Annotated Bibliography for Ethics and Character Formation in Philosophy and Religion

By
Paul Jensen

Introduction: This bibliography deals primarily, though not exclusively, with books or book chapters published within the past 15 years. Although I have included a couple of selections that are particular favorites and are general surveys of moral philosophy, the primary focus is on items that, in my judgment, would be valuable to others who are actively participating in character education.

Introductions to Moral Philosophy, Text-Books and General Surveys

Frankena, William. Ethics. 2nd Edition. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1973. There are many other basic ethics texts available, but this one is a model of clarity and brevity. In 116 pages, Frankena covers the entire territory of moral philosophy. I return to it repeatedly to refresh my memory. Frankena deals specifically with the ethics of virtue in chapter four, where he raises interesting questions, particularly regarding the relationship of virtue ethics to basic moral principles. Here, for example, is Frankena’s definition of a virtue: “Virtues are dispositions or traits that are not wholly innate; they must all be acquired, at least in part, by teaching and practice, or, perhaps, by grace. They are also traits of “character,” rather than traits of “personality” like charm or shyness, and they all involve a tendency to do certain kinds of action in certain kinds of situations, not just to think or feel in certain ways.” (63)

__________. Thinking About Morality. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980. This relatively short book consists of three lectures given by Frankena at the end of his teaching career at the University of Michigan. The third lecture entitled “Why Be Moral” merits reading and re-reading. It is probably not suitable for most undergraduates, but Frankena’s argument and insights are well worth absorbing.

Quinn, Philip L. and Taliaferro, Charles. A Companion to Philosophy of Religion. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997. Although this volume is obviously focused on the philosophy of religion, it includes a major section on theism and values. This section contains nine essays on the topics of divine command ethics, natural law, virtue ethics, narrative ethics, agapeistic ethics, law and politics, medical ethics, environmental ethics, and toleration. Each essay is concise, written by an expert in the field, and includes a useful bibliography.
Singer, Peter. *A Companion to Ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993. Singer is probably the most controversial moral philosopher of recent vintage, but he has edited a very useful and valuable companion to moral philosophy. It contains original chapters on Indian, Buddhist, Chinese, Jewish, Christian and Islamic ethics as well as a wide variety of essays on specific issues from poverty to crime and even war and peace. No professional academic would go wrong in purchasing this volume for his or her own library.

Sommers, Christina and Sommers, Fred. *Vice & Virtue In Everyday Life. 6th Edition*. Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth, 2004. The editors have judiciously chosen large variety of selections dealing with good and evil, vice and virtue, character, dignity and self-respect as well as moral education. The book is a gold mine of readings all of which are helpfully introduced and include questions for discussion at the end. This is an excellent resource for teachers in other disciplines who want good readings for the ethical component of a course that is not focused exclusively on ethics.

**Monographs and Chapters**

Audi, Robert. *Moral Knowledge and Ethical Character*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. Audi, a long time professor at the University of Nebraska and one of the most influential and prolific American philosophers of the 20th century, has written widely on epistemology and moral philosophy. Section III of this book is entitled “Character, Responsibility and Virtue” and contains chapters on “Responsible Action and Virtuous Character” and “Acting from Virtue.” Audi is difficult but very rewarding.

Budziszewski, J. *Written on the Heart: The Case for Natural Law*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997. Budziszewski is a professor at the University of Texas where he began his academic career as a moral anti-realist (right and wrong are human inventions) and has since become convinced of moral realism (right and wrong are discovered by humans). This book is an extended argument for moral realism and in particular for the ancient and honorable view known as *natural law*. (Cp. C. S. Lewis on the Tao in *The Abolition of Man* cited and discussed below.) According to this view, prescriptive laws, i.e., laws which state how humans ought to act, are intuitively obvious to all humans. This explains, in part, why all of the world’s major religions uniformly teach the wrongness of stealing, murder, lying, and adultery. The book’s usefulness is enhanced by the questions for reflection at the end of each chapter.
Dalrymple, Theodore. *Life at the Bottom: The Worldview That Makes the Underclass.* Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2001. Until recently, Dalrymple made his living working as a psychiatrist in a British prison and hospital, both located in a slum area of Birmingham, England. Dalrymple describes and comments on the worldview of his patients (hundreds of them) who come from the underclass of this British city. I used Dalrymple in World View 2 class as a contrast to Ben Franklin’s *Autobiography* and particularly Frederick Douglass’ *Narrative of the Life of an American Slave.* The difference between Douglass’ insatiable drive for self-education, knowledge, dignity, and freedom and the worldview exemplified by Dalrymple’s patients is stark. It is very difficult to say with certainty what accounts for the difference, but there is no doubt that Douglass exemplifies the nobility of human intellectual and moral virtues whereas Dalrymple’s patients live lives that degrade and dehumanize them.

Hallie, Philip. *Tales of Good and Evil, Help and Harm.* New York: HarperPerennial, 1998. In teaching undergraduates, I have found that stories have a power to communicate moral truths where “profound” and “erudite” lectures fail. Halle’s book is built around such very powerful stories and I recommend it to anyone who wants to stimulate discussion in class. Among the stories is an account of Hallie’s acquaintance with Magda Trocme, the wife of the pastor of a small church in Le Chambon, France. Pastor Trocme, his wife Magda, and their parishioners together rescued about 5000 Jewish children during World War II, hiding them and then taking them across the alps into Switzerland. Halle is particularly interested in what he refers to as the positive commands, e.g., love one another, as compared with the negative injunctions.

Hare, John. *The Moral Gap.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997. John Hare is the son of R. M. Hare, one of the most influential British moral philosophers of the 20th century. John Hare taught at Calvin College for a number of years and is now at Yale. The “moral gap” is the gap between the universal demands of morality and the diminished capacity of humans to lead moral lives. Part III of this book is a philosophically sophisticated discussion of repentance, forgiveness and God’s assistance in bridging the moral gap.


Lewis, C. S. *The Abolition of Man.* New York: Macmillan, 1947. This is Lewis’ response to a now discredited moral theory known to philosophers as “emotivism.” Lewis is always worth reading, but today the most valuable portion of this book is the appendix, which is entitled “Illustrations of the Tao.”
Lewis collected sayings from human history that illustrate an amazing unity of moral beliefs cross-temporally and cross-culturally. These include the law of general and special beneficence, duties to parents, elders and ancestors, duties to children and posterity, the laws of justice, good faith, veracity, mercy, and magnanimity.


Peck, M. Scott. *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983. Peck, a psychiatrist best known for his book *The Road Less Traveled*, uses case studies from his own medical practice to illustrate and discuss human evil. I use one of these stories in my Judeo-Christian Journeys class. The title comes from his conclusion that wherever human evil appears a lie is hanging around close by. The book does not deal directly with cheating or plagiarism, but it does draw the somewhat surprising conclusion that slothfulness is a primary source of human evil.

Wolfe, Tom. *I Am Charlotte Simmons*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004. One of many sub-plots in this riveting book about contemporary college life at an “elite” university revolves around Adam Gellin, an editor of the college newspaper, who is paid by the athletic department to “tutor” athletes. Early in the novel, Jojo Johanssen, a star basketball player, tells Adam that he has a paper due the following day. After some initial protests about not being given sufficient advance warning, Adam stays up all night to write the paper and Jojo turns it in the following day. Toward the end of the book, under duress, Adam confesses this act to a Professor Quat who wants to bring down the athletic department. In his determination to expose the entire corrupt system, Professor Quat decides to make Adam a sacrificial lamb. Adam is “saved” from this fate by . . . well, you can read the book and find out.

Wattles, Jeffrey, *The Golden Rule*. Oxford University Press, 1996. This is a survey of both the history and ethical status of the golden rule. It should certainly be part of the Wendt collection and a primary source of information for Wendt character scholars. It contains chapter length discussions of the rule in Confucian, Greek, Jewish, and Christian moral philosophy as well as an unapologetic defense of the rule as a religiously based moral principle. The book is thoroughly researched and documented and includes an eleven page bibliography of scholarly works related to moral philosophy and the golden rule in particular.
Williams, Bernard. “Ethics.” In Philosophy 1. Edited by A. C. Grayling. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. Grayling has edited two fabulous volumes for students and teachers of philosophy entitled respectively (and rather uncreatively) Philosophy 1 and Philosophy 2. These volumes are both in paper back and I cannot say enough good about them. The essay by Williams is only 30 pages, but covers considerable ground in ethical theories, meta-ethics and moral psychology.