

David Edmonds (ed.), *Ethics and the Contemporary World* (London: Routledge, 2019), 374 pages. ISBN: 9781138092051 (pbk.). Hardback/Paperback: £75.00/£15.99.

This is a collection of uniformly well-written, clear, and engaging short essays covering a broad range of topics within applied ethics, written particularly with students just beginning their philosophy studies in mind as the primary target audience. The book is divided into eight parts: race and gender, the environment, war and international relations, global poverty, ethics and social media, democracy, rights and moral status, and science and technology. The part about rights and moral status is the longest. It contains six essays. The first two parts both feature only two essays. The other parts all feature three essays. This adds up to a total of twenty five essays.

The essays take up 349 of the book's pages. And most essays are roughly the same length, which means that the average chapter is just a little over ten pages long. In the case of some of the essays, what this means is that the essay feels more like a quick vignette or a teaser than a thorough treatment of the topic. In some of the chapters, however, the authors manage to make substantial and well-explained arguments within the bounds of the few pages they have to work with.

Most of the essays start with striking examples that get the reader immediately interested in the topics at hand. Some are examples with a strong emotional impact, and the book consistently makes the topics covered feel like pressing issues that moral philosophy needs to deal with. This can actually be a little frustrating if, as I did, one reads several chapters in a row whenever one sits down with the book. It is probably better to dive in and out here and there, reading perhaps one chapter (or perhaps one part of the book) at a time, coming back to other chapters later. Otherwise one can sometimes get the feeling that the book jumps too quickly from one topic to another, getting the reader interested in each topic, only to then swiftly switch to some completely different topic. To put a more positive spin on what I just said: most, if not all, of the chapters are written in very engaging ways that make one interested in the topics discussed; many of the chapters left me wanting to hear much more about what the authors have to say about the topics they are covering.

Because the book contains so many different essays, all of which are short and most of which cover rather different topics – everything from abortion, to the demands of beauty, to climate engineering, to social media, or to religion and politics or human enhancement – it is hard to summarize the substantial contents of the book in a short review like this. This raises the following

question: is there anything that all these twenty five essays have in common except for being about topics in applied ethics and involving thought-provoking concrete examples? One thing the chapters have in common is that they are almost all written by authors with some significant connection to the University of Oxford's Uehiro Centre for Practical Ethics. Many of the authors of the individual chapters have also published articles together with authors of the other chapters in the past. In particular, many of them have published work together with the author of the second-to-last chapter of the book, Julian Savulescu, who is the director of the Uehiro Centre.

This means that there is a certain degree of apparent agreement among the authors in terms of their philosophical approaches and the types of arguments they use. This is not to say that one gets the sense that the authors agree in all of their views about applied ethics. But it is to say that if one is familiar with what you might call the Uehiro school of practical ethics, you will recognize many of the contributions to this book as being very much in line with that school of thought. What this means is that one is more likely to find arguments and lines of reasoning in the tradition of John Stuart Mill in these essays than arguments and lines of reasoning in the traditions of, say, Thomas Aquinas or Immanuel Kant. What this also means is that chapters on topics like abortion and human enhancement take very liberal or progressive approaches to those topics. Many of the chapters also have an either explicitly or implicitly acknowledged intellectual debt to Derek Parfit's style of moral philosophy. So even if there is some disunity in terms of the topics covered in the book – again, the book covers a very wide range of topics within applied ethics, many of which are rather different from each other – there is a certain unity in terms of the approaches the authors use to engage with their topics.

I do not intend the just-made observation as an objection to the contents of the book or to the editor's choice of contributors. But I would be inclined to recommend to teachers who are considering using this book in introductory ethics courses – which I think is a great idea – to also assign other readings that would cover some of the perspectives that are less well-represented here. In other words, if this book could be paired with readings less in line with the Uehiro school of practical ethics, that would make for a better balance in an intro to applied ethics course.

It also seems to me that something that would work well would be to use chapters from this book to quickly get students interested in the topics covered – but to then pair the chapters from this book with longer articles that discuss the topics in greater detail. The chapters in this book, as noted above, are engaging and would function really well as introductions that can spark

students' interest in the topics. But students starting to study applied ethics would benefit from also having more thorough treatments of these topics as additional required readings in university courses where this book is used.

Because the book is very readable and engaging, I can also imagine that other people than only philosophy students could enjoy reading the book – for example, members of the general public with an interest in ethics or philosophy more generally. What about academic researchers who work on applied ethics? Does the book have anything to offer to them? If you are familiar with the literature related to the topics covered in the book, some of these chapters may not offer anything new to you that you were not familiar with from before. For example, those familiar with Savulescu's previous work on human enhancement won't find anything they were not already familiar with in his chapter – though the chapter certainly serves as a good and easy-to-read reminder of some of the main arguments Savulescu has explored in his various publications about different kinds of human enhancement. However, researchers who have worked on other topics in applied ethics, but who want to start also doing work on the topics covered in this book could use many of the chapters in this book as quick introductions to the topics in question. And some of the chapters struck me as being not just quick introductions to the topics, but as also containing very interesting arguments worth engaging seriously with. For example, Helen Frowe's chapter on war and legitimate targets struck me as an instance of such a chapter.

Other highlights in this book include an updated (and I think improved) version of Judith Jarvis Thomson's famous violinist example in Francesca Minerva's chapter on abortion. In Minerva's version of the example, there is no violinist that you need to hook up with for nine months involved. Instead, this variation of that example involves the growing of a new intestine from stem cells in a sack that is implanted into your body for nine months. You wake up and learn that this has been implanted into your body and that somebody who will need the intestine in nine months will die unless you agree to let it grow inside your body for those nine months. Do you have a right to abort this procedure? I cannot do justice to Minerva's spin on this example here, but will only note that it struck me as a very interesting version of the much-discussed example in Thomson's classic article. Other highlights for this particular reader included the essay on the internet and privacy by Carissa Véliz and the essay on the child's right to bodily integrity by Brian Earp. Those were particular highlights for me, but the chapters are all consistently of high quality throughout the book. And while I would – as I said above – recommend pairing these chapters with readings featuring other points of view as well as longer treatments

of the individual topics, I would definitely recommend using this book as assigned reading in introductory courses in applied ethics.

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