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Great Traditions in Ethics

Denise White Peterfreund

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序

——西方伦理学知识谱系及其镜相

由丹尼斯、怀特、彼得佛荣德等教授合编的《伦理学经典选读》(Great Traditions in Ethics)一书今年已经是第十次修订再版了。她不是一部原创性的伦理学原理教科书,与我们在国内通常看到的那些伦理学教科书不同,它基本上只是西方自古及今有代表性的伦理学家的代表性伦理学文本汇编。但这种汇编绝非各家文本的简单合集,甚至也未能顾及每一位伦理学家理论文本的完整性,相反,它显示了编者极强的知识选择性。这种编选的知识选择性不仅体现在编者对入选代表十分严格挑剔的选择上,而且也体现在对每一位入选者典型文本的选择上。编者在"前言"中特别解释了斯宾诺莎几进几出的考虑,也特别说明了他们选择各位伦理学家典型文本的理由和用意,这些做法足以显示编者严格的知识选择标准和经典化的伦理学教育目标。当然,编者在本书的"导论"中集中阐明的几个伦理学议题,诸如,"原则与实践"、"理性与道德"、"历史与伦理学理论"、"伦理学理论的本性",实际上已然暗示了编者自身对伦理学理论主题和知识范畴所持的基本概念。这些基本概念,正是编者用以选编历代伦理学经典文本的知识选择标准,而该书能够长时间不断再版的事实表明,其所遵循的这一知识选择标准,在美国甚或西方(该书同时在多个西方说英语的国家里刊行)说英语国家的高等院校的人文学教育界,具有较为广泛的学术代表性和权威性。

不论人们如何理解,作为一本教科书至少需要保持较高的知识权威性和连贯性,这是知识教育的规范性所要求的。正是因为这一基本特点,使得教科书的编写与一般学术著述的编写有所不同。学术专著可以容许甚至提倡主题多样化,或大或小,或长或短,或正或偏,几乎无所不能。但教科书不能这样放纵,在内容上她必须持守知识传统和知识规范,否则就不可能普遍传授。在形式上,教科书也不能过于随意,甚至对编写的篇幅都有确定的要求,比如,需要考虑学习者的接受程度、时间限制和考试检测标准。而学者在编辑史料或撰写主题著作时,则无须顾及这些限制,可以完全惟主题要求是从,篇幅也可以随主题需要来确定。

我们可以看到,这部三百多页的文本式教科书,汇集了从古希腊苏格拉底到当代应用伦理学差不多所有卓越的伦理学家的代表性文本,上下纵横两千多年、近三十位伦理学家的近百部(篇)文本精华。这本身就需要编者去粗取精、爬罗剔抉的艰苦功夫,非简单拼凑所能成就。仅一个亚里士多德——作为伦理学知识原型的创立者——一人,就有超过这部教科书篇幅的经典文本,更不用说一些近现代伦理学家的皇皇巨著了。如何在这几千年的伦理学知识海洋里捞取珍珠并将之巧妙地串联起来,使其成为众人认可的知识范本呢?这的确不是一件简单的事情。

《伦理学经典选读》一书之所以能够成功,在我看来主要是因为她在浩如烟海的文本

资源中，仍然能够给学习者提供一幅完整的西方伦理学知识图像，用为数不多的精选文本，简明却不失连贯地展示了西方伦理学的学术传统和知识谱系。从古希腊三大家（即：苏格拉底、柏拉图、亚里士多德）的美德伦理学，到近现代的各种形式的规范伦理学（社会契约伦理、功利主义、混合道义论、社会正义伦理等等）；从中世纪的经院神学伦理，到现代宗教信念伦理；从马克思的道德意识形态论，到当代的社会信任伦理；林林总总，洋洋气象，蔚为壮观。如果人们想在一段不太长的时间里获取一幅完整的西方伦理学知识图像，这部教科书的确是再好不过了，至少迄今为止可以这么说。

当然，由于篇幅的限制和编者自身学术趣旨和理论立场的主观性，其编辑选择也不可能不存在某些“前设”（presupposition）或“后设”（post-supposition）的局限。比如带有较为明显的“英语文本中心”的倾向，而在英语伦理学作者和作品文本中，又似乎显露出了某些学界主流的倾向性，一个典型的例子是，像麦金太尔的《追寻美德》（1981）、查尔斯·泰勒的《本真伦理学》这样的现代伦理学经典都没有能够进入选编者的视野。不过，我并不因此低估这部教科书的适用价值和典范意义，相反，我仍然相信她在选材和编释的学术公正性方面是做得较好的，譬如说，她没有因为某种意识形态的偏见而忽略马克思在道德理论上的特殊贡献。

一本大学伦理学教科书在很短的时间内能够连续十次再版，这本身就是一件耐人寻味的知识教育事件。反观国内教科书生产，有泽被深远者，亦有群起效颦者。我想，这里面至少有两个值得考虑的问题：第一，经典文本的知识权威性与知识创新的连贯性问题；第二，知识谱系与教育学统之间的关联问题。对于前者，我自己的看法是，作为教科书，知识的规范性和权威性是第一位的。教科书是用来实施知识教育的，缺乏知识的规范和权威，知识的教育既不可能普遍有效，也不可能连贯传承。即便是像伦理学这样具有强烈人文价值导向性的学科教育，也不能忽略其基础知识的规范和传统。诚然，作为大学用书，应当有远远高于中学教科书的知识启发和理论创新的教育目标诉求，但我们必须记住：离开知识的传统和规范，所谓创新就会成为无本之木，无源之水。创新是相对于某一既定的知识规范而言的，失去规范的前提，创新之说就成为疑问（新在何处？）。对于第二个问题，我只想强调一点：知识谱系与教育学统构成了人类知识传承的基本样式。我们可以不断地改造和更新某些教育体制、规模和方法，但无论如何不能以牺牲知识谱系的完整性和学统的连贯性为代价。改造和更新的目的或结果只能是丰富知识谱系，延续和完善教育学统，而不是相反。

这部英文伦理学教科书的引进犹如找到一面对照的镜子，她既为我们了解西方伦理学标示了一幅相当完整的知识图像，也为我们更好地了解我们自己的道德知识谱系提供了一面可以互镜互竞的知识镜相。

是为序。

万俊人　谨识

2002年6月8日凌晨于

北京西北郊蓝旗营小区悠斋

Authors

Saint Thomas Aquinas • Selections from the *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Book iii, and the *Summa Theologica,* Articles i–iii and v–viii

Aristotle • Selections from the *Nicomachean Ethics,* Books i–ii, vi, and x

Saint Augustine • Selections from the *Enchiridion,* Chapters xi–xii, xcvi, and c–ci, and *The City of God,* Books v, xii, xiv, and xix–xxii

A. J. Ayer and C. L. Stevenson • Selections from Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic,* Chapter vi, and Stevenson's "The Nature of Ethical Disagreement"

Annette Baier • Selections from "Trust and Antitrust"

Kurt Baier • Selections from *The Moral Point of View*

Joseph Butler • Selections from *Sermons* i–iii and xi and the *Preface*

John Dewey • Selections from *The Quest for Certainty,* Chapter x

Epictetus • Selections from *The Discourses,* Books i–iv, the *Enchiridion,* and the *Fragments*

Epicurus • Selections from the letters *To Herodotus* and *To Menoeceus,* the *Principal Doctrines,* and the *Fragments*

Philippa Foot • Selections from *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy*

William K. Frankena • Selections from *Thinking about Morality*

Thomas Hobbes • Selections from the *Leviathan,* Chapters vi, xiii–xv, and xxix–xxx, and *Philosophical Rudiments,* Chapter i

David Hume • Selections from *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*

Immanuel Kant • Selections from *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals,* First and Second Sections

Søren Kierkegaard • Selections from *Either/Or, Fear and Trembling,* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*

Karl Marx • Selections from *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*

John Stuart Mill • Selections from *Utilitarianism,* Chapters ii–iii

G. E. Moore • Selections from *Principia Ethica*

Friedrich Nietzsche • Selections from *The Will to Power, The Genealogy of Morals* (First Essay), and *Beyond Good and Evil*

Plato • Selections from the *Gorgias* and the *Republic,* Books i–ii, iv, vi–vii, and ix

John Rawls • Selections from "Justice as Reciprocity"

W. D. Ross • Selections from *The Right and the Good*

Jean-Paul Sartre • Selections from *Existentialism and Human Emotions*

Henry Sidgwick • Selections from *The Methods of Ethics*

Benedict de Spinoza • Selections from *On the Improvement of the Understanding* and the *Ethics,* Chapters i–v

Bernard Williams • Selections from *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* and *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*

Preface

The tenth edition of *Great Traditions in Ethics* includes two additional chapters and an epilogue. In Chapter 28, "Ethical Skepticism," Bernard Williams provides a contemporary version of the skeptic's disavowal of ethical theory while in Chapter 9, "Nature and Reason," Benedict de Spinoza brings the full measure of Stoicism with its emphasis on reason into modern ethical thinking. The Spinoza chapter is returned from earlier editions of *Great Traditions*. We believe that there is renewed awareness of Spinoza's historical importance. In the epilogue, we comment briefly on the relation between ethical theory and applied ethics.

In view of the diversity of theories and points of view in ethics, we believe that the fairest way to introduce the subject to readers who have no previous acquaintance with it is to direct them to representative primary sources. To lessen somewhat the difficulty of reading the original writings, without sacrificing accuracy or reducing the challenge of ethics, we have subjected the material to some internal editing. By this means, we have eliminated what we regard as extraneous to the central argument, and, through rearranging the components of some of the theories, we have clarified the major lines of their arguments. The brief biographies and introductions at the beginning of each chapter suggest, respectively, something of the theorists' personal and historical backgrounds and of their general philosophical positions as they bear on ethical theory. In short, we hope that we have provided a guide to ethical theory for the beginning student.

As far as we were able, we presented each theory in its best light and followed as closely as possible what we believe the author intended. Beyond the exercise of judgment in selecting writers and passages to be used, and apart from our statements in the introductory chapter, we have endeavored to keep our own views and interests from prejudicing the presentation of the theories we treat. We have sought to put forward material that can serve as a basis for classroom work, not as a substitute for lectures and discussions.

Completeness has not been our goal. It is not within the compass of a single volume to contain, even in brief form, all the ethical theories that may deserve to be called classics. Moreover, it was not feasible to present any theory in its entirety. We made no attempt at the delicate and tenuous task of classifying types of ethical theory; rather, we adopted a simple historical arrangement of chapters. Each chapter is an independent unit—although there are occasional cross-references—because it is desirable to leave the decision of a suitable order of treatment to the users of the book.

For the reader, we have undertaken to make the classical theories of ethics more readily accessible. On the assumption that comprehension is a necessary precondition of intelligent criticism, we have been interested primarily in the exposition of points of view that are important in the history of ethical theory, leaving for a later stage of ethical inquiry their analysis, criticism, comparison, and interpretation. Within each chapter, the constituent ideas of the theory treated have been set off from one another, and connecting passages serve both as transitions and explanations of important concepts. In addition, where we deemed it necessary, we have defined technical terms. At the close of each chapter, we have included a list of questions, a key to selections, and a guide to additional reading.

We thank our reviewers for their suggestions and their words of encouragement: Sheralee Brindell, University of Colorado; Peter Burkholder, Central Washington University; Ronald Cox, San Antonio College; William Lovitt, California State University, Sacramento; Michael Mahon, Boston University; Carol Nicholson, Rider University; Frank Ryan, Kent State University. We also thank Dr. Martin J. Tracey of Benedictine University and three of his students for locating many of the typos that, unfortunately, inhabited the ninth edition of *Great Traditions in Ethics.*

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

"The Unexamined Life Is Not Worth Living"

"The unexamined life is not worth living." In these terms, Socrates—the first great moral philosopher of Western civilization—stated the creed of reflective individuals and set the task of ethical theory. To seek, with the aid of reason, a consistent and correct ideal of life is the traditional goal of moral philosophers. Yet to search for basic moral principles and to attempt to solve problems concerning the good and the bad, the right and the wrong, is not the exclusive province of philosophers. Writers, government leaders, historians, and ordinary citizens also conduct ethical inquiry, although they may not call it that. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics,* Shakespeare's *Hamlet,* Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address,* and Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations,* as well as discussions at the bridge table and in college dormitories, exemplify at various levels the same questing spirit and desire for wisdom.

Flowing beneath every human action is the current of ethical significance, and in all ages and places, questions about moral conduct and moral principles are posed and answers attempted. "To be or not to be?" is at its heart a question of ethics. And "Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them"—this is, indeed, a difficult decision. In this, Hamlet's dilemma is typical of the problems that confront the ethical theorist and the sensitive lay person alike. They are among the most subtle and pressing problems of life.

The answers to ethical questions, whether as momentous as the agonized query of Hamlet or as trivial as the smallest matter of conformity to convention, are not to be found at the back of the book. The various means that have been devised to deal with ethical problems range from the mute acceptance of authority, through the poet's inspiration and the gambler's hunch, to the moral philosopher's direct and systematic analysis of the foundations of morality. Admittedly, the philosopher's commitment "to seek the truth, and to follow it wherever it leads" involves a harsh discipline. To earn the

title of "rational animal," we are not obligated to think through every moral situation to its very roots; but once we go beyond immediate action to a consideration of the reasons for our actions, we are in reason's territory, and there, logic rules. In truth, we have only two alternatives: to reflect on moral matters or to remain silent. We would have to use reason even to argue for the soundness of refraining from rational discussion. The philosopher Epictetus, confronted by a skeptic, made plain the inescapability of committing ourselves to the use of logic:

> When one of the company said, "Convince me that logic is necessary," Epictetus asked: "Do you wish me to demonstrate this to you?" "Yes." "Then must I use a demonstrative form of argument?" And when this was admitted: "Then how will you know whether I argue fallaciously?" And as the man was silent: "Don't you see," said Epictetus, "how even you yourself acknowledge that *logic is necessary, since without its assistance you cannot so much as know whether it is necessary or not?*"

Principles and Practices

To think about morality, deeply and honestly, is the main business of ethical theorists, and in this, we can all participate to some degree. But more often than not, it is an instructive and chastening experience to seek out the theory that lies beneath actual practice, for we can then see the inconsistencies of ordinary moral thought and practice. We condemn as lazy the person who chooses the life of a beachcomber, yet we envy and admire those who are sufficiently wealthy to spend their time doing nothing. We disapprove of the "climber" who is someone we dislike, yet we praise the same quality when it appears in a "go-getter" who is our friend. We say that "honesty is the best policy" and yet acknowledge in our actions and words the good taste and practicality of telling white, gray, and black lies. It would be difficult to reconcile the principles underlying such judgments, and we can see why systematic ethical theorists usually distrust common-sense morality. On examination, it proves to be a murky and illogical collection of rules bound together only by the slender threads of chance and custom.

When observation and experience reveal to us how great the distance is between the high-flown ideals to which people give lip service and the down-to-earth expediency of the morality they practice, we may lose confidence in the efficacy of moral principles and theories. But moral principles cannot be escaped. Even the most cynical moral opportunists, in their recommendation that we act in each case only to promote our best interests, are setting up a principle to govern behavior. It is different *in content* but not *in kind* from the Socratic ideal of the life of reason or the Utilitarian goal of "the greatest good of the greatest number." Our moral integrity suffers when our principles are allowed to remain underground or when they are inconsistent with each other or with our actions.

We all have beliefs in accordance with which we judge actions and characters, our own and those of others, to be right or wrong, good or bad; we have aspirations that we strive to realize; and we have a conception, dim or clear, of the best way to live. When we endeavor to fill in the blank places in our moral theory, to eliminate as far as possible contradictory directives for behavior; when we endeavor to know what principles we act upon and how these are related to the principles to which we give intellectual assent; and when we endeavor to know *why* we think an ideal or moral judgment

is correct, we have made a good beginning in our effort to apply reason to the moral life—to seek an ethical theory.

Reason and Morality

Reason is applied to moral situations and problems in different ways, depending on the purposes of the investigator. *Social scientists* undertake to describe how we actually behave, and they may or may not draw conclusions from their inquiry as to how we ought to act. *Casuists,* drawing on moral principles, law, religion, and related areas, attempt to decide concrete cases of morality. *Moralists,* whether literary lights or religious leaders, tell us what they think we ought to do and exhort us to follow the right way. Finally, *ethical theorists* undertake the systematic questioning and critical examination of the underlying principles of morality. These ways of dealing with morality are not mutually exclusive, and it is not uncommon for an individual to combine all four in an approach to morality.

For social scientists, the examination of moral behavior entails the processes of definition, classification, and generalization. They observe and compare the mores, customs, traditions, morals, and laws of different societies and formulate theories about the role of morals in society; or they may study the relationship between technological and moral-cultural change; or they may report the facts, points of view, and actions taken in specific cases of moral conduct. Although their findings are relevant to conclusions reached by others interested in morality, social scientists as such are essentially engaged in *descriptive* activity.

Casuistry—applied ethics—deals with individual moral problems, such as matters of conscience and conflicts of obligation. Casuists act on some occasions in an *advisory* capacity, guiding individuals in their choice of actions; for example, they may attempt to resolve the conflicting duties of the father of a starving family who has no other course than to steal. They also have an *adjudicative* function, for they must bring to bear various principles that they regard as relevant to a particular case and judge the guilt and responsibility of the offender by weighting the various circumstances of the case. Confronted with the problem of being both just and merciful to a hungry man who has stolen bread, a judge in a court of law would be engaged in casuistry in order to balance the principle of justice and the principle of mercy to meet the demands of a practical situation.

Moralists want to keep alive the values they consider worthwhile and to improve the moral quality of their community. Seeking to win others over to their ethical convictions and to exhort such others to act in accordance with these beliefs, they act in a manner that is primarily *persuasive* and *prescriptive.* To them, such actions as the stealing of bread provide the impetus and occasion to warn people away from what is wrong and to guide them toward what is right.

Ethical theorists, were they to examine the case of the hungry thief, would be interested in it chiefly as an illustration of a more general problem: whether it is possible to reconcile the principle of justice—which demands that all people be given what is due them—with the principle of mercy—which requires that extenuating circumstances be taken into account. In dealing with principles that establish standards for action, ethical theorists have in common with casuists and moralists an interest in the normative—that is, the *regulative*—phase of ethics. Their distinctive function, however,

is a *deliberative* one, for they are interested in the examination of underlying assumptions and the critical evaluation of principles.

History and Ethical Theory

The development of ethical theory in Western civilization has been by the gradual accretion of insights, rather than by a systematic evolution in a straight line of progress. Two principal influences, divergent in origin and direction, have provided most of the concepts with which ethical theorists in the Western world deal. In the Greek tradition, ethics was conceived as relating to the "good life." Inquiry was directed toward discovering the nature of happiness; differences of opinion regarding the characteristics of the happiest life and the means for achieving it enliven the writings of the ancient philosophers. A quite different orientation was introduced by the Judeo-Christian ethic. In this tradition, the ideals of righteousness before God and the love of God and neighbor, not the happy or pleasant life, constitute the substance of morality. These two influences reflect a major cleavage between those theorists who regard duty and the right as the primary ethical concepts and those who view happiness and the good life as the fundamental concerns of ethics. If we make an effort to reconcile these diverse views, we are faced with the difficult task of defining the relationship between "doing what is right" and "being happy."

The diverse traditions of the Greek and Judeo-Christian ethics, in combination with the many other historical and cultural factors operative in the formation of ideas, produce a multiplicity of systems in ethics. To the extent that ethical theory addresses itself to the problems current in the time of its formulation, it necessarily manifests this variety. History does not follow an orderly course in which one set of problematic situations is neatly solved and filed away before a new set of problems arises. The content of ethical theories, as a consequence, is largely a series of problems posed, solutions tendered, objections made, and replies attempted. The problems that occupy a generation may not be solved, yet fresh difficulties may demand to be treated; a German sage is reported to have observed that problems are never solved but are merely superseded by new ones. Even so, the very issues that have been put aside in favor of more pressing matters may reappear generations, or even centuries, later, to be considered afresh. Within any one ethical theory, there is system, rational structure, and a high degree of definiteness, but the history of ethical theory in the heterogeneous Western tradition is markedly irregular, unsystematic, and unsettled. Ethics is, in consequence, all the richer and the more challenging.

The Nature of Ethical Theory

The initial problem of ethical theory is that of defining the nature of ethics. Any definition of a discipline so long in tradition and so rich in variety is made vague by the demands of inclusiveness. Broadly conceived, ethical theorizing is concerned with the construction of a rational system of moral principles and, as we have seen, with the direct and more systematic examination of the underlying assumptions of morality. More specifically, we find among the enterprises attempted by ethical theorists (1) the analysis and explanation of moral judgments and behavior, (2) the investigation and clarification of the meanings of moral terms and statements, and (3) the establishment of the