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<b>PART I: THE ROOTS</b>	
<b>1 The origin of ethics</b>	<b>3</b>
MARY MIDGLEY	
Where did ethics come from? Is it a human invention, or something we owe to our pre-human ancestors? We need to put aside some myths that still obscure our thinking on these matters: the myth that society is an artificial construct and the myth that nature is red in tooth and claw. Then we can look at what we now know about the social lives of other animals, especially other mammals, and by this means find clues to the origins of human ethics.	
<b>2 Ethics in small-scale societies</b>	<b>14</b>
GEORGE SILBERBAUER	
Early human beings lived in small nomadic groups. Examining the ethical systems of contemporary small-scale societies, such as the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert, helps us to grasp the elements of ethical systems suited for societies that live in this manner. Anthropological accounts can help us to understand why and to what extent some ethical values and principles are universal, or nearly so, among human beings, while others are subject to wide variation.	
<b>3 Ancient ethics</b>	<b>29</b>
GERALD A. LARUE	
The earliest surviving documents with an ethical content were written by inhabitants of Mesopotamia, some five thousand years ago. They shed light on the initial development of ethics in settled societies. Other early ethical writings show the nature of ethics in ancient Egypt and in early Hebrew civilization.	



PART II: THE GREAT ETHICAL TRADITIONS

There are many distinct ethical traditions. The essays in this part outline some of the major ones: Indian, Buddhist, Chinese, Jewish, Christian and Islamic. (Western philosophical, as distinct from Christian, ethics is the subject of Part III.) These ethical traditions are, for much of the world's population, the living ethical systems to which they look for guidance.

The essays present, for each tradition, the answers to such questions as: how did this tradition arise? What is distinctive about it? How does it answer such basic questions as: Where does ethics come from? How can I know what is right? What is the ultimate criterion of right action? Why should I do what is right? The essays also indicate what each tradition shares with other ethical traditions, especially with contemporary Western ethics.

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PART III: WESTERN PHILOSOPHICAL ETHICS: A SHORT HISTORY

The dominant position of Western civilization today means that the Western tradition of philosophical thinking about ethics exerts a strong influence on all contemporary discussions of ethics. The three articles that follow cover the history of Western philosophical ethics from ancient Greece to the present day.

10	Ethics in ancient Greece	121
	CHRISTOPHER ROWE	



- 11 Medieval and Renaissance ethics** 133  
JOHN HALDANE
- 12 Modern moral philosophy** 147  
J. B. SCHNEEWIND

#### **PART IV: HOW OUGHT I TO LIVE?**

The articles in this part discuss ethical theories that attempt to answer the fundamental practical questions of ethics: What ought I to do? How ought I to live? These theories make up the more abstract part of what is known as normative ethics – that is, the part of ethics concerned with guiding action.

- 13 Natural law** 161  
STEPHEN BUCKLE  
One ancient answer to the question ‘How ought I to live?’ is: ‘In accordance with human nature’. In tracing the changes in the meaning of this answer since Greek and Roman times, this essay provides a background to many later ethical theories. At the same time it indicates some problems for subsequent attempts to appeal to natural law in order to argue that specific kinds of conduct (for example, the use of contraception) are wrong.
- 14 Kantian ethics** 175  
ONORA O’NEILL  
Many modern ethical theorists invoke ideas that have their origins in the ethical writings of Kant. Kant’s claim that all rational beings ought to obey a ‘categorical imperative’ derived from a universal law of reason has been much acclaimed, but also much criticized. Here Kant’s position is explained, and the common charges against it are considered.
- 15 The social contract tradition** 186  
WILL KYMLICKA  
Can morality be thought of as an implicit agreement we make with our fellow human beings in order to gain the benefits of a co-operative social life? This initially attractive view must face several objections: attempts to meet these lead to distinctive modern variations on the idea of a social contract as it was developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.
- 16 Egoism** 197  
KURT BAIER  
Egoism tells us to live so as to further our own interests. Psychological egoists think that we all do this anyway, and so it scarcely needs to be advocated. Other philosophical egoists advocate the pursuit of one’s own interest as the rational, and even the ethical, way to live. Despite doubts



about whether egoism is properly classified as an ethical theory, it does provide a challenging answer to the fundamental practical question of how we ought to live.

**17 Contemporary deontology 205**

NANCY (ANN) DAVIS

Deontological theories of ethics tell us that the most important aspects of how we ought to live are governed by moral rules that ought not to be broken, even when breaking them might have better consequences. To assess such a view we need to understand how the rules are to be framed and what acts are to count as a breach of them. Exploring these questions leads to a need to distinguish between intention and foresight, and raises doubts about the coherence of the common notion of obedience to a rule.

**18 An ethic of prima facie duties 219**

JONATHAN DANCY

An ethic of prima facie duties is based on a distinctive notion of what it is to have a duty. Prima facie duties may, in particular circumstances, yield to other duties. Thus they avoid some of the harsher consequences of a more rigid deontological ethic; but they encounter other objections.

**19 Consequentialism 230**

PHILIP PETTIT

Utilitarianism is an example of a consequentialist theory: it tells us that we ought always to do whatever has the best consequences. In the case of classical utilitarianism, 'best consequences' is understood in terms of the greatest possible increase of pleasure over pain; but other theories may share the view that we ought to do what has the best consequences, while dissenting from the classical utilitarian view that pleasure is the sole intrinsic good, and pain the only intrinsic evil. This article sharpens the distinction between such consequentialist theories and their non-consequentialist rivals, finding the consequentialist approach more persuasive.

**20 Utility and the good 241**

ROBERT E. GOODIN

What things are good in themselves? Consequentialist theories obviously need an answer to this question, but so will any ethic that under some conditions advocates doing good. Classical utilitarianism suggests that only pleasure is good in itself; but subsequent versions of utilitarianism have suggested different, and perhaps more convincing, answers. In contrast to the preceding essay, therefore, this essay focuses on the content, rather than the structure, of consequentialist theories, and of any duty or obligation to promote the good.



- 21 Virtue theory** 249  
 GREG PENCE  
 Perhaps 'What ought I to do?' is the wrong question to ask. We might ask instead: 'What kind of person should I be?' Virtue theory focuses on this latter question, and on the virtues that make up good character. But can a theory of the virtues replace alternative approaches to ethics?

- 22 Rights** 259  
 BRENDA ALMOND  
 Some hold that a morality can be based on rights; others regard them as derivative from a more fundamental moral principle or principles. Whatever the view taken on this question, it is widely thought that at least a partial answer to the question of how we ought to live is given by the injunction to respect the rights of others.

## PART V: APPLICATIONS

The application of ethical reasoning to specific issues or areas of practical concern – sometimes known as applied ethics – is the practical counterpart of the more abstract theories of normative ethics discussed in Part IV. In the last two decades the development of applied ethics has been so great that it is impossible to cover it here in any systematic way. Instead, this Part consists of articles on issues selected on the basis of the practical importance of the issue, and the extent to which the issue is amenable to ethical reasoning. (Ethical reasoning can do little to resolve an issue if the parties are at one on all the value-questions, and differ only in their views of the facts.) The titles of the articles indicate their subject-matter clearly enough to make further description unnecessary.

- 23 World poverty** 273  
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- 24 Environmental ethics** 284  
 ROBERT ELLIOT
- 25 Euthanasia** 294  
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- 26 Abortion** 303  
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PART VI: THE NATURE OF ETHICS

Despite the many ethical theories that have been developed with a view to guiding our conduct, and the considerable body of writing on the application of these theories to practical issues, there is uncertainty about what exactly we are doing – and are justified in doing – when we make ethical judgements, or engage in ethical argument. Are we trying to get the facts right, as a scientist might do? Or simply expressing our feelings, or perhaps the feelings of our society as a whole? In what sense, if any, can moral judgements be true or false? The study of these questions has led to the development of theories that differ from the normative theories discussed in Part IV, because they are not intended to guide conduct. They are not so much theories *of* ethics, as theories *about* ethics. For that reason this branch of moral philosophy is known as meta-ethics; a term that suggests that we are not engaged in ethics, but are looking at it, and considering what exactly ethics is, what rules of argument can apply to it, in what way it is possible for ethical judgements to be true or false, and what (if anything) can provide a grounding for them.

35	Realism	399
	MICHAEL SMITH	
	Moral realism is the view that in some sense there is an objective moral reality; realism thus asserts that morality is objective. It also seems undeniable, however, that morality provides us with reasons for action. But the standard picture of human psychology suggests that to have a reason for action we must have a desire; and desires seem to be subjective, in	



that one person's desire may not resemble the desires of another. That difficulty for realism is the theme of this article.

- 36 Intuitionism** 411  
 JONATHAN DANCY  
 Intuitionism holds that claims about morality can be objectively true or false, and that we can come to know what moral principles are right in a special way, by a kind of intuition or direct awareness of their moral properties.
- 37 Naturalism** 421  
 CHARLES R. PIGDEN  
 Like intuitionists, naturalists believe that moral judgements can be true or false, and can be known; but unlike intuitionists, they do not think there are any special moral facts or properties, to be known by intuition. Instead, they think that goodness or rightness can be identified with, or reduced to, some other property (happiness, perhaps, or maybe the will of God, to take two very different examples). In defending their views, naturalists must take account of the claim that it is a fallacy (the naturalistic fallacy) to derive values from facts.
- 38 Subjectivism** 432  
 JAMES RACHELS  
 There is now a widely held, if often unreflective, view that morality is 'subjective'. By this, people often mean that any moral opinion is as good as any other. Among philosophers, the term 'subjectivism' is usually applied to a range of ethical theories that deny that moral inquiry can yield objective truths. This essay discusses both popular subjectivism and the philosophical theories to which the term is often applied.
- 39 Relativism** 442  
 DAVID WONG  
 Meta-ethical relativism is the view that in moral matters there are no universal truths; instead morality is relative to one's particular society or culture. This essay defends a moderate version of that position. It also considers what many believe to be an implication of it, namely normative relativism, or the view that we should not pass judgement on, or attempt to change, the values of people from other cultures.
- 40 Universal prescriptivism** 451  
 R. M. HARE  
 Universal prescriptivism attempts to avoid well-known objections to such 'objectivist' theories as naturalism and intuitionism; yet in contrast to standard 'subjectivist' theories, it allows a prominent place for reasoning about ethical judgements. The outcome, it is claimed, is a way of making



moral decisions that combine elements of Kantian and utilitarian thinking. Unlike the other meta-ethical theories discussed in this Part, universal prescriptivism is of relatively recent origin; it is here outlined by its creator and leading exponent.

**41 Morality and psychological development 464**

LAURENCE THOMAS

Do we develop morally, as we develop psychologically? This may not seem to be a question about the nature of ethics, but the answer we give is directly relevant to central issues about the nature of ethics. If human beings generally pass through stages of moral development corresponding to their psychological development, and if it could be shown that these stages are the same for all of us, this would be persuasive evidence that morality is not purely subjective or culturally relative.

**42 Method and moral theory 476**

DALE JAMIESON

The final essay in this section differs from the others, in that its topic is not the nature of ethics, but the nature of moral theory: that is, of the kinds of theories of ethics put forward in Part IV of this volume. How can we construct such theories, and argue that one is better than another? Two different models are proposed and discussed. The widespread use of hypothetical and imaginary examples in deciding between theories is also addressed.

**PART VII: CHALLENGE AND CRITIQUE**

Subjectivism and relativism, discussed in Part VI, deny that ethics has any objective or universal validity; but these are not the only challenges that defenders of ethics have had to meet. There have been other attempts, based on specific philosophical positions, to show that morality is merely the instrument of the dominant group in society, or is all an illusion, or is meaningless in the absence of religion. The articles in this Part take up some of these challenges.

**43 The idea of a female ethic 491**

JEAN GRIMSHAW

Is there something distinctively male about ethics, or about the way in which we currently understand ethics? The suggestion that there is has been made by recent feminist writers; but what would a 'female ethic' be like? Is ethics really something that can properly take forms that differ according to gender?



- 44 The significance of evolution** 500  
 MICHAEL RUSE  
 Darwin's theory of evolution tells us that we owe our existence to millions of years of evolution in which organisms that left more descendants survived, and those that did not perished. Can we reconcile ethics with such a process? Does evolution imply that our morality should allow the weak to go under? Or more drastically, that we should reject morality altogether?
- 45 Marx against morality** 511  
 ALLEN WOOD  
 According to Marx, the morality of a society reflects its economic basis, and serves the interests of the ruling class. At the same time Marx condemned capitalism in terms that suggest strongly-held values. Is Marx inconsistent? If not, what substance is there in the Marxist challenge to morality?
- 46 How could ethics depend on religion?** 525  
 JONATHAN BERG  
 It is often said that without God, there can be no morality. This essay examines different grounds for holding that belief: that the very meaning of 'good' and 'bad' stem from God's will; that only through God can we come to know what is good; and that only belief in God can serve to motivate us to act morally.
- 47 The implications of determinism** 534  
 ROBERT YOUNG  
 The entire apparatus of moral decision-making, praise and blame, reward and punishment, seems to be premised on the assumption that in normal circumstances we are responsible for what we freely choose to do. Determinists maintain that there is a causal explanation for everything that happens in the universe, human behaviour included. This seems to suggest that we do not freely choose to do anything, and this in turn appears to imply that we are not morally responsible for anything we do. Are ethics and determinism incompatible?
- Afterword** 543  
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