



ETHICS *in* PRACTICE

AN ANTHOLOGY

FOURTH EDITION

EDITED BY HUGH LAFOLLETTE

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Ethics in Practice

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FOURTH EDITION

Edited by

Hugh LaFollette

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Preface for Instructors

This anthology seeks to provide engagingly written, carefully argued philosophical essays, on a wide range of important, contemporary ethical issues. When I had trouble finding essays that suited those purposes, I commissioned new essays – four for this edition. I also invited a number of philosophers to revise their “classic” essays – three for this edition, with four reprints new to this edition. Altogether, more than half of the essays were written or revised specifically for *Ethics in Practice*. This edition also features a new introductory essay, “Writing a Philosophy Paper.”

The result is a tasty blend of the old and the new, the familiar and the unfamiliar. I have organized the book into five thematic sections and fifteen topics to give you the greatest flexibility to construct the course you want. When feasible, I begin or end sections with essays that bridge to preceding or following sections.

Although I have included essays I think introductory students can read and comprehend, no one would believe me if I claimed all the essays are easy to read. We all know many students have trouble reading philosophical essays. That is not surprising. Many of these essays were written originally for other professional philosophers, not first-year undergraduates. Moreover, even when philosophers write expressly for introductory audiences, their ideas, vocabularies, and styles are often foreign to the introductory student. So I have included a brief introduction on READING PHILOSOPHY to advise students on how to read and understand philosophical essays.

I want this volume to be suitable for a variety of courses. The most straightforward way to use the text is to assign essays on six of seven of your favorite practical issues. If you want a more topical course, you could emphasize issues in one or more of the major thematic sections. You could also focus on practical and theoretical issues

spanning individual topics and major divisions of the book. If, for instance, you want to focus on gender, you could select most essays from four sections: ABORTION, FAMILY AND SEXUALITY, SEXUAL AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, and AFFIRMATIVE ACTION, and combine these with some specific articles scattered throughout, for example, Young’s “Displacing the Distributive Paradigm” (ECONOMIC JUSTICE). Finally, you can also give your course a decided theoretical flavor by using the section on ETHICAL THEORY, and then selecting essays that address, in diverse contexts, significant theoretical issues like the act/omission distinction, the determination of moral status, or the limits of morality, and so on. You can also direct your students to THEORIZING ABOUT ETHICS – a brief introductory essay designed to help them understand why we should theorize, and then giving them a snapshot of some major theories.

One distinctive feature of the anthology is the section introductions. Some anthologies do not include them. Those that do often use introductions simply to summarize the articles in that section. The introductions here do indicate the main thrust of the essays. However, that is not their primary purpose. Their purpose is (1) to focus students’ attention on the theoretical issues at stake, and (2) to relate those issues to the discussion of the same or related issues in other sections. All too often students (and philosophers) see practical ethics as a hodgepodge of largely (or wholly) unrelated problems. The introductions should go some way toward remedying this tendency. They show students that practical questions are not discrete, but intricately connected with one another. Thinking carefully about any problem invariably illuminates (and is illuminated by) others. Thus, the overarching aim of these introductions is to give the book a coherence some anthologies lack.

There are consequences of this strategy you might mention to your students. I organized the order of the papers within each section to maximize the students' understanding of that practical issue – nothing more. However, I wrote the introductions and organized the summaries to maximize the understanding of theoretical issues. Often the order of the discussion of essays in the introduction matches the order of essays in that section; occasionally it does not. Moreover, I spend more time “summarizing” some essays to the exclusion of others. That in no way suggests that the essays on which I focus are more cogent, useful, or in any way better than the others. Rather, I found it easier to use them as *entrées* into the theoretical questions.

Finally, since I do not know which sections you will use, you should be aware that the introductions will likely refer to essays the student will not read. When that happens, they will not realize one aim of the introductions. They may still be valuable. For even if the student does not read the essays to which an introduction refers, she can better appreciate the interconnections between issues. It might even have the delicious consequence of encouraging the student to read an essay that you did not assign.

One last note about the criteria for selecting essays. Many practical ethics anthologies include essays on opposing sides of every issue. For most topics I think that is a laudable aim that an editor can normally

achieve. But not always. I include essays that discuss the issue as we currently frame and understand it. Sometimes that understanding precludes some positions that might have once been part of the debate. For instance, early practical ethics anthologies included essays that argued that an individual should always choose to prolong her life, by any medical means whatever. On this view, euthanasia of any sort and for any reason was immoral. Although that was once a viable position, virtually no one now advocates or even discusses it. Even the author of the essay with serious misgivings about a “right to die” would not embrace *that* position. The current euthanasia debate largely concerns *when* people might choose not to sustain their lives, *how* they might carry out their wishes, and with *whose* assistance. Those are the questions addressed by these essays on euthanasia.

Likewise, I do not have any essays that argue that women and Blacks ought to be relegated to the bedroom or to manual labor. Although everyone acknowledges that racism and sexism are still alive and well in the United States, few people openly advocate making Blacks and women second class citizens. No one seriously discusses these proposals in academic circles. Instead, I include essays that highlight current issues concerning the treatment of minorities and women (sexual harassment, date rape, etc.).

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