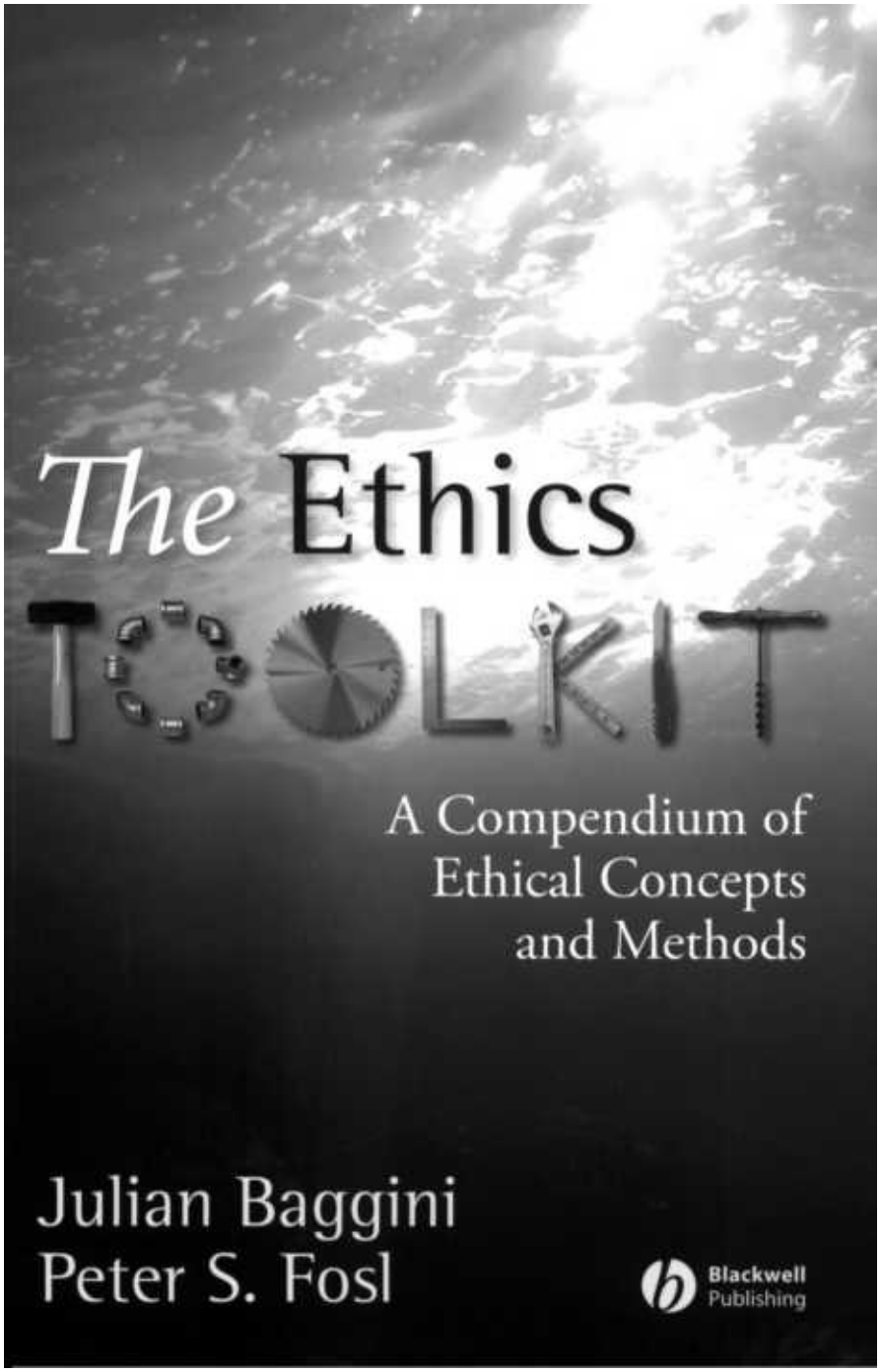
The Ethics TOOLKIT

A Compendium of Ethical Concepts and Methods

Julian Baggini
Peter S. Fosl

Blackwell Publishing


The Ethics
TOOLKIT
A Compendium of
Ethical Concepts
and Methods
Julian Baggini
Peter S. Fosl
Blackwell
Publishing

The Ethics Toolkit

The Ethics Toolkit

A Compendium of Ethical Concepts and Methods

Julian Baggini and Peter S. Fosl

Blackwell
Publishing

© 2007 by Julian Baggini and Peter S. Fosl

BLACKWELL PUBLISHING
350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148–5020, USA
9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK
550 Swanston Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053, Australia

The right of Julian Baggini and Peter S. Fosl to be identified as the Authors of this Work has been asserted in accordance with the UK Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, except as permitted by the UK Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act 1988, without the prior permission of the publisher.

First published 2007 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd

1 2007

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Baggini, Julian.
The ethics toolkit : a compendium of ethical concepts and methods / Julian Baggini and Peter S. Fosl.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-4051-3230-5 (hardcover : alk. paper) —
ISBN 978-1-4051-3231-2 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Ethics. I. Fosl, Peter S. II. Title.

BJ1012.B33 2007
170--dc22 2007005633

A catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Set in 10/12.5 pt Plantin
by The Running Head Limited, Cambridge, www.therunninghead.com
Printed and bound in Singapore
by Markono Print Media Pte Ltd

The publisher's policy is to use permanent paper from mills that operate a sustainable forestry policy, and which has been manufactured from pulp processed using acid-free and elementary chlorine-free practices. Furthermore, the publisher ensures that the text paper and cover board used have met acceptable environmental accreditation standards.

For further information on
Blackwell Publishing, visit our website:
www.blackwellpublishing.com

To Joseph P. Fell and Lucy O'Brien

Contents

Acknowledgments xiii

Introduction xv

Part I The Grounds of Ethics 1

1.1 Aesthetics 1

1.2 Agency 3

1.3 Authority 6

1.4 Autonomy I0

1.5 Care 12

1.6 Character 15

1.7 Conscience 16

1.8 Evolution 19

1.9 Finitude 21

1.10 Flourishing 23

1.11 Harmony 26

1. 12 Interest 28

1.13 Intuition 31

1.14 Merit 33

1.15 Naturallaw 36

1.16 Need 39

1.17 fain and pleasure 41

1.18 Revelation 44

1.19 Rights 47

1.20 Sympathy 51

1.21 Tradition and history 53

Part II Frameworks for Ethics 56

2.1 Consequentialism 56

2.2 Contractarianism 60

2.3 Culture critique 62

2.4 Deontological ethics 64

2.5 Discourse ethics 66

2.6 Divine command 68

2.7 Egoism 71

2.8 Hedonism 74

2.9 Naturalism 76

2.10 Particularism 79

2.11 Perfectionism 81

2.12 Pragmatism 84

2.13 Rationalism 86

2.14 Relativism 88

2.15 Subjectivism 91

2.16 Virtue ethics 94

Part III Central Concepts in Ethics 98

3.1 Absolute/relative 98

3.2 Act/rule 101

3.3 Bad/evil 104

3.4 Beneficence/non-maleficence 106

3.5 Cause/reason 109

3.6 Cognitivism/non-cognitivism 111

3.7 Commission/omission 114

3.8 Consent 116

3.9 Facts/values 119

3.10 The golden mean 122

3.11 Honor/shame 124

3.12 Individual/collective 127

3.13 Injury 129

3.14 Intentions/consequences 132

3.15 Internalism/externalism 134

3.16 Intrinsic/instrumental value 137

3.17 Legal/moral 140

3.18 Liberation/oppression 142

3.19 Means/ends 144

3.20 Metaethics/normative ethics 147

3.21 Moral subjects/moral agents 149

3.22 Prudence 152

3.23 Public/private 154

3.24 Stoic cosmopolitanism 157

Part IV Assessment, Judgment, and Critique 160

4.1 Alienation 160

4.2 Authenticity 162

4.3 Consistency 164

4.4 Counterexamples 167

4.5 Fairness 169

4.6 Fallacies 172

4.7 Impartiality and objectivity 174

4.8 The "is/ought gap" 177

4.9 Justice and lawfulness 179

4.10 Just war theory 182

4.11 Paternalism 185

4.12 Proportionality 187

4.13 Reflective equilibrium 189

4.14 Restoration 192

4.15 Sex and gender 194

4.16 Speciesism 196

4.17 "Thought experiments 199

4.18 Universalizability 201

Part V The Limits of Ethics 205

5.1 Akrasia 205

5.2 Amoralism 207

5.3 Bad faith and self-deception 209

5.4 Casuistry and rationalization 211

5.5 Fallenness 214

5.6 False consciousness 216

5.7 Free will and determinism 218

5.8 Moral luck 222

5.9 Nihilism 224

5.10 Pluralism 227

5.11 Power 229

5.12 Radical particularity 231

5.13 The separateness of persons 233

5.14 Skepticism 235

5.15 Standpoint 237

5.16 Supererogation 239

5.17 Tragedy 242

Appendix: Ethics Resources 245

Index 247

Alphabetical List of Entries

Absolute/relative 98

Act/rule 101

Aesthetics 1

Agency 3

Akrasia 205

Alienation 160

Amoralism 207

Authenticity 162

Authority 6

Autonomy 10

Bad/evil 104

Bad faith and self-deception 209

Beneficence/non-maleficence 106

Care 12

Casuistry and rationalization 211

Cause/reason 109

Character 15

Cognitivism/non-cognitivism 111

Commission/omission 114

Conscience 16

Consent 1 16

Consequentialism 56

Consistency 164

Contractarianism 60

Counterexamples 167

Culture critique 62

Deontological ethics 64

Discourse ethics 66

Divine command 68

Egoism 71

Evolution 19

Factsivalues 119

Fairness 169

Fallacies 172

Fallenness 214

False consciousness 216

Finitude 21

Flourishing 23

Free will and determinism 218

The golden mean 122

Harmony 26

Hedonism 74

Honor/shame 124

Impartiality and objectivity 174

Individual/collective 127

Injury 129

Intentions/consequences 132

Interest 28

Internalism/externalism 134

Intrinsic/instrumental value 137

Intuition 31

The "is/ought gap" 177

Justice and lawfulness 179

Just war theory 182

Legal/moral 140

Liberation/oppression 142

Means/ends 144

Merit 33

Metaethics/normative ethics 147

Moral luck 222

Moral subjects/moral agents 149

Natural law 36

Naturalism 76

Need 39

Nihilism 224

Pain and pleasure 41

Particularism 79

Paternalism 185

Perfectionism 81

Pluralism 227

Power 229

Pragmatism 84

Proportionality 187

Prudence 152

Public/private 154

Radical particularity 231

Rationalism 86

Reflective equilibrium 189

Relativism 88

Restoration 192

Revelation 44

Rights 47

The separateness of persons 233

Sex and gender 194

Skepticism 235

Speciesism 196

Standpoint 237

Stoic cosmopolitanism 157

Subjectivism 91

Supererogation 239

Sympathy 51

Thought experiments 199

Tradition and history 53

Tragedy 242

Universalizability 201

Virtue ethics 94

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Peter's spouse, Catherine Fosl, and his children, Elijah Fosl and Isaac Fosl van-Wyke, for their patience and support; Avery Kolers for advice on the contents; Jack Furlong and Ellen Cox for their insight; Maggie Barr for proofreading the text; and Transylvania University's Jones Grant program for underwriting Peter's intercontinental travel.

We would also like to thank Jeff Dean and Danielle Descoteaux at Blackwell for their support and patience, as well as the anonymous referees for their thoughtful, thorough, helpful comments, and for their encourage- ment.Thanks also to Charlotte Davies, Annie Jackson, and David Williams at The Running Head for their remarkably thorough tidying up of the manuscript. We are also deeply grateful to all those who have built and who maintain the Internet. Without it, our work together and our friendship would have never come to exist.

Julian Baggini

Peter S. Fosi

Introduction

How should you think about ethics? It's a deceptively simple question. Certainly, you should think well, think clearly, think accurately, and - if it's possible in ethics - think rightly. But how exactly can you set about doing all this?

One way to approach the topic is to try to establish a general theory that attempts to do things like determine the true nature of ethics, define the meaning of ethical terms, formulate fundamental moral principles, and place those principles in a hierarchy. This way of thinking about ethics, in short, tries to produce a theory that pretty much answers all the theoretical questions anyone might ask.

Having accomplished this, of course, you also have to explain why your general theory is better than all the rest, and you have to repel the various challenges that critics are certain to advance. After producing such a theory and defending it, you next set about applying your theory to real-life moral problems, demonstrating how it resolves disputes and answers questions about what to do in various actual circumstances.

One problem with this kind of approach, however, is that more than two millennia of moral philosophy have led to little consensus about the fundamental nature of ethics, the hierarchy of moral principles, or the way to apply them in the real world.Worse, some respectable thinkers have rejected the idea that reaching consensus about such things is even possible.

Meanwhile, of course, the world goes on, tangled in the most profound sorts of moral struggle. If anything, the demand for meaningful and effective moral thinking has become greater than ever. Moral thinking and reasoning, then, despite the limitations of moral philosophy, can neither be put on hold until agreement is reached nor abandoned altogether. Even amoralists need to get clear on what they're rejecting.

The fact that theoretical consensus about moral issues hasn't been reached doesn't mean it can't be reached. But perhaps there's another method, another way to think about ethical matters, a way that can bring real intellectual force to bear upon the moral controversies that populate the world but doesn't require a univocal, general moral theory.

Rather than trying to determine a single, complete ethical theory that answers all the relevant moral questions that may arise, and defeats all its competitors, perhaps one might instead (or also) try to gain a kind of mastery or at least facility with some of the many different theories, concepts, principles, and critiques concerned with ethics that moral philosophers have produced over the ages. The Ethics Toolkit aspires to help those engaged in moral inquiry and reflection to do just that. By placing a selection of insights from different moral theorists and theories side by side, we hope

to show readers something about ethics that may go missing in the contests among ethical theories.

We hope to show how many of the concepts and ideas collected under the umbrella of ethical theory have a wider and more complex range of application than can sometimes appear. There are many voices composing the moral discourses of our age, and these different voices address many different problems in different ways. Many tools are necessary to hear them and to respond properly to them, not a single voice or a single tool.

Indeed, anyone who wants to deliberate and converse with others about the major moral concerns that occupy people today must be able to draw upon not just a single well-crafted theory but more broadly upon the rich and diverse work of the past 2,500 years of moral philosophy. Competent thinkers simply must have in their possession a well-stocked "toolkit" containing a host of intellectual instruments for careful, precise, and sophisticated moral thinking.

By producing a compendium like this we also hope to provide readers with a deeper and subtler sense of how different ideas and methods may be enlisted so that people might not only think but also act with regard to moral matters in more effective and satisfying ways. Many of the problems that human beings have to deal with are in part conceptual and philosophical. Coming to terms with these problems will require better thinking. Medicines and machines will be needed to help make the world a better place. But, contrary to the charges that are often brought against philosophy, so will the capacity for clear thinking and sound moral deliberation. In this way, we believe that there is a connection between what the ancient Greeks called "knowing that" (theoretical knowledge) and "knowing how" (practical knowledge).

The vision of ethics underwriting The Ethics Toolkit is pluralistic, and unabashedly so, in the sense that it holds that the insights of, say, utilitarianism are of interest and value not only to utilitarians but also to anyone who wishes to engage in moral reflection. This vision of ethics does not, however, imply that the tools described here can simply be picked up and applied blindly to suit whatever need arises. Various tools are more appropriate to certain needs than others. That is not to say that the tools we collect here can or should only be used in a single way. Some may effectively use a screwdriver to take on the same job others would tackle with a hammer. More advanced thinkers may be able to use some of the tools in ways that beginners cannot. Moral thinkers of all abilities will use some tools more than others, using some only rarely.

There are, similarly, different ways to use this text. The Ethics Toolkit can be read cover-to-cover as a course in ethical reasoning. We begin in fart I with the question of the grounds on which ethics stands. We then consider in Part II the most important frameworks that have been constructed to enable us to reason about ethics. Part III describes a number of central concepts in ethical discourse. In Part IV, we look at the ways in which ethical theories and judgments may be critiqued. Finally, we look at the

limits of moral reasoning in Part V.

But this sort of linear approach isn't the only way to use Ac Ethics 7iholkit. It can also be used as a reference text upon which people can draw, using either the table of contents or the extensive index, to help understand a specific issue. Or alternatively, readers can simply wander about through the hook, following their own muses in a nearly countless variety of ways. The cross-referencing we've appended to each entry directs readers to other entries that will complement or elaborate upon the material at hand, helping readers to make connections and articulate contrasts, sometimes in surprising ways.

Each entry is also followed by two or three suggestions for further reading. Usually these recommendations will tell you more about the subject of the entry, but sometimes we have also included details of works referred to in the entries that concern the specific examples used. Readings particularly suitable for beginners are marked with asterisks. In addition, we have tried to include concrete examples that illustrate many of the more abstract ideas of the text and also show readers how the material of the text applies to actual ethical controversies. The index includes the topic areas these examples cover. A list of societies, institutions, websites, and other resources related to the study and practice of ethics has been appended to the end of the text.

No matter how it's used, though, we hope Pie Ethics Tholkit will be a book that readers will return to again and again, whether they are students, teachers, scholars, professionals, or just people concerned with how to think better about morality.

Part I

The Grounds of Ethics

1.1 Aesthetics

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty" wrote the poet John Keats (1795 1821) in "Ode on a Grecian Urn." Was he the victim of a romantic delusion or is there really a relationship between the true, the beautiful, and even the good? Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) seemed to think there was a connection between at least the last two when he claimed that, "Ethics and aesthetics are one" (I ractatus 6.421). Taking at face-value a statement from any thinker as cryptic as Wittgenstein is a potentially misleading affair. But nevertheless, many have argued for links between aesthetics and ethics. Beauty can be seen as capable of representing goodness, revealing the nature of goodness, or instructing us in goodness.

Representations of good

Various ethical notions have been personified in statues and images. At the Library of Celsus in Ephesus,Turkey, you'll hump into statues of beautiful women said to be wisdom (sophia) and virtue (arenc), while justice is commonly depicted as a blindfolded woman holding a pair of scales.

Besides personifying ethical concepts, the aesthetic can have ethical import in much more abstract ways. When one looks at, for example, the Parthenon in Athens, one sees a structure that exhibits exquisite balance and harmony. The pediment and supports are carefully proportioned according to what mathematicians call the "golden section," conveying intelligence, control, and moderation. The pillars are shaped with a slight swelling (entasis) to give them a feeling of strength as well as rectitude. The site of the structure in an elevated, central, and historic location communicates a connection with the divine and with the past; it is the centering pole of the polls.

What is it, though, that such "moral" art is representing? In his Critique of Judgment (1790), Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) argued that art cannot directly depict moral principles, but it can offer symbols of morality. By this Kant meant that the way we reflect on objects of our aesthetic experience is somehow analogous to the way we reflect on the purely abstract concepts of morality. "The morally good," Kant writes, "is the intelligible that taste has in view" (Critique, 353-4). That's why beauty seems bound up with so many notions connected to morality. For example, says Kant, our experience of beauty is disinterested; we find beauty in things from which we have absolutely nothing to gain (e.g. someone else's art). Beauty can also seem universal in

the sense that we think everyone ought to be able to see it that way - ought to in a way analogous to the way people ought to be moral. In short, aesthetic thought makes universal claims independent of self-interest analogous to the claims of ethical thought.

Revealing the good

The connection between aesthetics and ethics isn't restricted to art representing goodness. Nature's aesthetic qualities have also been thought to have moral significance. Ancient Pythagoreans believed that there are harmonic or at least harmonious relationships (harmonia) among the various structures of the natural world and that achieving a good life means replicating them in one's own soul (psyche), making as it were the microcosm correspond to the macrocosm. In his own ways, Plato followed them in this. Later, Romantic thinkers such as William Blake (1757-1827) and William Wordsworth (1770-1850) would find in natural beauty a source of moral restoration for those suffering from the depravity of urban, industrial society, as well as an expression of a deeper spiritual or divine goodness and beauty.

Art as instruction

Perhaps the most widespread view of art's moral dimension is that it can help develop our moral sense. For example, Aristotle's Poetics remarks upon the powerful and important effects of tragedy. When one walks around the remains of ancient Greece one is struck by the important location of its theaters. Directly above the great temple of Delphi is a theater. The theater of Dionysus sits snuggly at the base of the Athenian acropolis. That's because, for the ancient Greeks and many others after them, art offers not simply the exhibition of morality but instruction in it and a site for deliberation about the features of moral life.

Part of that instruction involves the cultivation of our feelings, sentiments, sympathies, and affections. Aesthetic experience can help people sympathize with the victims of war, crime, abuse, and vice. It can cultivate compassion, moral outrage, pity, pride, devotion, admiration, and respect. It can edify and elevate. Consider, for example, Picasso's painting Guernica (1937), the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, Arnold Schoenberg's A Survivor fronmWarsaw (Opus 46), and the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.

But not everyone agrees that art makes us better people. In his dialogue Ion, Plato argued that art is more likely to corrupt. Even if aesthetic experience can make a positive contribution to moral understanding, we might still question whether it offers us moral insight, cognition, deliberation, or instruction in a way nothing else can. Which raises the question: when faced with an ethical problem, is it better to turn to a theory or a poem?

See also