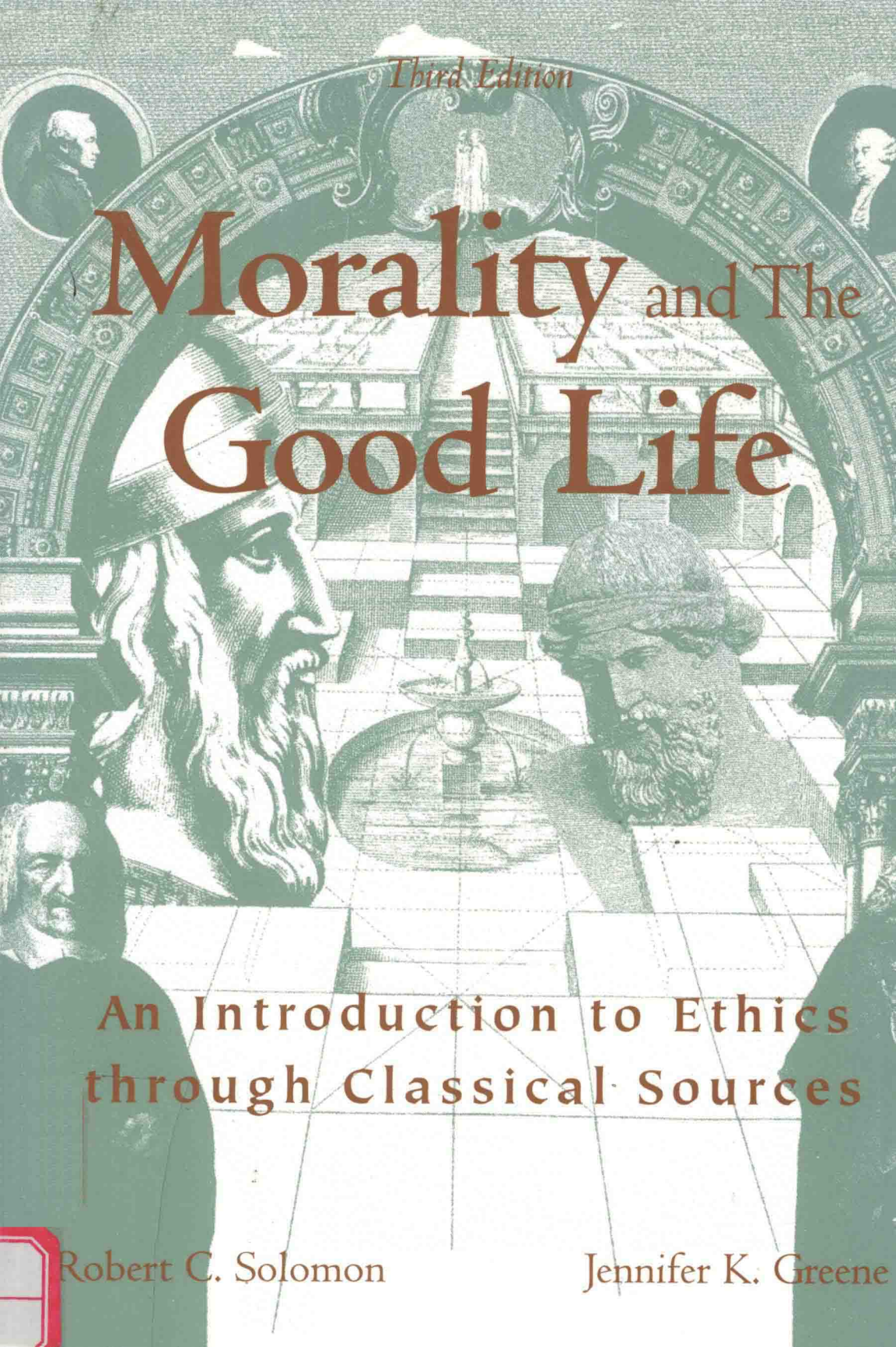
Third Edition
Morality and The Good Life
An Introduction to Ethics through Classical Sources
Robert C. Solomon
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MORALITY AND THE GOOD LIFE

AN INTRODUCTION TO ETHICS THROUGH CLASSICAL SOURCES

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For Kathleen Higgins

For R. J. Hankinson

PREFACE

This is a textbook in ethics. It is intended as an introduction for students who have had no philosophical background but are capable of studying somewhat difficult yet indisputably important sources. The premise of this book is that the study of ethics is first of all participation in a long tradition that is based upon a (more or less) agreed-upon sequence of "great" philosophers. Of course, ethics is also an attempt to come to grips with certain perennial moral problems, but these too must be understood as part of a tradition of questions and answers as well as problems intrinsic to the human condition.

Ethics has never been a more urgent undertaking. We live at a time in which the very existence of morals—or at least any "correct" morals—has been thrown into question. But in the pedagogical attempts to capture this urgency with reference to current moral crises (the morality of abortion and euthanasia, the threat of nuclear war), too many introductory ethics courses have been made "relevant" only at the cost of ignoring the tradition that gives them significance. There is no disputing that questions such as "What is right and what should I do?" are utterly necessary and ought to be asked more often and with greater insight than they are in our "bottom-line"–minded society. But, on the one hand, it is not at all clear that the heavy intellectual artillery of philosophy is usually required or even suitable to answer the more usual variety of ethical queries (for example, "Why shouldn't I cheat on my test? Everyone else does"). On the other hand, it is not clear that a serious answer to such questions can be provided except *within* that long tradition that stretches from Plato and the Bible to the present.

The study of ethics is this synthesis of current problems and a long tradition of answers. It is a common error to think that ethical issues can be settled in a moral vacuum, without already shared values and a broad, if vague, general understanding of the nature of morality and the importance of being moral. But it is also an error to expect that the broad understanding of ethics—even when sharpened by the study of ethics—

will provide concrete answers to pressing moral problems. (One leading American ethicist tells of the time when a student walked into his office and with obvious urgency asked, "Do you believe that suicide is ever justified?" As a matter of fact, the ethicist did believe that suicide was justifiable in certain cases, but it was equally clear to him that this was not the time to display philosophical subtleties.)

This is not to say that ethics is irrelevant to practical problems; indeed, it would be absurd if that were so. But solving problems is not the only concern of ethics or philosophy, and there are virtues of general understanding that need not be convertible into concrete solutions. It may be that no ethical theory or viewpoint is of any interest if it does not come to grips with our everyday moral concerns, but we should not thereby expect ready-made solutions to every personal problem. Indeed, one of the lessons of the history of ethics is that difficulties enter into solving even the simplest moral dilemma. The point of learning about various ethical theories or viewpoints is not to make solving problems easier for us. In fact, it may well make problem solving harder, as we come to appreciate more and more of the implications and considerations that enter into even the simplest ethical decision.

To study ethics, with the approach assumed in this text, is to participate in that tradition that reaches back over 2,500 years, a tradition we tend to trace, somewhat arbitrarily, back to Socrates. It was Socrates—at least according to his student Plato (from whom we have most of the records of Socrates's teachings)—who set in motion some of the central questions of ethics, such as What is the good? and What is justice? as well as, Why shouldn't a person always do just what is in his or her own interest, without regard for anyone else? Studying ethics is reading and thinking through such questions and the answers provided to them by Socrates and Plato and by Plato's student Aristotle, by the medieval Christian philosopher Saint Augustine, and by such modern philosophers as David Hume, Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, and Jean-Paul Sartre.

It is too often said today that students are no longer interested or willing (or sometimes able) to read original texts. But these are not so difficult as supposed, and if they seem to be, it is in part because students today are confronted less and less with original philosophy texts, which means that they have a harder time reading them, which means that they avoid them more, and so on *ad illiteratum*. At the same time, it is a pedagogical fact that students resist long tracts of original text and at least at first have considerable difficulty learning the kind of critical reading required in philosophy. Accordingly, we have tried to provide both substantial portions of original texts *and* a continuing sequence of comments and suggestions. This has the effect, however modest, of providing a tutor for each student as he or she reads through the material and encouraging him or her to participate in the process rather than just struggling with the text. It is to be hoped that the commentary will allow instructors not only more freedom in leading discussions but also more confidence that their students will have had at least some minimal exposure to a broad range of issues.

This book is composed of substantial texts coupled and broken up with background and commentary, suggestions, and study questions. The works are not complete but, given the context of an undergraduate course, more than sufficient to give the student substantial knowledge of the classical texts. This book is adequate for a full course in ethics, but it is concise enough to allow the instructor time to include other

approaches—whether more contemporary authors and issues or particular moral dilemmas—in addition to the classic texts and materials presented here.

In this, the third edition, we have replaced the older translations (of Plato and Kant) with the latest editions. We have added more Plato (from *The Republic*), more Augustine (on the "problem of evil"), and more Nietzsche (from *The Gay Science* and *Zarathustra*). Finally, we have added a chapter on a contemporary philosopher, John Rawls (from *A Theory of Justice*). We have also tried to make reading easier for students by breaking up the text with additional commentary.

It is appropriate to comment here on the typical use of the masculine noun "man" in many of the authors included here. Aristotle, for example, develops an ethics that is literally just for men. More modern authors—Hume, Kant, and Mill, for example—use "man" as a generic term for "humanity." This grates against our contemporary sensibilities, and we have accordingly used more neutral language in the commentaries. The original language has been left in the texts as a matter of accuracy, not as a matter of approval.

We would like to express our thanks for the many useful comments and suggestions provided by colleagues who reviewed this text during the course of its development, especially to Daniel Bonevac, the University of Texas at Austin; Orville Clark, University of Wisconsin–Green Bay; James Fortuna, Forsyth Technical College; R. J. Hankinson, the University of Texas at Austin; Izchak Miller, University of Pennsylvania; Sharon Lee Staples, Utah Valley Community College; John J. Stuhr, Whitman College; James J. Valone, visiting associate professor, Loyola University of Chicago; and Stephen Voss, San José State University.

Robert C. Solomon

Jennifer K. Greene

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

In the following pages, some of the classic texts in the history of ethics are presented with introductions and commentary to help the beginning student through the readings. It is not to be expected that most instructors will attempt to use all the readings; in fact, some may want to use only three or four of them. Several possible combinations are particularly recommended:

Basic Sequence

Plato, *Crito*
Augustine, *City of God*
Kant, *Grounding*
Mill, *Utilitarianism*
(optional: Nietzsche or Rawls selections)

Historical Survey

Plato, *Crito, Republic*
Aristotle, *Ethics,* (Book I)
Augustine, *City of God*
Hobbes, *Leviathan* (first chapter)
Hume, *Treatise, Inquiry* (Book I)
Kant, *Grounding* (Sections 1 and 2)
Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Chapters 1 and 4)
Nietzsche selections
Sartre, *Existentialism*
Rawls, *Theory of Justice*

Emphasis on Justification

Aristotle, *Ethics* (Books I to III)
Augustine, *City of God*
Hobbes, *Leviathan* (first section)
Kant, *Grounding* (Sections 1 and 2)
Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Chapters 1 and 4)
Nietzsche, selections from *Beyond Good and Evil* and *Genealogy of Morals*
Camus, *Myth of Sisyphus*

Individual and State

Plato, *Crito* and *Republic*
Aristotle, *Ethics* (Books I to III)
Hobbes, *Leviathan* (first section)
Hume, *Inquiry* (Chapters 2 and 3)
Kant, *Grounding* (Sections 1 and 2)
Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Chapters 1, 2, 5)
Sartre, *Existentialism* and *Bad Faith*
Rawls, *Theory of Justice*

The Virtues

Plato, *Crito*
Aristotle, *Ethics* (Books I to IV)
Augustine, *City of God*
Kant, *Grounding* (Chapters 1 and 2)
Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Chapters 1 to 3)
Nietzsche, selections
Sartre, *Existentialism*

Ethos and Ethics

Plato, *Crito*
Aristotle, *Ethics* (Books I to IV)
Augustine, *City of God*
Kant, *Grounding* (Chapter 1)
Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Chapters 1 and 4)
Nietzsche, selections (esp. *Beyond Good and Evil*)
Camus, *Myth of Sisyphus*
Sartre, *Existentialism*
Rawls, *Theory of Justice*

Happiness

Aristotle, *Ethics* (Books I to III, X)
Augustine, *City of God*
Hobbes, *Leviathan* (first section)
Kant, *Grounding* (Section 2)
Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Chapters 1, 2, 5)

Nietzsche, selections from *Beyond Good and Evil* and *Will to Power*
Camus, *The Stranger*
Rawls, *Theory of Justice*

Freedom

Plato, *Crito*
Aristotle, *Ethics* (Books I to III)
Augustine, *City of God* (Problem of Evil)
Hobbes, *Leviathan*
Kant, *Grounding* (Sections 1 and 2)
Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Chapters 1 and 2)
Nietzsche, selections from *Beyond Good and Evil* and *Will to Power*
Camus, *Myth of Sisyphus*
Sartre, *Existentialism*

Study questions are provided at the end of each chapter; thought questions appear in the discussions of the text as well. A glossary is provided at the end of the book, but new and technical terms are also explained when they are introduced in the text. The introduction is an attempt to provide a simple overview of ethics for the student who has no or little familiarity with the subject. Because of the complexity and difficulty of some of the material that follows, we will frequently interrupt the flow of text with notes and reference guides.

CONTENTS

Introduction

Today in a wood, we heard a Voice.

We hunted for it but could not find it. Adam said he had heard it before, but had never seen it. . . . It was Lord of the Garden, he said, . . . and it had said we must not eat of the fruit of a certain tree and that if we ate of it we would surely die. . . . Adam said it was the tree of good and evil.

"Good and evil?

"Yes."

"What is that?"

"What is what?"

"Why, those things. What is good?"

"I do not know. How should I know?"

"Well, then, what is evil?"

"I suppose it is the name of something, but I do not know what."

"But, Adam, you must have some idea of what it is." "Why should I have some idea? I have never seen the thing, how am I to form any conception of it? What is your own notion of it?"

Of course I had none, and it was unreasonable of me to require him to have one. There was no way for either of us to guess what it might be. It was a new word, like the other; we had not heard them before, and they meant nothing to us.

Mark Twain

WHAT IS ETHICS?

Ethics, broadly speaking, is the study of values, rules, and justifications. It involves questions such as the ones Adam and Eve were just beginning to think about: What is good? What is evil? How do we know right from wrong? What is the good life? What makes a person good? As indicated by this broad range of questions, giving precise meaning to the study of ethics is a complicated business. We might begin to untangle some of its many aspects by looking at the distinction between "ethics" and "morality." Although the two terms are often used interchangeably, there is an important conceptual difference between them. *Morality* has to do specifically with rules of conduct. It is concerned, in

other words, with the interpretation and implementation of our value system. Moral questions have to do with right and wrong, as opposed to larger questions about good and evil, ultimate sources of value, or means of justification. The study of *ethics* involves the question of *why* certain actions are deemed right while others are deemed wrong. And this is a call for justification. In philosophy, ethics refers to the theory behind our moral pronouncements.

That ethics and morality are often used interchangeably is not simply a matter of carelessness (although this is sometimes the case). Rather, the two disciplines are intimately related, and, at least ideally, constantly influence one another. We cannot ask what "right" conduct is in a vacuum—to inquire about the right thing to do is to necessarily take into account the sort of agents involved in making the choice and the values to which they are attached. For example, to answer the question of whether physician-assisted suicide is morally permissible, we must go beyond the particular circumstances and delve deeper to ask about the value of life in general, whether that value is compromised by terminal illness, what rights the individual requesting assistance has, and what the duties are of those who attend that person. In other words, questions about "right" actions inevitably lead us to further questions about values and their place in human lives.

Conversely, many hold that the study of ethics is (or should be) influenced by existing morality and the problems that arise within morality. Taking the preceding example, assisted suicide and euthanasia in general have only become a pressing problem (although such practices have existed for much longer) with the advent of medical and technological advances that enable us to keep people alive far longer. Thus, our day-to-day lives and the rules we use to govern them are constantly presenting us with new questions for the theoretical discipline of ethics to investigate. Practice informs theory and vice versa.

The readings included in this volume are, for the most part, concerned with ethical, rather than strictly moral, questions. Although it is difficult to generalize across the 11 quite distinct approaches offered, the authors are (again for the most part) concerned with questions regarding the nature of the values we hold and their role in human lives. One way of putting this, which we shall see time and again, is to ask, What is the ultimate good—or *summum bonum* (literally, "greatest good")—for human beings? The answers to this question are enormously varied. St. Augustine holds it to be salvation in the next life, while John Stuart Mill claims it is happiness in this one. Immanuel Kant locates the ultimate good in reason alone, while David Hume states famously that "reason is, and ought to be, the slave of the passions." Aristotle and Plato both thought that we could determine the good for human beings by thinking carefully about their nature, while Thomas Hobbes and John Rawls claim that we must first look at the sorts of relationships humans form and then determine the good accordingly. Finally, there are others, such as existentialists Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, who argue that there is no final good apart from life itself.

Although the disparities among these various philosophers are obvious, their intellectual journeys share a common element. And that is, we begin our inquiries

into the broad array of ethical questions by asking what we *should* be doing or working toward. That is, unlike sociology, ethics and morality are *prescriptive,* rather than *descriptive,* disciplines. In other words, they purport to say what people *ought* to do rather than merely describing how they do in fact behave. This is most explicit with regard to morality—a set of rules stating what you ought and ought not to do. But it is also true (in a less straightforward sense) in the field of ethical theory. For, in ethical inquiries, we should ask which values ought to be promoted, what sort of a person we should strive to be, and what kind of life we ought to pursue. As such, the study of ethics is more general than specific moral questions, but it nevertheless prescribes rather than simply describes.

A final point about the question of what the *summum bonum* is: It provides a starting point. If we can determine a best good, so to speak (and not all the authors included here believe that we can), this will provide a framework within which to begin to answer further questions. What is the ideal society? That which best enables its members to achieve the *summum bonum.* Who is the good person? He or she who comes closest to embodying, and facilitating others to realize, the greatest good. What rules (moral and legal) ought we to have? Those which promote the *summum bonum.*

THE HISTORY OF ETHICS

It is of more than casual interest that some of the classical ethical statements that we will be studying in this book were written by philosophers who lived in cultures quite different (but not entirely different) from our own. Plato and Aristotle, most notably, wrote almost 2,500 years ago, in the city-state (*polis*) of Athens. On the one hand, their ethics are sufficiently similar to ours (and often taken as an ideal by modern thinkers) so that they are traditionally treated as the originators of ethical philosophy, and much of ethics since is based on them. Indeed, the whole history of ethics (and philosophy in general) has been said to be the development of ideas originally suggested by Plato and Aristotle so long ago, and much of what we will see in the texts of this book will be a continuing dialogue with these two great philosophers on a number of topics of mutual interest over the years. At the same time, however, the differences between our societies are sufficiently remarkable—the differences in whom they considered to be "the good man," for example—to make us think quite seriously about our own sense of the virtues.

Other writers are more modern but still quite distinctly different from ourselves and from each other. Both Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Nietzsche, for example, are German writers from the last two centuries (Kant died as an old man in 1804; Nietzsche died relatively young in 1900), but even the hundred-year difference that separates them is more than sufficient to display drastic differences in outlook. Kant insists that there is a universal set of absolute moral rules, while Nietzsche, heralding in the twentieth century, warns us of a breakdown in all morality and anticipates the individualistic ethical codes that have become so prevalent today. Indeed, even our two French authors,