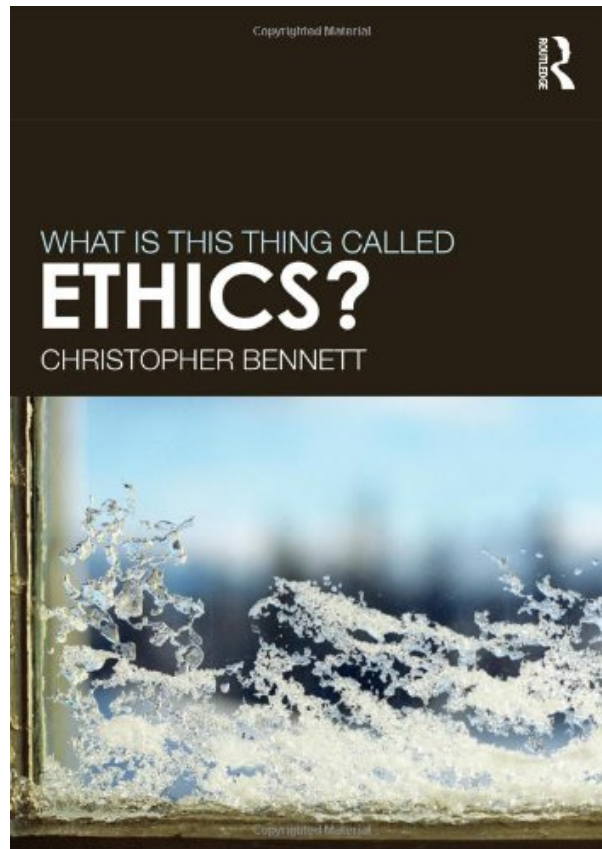


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Review

'What is particularly appealing about this volume are its clarity of style, organization, and accessibility. Each chapter presents six or seven aspects of the problem in question, a conclusion, a set of excellent questions for discussion, and a good, short bibliography. Summing Up: Recommended. Lower- and upper-level undergraduates; general readers.' - CHOICE

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What is morality? How do we define what is right and wrong? How does moral theory help us deal with ethical issues in the world around us?

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What is this thing called Ethics? contains many helpful student-friendly features. Each chapter concludes with a useful summary of the main ideas discussed, study questions, and annotated further reading. This is an ideal introduction to ethics not only for philosophy students but for anyone coming to the subject for the first time.

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I found it difficult to teach from

By C. F. Guthrie

Bennett writes well, but my students have struggled to appreciate this book. My difficulty with it as a teacher is that he is far too quick to highlight the problems with each of the theories. I believe students need first to grasp the thoughtfulness and even the beauty of each proposed moral theory. There is a reason why each one is a classic in itself and useful for thinking through our ethical conflicts. Too much initial critique of the theories feeds the individualistic story line that there are no better or worse answers to moral questions so we should all just go with our initial feelings. After using this for two semesters I'm moving to a different text.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Five Stars

By Jessica Gaudino

What I needed for school

0 of 13 people found the following review helpful.

Disappointed

By Apples

Apart from being way overpriced this book is little real use to any student. The fact that it is written by someone teaching philosophy is, to put it mildly, disappointing and despite the glowing tributes paid by others on the back cover I suspect that this book has not been peer reviewed.

This book is not only badly written, it is inconsistent in its approach to an otherwise important subject and is riddled with invalid arguments - which for a book about philosophy is more than disappointing.

Bennett claims that he is interested in making ethics 'explicit' and in deciding what we 'ought' to believe there must be an attempt 'to explain what our views are, and defining them, is an essential part of ensuring that our views are the right ones' - which is ironic given the subject topic. Rather, what is delivered is the author's Western humanistic approach which, apparently, has all the answers; 'Those who dismiss the enterprise of ethics deny that ethics is an area in which there really are answers' - more irony.

Against this grand claim the author trivializes the morality of other cultures as examples of 'relativism'. He writes; 'Now consider a different culture - there are quite a lot to choose from - in which women are excluded from the main decision-making forums of their social group'. Readers are not enlightened as to which cultures Bennett actually refers but it is obvious that the author has not read anything by Lila Abu-Lughod, Professor of Anthropology and Women and Gender Studies at Columbia University. She is Palestinian and has lived with Bedouin people for years and testifies in any of her numerous books, that women, even in those societies which we in the West assume to be 'backward' cultures, particularly with respect to women, that women have a powerful say in social discourse - often in very imaginative ways. But none of this stops Bennett claiming that who 'try to question these gender roles are treated with ridicule'. Well they might, but that is not the point Bennett is hoping to make which is, ironically, that morality is - relative. He writes, ' ... although it is important to question the moral beliefs through one's upbringing, it is another thing to say that we should be sceptical about all moral beliefs' at which point Bennett loses me.

In the Chapter on ethics and religion (Chapter 7) Bennett outline the arguments for the existence of God. These are well know and may be found in any book dealing with philosophy. There is nothing really new except that for some reason Bennett does not mention the most mentioned argument for the existence of God - Anslem's Ontological Argument. Why, if the matter of the proof of the existence of God is seen as important enough to raise concerning the matter of ethics, is this well-known argument missing from his thesis? I can only guess. I suspect that the ontological argument is bypassed as it raises the significant matter of the what is 'good'. The intricacies of the ontological argument are tricky, particular if you are a humanist and God is not the absolute 'good' then the only alternative is - Bennett? I can understand his reluctance in raising the matter but not to do so seriously compromises the book's contribution.

Bennett's brand of humanism undermines his appreciation of cultural context. In a convoluted text to do with biblical scripture (by which he means Christianity - Islam does not rate a mention) he concludes that the 'holy book' (apparently he cannot write 'Bible'), in order to be morally relevant, must be 'interpreted in a way that is compelling to us' and that 'religious texts cannot replace our moral understanding'. In this Bennett forgets that it was those same biblical texts that led, eventually, to his grandiose claims concerning morality and ethics.

My own work as an anthropologist in Australia provides me with an insight into Aboriginal culture which do not have a written culture as we in the West would understand the term - their culture is 'written' in the landscape. To understand, rather than gaining simply knowledge, is an aspect of philosophy. To understand

that morality may be written in a landscape would be, I suspect, be beyond Bennett's understanding. Morality, as part of culture, is relative whether Bennett agrees or not. Failing to appreciate this fact demonstrates a severe weakness for anyone proposing to write on ethics.

Bennett does have some useful things to say but unfortunately what might be worthwhile is hampered by his own bias.

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