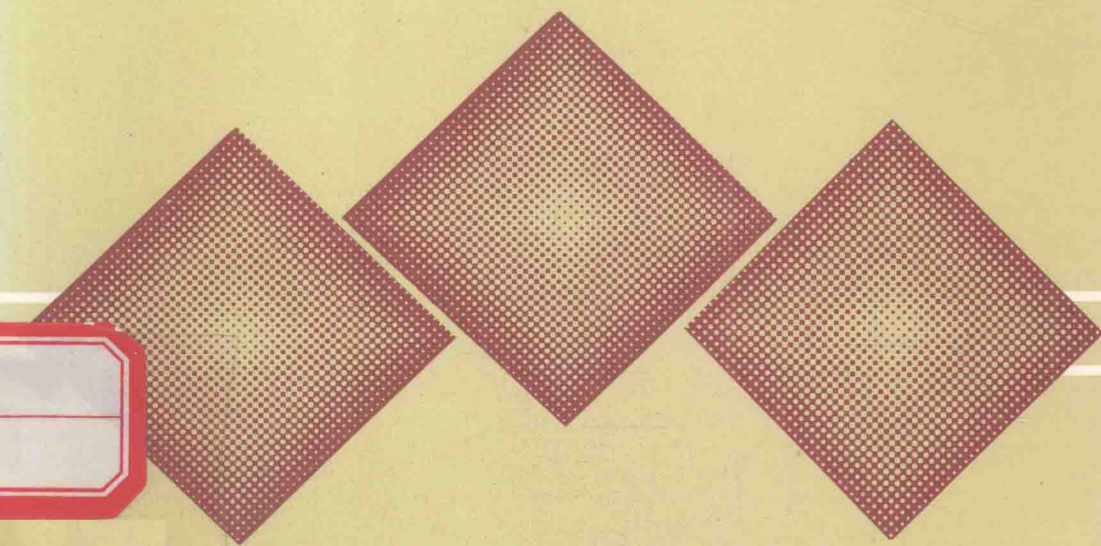


# Ethics COMPANION

Bernard Rosen



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*The Ohio State University*



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***To Peter Horn, a friend, and a friend of philosophy.  
His love of philosophy and commitment to the highest standards of its  
teaching are an inspiration to all of us.***

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# Preface

*Ethics Companion* is designed to be a companion to ethics anthologies for courses in theoretical, applied, or professional ethics. Anthologies contain selections by different authors in ethical theory or on particular topics such as price fixing, abortion, child abuse, or nuclear disarmament. The theoretical articles present important views by authors such as Kant or Mill, whereas the topical articles raise moral issues and typically offer solutions to them. Students are expected to evaluate the theories and arguments and compare them with positions and arguments offered in other articles. This critical evaluation and comparison requires a common framework within which these activities take place. The framework is usually supplied by the editor of the anthology in a very short section that only rarely tells students how to compare and select among competing normative ethical theories such as utilitarianism and kantianism. Most anthologies present a sketch of two or three ethical theories and some philosophical tools. The very good student may learn from these short sections but most need more help than they provide. The instructor will have to provide much of the required background, taking significant time from the discussion of the merit of theories or the specific issues to make sure students will be able profitably to read the selections. While no text can replace an instructor, for there are always issues that require clarification and topics that require further explanation, this work is intended to be a text instructors can rely on to provide most of the background and tools so they can spend more of their time on the articles in the anthologies. This is a text that can

be assigned by instructors to students taking a reading course in theoretical, applied, or professional ethics. It is sufficiently detailed for the good student to understand it and to be able to apply it with a minimum of guidance from the instructor.

This work will provide an overview of a “traditional” course in ethics. In these courses students read the original works of authors such as Aristotle, Aquinas, Hume, Kant, Mill, and Moore. *Ethics Companion* will enable students to recognize and understand the central issues addressed by the various authors, a task otherwise made difficult by the absence of a common framework and vocabulary.

I would like to acknowledge the debt I owe to my students at Ohio State University. In my attempt to understand and address what troubled them philosophically I was lead to the approach in this work. I benefited from suggestions of Andrew Swift, a graduate student at Ohio State who used the work in manuscript form. I am also immensely grateful for the help Alana Shindler provided both in the preparation of the manuscript and in her support for the project.

I would like to acknowledge my debt to the reviewers for their many suggestions on how best to present the material. Those reviewers were Matthias T. Schulte, Montgomery College; Richard Conrath, Central Maine Vocational Technical Institute; and Ronald Glass, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.

# Contents

PREFACE vii

CHAPTER 1 Introduction 1

ETHICS SURVEY 2

ETHICS SUBJECT MATTER 10

Morality 10

CHAPTER 2 Preliminary Theories 20

RELATIVISM AND ABSOLUTISM 20

Absolutism 21

Ethical Relativism 22

**PREFERENCE THEORY 31**

**INDIVIDUAL RELATIVISM 32**

**RELIGION AND MORALITY 33**

    Moral Knowledge and God    33

    The "Direction"    35

**EGOISM 37**

    Two Egoisms    37

    Psychological Egoism Evaluated    39

    Ethical Egoism Evaluated    41

**CONSCIENCE 43**

**CHAPTER 3    Finalists**

**45**

**UTILITARIANISM 45**

    Consequentialist Theories    46

    Good    47

    Direct and Indirect Utilitarianism    47

    Criticisms    49

**PRIMA FACIE/VARIABLE-WEIGHT THEORY 52**

    Variable Weight    52

    Prima Facie—Categorical and Actual    52

    How Many Factors?    53

    Criticisms    54

**KANT 56**

**The Categorical Imperative 57**

**Kingdom of Ends 60**

**RIGHTS 62**

**CONTRACTARIANISM FROM HOBBS TO RAWLS 64**

**Some Conclusions 66**

**CHAPTER 4    Value**

**68**

**TERMS 69**

**THEORIES OF VALUE 70**

**Hedonism 70**

**Addition Test 73**

**Other Monist Theories 75**

**Nihilism 75**

**Pluralism 78**

**Organic Unities 79**

**Ultimate Value 82**

**Human Life 83**

**Virtue 84**



<b>CHAPTER 5</b>	<b>Applied Ethics and Meta-Ethics</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>APPLIED ETHICS 89</b>		
	Vegetarianism	91
	Abortion	94
<b>META-ETHICS 96</b>		
	Epistemology of Morals	97
	Metaphysics of Morals	103
	Spring of Action	105
<b>APPENDIX A</b>	<b>Professions</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>APPENDIX B</b>	<b>Personal</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>APPENDIX C</b>	<b>Moral Negotiation</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY 129</b>		
<b>INDEX 134</b>		

# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

Everyone faces moral problems. The physician who becomes aware of a colleague who incorrectly diagnosed several patients, and yet remains silent, makes a moral decision. To say nothing while knowing a colleague is harming patients is to take some of the moral responsibility, to become a moral actor in the situation. The student who uses material from another student's paper on the grounds that it is all right to do because "everyone does it" is endorsing and using an ethical theory. The ethical theory is a form of ethical relativism, a view that will be examined in detail in this work. The nurse who waits for five minutes before calling for help for a terminally ill elderly patient who has suffered his third cardiac arrest is making a moral decision. It is better for the patient not to suffer any longer, for any time left will be of such low quality it will be of negative benefit to the patient and to the family.

Moral problems and decisions range from the very important to the everyday. The decision about whether to give the shabbily dressed person the quarter asked for is typically a moral decision. You think, perhaps, the person will only buy cheap wine or will only be encouraged to stay on the streets. Perhaps you think the person really needs the money for food. It is more important, you think, to err on the side of trusting the person because it will result in less harm. If the person buys food, that is good, for the person is hungry. If the money is used to buy wine, that is not good, but the harm is less than would occur if the money would be used for food but is not obtained. Many of us reason this way.

In this work you will learn how to make your moral reasoning more explicit. You will learn how to use an ethical theory to help you make difficult moral decisions. As a first step in understanding your own view, it will be helpful to read the options in the ethics survey that follows. The survey contains both ethical theory material and specific topics in applied and professional ethics. The views are stated in unqualified form so you can more easily recognize your own position. At the end of the term you should look again at the passages to see how your understanding has increased. Some of the passages are in a condensed form, so you may have to read them a few times to make sure you have understood the positions. After taking the course you will see how much easier it is to read the passages that gave you so much trouble at the beginning.

### **ETHICS SURVEY**

This is a survey of your moral views as you begin the study of ethics. You are not graded on this exercise, nor is there some set of views you are supposed to choose. No one but you and your instructor will know your position. You are asked to choose the passages that *now* seem to you to be correct, both with respect to the conclusion and to the reasoning used to arrive at it. At the end of the course your instructor may ask you to evaluate your own answers, but you will then be graded on the quality of your evaluation, not on the basis of your original answers.

The survey contains pairs of passages with incompatible conclusions. You will be asked which passage contains the conclusion you are most inclined to accept now. The arguments are made as persuasive as possible, so you may sometimes be tempted by both passages. However, since the passages contain *incompatible* conclusions, you cannot choose both. You must choose the *one* passage and its conclusion that seem best by answering the questions that follow each pair of passages.

The first half of the survey contains passages about normative ethical theory, and the second half is concerned with specific moral issues.<sup>1</sup>

In the following passages, the conclusion derived from each set of statements is printed in **boldface**.

#### **I. RELATIVISM**

A. 1. Value judgments differ among different cultures. 2. We in the U.S. think it wrong to cast aged parents out to sea on ice floes, but the Eskimos think it is their filial duty. 3. Most Hindus and Buddhists think it is immoral to eat meat, but most Westerners think it is morally permitted. 4. The hypothesis that best explains these and many other similar anthropological facts of cultural relativity is ethical relativism. 5. So, the conclusion is that ethical relativism is correct: **The acceptabil-**

<sup>1</sup>Instructors may wish to add other passages or choose just some sample of the ones provided. I have my students indicate their choices on a separate answer sheet so I can tabulate the results and hand them out to the class. Students like to see how others have answered, and it also gives the instructor an idea of which issues need to be clarified. Any instructor who would like to see how their classes compare with mine is welcome to see my results, and if you have a copy of yours I would like to see them.

ity, that is, the correctness or truth, of moral and value judgments is relative to the predominant moral beliefs of one's culture.

B. 1. There are some unacceptable consequences of saying that moral and value judgments are relative to the predominant moral beliefs of one's culture. 2. For example, we would have to agree that the deprivation of the civil rights of the Bahai and other non-Muslims in Iran is morally permissible in that country since the vast majority of Iranians endorse that policy. 3. In addition, for the same reason we would have to agree that slavery in the U.S. in the eighteenth century was morally acceptable and that the Nazi's killing six million Jews, Gypsies, and Slavs was morally acceptable. 4. It is the relativity of moral judgments that leads to these unacceptable conclusions. 5. So, we are justified in rejecting ethical relativism, the view that the acceptability of moral and value judgments is relative to one's culture.

### QUESTIONS

1. The conclusion I am most inclined to agree with is in passage (*circle one*): A B.
2. In the passage containing the conclusion I did not choose, the sentence(s), *other than the conclusion*, I reject are (*write numbers*)
3. The passage containing the conclusion I am most inclined to agree with contains some sentence(s) with which I do not agree. The number(s) is (are)

## II. PREFERENCE

A. 1. When someone makes a moral judgment, such as "The use of surrogate mothers is wrong," it is usually relevant to ask for reasons. 2. The reasons given include: "The practice would, if accepted, result in the weakening of the family, and it would lead to baby selling." 3. Now, of course, we may disagree with this conclusion and consequently offer our own reasoning to replace it, but we recognize the appropriateness of the procedure. 4. This procedure is the giving, evaluating, accepting, and rejecting of reasons, something that is not just a matter of preference. 5. Thus, **moral judgments are not just a matter of preference.**

B. 1. Two people can agree about all the observable, factual characteristics of vanilla and strawberry ice cream, and yet one prefers vanilla to strawberry and the other chooses strawberry over vanilla. 2. This is true of all matters of preference, of which taste is but one instance. 3. Disagreements about such matters often outlast factual agreement about the matter at hand. 4. A moral example will show how this applies to ethics: Two people will frequently agree that capital punishment does not significantly deter crime, and yet one will hold that we morally ought to have a capital punishment law and the other the opposite view. 5. This kind of phenomenon shows that **moral judgments are primarily a matter of preference.**

### QUESTIONS

1. The conclusion I am most inclined to agree with is in passage (*circle one*): A B.
2. In the passage containing the conclusion I did not choose, the sentence(s), *other than the conclusion*, I reject are (*write numbers*)

3. The passage containing the conclusion I am most inclined to agree with contains some sentence(s) with which I do not agree. The number(s) is (are)

### III. ABSOLUTES

A. 1. Moral rules are stated without qualification, or they are useless. 2. For example, "lying is wrong" has to have the force of "all lying is wrong." 3. But, we know that it is sometimes not wrong to lie. 4. For example, if your mother asks if you like the special meal she made for your birthday, you are usually not doing the wrong thing in lying when you do not much care for it but tell her that you do. 5. Moral rules stated without qualification are absolutes, and absolute rules are not acceptable. 6. Morality requires such absolute rules. 7. So, **moral judgments are themselves not acceptable.**

B. 1. Moral rules contain an implicit "all things being equal" clause. 2. We should not lie, all things being equal. 3. However, when we would hurt our mother, bring about greater harm, or violate a weightier moral consideration, we are morally justified in lying. 4. We know we are sometimes morally justified in lying, and moral rules as so interpreted allow this. 5. With this understanding, then, **moral judgments are acceptable when they are so interpreted.**

#### QUESTIONS

1. The conclusion I am most inclined to agree with is in passage (*circle one*): A B.
2. In the passage containing the conclusion I did not choose, the sentence(s), *other than the conclusion*, I reject are (*write numbers*)
3. The passage containing the conclusion I am most inclined to agree with contains some sentence(s) with which I do not agree. The number(s) is (are)

### IV. EGOISM—MOTIVES

A. 1. When someone does something voluntarily, they do it because they want to. 2. Whatever we do for this reason is done to satisfy that want. 3. Wants, when satisfied, benefit the person whose wants they are. 4. This shows that **our only or primary motive in any voluntary action is to benefit ourselves.**

B. 1. Some, perhaps even most, of our motives in voluntary action are to benefit ourselves, but some are to benefit others. 2. When we open a door for someone whose arms are full of books or packages, a person we have never seen before and are not likely to see again, our primary motive is usually to help that person get through the door, not primarily to benefit ourselves. 3. This kind of voluntary action commonly occurs. 4. Therefore, **it is not true that our only or primary motive in any voluntary action is to benefit ourselves.**

#### QUESTIONS

1. The conclusion I am most inclined to agree with is in passage (*circle one*): A B.
2. In the passage containing the conclusion I did not choose, the sentence(s), *other than the conclusion*, I reject are (*write numbers*)

3. The passage containing the conclusion I am most inclined to agree with contains some sentence(s) with which I do not agree. The number(s) is (are)

## V. EGOISM—JUDGMENTS

A. 1. We make many moral and value judgments that are about future events. 2. For example, we think it right or even obligatory to set aside wilderness areas for future development of parks, to limit population so future generations will live reasonably well, and to buy life insurance. 3. We often judge that a certain course of action is right because of the benefit others will receive. 4. When we are dead, nothing that happens (on earth at least) will benefit us or hurt us. 5. This shows that **moral judgments are based not only on an assessment of our own self-benefit and self-interest.**

B. 1. Consider the hypothesis that when individuals judge that an action is right they do so on the basis of the benefit each thinks he or she will receive from that action. 2. For example, the judgment that the U.S. ought to increase (or decrease) defense spending is based on thinking that more (or less) defense spending will make me more secure. 3. Sometimes my interests and your interests coincide, and then we have a common moral position. 4. This is the nature of moral judgments: **They are based wholly on an assessment of our own self-benefit and self-interest.**

### QUESTIONS

1. The conclusion I am most inclined to agree with is in passage (*circle one*): A B.
2. In the passage containing the conclusion I did not choose, the sentence(s), *other than the conclusion*, I reject are (*write numbers*)
3. The passage containing the conclusion I am most inclined to agree with contains some sentence(s) with which I do not agree. The number(s) is (are)

## VI. RIGHTS OF COUNTRIES

A. 1. Countries have the right of self-defense. 2. On occasion this right requires that some members of the country give up their life or liberty rights. 3. For example, as a soldier you may be given a lawful order that leads to your death, but in most instances you are legally and morally obligated to obey it. 4. You are not typically justified in exercising your individual freedom to disobey such an order. 5. This shows that **collectives such as countries have at least some basic rights.**

B. 1. Individuals have basic rights such as life and liberty. 2. Collectives such as countries have only those rights given to them by individuals. 3. So, **collectives such as countries have no basic rights.**

### QUESTIONS

1. The conclusion I am most inclined to agree with is in passage (*circle one*): A B.
2. In the passage containing the conclusion I did not choose, the sentence(s), *other than the conclusion*, I reject are (*write numbers*)

3. The passage containing the conclusion I am most inclined to agree with contains some sentence(s) with which I do not agree. The number(s) is (are)

## VII. ULTIMATE VALUE

A. 1. We value various things, such as friendship, pleasure, love, and freedom. 2. All of these, however, will come to an end. 3. Indeed, since each of us will die, each of the things we value will come to an end. 4. If we wish to find some value to our life as a whole, we must find something that is of value forever, something whose value is eternal. 5. **Therefore, if there is not something of this sort, something of ultimate value, then none of the things we now value are valuable at all.**

B. 1. We think that pleasurable experiences are valuable and painful ones disvaluable. 2. When the pain ends it is still true that our experience was disvaluable. 3. If disvalue does not require that something be disvaluable forever, then there is no reason to think that a value such as pleasure or freedom needs to be valuable forever. 4. Furthermore, value requires contrast; we would not appreciate the value of pleasure if pleasure was all we had. 5. But, since there is a contrast, pleasurable experiences must end. 6. For these 2 reasons we can see that **there need not be anything of ultimate value for some things, for example, love or freedom, to have value.**

### QUESTIONS

1. The conclusion I am most inclined to agree with is in passage (*circle one*): A B.
2. In the passage containing the conclusion I did not choose, the sentence(s), *other than the conclusion*, I reject are (*write numbers*)
3. The passage containing the conclusion I am most inclined to agree with contains some sentence(s) with which I do not agree. The number(s) is (are)

## VIII. WAR

A. 1. Present U.S. and Soviet defense policies depend on each side having the capacity to destroy the other. 2. This policy of mutual assured destruction (MAD) has prevented nuclear war for the past thirty-five years. 3. **So, we should preserve our nuclear arsenal.**

B. 1. There can be no limited nuclear war. 2. Once nuclear weapons are used, the inevitable escalation will result in the destruction of all life—with the possible exception of hardy life such as cockroaches. 3. If we disarm unilaterally, the worst thing that can happen is a long period of tyranny under Soviet rule. 4. However, we have a much stronger obligation to preserve life on earth than to fight to protect our country. 5. **So, we should now, unilaterally if necessary, destroy our nuclear arsenal.**

### QUESTIONS

1. The conclusion I am most inclined to agree with is in passage (*circle one*): A B.
2. In the passage containing the conclusion I did not choose, the sentence(s), *other than the conclusion*, I reject are (*write numbers*)

3. The passage containing the conclusion I am most inclined to agree with contains some sentence(s) with which I do not agree. The number(s) is (are)

## IX. WAR IS HELL

A. 1. When fighting a war of national survival, one must use whatever means necessary to win. 2. Moral concerns, such as avoiding inflicting casualties on civilians, must not be allowed to sway our military strategy, for otherwise we might lose. 3. **So, the notion of morality does not apply in war.**

B. 1. We fight wars not just to survive but to survive as the nation that values such things as human life and freedom. 2. It would be pointless to fight a war that we win only because we give up our national moral character. 3. **So, the notion of morality does apply in war.**

### QUESTIONS

1. The conclusion I am most inclined to agree with is in passage (*circle one*): A B.
2. In the passage containing the conclusion I did not choose, the sentence(s), *other than the conclusion*, I reject are (*write numbers*)
3. The passage containing the conclusion I am most inclined to agree with contains some sentence(s) with which I do not agree. The number(s) is (are)

## X. ABORTION

A. 1. A fetus is a living human being, not a lizard or wart. 2. Living human beings have a life right. 3. Life rights generate an obligation on the part of others not to kill the being who has it. 4. Abortion consists of killing a human fetus. 5. **So, there is an obligation not to perform abortions.**

B. 1. A "living human being," a being with rights, is a creature with cerebral brain activity. 2. Before the second trimester of development, until approximately the twelfth week, there is no such brain activity. 3. When there is no "live human being," there is no human with a life right. 4. The first-trimester fetus is thus seen not to be a live human being with a life right. 5. **Therefore, there is no obligation not to perform abortions within the first trimester or about twelve weeks into the pregnancy.**

### QUESTIONS

1. The conclusion I am most inclined to agree with is in passage (*circle one*): A B.
2. In the passage containing the conclusion I did not choose, the sentence(s), *other than the conclusion*, I reject are (*write numbers*)
3. The passage containing the conclusion I am most inclined to agree with contains some sentence(s) with which I do not agree. The number(s) is (are)

## XI. EUTHANASIA

A. 1. In the course of some illnesses there is overwhelming evidence that the person will shortly die. 2. Miracles can happen, but we have to make decisions on the basis of what is most likely to happen, given the evidence. 3. On those occasions of



imminent death, where the person is suffering greatly, where there is overwhelming evidence the person will die shortly, and the person chooses to die, a quicker death would have the effect of reducing the person's suffering. 4. We have some obligation to end suffering when requested. 5. **So, on those occasions when a terminally ill person who is suffering greatly requests a physician to end his or her life with a painless injection, the physician has an obligation to administer the injection.**

B. 1. When people are in great pain they do not think very clearly. 2. When someone is not thinking very clearly we do not take that person's requests to be binding, especially on matters of life and death. 3. On the other hand, if a patient is not in great pain, there is no reason to end life more quickly. 4. Physicians, after all, are the preservers of life and not the destroyers of life. 5. Since terminally ill patients are either in great pain or not, the conclusion is inescapable. 6. **Thus, physicians never have an obligation to end a terminally ill patient's life with a painless injection.**

### QUESTIONS

1. The conclusion I am most inclined to agree with is in passage (*circle one*): A B.
2. In the passage containing the conclusion I did not choose, the sentence(s), *other than the conclusion*, I reject are (*write numbers*)
3. The passage containing the conclusion I am most inclined to agree with contains some sentence(s) with which I do not agree. The number(s) is (are)

## XII. HOMOSEXUALITY

A. 1. If someone wanted to eat a live chicken in a public park, we would not hesitate to prevent this disgusting activity. 2. Freedom of action is properly restricted when a vast majority of persons find the action disgusting. 3. The vast majority of Americans find homosexual activity disgusting. 4. For example, a homosexual dance, that is, one advertised as being for homosexuals, is something most people would find offensive, and known homosexuals teaching at the elementary school level is something that would repel most people. 5. **So, it is morally permissible to prevent such events from taking place.**

B. 1. We are justified in restricting actions of persons only when their actions are likely to harm others. 2. Homosexual activities are not likely to harm others. 3. People may be offended, but there is almost no action that does not offend someone or other. 4. Those who are offended by homosexual dances or the sight of homosexuals teaching school need not witness those events. 5. **So, it is not morally permissible to restrict such events from taking place.**

### QUESTIONS

1. The conclusion I am most inclined to agree with is in passage (*circle one*): A B.
2. In the passage containing the conclusion I did not choose, the sentence(s), *other than the conclusion*, I reject are (*write numbers*)