

(Free pdf) Virtues and Vices: and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy

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Philippa Foot

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#12768250 in Books 2003-02-06Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 5.50 x 1.00 x 8.60l, .0 #File Name: 0199252858232 pages | File size: 34.Mb

Philippa Foot : Virtues and Vices: and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Virtues and Vices: and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy:

25 of 25 people found the following review helpful. Must-Read Papers for Meta-EthicistsBy ctdreyerThis is a fabulous collection of papers. It covers the most important papers from Foot's in the period from the 50s to the 70s, and it includes several classics of twentieth-century meta-ethics (e.g. "Moral Arguments," "Moral Beliefs," and "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives").While Foot's most important work has been in meta-ethics, this collection

includes some quality papers in normative ethics. The opening paper, "Virtues and Vices," is one of the works that helped to resurrect virtue ethics as a research program in contemporary analytic philosophy. Also included are "Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect," and Foot's paper on euthanasia. There are also a couple of papers on the history of philosophy, one on Hume and one on Nietzsche. These historical concerns reflect the two major projects that have been central to Foot's meta-ethical thinking throughout her career: (i) defending a form of cognitivism against various forms of noncognitivism, and (ii) understanding the relation between moral obligations and reasons for action. She is interested in the classical empiricists (and especially Hume) as a source of contemporary assumptions about reasons and psychology that lead to noncognitivism, and she is concerned with Nietzsche's challenges to morality and their relevance to thinking about the connection between moral obligation and reasons for action. And Foot's two fundamental concerns in meta-ethics--cognitivism vs. noncognitivism, and the connection between reasons and moral obligations--are represented by several papers in this collection. Several of the most important papers here (viz. "Moral Arguments," "Moral Beliefs," and "Goodness and Choice") attack noncognitivism, and especially the sorts of noncognitivism accepted by Stevenson and Hare. In several papers she questions Hume's Law according to which one cannot infer an 'ought' from an 'is'. In particular, she wants to argue that there are descriptive requirements on what counts as evidence for and against moral views, and that it is impossible to understand certain claims with the formal components or attitudinal concomitants that noncognitivists claim characterize ethical discourse as moral claims. Moreover, she claims that it is unclear that there is any sort of feeling or attitude or desire that must be connected with a judgment for that judgment to be considered a moral judgment. So it's unclear that those judgments express such feelings or attitudes or desires. Here her aim is to argue for a form of cognitivism. Pace Hare (and his purely formal account of moral language), there are content constraints on what counts as a moral opinion. And pace emotivists and expressivists, having a certain attitude or an emotion is neither necessary nor sufficient for making a moral claim. Minimally, Foot argues, moral opinions must be concerned with human good and harm, and this rules out certain views as moral views--even if those views have the form of universalizable prescriptions or are accompanied by whatever attitudes a noncognitivist considers to be distinctively moral. If you want to engage in genuine moral discussion, you have to accept facts about human good and harm as evidence in the argument. If you ignore such evidence when it is brought forward, you are opting out of the moral debate. Indeed, it is unclear that we can understand a person who isn't responsive to such evidence as putting forward and defending moral opinions at all. This collection also allows the reader to observe the evolution of Foot's views about the connection between moral obligations and reasons for action. The problem with which she is dealing arises from the apparent inconsistency of the following three claims: (a) moral obligations provide everyone with reasons for action; (b) different people have different desires and interests; and (c) people's reasons for actions depend on their desires and interests. There is a prima facie tension here: moral obligations are supposed to provide everyone with reasons for action, and yet the basis of reasons for action are different from person to person. Now, these three claims aren't straightforwardly inconsistent. It is possible that moral obligations will have a sort of connection to different people's desires and interests that allows them to provide everyone with reasons for action, even though different people have different desires and interests. Being just, for example, may be to everyone's advantage, irrespective of their particular desires and interests. Still, it appears to be against many people's desires and interests; it appears that being just often requires a person to put aside her own desires and interests in order to do the right thing. But one might take on the project of showing that, notwithstanding the appearance to the contrary, being just really will contribute to everyone's diverse desires and interest. This would provide some evidence for the view that everyone has reason to act justly. Foot's appears to have been somewhat sympathetic to this sort of project when she wrote "Moral Beliefs"--or, at least, she was willing to consider the possibility that this project might be successful. But she gradually became much more skeptical about the ordinary view that moral obligations always provide people with reasons for action. This skepticism received its fullest expression in "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives." There she held that it may be the case that only those who have a desire to be moral have good reason to, say, be just in all cases. She thought that there may be immoralists, people who simply don't care about morality, for whom moral obligations do not provide reasons for action in many (or even all) cases. We can still say that these people are morally obligated to be just, but they don't have reasons to be just since they lack the relevant interests and desires that make it the case that most people have reason to act justly in most cases. (In her more recent work Foot has opted for a different response to these issues. She now thinks that moral obligations do in fact provide people with reasons for action, but she denies that reasons for action are based on people's desires and interests. For more on this, see her more recent collection *Moral Dilemmas* and her book *Natural Goodness*.) I can't recommend this book enough. Go out and buy it if you're interested in contemporary meta-ethics.

"Foot stands out among contemporary ethical theorists because of her conviction that virtues and vices are more central ethical notions than rights, duties, justice, or consequences--the primary focus of most other contemporary moral theorists....[These] essays embody to some extent her commitment to an ethics of virtue. Foot's style is straightforward and readable, her arguments subtle..."--Choice

"Foot stands out among contemporary ethical theorists because of her conviction that virtues and vices are more central ethical notions than rights, duties, justice, or consequences--the primary focus of most other contemporary moral theorists. This volume brings together a dozen essays published between 1957 and 1977, and includes two new ones as well. In the first, Foot argues explicitly for an ethic of virtue, and in the next five discusses abortion, euthanasia, free will/determination, and the ethics of Hume and Nietzsche. The final eight essays chart her growing disenchantment with emotivism and prescriptivism and their account of moral arguments. All the essays embody to some extent her commitment to an ethics of virtue. Foot's style is straightforward and readable, her arguments subtle, ingenious, and some of them important."--Choice

About the Author
Philippa Foot is Griffin Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at the University of California, Los Angeles, and an Honorary Fellow of Somerville College, Oxford.