



# ETHICAL THEORY

AN ANTHOLOGY

SECOND EDITION

EDITED BY RUSS SHAFER-LANDAU



**WILEY-BLACKWELL**

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## AN ANTHOLOGY

Second Edition

Edited by

Russ Shafer-Landau



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# Preface

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As a cursory scan through the table of contents will show, the realm of ethical theory is an expansive one. If I had my way, this book would have been half again as long, to reflect this breadth, but then my editor rightly drew my attention to certain practicalities of the publishing world. I am hopeful, nonetheless, that most of the centrally important questions in ethical theory receive attention within these covers.

At the heart of ethics are two questions: (1) What should I do?, and (2) What sort of person should I be? Though philosophers sometimes proceed as if these questions were really quite distinct from one another, it is artificial to suppose that we can plausibly answer the one without making important commitments that go some ways towards answering the other. We can also, of course, ask about the status of our answers to these questions, by asking, for instance, whether such answers are in some way reflective only of personal opinion, or whether they might be best measured against some more objective standard. And again, we might be puzzled at how we can gain ethical knowledge in the first place (if we can), and wonder at the rational authority of morality (if there is any). All of these questions, and many others, are addressed, if not conclusively answered, in the readings that follow.

Any contemporary ethics anthology worth its salt will be sure to include coverage of consequentialism, deontology, contractarianism, and virtue ethics. This book does that, but I have been intent on ensuring that other areas, less often surveyed in such books, receive attention as well. This explains the separate sections on moral standing, moral responsibility, moral knowledge, and a concluding sampling of work that asks about the

very possibility of systematic ethical theory. These are matters in which students tend to be quite interested, though for various reasons these issues are usually omitted, or given only scant representation, in anthologies such as this one.

I have also made the difficult decision, in the last several sections devoted to normative ethics, to forgo the usual point-counterpoint sampling of contrasting views, in favor of devoting each such section entirely to proponents of the theory being represented. Thus, in the section on consequentialism, for instance, I omit the usual critics of the doctrine, and restrict myself to allowing only its defenders a voice therein. This makes the reader's work a bit more difficult, but also, I think, much more interesting. What this approach allows is a richer and subtler representation of the normative theory under scrutiny. Readers will not have criticisms of the theories presented and ready to hand. As a compensation, however, they will have a more nuanced target to aim at when seeking to identify for themselves the vulnerabilities (and the strengths) of the views they are exploring.

The task of comprehending, within the pages of even this large work, the entire compass of ethical theory is not one that any sane philosopher would think possible. (Not that it hasn't been fun trying.) I'm sure that those with experience of this area will doubtless be disappointed to find that a favorite paper has gone missing here or there. But I hope to have provided enough in the way of pleasant surprises and compensating rewards to make up for that sort of thing. My own goal is to have included here articles that are exemplary in their accessibility, their being centrally

representative of an important view within ethical theory, and their being first-rate works of philosophy. In a very small number of cases I have included pieces that I know to have failed in one of these aspects, because they have been so successful in the others.

Here is a listing of what is new in this second edition:

- Harry Gensler, “Cultural Relativism” (Part I)
- George Sher, “But I Could Be Wrong”
- David O. Brink, “A Puzzle About the Rational Authority of Morality” (Part III)
- Thomas Carson, “Rationality and Full Information” (Part V)
- J.J.C. Smart, “Extreme and Restricted Utilitarianism”
- Peter Railton, “Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality” (Part VIII)

In addition to these fine selections, I have added an entirely new part, Part XII, devoted to feminist ethics. The readings in that part are:

- Carol Gilligan, “In a Different Voice”
- Nel Noddings, “An Ethic of Caring”
- Cheshire Calhoun, “Justice, Care, and Gender Bias”
- Annette Baier, “The Need for More than Justice”
- Marilyn Frye, “Sexism”
- Margaret Walker, “Feminist Skepticism, Authority, and Transparency”

I’ve greatly enjoyed acquainting and reacquainting myself with these terrific works. A further source of genuine pleasure comes from acknowledging the very kind, expert advice I have received from so many talented and generous philosophers. My sincere thanks to Jim Anderson, Steven Arkonovich, Paul Bloomfield, Ben Bradley, Claudia Card, Tom Carson, Terence Cuneo, Jonathan Dancy, Ben Eggleston, Dan Hausman, Dan Haybron, Chris Heathwood, Thomas Hill, Jr., Dan Jacobson, Robert Johnson, Hilde Lindemann, Thaddeus Metz, Carolina Sartorio, Sam Scheffler, Rob Streiffer, and Pekka Väyrynen. Don Hubin, Simon Keller, and James S. Taylor reviewed my introductory essays and offered excellent suggestions for improvement. Bekka Williams and David Killoren significantly aided in the research, and Brad Majors was a superb assistant in every way.

Jeff Dean prompted me to put this book together, and I’d like to express my appreciation to him not only for encouraging me along these lines, but also for being such a thoughtful and reasonable editor. His assistants, Danielle Descoteaux (for the first edition) and Tiffany Mok (for the second), served as my regular correspondents at Blackwell, and were the very model of cheery, intelligent efficiency. I couldn’t have asked for a better editorial team.

RSL

Madison, Spring 2012

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## Part I

# The Status of Morality

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