

Doing Ethics

Moral Reasoning and Contemporary Issues



LEWIS VAUGHN

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Lewis Vaughn



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Advance praise for *Doing Ethics*

A great advance! . . . Vaughn stresses the basic critical reasoning skills that should be at the heart of any philosophy class. Doing Ethics is good as both an intro to ethical theory text and one for a moral problems class. Both aspects are clearly and carefully presented and supported with an excellent selection of primary sources.

—Mark Greene, University of Delaware

Doing Ethics does a good job of setting the stage for students to better understand the nature and value of moral argumentation. The crash course in critical reasoning is particularly useful.

—Thomas Nadelhofer, Dickinson College

I found Doing Ethics to successfully balance theory and the practical application of theories in the "real world."

—Joseph J. Rogers, University of Texas, San Antonio

The explanations of moral and philosophical issues provided in Doing Ethics are quite sophisticated and avoid the "dumbing down" that is found so often in moral problems texts.

—Thomas M. Powers, University of Delaware

Vaughn's clear, accessible prose makes the book approachable. The case studies and introductions do an especially good job of showing the relevance of the issues to students.

—Steve Dickerson, South Puget Sound Community College

Doing Ethics offers a very thorough and systematic analysis of the main arguments and perspectives of the capital punishment debate, but does so in a clear and accessible way. I'm very impressed with Doing Ethics, and will use this text when teaching ethics in the future.

—Harry Adams, Prairie View A&M University

The chapter on terrorism is excellent. The introduction by Vaughn is clear, intelligent, accessible to the ordinary reader, and as comprehensive as it could be. This is a very strong section.

—Robert Hull, West Virginia Wesleyan College

About the cover

The cover image is a photograph of an organic sculpture by Andy Goldsworthy, a British environmental artist. Goldsworthy's work transforms ordinary "found" objects from nature, usually taken from the spot where the work is made, into deliberately assembled geometric patterns. This transformation of natural raw material into something that bears the distinct stamp of human thought, care, and creativity is an apt visual metaphor for the process of moral decision-making that the author of this text calls "doing ethics."

About W. W. Norton & Company

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PREFACE



Consider the unhappy truth of the applied ethics course: Students often enter it with only the dimmest idea of the subject (or with notions that make things all the dimmer), exit the course in a semester, and never again get any training in ethics—or any other branch of philosophy. Thus the bread of a brief course must feed them for a lifetime. Given these high stakes, what do we want students to learn? What *should* they learn? I think they should come to see why ethics matters to society and to themselves; they should understand core concepts (theories, principles, values, virtues, and the like) and be familiar with the background (scientific, legal, and otherwise) of contemporary moral problems; and above all they should know how to apply critical reasoning to moral problems—to assess moral judgments and principles, construct and evaluate moral arguments, and apply and critique moral theories. They should, in other words, be able to think for themselves and competently do what is often required of morally mature persons.

These ambitious aims drive this text. They are reflected in its extensive introductions to concepts, cases, and issues; its large collection of readings and exercises; and its chapter-by-chapter coverage of moral reasoning—perhaps the most thorough introduction to these skills available in an applied ethics text. This latter theme gets systematic treatment in five chapters, threads prominently throughout all the others, and is reinforced everywhere by “Critical Thought” text boxes prompting students to apply critical thinking to

real debates and cases. The point, as reflected in the book’s title, is to show students how to *do* ethics, not just to study it.

But this thoroughness is for naught if the material is too dense or fuzzy. I have therefore worked hard for clarity of expression in these pages, trying to make every concept and argument plain without oversimplifying. Where are lucidity and concision needed more than in a textbook on applied ethics?

ORGANIZATION

Part 1 (“Fundamentals”) prepares students for this central task. Chapter 1 explains why ethics is important and why thinking critically about ethical issues is essential to the examined life. It introduces the field of moral philosophy, defines and illustrates basic terminology, clarifies the connection between religion and morality, and explains why moral reasoning is crucial to moral maturity and personal freedom. Chapter 2 investigates a favorite doctrine of undergraduates—ethical relativism—and examines its distant cousin, emotivism.

Part 2 (“Moral Reasoning”) consists of Chapter 3, which starts by reassuring students that moral reasoning is neither alien nor difficult but is simply ordinary critical reasoning applied to ethics. They’ve seen this kind of reasoning before and done it before. Thus the chapter focuses on identifying, devising, and evaluating moral arguments and encourages practice and competence in finding implied premises, testing moral premises,

assessing nonmoral premises, and dealing with common argument fallacies.

Part 3 (“Theories of Morality”) is about applying critical reasoning to moral theories. Chapter 4 explains how moral theories work and how they relate to other important elements in moral experience: considered judgments, moral arguments, moral principles and rules, and cases and issues. It reviews major theories and shows how students can evaluate them using plausible criteria. The rest of Part 3 (Chapters 5–7) covers key theories in depth—utilitarianism, ethical egoism, Kant’s theory, natural law theory, and the ethics of virtue. Students see how each theory is applied to moral issues and how their strengths and weaknesses are revealed by applying the criteria of evaluation.

In Part 4 (“Ethical Issues”), each of nine chapters explores a timely moral issue through discussion and relevant readings: abortion, euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide, capital punishment, pornography and censorship, equality and affirmative action, human values and the environment, animal rights, warfare, and terrorism. Each chapter supplies legal, scientific, and other background information on the issue; discusses how major moral theories have been applied to the problem; examines arguments that have been used in the debate; and includes additional cases for analysis with questions. The readings are a mix of well-known essays and surprising new voices, both classic and contemporary.

PEDAGOGICAL FEATURES

In addition to the “Critical Thought” boxes and “Cases for Analysis,” there are other pedagogical devices:

- “Quick Review” boxes that reiterate key points or terms mentioned in previous pages
- Text boxes that discuss additional topics or issues related to main chapter material

- End-of-chapter review and discussion questions
- Chapter summaries
- Suggestions for further reading for each issues chapter
- Glossary

SUPPLEMENTS

Two websites—one for student review and research, and the other offering instructor’s resources—accompany this text. To learn more about these two supplements, visit www.wwnorton.com/college/philosophy.

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