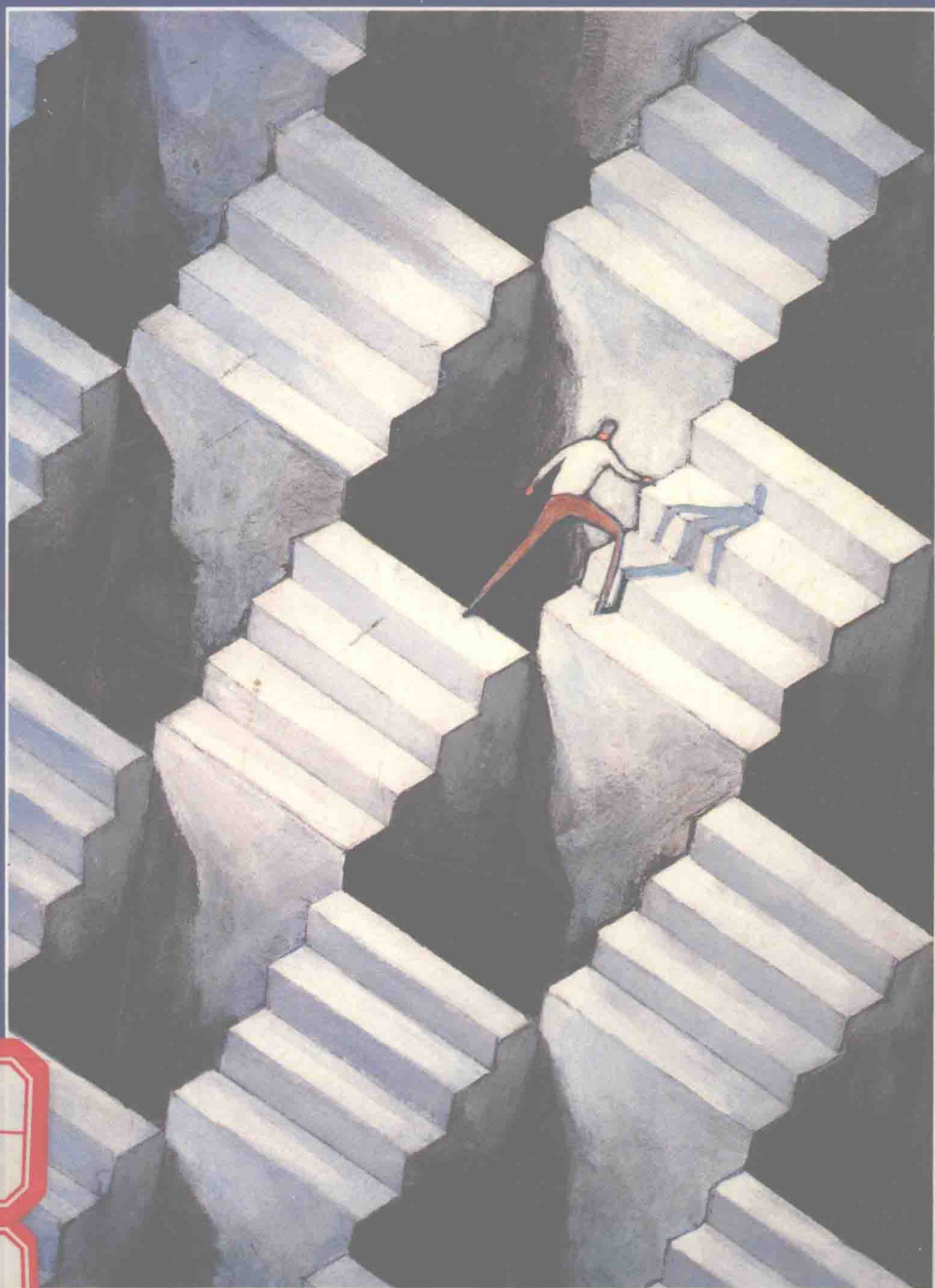
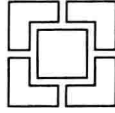


THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT ETHICAL ISSUES

THIRD EDITION



VINCENT RYAN RUGGIERO



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THIRD EDITION

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THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT ETHICAL ISSUES



To
Vincent V. Ruggiero, my father,
Filomena Ruggiero, my grandmother,
Francis and Michael Ruggiero, my uncles, and
Edith and Bernhard Theisselmann, my "extra parents,"
whose quiet lessons and example first introduced
me to the subject of this book.



PREFACE

No introductory textbook can do complete justice to the subject of ethics. The best it can do is to help students develop a basic competency in ethical analysis, acquire a measure of confidence in their judgment, and stimulate enough interest in the subject that they will want to continue learning about it, formally or informally, when the final chapter is completed and the course is over. Even that relatively modest aim is difficult to achieve. The author must strike the right balance between the theoretical and the practical, breadth and depth of treatment, and rigor and relevance, so that students are challenged but not daunted.

This book is based on several specific ideas about how that crucial balance is best achieved:

The emphasis should be on DOING ethics rather than on studying the history of ethics. This does not mean that students should not become familiar with historical developments and the contributions of great ethicists. It means that more attention should be given to applying ethical principles to specific cases; that is, to conducting ethical analysis. This approach, which Alfred North Whitehead termed an emphasis on principles rather than details (and which he proposed as the standard for all education), is the same approach that many educators are recommending to promote the development of critical thinking skills in philosophy, the social sciences, and the humanities.

Careful attention should be given to overcoming students' intellectual impediments to ethical analysis. Today's students have been exposed to

numerous misconceptions about ethical analysis—indeed, about thinking in general. For example, it is fashionable today to regard all value judgments as undemocratic. This fashion has led many students to the belief that whatever one *feels* is right is by that very fact right. Even when they manage to avoid that notion, many students adopt other erroneous notions—for instance, that the majority view is necessarily the best view, or that morality is a religious matter only, without any secular dimension. Unless students get beyond such crippling notions, their efforts at ethical analysis are unlikely to be effective and meaningful.

The fundamental concerns in ethical analysis should be presented first, and more complex concerns reserved, wherever possible, until later. This may seem too obvious to state. Yet it is a consideration that many textbooks in ethics ignore. Such textbooks present a concept in detail, with all the conflicting interpretations of it that have been advanced by various ethical schools. This conflicting information can paralyze students' efforts. Instead of applying the concept in their work, as the authors intend, students often think, "If the experts disagree, how can I be expected to make sense of this?" The time for identifying complexities is after students have been introduced to the basic concepts and have become comfortable applying them in their analyses.

□ SPECIAL FEATURES OF THIS BOOK

The influence of the foregoing ideas accounts for certain features that distinguish this book from other texts. The most significant of these features are the following:

ORGANIZATION

The history of ethics and the contributions of great ethicists are presented at the end of the book (in Chapter 13) rather than at the beginning or throughout. This arrangement reflects the author's experience that most introductory students learn ethical analysis better when they are not burdened with names and dates and details of ethical systems. Showing students how Plato, Kant, and Mill approached an ethical issue and then asking them to analyze an issue themselves is very much like showing them a professional athlete performing and then saying, "Now, let's see how you perform." Both situations are intimidating; students are put in a competitive situation in which they cannot compete. In ethics, as in

sports, it is better to postpone introducing students to “the professionals” until they have gained a little experience and confidence.

This format does not diminish the importance of ethical history. On the contrary, students are better able to appreciate and remember historical contributions after they have grappled with problems themselves and pondered the question of how to judge them. (In cases where course syllabi require that historical material be presented first, instructors can begin with Chapter 13 and then proceed with Chapters 1, 2, and so on.)

CHAPTER LENGTH

Short chapters allow students to spend less time reading and underlining and more time analyzing ethical problems. More conscientious students gain an additional benefit from the brevity of the chapters. These students are able to read each chapter more than once and thereby master the material better than they would with a long chapter.

APPENDIX ON WRITING

Today’s students often arrive at college without the English proficiency that instructors expect them to have. The guide to writing included in this text can save instructors time and effort. Instead of trying to teach rhetorical skills during class or in conferences with students, instructors need only direct students to the Appendix. Students, too, benefit by being able to break the common cycle of submitting poor papers, getting poor grades, becoming frustrated, losing interest, and blaming the instructor. By knowing what is expected in their analyses of issues and, more important, how to provide it, they can devote more attention to the mastery and application of ethical principles.

The correction symbols noted in the Appendix can be used to make the evaluation of papers faster and more effective. If a paper is lacking in both coherence and development, the instructor need write nothing more than COH and DEV. Students will be able to turn to the appropriate sections of the Appendix, see what errors they have committed, and note how to avoid those errors in the future.

□ A NOTE ON STUDENT FRUSTRATION

The approach used in the early chapters of this book will be frustrating to some students. They will ask, “If it’s not feelings and not majority opinion that decide the morality of an action, then what is it? Why doesn’t

the author tell us?" This reaction is a reflection of students' prior classroom conditioning. They expect textbooks to provide neat answers that can be swallowed and then regurgitated on a test. When asked to think, to reason out for themselves the best answers to moral problems, they naturally become anxious for a time. The activity is unfamiliar.

Whenever your students ask, "What *does* decide the morality of an action?" you will know that their minds have become engaged in the subject, that they are seeing the need for a standard, other than feelings, for example, and are struggling to define it. By the time the book suggests the criteria of judgment (Chapter 7), students will be ready to learn and apply those criteria. Many, in fact, will already have anticipated the criteria in their own analyses of problems. Without realizing it, they will have been *doing* ethics.

□ ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Vincent Ryan Ruggiero

THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT ETHICAL ISSUES

THE SAME MORAL ISSUES that men and women have grappled with throughout history have grown ever more difficult in a society whose structures and forms are changing. And the impressive advances of science and technology have created a host of new issues.

Yet precisely at this time, when we most need a firm intellectual foundation to guide our judgment, we are confused by countless challenges to old and familiar faiths and standards.

The outlines of our very humanity are blurred by conflicting theories.

This, then, is the moral imperative of our time—to break the bonds of indecision, move beyond fad and foolishness, and address the dilemmas of modern living, sensitively and sensibly, with regard for their complexity.



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I

THE CONTEXT

