, though in Asia it has been continuously alive since antiquity, in particular in the shape of Confucianism. Although some people might suspect that the gap between virtue ethics and the standard alternatives of consequentialism and deontology is slight, Michael Slote claims the theories are different to the core. Whereas both consequentialism and deontology treat deontic concepts of "ought," "right," "duty," and "obligation" as the central moral concepts, virtue theorists hold aretaic notions like "excellence" and "admirable" as key. More specifically, virtue theorists are especially concerned about inner states of character and motivation. Although deontologists or consequentialists may also be concerned about character, their concern is derivative: character matters only because it makes people more likely to promote the good or to follow moral rules. Consider, for instance, Frey's argument that character plays a central role in the proper understanding of act-utilitarianism. In contrast, virtue theorists see virtue as primary and deontic notions as derivative.

Slote distinguishes between a *rationalist* form of virtue ethics, which he sees Aristotle as advocating, and a *sentimentalist* form, which he finds in Hume. In Slote's view, Aristotelian rationalism, with its stress on the superiority of the morally wise person, has troubles fitting in with the current political ideals of democracy and toleration. Sentimentalist virtue ethics has greater resources of accommodating such ideals by means of the virtues of empathy and humility. On the other hand, sentimentalism is harder put than rationalism to provide a ground for the objectivity that we are inclined to attribute to morality. So, Slote concludes that contemporary virtue theorists, whichever their persuasion, have a pretty full agenda.

"Capability Ethics" is a recent addition to the ethical landscape. Ingrid Robeyns argues in her essay that it has not yet been developed into a full moral theory. It is best seen as offering an alternative to the concept of well-being or welfare which occupies a central place in many ethical theories, in particular utilitarianism. Human "capabilities" refer to the combination of internal and external conditions which are necessary for humans to be or to do something, in particular something that they regard as valuable. The two main advocates of capability ethics are Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, and Robeyns spends a good deal of her essay detailing differences between their conceptions of capabilities. Further questions that

Robeyns discusses are to what extent the capability approach offers a theory of social justice, what the relations are between capabilities and human rights, and whether the capability approach should be regarded as deontological or consequentialist theory. She concludes by emphasizing respects in which capability ethics needs to be further developed to amount to a full theory of morality.

In the penultimate essay – "Feminist Ethics" – Alison M. Jaggar argues that all Western ethical theories have consistently devalued women. This devaluation has been captured and rationalized in these theories' central concepts and reasoning. Even after ethical theorists acknowledged the basic equality of men and women, they still refused to criticize or challenge the myriad ways in which women have been and continue to be disadvantaged, or the ways in which their theories support that disadvantage.

How are these disparities to be remedied? Minimally, standard ethical categories must be expanded to give due attention to significant issues affecting women. Some women have also proposed that women's ethical experience should be explicitly given a central role in ethical theory. Most notably this is seen in the development of a care ethic. Although Jaggar thinks the care ethic has been a significant development, in part because it exposes some central flaws in modern ethical theory, the theory is inadequate. The care perspective must be supplemented by a capabilities approach that first arose in, and now informs, debates about third world development.

The view advanced by William R. Schroeder in the last essay, "Continental Ethics," notably differs from that taken by most essayists in this book: essayists who are representatives of the analytic (Anglo-American) tradition. According to Schroeder, Continental thinkers are suspicious of conventional morality, much more so than analytic moral philosophers generally are. In spite of this difference, many current developments in analytic ethical theory – especially the search for alternatives to consequentialism and deontology and the renewed interest in moral realism – have their roots in Continental thought.

Perhaps the most notable difference between Continental and analytic ethics, Schroeder claims, is the Continentalist's emphasis on personal growth, authenticity, and creativity. He shows how these ideas were developed in the work of several pivotal Continental thinkers: Hegel, Nietzsche, Scheler, Sartre, and Levinas. Schroeder then explores ongoing questions about whether values are found or created by humans and questions about the priority of liberty. He challenges what he claims is a guiding assumption of most analytic ethical theories: that the main job of ethics is to suppress people's basic selfishness.

Prospects for Future Ethical Theory

This book does not explicitly discuss the history of ethics, although some elements of that history are evident in the discussions of individual authors. Nor does this

book pretend to discuss all the relevant issues or to provide a final solution to the questions that have plagued philosophers for thousands of years. Its aim is more modest: to provide a way station on the long and distinguished journey of ethical theory. Our hope is that it not only reliably captures the current state of debate but also will prompt further productive work in ethics.

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Part I

Metaethics and Moral Epistemology