

Summary

Approaches to Ethics III.

The final volume of the three volume project “Approaches to ethics” covers several topics from the development of normative ethics and metaethics throughout the twentieth century. The chapters offer a summary of the most important trends as well as philosophers with impact on the contemporary state of moral theory. The first chapter analyzes the role of philosophical style in the approach to ethical issues as practiced by Ludwig Wittgenstein and, partly in his wake, by Stanley Cavell and Cora Diamond. Its main focus is on their shared assumption that the personal and truly intimate dimension of morals is not an affair of some silent interiority, but is inseparable from its own linguistic expression. Hence the importance of ethics as a choir of voices participating in the ongoing conversation of mankind. The second chapter offers an interpretation of the principles of Emmanuel Lévinas’ ethics understood as first philosophy. Levinas is here considered to be highly influential in the so-called continental tradition of philosophy with laying the groundwork for later theories of ethics focused around the other, the different and the disappearing subject (e.g. Foucault, Lacan, Derrida, Butler). On the other hand the third chapter focuses on Peter Singer both as an innovator in the utilitarian tradition and original thinker in bioethics. The chapter briefly describes Singer’s impact on the bioethical debate, gives a short comment on the debate about Singer in the German-speaking countries and then it gives an outline of Singer’s philosophical position in *Practical Ethics*. Finally, the chapter discusses the Principle of equal consideration of interests and considers the ‘Sanctity of life’ Doctrine and the criticism of speciesism. The chapter „Bernard Williams: Ethics without too much of thought, utility and morality“ discusses the fundamental characteristics of Bernard Williams’ critic of modern moral philosophy (Kantian and utilitarian) and with this critic connected the most important ideas of his own notion of ethics – moral luck, personal identity and integrity, the notion

of importance and confidence. The fifth chapter introduces Immanuel Kant as the principal inspiration behind much of contemporary practical philosophy, especially in Anglo-Saxon tradition. The chapter traces the popularity of Kantian themes through the highly influential work of John Rawls. With this background in place, the rest of the article analyses the main ideas of prominent contemporary Kantians like Thomas Scanlon, Christine Korsgaard, Barbara Herman and Stephen Darwall. The seventh chapter offers a broad overview of a plural family of theories usually labeled virtue ethics. It discusses its origins, pivotal concepts (virtue, character etc.) and offers a discussion of the main critiques related to the virtue ethics. The chapter "Platonic Tradition in Contemporary Anglophone Ethics" introduces a line of ethical inquiry that evolved as an alternative to (mainly Aristotelian) virtue ethics, drawing inspiration from Platonic ethics of Simone Weil. Contrary to the prevalent assumption, the "Platonists" claim that the two aspects of human psychology, the cognitive and the affective, are not independent and cannot be separated. This claim has important implications both for the content and the method of their ethical thinking. In the first part of the chapter, the Platonic account of human psychology is presented that delineates the initial human condition and its movement to ethical perfection: overcoming selfishness towards clearer perception of reality. In the second part, conceptions of good (or goodness) and evil are examined that are necessary for true perception and just assessment of reality (good) or that derive from disregarding this reality (evil). The aim of the eighth chapter is to present the principle features of what might be called „ethics after the death of the subject“. In the opening part of the text, the chapter presents some general considerations concerning the topic of „the death of the subject“, emphasizing all the complexity the question of subject may acquire in the work of different thinkers (Foucault, Deleuze, Barthes, Lacan, and others). In the following parts, it focuses on two key figures in whose works the question of ethics may be viewed as predominant: Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler. In both cases, it is stressed that the importance of their philosophical development leads, in Derrida's work, from an ambitious attempt to take a certain distance from the

very foundations of Western metaphysics to developing what might be called an „ethics of disharmony“, and in Butler’s work, from an attempt to deconstruct the sex/gender distinction to create, in her later works, a certain „ethics of insecurity“. The final chapter “Darwinian Metaethics” reviews the work of those moral philosophers who have reflected on the core issues in moral ontology and semantics by taking seriously the Darwinian hypothesis about the origin of our moral beliefs, emotions and behavior. The chapter opens with a differentiation among Darwinian programs in genealogy of morals, normative ethics and metaethics. It claims that a critique of a particular attempt to derive normative conclusions from evolutionary premises actually launched metaethics as a separate kind of inquiry. An analysis of Moore’s Open Question Argument is then followed by a classification of major metaethical positions issuing from Moore’s argument. The rest of the paper critically examines three such theories: Darwinian noncognitivism (Gibbard); Darwinian cognitivist realism (Railton, Richards, perhaps Dennett and Kitcher); and Darwinian cognitivist anti-realism (Joyce, Rosenberg and Street).