SIXTH EDITION

VICE & VIRTUE
IN EVERYDAY LIFE

INTRODUCTORY READINGS IN ETHICS

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Preface

After many years of dormancy, the teaching of ethics is flourishing again. Philosophy departments are attracting unprecedented numbers of students to courses in contemporary ethics problems, business ethics, medical ethics, and ethics for engineers, nurses, and social workers. We find dozens of journals, hundreds of texts and anthologies, and, according to a Hastings Center survey, eleven thousand courses in applied ethics.

In reading the essays selected for a course in ethics, students encounter arguments by philosophers who take strong stands on such important social questions as abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, and censorship. By contrast, students may find little to read on private, individual virtue and responsibility. Many college ethics courses are concerned primarily with the conduct and policies of schools, hospitals, courts, corporations, and governments. Again, the moral responsibilities of the students may be discussed only occasionally. Because most students are not likely to be personally involved in administering the death penalty or selecting candidates for kidney dialysis, and because most will never conduct recombinant DNA research or undergo abortions, the effective purpose of such courses in ethics is to teach students how to form responsible opinions on social policies—a purpose more civic than personal. "Applying" ethics to modern life involves more than learning how to be for or against social and institutional policies. These are important goals, but they are not enough.

Vice and Virtue in Everyday Life, Sixth Edition, brings together classical and contemporary writings on such matters as benevolence, self-respect, dignity, and honor. It includes essays on moral foibles including hypocrisy, jealousy, spite, and self-deception. More conventional materials are included: chapters on theories of moral conduct, moral education, and contemporary social issues. We believe that social ethics is only half of normative ethics. Private ethics, including "virtue ethics," is the other half. Hence this anthology.

To prepare for a new edition of *Vice and Virtue in Everyday Life,* we conducted a survey of instructors who had used previous editions. This survey prompted many changes. We have added a chapter on the meaning of life that includes selections from Eastern and Western philosophy. There are new readings on Kant and Stoicism. Finally, three selections on the ethics of cloning have been added to the social policy chapter.

Christina Sommers
Fred Sommers

Introduction

Why, in novels, films, and television programs, are villains so easily distinguishable from heroes? What is it about, say, Huckleberry Finn or the runaway slave Jim that is unmistakably good, and about Huck's father Pap and the Duke and King that is unmistakably bad? For generations children have loved Cinderella and despised her evil stepsisters. Our moral sympathies are in constant play. We root for the moral heroes of the prime-time shows and eagerly await the downfall of the villains they pursue.

The moral dimension of our everyday experience is a pervasive and inescapable fact. In an important sense we are all "moralizers," instinctively applying moral judgment to the fictional and real people of our acquaintance and, in reflective moments, to ourselves as well. Moral philosophy seeks to make sense of this moral dimension in our lives. One objective is moral self-knowledge and self-evaluation. This is notoriously difficult. It is one thing to recognize good and evil when we encounter it in literature or in other people; it is quite another to recognize good and evil in ourselves. The philosophical study of morality, by its reasoned approach to the concepts that figure centrally in our moral judgments, can help us be more objective. In particular, it can help by alerting us to some of the characteristic deceptions that prevent us from seeing our own moral virtues and defects.

The philosopher's approach to such concepts as good and evil or vice and virtue differs in important ways from that of the social scientist or theologian. A sociologist or an anthropologist, for example, describes and interprets a society's mores and, in contrast to the moral philosopher, usually is careful to keep the account morally neutral. A theologian will call on us to act in a particular way and to avoid certain sinful practices. By contrast, the moral philosopher, though not neutral, usually does not exhort to action. Instead, the moral philosopher will explain what makes an act right or a person virtuous. In discussing criteria of right action and virtuous character, the philosopher will try to show why certain traits, such as honesty, generosity, and courage, are worthy, and others, such as hypocrisy, selfishness, and cowardice, are not. More generally, the moral philosopher seeks a clear and well-reasoned answer to the question: "What is it to be moral?"

Moral philosophers have viewed this central question in two distinct ways. Some construe the question as asking what we, as responsible agents confronting decisions of right and wrong, ought to do. These moral philosophers, then, see it as their task to formulate general principles of behavior that define our duties by distinguishing right actions from wrong ones. A theory that emphasizes moral duties and actions is *action-based*. A second approach—called *virtue-based*—takes the central question of morality to be: "What sort of person should I be?" Here the emphasis is not so much on what to *do* as on what to *be*. For virtue-based theorists, the object of moral education is to produce a virtuous individual. They therefore have much to say about moral education and character development. By concentrating attention on character rather than action, the philosopher of virtue tacitly assumes that a virtuous person's actions generally fall within the range of what is right and fair.

In the modern period—beginning with David Hume and Immanuel Kant—moral philosophy has tended to be action-based. The reader will learn some of the reasons underlying the recent neglect of virtue and character from selected essays by Bernard Mayo, Anthony Quinton, Bernard Williams, and Alasdair MacIntyre, who are among the growing number of philosophers who view an exclusively action-based approach as inadequate. We have attempted to give equal space to virtue-based theories.

The ten chapters of this sixth edition are distinguished thematically. The opening essays highlight the crucial importance of character and of the capacity for sympathy and compassion. These essays, together with several other selections, suggest that being moral is never simply a matter of knowing how one should act. Sociopaths may be well aware of the right thing to do but, because they lack human sympathy, simply not care enough to be moral except where a display of moral behavior serves their individual purpose. All the same, knowing how to act is essential to being moral. Several essays in Chapter Two are devoted to the exposition and criticism of action-based theories such as utilitarianism and Kantianism.

Chapter Three, on moral relativism, presents the views of philosophers who deny there are any moral principles binding on all societies, maintaining instead that each society determines what is right and wrong for its members. Critics of relativism argue that relativism is internally inconsistent, and they challenge its empirical assumptions by pointing to universally accepted moral principles such as those contained in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The selections on virtue and vice in Chapters Four and Five range from classical to contemporary. Aristotle's (and Plato's) thesis that happiness is tied to the moral virtues is a central theme. The religious and philosophical discussions of vice and virtue differ in characteristic ways. For a theologian such as Augustine, vice is sin construed as rebellion against the decrees of God. For a philosopher such as Aristotle or Plutarch, vice is more akin to physical illness or deformity. The selections reflect ongoing disputes over how much of our good and evil behavior is due to innate traits, how much to the adequacy or inadequacy of our moral education, and how much to the exercise of our own free will. Theolo-

gians talk about a sinful inheritance in our nature. According to Augustine and Jonathan Edwards we are born in and with sin. Charles Darwin and the evolutionary psychologists maintain that we are innately endowed with moral sentiments like benevolence and a tendency to disapprove of (and to punish) injustice.

Chapter Six includes moral doctrines that some consider immoral or amoral. Ethical egoists like Ayn Rand consider self-interestedness to be a major virtue, while others construe it as an amoral imperative to "take care of number one." Amoralists and nihilists deny that we have any moral constraints whatsoever. Critics of egoism and amoralism such as James Rachels, Louis Pojman, and Colin McGinn argue that these doctrines are self-defeating and indefensible.

Part of being moral is respecting ourselves as well as respecting others. Respect for others is bound up with self-respect since we cannot respect ourselves as moral beings unless we value our respectful treatment of others. Chapter Seven includes discussions of the place of self-respect and dignity in the development of moral character.

Chapter Eight, "Moral Education," continues the discussion of moral character, focusing on training and development. We present several views on how best to educate children to become morally sensitive and mature. Aristotle's classic position that moral education uses reward and other reinforcements to habituate the child to virtuous activity is followed by (Lawrence Kohlberg's) contemporary theory, inspired by Plato's idea, that morality is innate and that moral education proceeds by eliciting it in stages. In this chapter, we also consider the question of how to distinguish an effective but legitimate approach to education from an approach that wrongfully interferes with the child's autonomy through "indoctrination" and "thought control."

Chapter Nine contains essays on general social policy issues such as world hunger, the ethics of cloning, and environmental ethics.

Human beings are conscious of themselves as finite creatures in the wider environment of a vast universe. Chapter Ten, "The Meaning of Life," focuses on the profound question of how we may see ourselves in this perspective. As significant? As doomed to futility and extinction? As "absurd"? Where does morality fit in? This last chapter presents a wide range of responses from Job and T'ao Ch'ien in ancient times, to Leo Tolstoy and Bertrand Russell in modern times.

What, finally, may the open-minded and careful reader of a comprehensive text on moral philosophy expect to gain? First, if not foremost, the reader will acquire a great deal of knowledge of the classical approaches to moral philosophy and, with this, some sense of the moral tradition of Western civilization as Greek and Judeo-Christian thought have influenced it. Second, the reader will become aware of some of the central problem areas in ethics and will be in a better position to approach them with the confidence that comes with historical perspective and a sharpened moral insight. Social change and novel technologies bring about new problems, each with its moral dimension. Yet morality itself is not really changed in any radical way. There will always be a right and decent way to cope with the new situations that confront us.

Contents

Good and Evil

Much of moral philosophy is a disciplined effort to systematize and explain our most common convictions about good and evil and right and wrong. Proper ethical philosophy takes the simplest moral truths as its starting point. Almost no one doubts that cruelty is wrong. But philosophers differ on how to explain what is wrong about acting cruelly and even about the meaning of right and wrong. So we have various systems of moral theory. Inevitably we have the possibility that a philosopher may devise a pseudo–ethical doctrine that loses sight of basic intuitions about human dignity and elementary decency. When such a doctrine achieves currency and popular respectability, it becomes a powerful force for evil. For then, what passes as conventional wisdom allows the average person to behave in reprehensible but conventionally acceptable ways.

In Chapter One we find examples of the ways the moral intuitions of the individual may conflict with publicly accepted principles that are not grounded in respect for human dignity. In the first two selections, "From Cruelty to Goodness" by Philip Hallie and "The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn" by Jonathan Bennett, the moral failure of principle is easy to diagnose. A dominant group adopts a philosophy that permits it to confine its moral concern to those inside the group, treating outsiders as beyond the moral pale; their pain, their dignity, even their very lives merit no moral consideration. Huckleberry Finn, being white, is within the moral domain. His mentors have taught him that he does not owe moral behavior to slaves. Yet Huck treats Jim, the runaway slave, as if he too deserves the respect due a white person. And therein lies Huck's conflict. Everything he conventionally believes tells him he is doing wrong in helping Jim elude his pursuers.

Mark Twain's account of the conflict between official "book" morality and the ground-level morality of an innately decent and sympathetic person is one of the best in literature. Usually the conflict is embodied in two protagonists (Victor Hugo's novel *Les Misérables* is an example), but Huck Finn's conflict is within himself. And we are glad that his decency is stronger than his book morality. Both Jonathan Bennett and Philip Hallie quote the Nazi officer Heinrich Himmler, one of the fathers of the "final solution," as a spokesman for those who advocate suspending all moral feeling toward a particular group. Interestingly, Himmler considered himself all the more moral for being above pitying the children and other innocent victims outside the domain of moral consideration. Indeed, we hear stories of Germans who were conscience-stricken because—against their principles—they allowed some Jews to escape.

Our dismay at man's inhumanity to man is qualified by the inspiring example of the residents of the French village Le Chambon-sur-Lignon who acted together to care for and save 6,000 Jews, mostly children, from the Nazis. Le Chambon is said to have been the safest place in Europe for a Jew during World War II. From his studies of the village, Hallie concludes that Le Chambon residents successfully combated evil because they never allowed themselves to be blind to the victim's point of view. "When we are blind to that point of view we can countenance and perpetrate cruelty with impunity." The true morality of Le Chambon drives out false and hypocritical Nazi "decencies" that ignore the most elementary moral intuitions and that permit and encourage the horrors of Himmler's and Hitler's Germany.

The example of Le Chambon is the proper antidote to the moral apathy that is the condition of many people today, and which Martin Gansberg dramatically describes in "Thirty-eight Who Saw Murder Didn't Call Police." In sharp contrast to the residents of Le Chambon, the spectators who witnessed the murder of Kitty Genovese were literally demoralized. Not only did they fail to intervene, they did not even call for help.

In his selection, Josiah Royce defends a morality that respects human dignity. Beginning from the axiom that we owe respect and decency to our neighbor, Royce confronts the question that the Nazis and all those who ignore the humanity of special groups pervert: Who, then, are our neighbors? Royce answers that our neighbors include anyone with feelings: "Pain is pain, joy is joy, everywhere even as in thee." Royce calls this the moral insight. He points out that treating strangers with care and solicitude is hardly unnatural; for each of us, our future self is like a stranger to us, yet we are naturally concerned with the welfare of that stranger.

The moral blindness that is the opposite of Royce's moral insight has tragic consequences for the victims whose humanity is ignored. The point is taken up by Hallie, who complains that some moral philosophers who concentrate on the motives and character of evildoers often fail to attend to the suffering of the victims. Hallie argues that it is not the character of evildoers that is the crucial element of evil, but rather that evil mainly consists in the suffering caused by the perpetrators of evil. For Hallie, evil is what evil does. He therefore takes sharp issue with Bennett for saying that the Nazi who professes to be affected

by the suffering he causes is in some respects morally superior to theologians like Jonathan Edwards who never actually harmed anyone but who claim to have no pity for the sinner who would suffer the torments of the damned.

Do we punish people for the evil they do or for what they are? Herman Melville's *Billy Budd* is a classic on this question. Billy Budd is an exceptionally pure and good person who has committed a crime. We are tempted to say that Budd's fine character exculpates his crime. But this could be a dangerous doctrine if applied generally, since it challenges the principle that moral agents— including those of especially superior moral character—must be responsible to society for the consequences of their acts.

Friedrich Nietzsche challenges the tradition of Western morality with its moral insights and its Golden Rule to do to others what you would want them to do to you. He characterizes this tradition that enjoins us to protect the weak and whose origins lie in the teachings of Judaism and Christianity as "sentimental weakness" and a "*denial* of life." According to Nietzsche, the tradition emasculates those who are strong, vital, and superior by forcing them to attend to the weak and mediocre. Nietzsche was especially effective in suggesting that morality often is used in hypocritical ways to stifle initiative. Yet, on the whole, philosophers have rejected Nietzsche's heroic morality as tending to encourage a morally irresponsible exercise of power. This is perhaps unfair, since Nietzsche himself almost certainly would have looked with contempt upon such self-styled "heroes" as the leaders of Nazi Germany. Another reason seems more valid: Nietzsche's own ideal does in fact denigrate sympathy with the weak and helpless, and so fails to convince those of us who see moral heroism in the likes of Huckleberry Finn and the people of Le Chambon.

From Cruelty to Goodness

Philip Hallie

Philip Hallie (1922–1994) was a professor of philosophy at Wesleyan University. His published works include *The Paradox of Cruelty* (1969), *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed* (1979), and *In the Eye of the Hurricane: Tales of Good and Evil, Help and Harm* (2001)

Philip Hallie considers institutionalized cruelty and finds that, besides physically assaulting its victims, it almost always assaults their dignity and self-respect. As an example of the opposite of institutionalized cruelty, Hallie cites the residents of the French village of Le Chambon who, at grave risk to their lives, saved 6,000 Jews from the Nazis. For him the contrary of being cruel is not merely ceasing to be cruel, nor is it fighting cruelty with violence and hatred (though this may be necessary). Rather, it is epitomized in the unambiguous and unpretentious goodness of the citizens of Le Chambon who followed the positive biblical injunctions "Defend the fatherless" and "Be your brother's keeper," as well as the negative injunctions against murder and betrayal.

I am a student of ethics, of good and evil; but my approach to these two rather melodramatic terms is skeptical. I am in the tradition of the ancient Greek *skeptikoi*, whose name means "inquirers" or "investigators." And what we investigate is relationships among particular facts. What we put into doubt are the intricate webs of high-level abstractions that passed for philosophizing in the ancient world, and that still pass for philosophizing. My approach to good and evil emphasizes not abstract common nouns like "justice," but proper names and verbs. Names and verbs keep us close to the facts better than do our high-falutin common nouns. Names refer to particular people, and verbs connect subjects with predicates *in time*, while common nouns are above all this.

One of the words that is important to me is my own name. For me, philosophy is personal; it is closer to literature and history than it is to the exact sciences, closer to the passions, actions, and common sense of individual persons than to a dispassionate technical science. It has to do with the personal matter of wisdom. And so ethics for me is personal—my story, and not necessarily (though possibly) yours. It concerns particular people at particular times.

But ethics is more than such particulars. It involves abstractions, that is, rules, laws, ideals. When you look at the ethical magnates of history you see in their words and deeds two sorts of ethical rules: negative and positive. The negative rules are scattered throughout the Bible, but Moses brought down from Mount Sinai the main negative ethical rules of the West: Thou shalt not murder; thou shalt not betray. . . . The positive injunctions are similarly spread throughout the Bible. In the first chapter of the book of Isaiah we are told to ". . . defend the fatherless, plead for the widow." The negative ethic forbids certain actions; the positive ethic demands certain actions. To follow the negative ethic is to be decent, to have clean hands. But to follow the positive ethic, to be one's brother's keeper, is to be more than decent—it is to be active, even aggressive. If the negative ethic is one of decency, the positive one is the ethic of riskful, strenuous nobility.

In my early studies of particularized ethical terms, I found myself dwelling upon negative ethics, upon prohibitions. And among the most conspicuous prohibitions I found embodied in history was the prohibition against deliberate harmdoing, against cruelty. "Thou shalt not be cruel" had as much to do with the nightmare of history as did the prohibitions against murder and betrayal. In fact, many of the Ten Commandments—especially those against murder, adultery, stealing, and betrayal—were ways of prohibiting cruelty.

Early in my research it became clear that there are various approaches to cruelty, as the different commandments suggest. For instance, there is the way reflected in the origins of the word "cruel." The Latin *crudus* is related to still older words standing for bloodshed, or raw flesh. According to the etymology of the word, cruelty involves the spilling of blood.

But modern dictionaries give the word a different meaning. They define it as "disposed to giving pain." They emphasize awareness, not simply bloodshed. After all, they seem to say, you cannot be cruel to a dead body. There is no cruelty without consciousness.

And so I found myself studying the kinds of awareness associated with the hurting of human beings. It is certainly true that for millennia in history and literature people have been torturing each other not only with hard weapons but also with hard words.

Still, the word "pain" seemed to be a simplistic and superficial way of describing the many different sorts of cruelty. In Reska Weiss's *Journey Through Hell* (London, 1961) there is a brief passage of one of the deepest cruelties that Nazis perpetrated upon extermination camp inmates. On a march

> Urine and excreta poured down the prisoners' legs, and by nightfall the excrement, which had frozen to our limbs, gave off its stench.

And Weiss goes on to talk not in terms of "pain" or bloodshed, but in other terms:

> . . . We were really no longer human beings in the accepted sense. Not even animals, but putrefying corpses moving on two legs.

There is one factor that the idea of "pain" and the simpler idea of bloodshed do not touch: cruelty, not playful, quotidian teasing or ragging, but cruelty (what the anti-cruelty societies usually call "substantial cruelty") involves the maiming of a person's dignity, the crushing of a person's self-respect. Bloodshed, the idea of pain (which is usually something involving a localizable occurrence, localizable in a tooth, in a head, in short, in the body), these are superficial ideas of cruelty. A whip, bleeding flesh, these are what the journalists of cruelty emphasize, following the etymology and dictionary meaning of the word. But the depths of an understanding of cruelty lie in the depths of an understanding of human dignity and of how you can maim it without bloodshed, and often without localizable bodily pain.

In excremental assault, in the process of keeping camp inmates from wiping themselves or from going to the latrine, and in making them drink water from a toilet bowl full of excreta (and the excreta of the guards at that) localizable pain is nothing. Deep humiliation is everything. We human beings believe in hierarchies, whether we are skeptics or not about human value. There is a hierarchical gap between shit and me. We are even above using the word. We are "above" walking around besmirched with feces. Our dignity, whatever the origins of that dignity may be, does not permit it. In order to be able to want to live, in order to be able to walk erect, we must respect ourselves as beings "higher" than our feces. When we feel that we are not "higher" than dirt or filth, then our lives are maimed at the very center, in the very depths, not merely in some localizable portion of our bodies. And when our lives are so maimed we become things, slaves, instruments. From ancient times until this moment, and as long as there will be human beings on this planet, there are those who know this and will use it, just as the Roman slave owners and the Southern American slave owners knew it when—one time a year—they encouraged the slaves to drink all the alcohol they could drink so that they could get bestially drunk and then even more bestially sick afterwards, under the eyes of their generous owners. The self-hatred, the loss of self-respect that the Saturnalia created in ancient Rome, say, made it possible to continue using the slaves as things, since they themselves came to think of themselves as things, as subhuman tools of the owners and the overseers.

Institutionalized cruelty, I learned, is the subtlest kind of cruelty. In episodic cruelty the victim knows he is being hurt, and his victimizer knows it too. But in a persistent pattern of humiliation that endures for years in a community, both the victim and the victimizer find ways of obscuring the harm that is being done. Blacks come to think of themselves as inferior, even esthetically inferior (black is "dirty"); and Jews come to think of themselves as inferior, even esthetically (dark hair and aquiline noses are "ugly"), so that the way they are being treated is justified by their "actual" inferiority, by the inferiority they themselves feel.