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### **Directing Human Actions: Perspectives on Basic Ethical Issues, Ron Yezzi**

University Press of America, Lanham, MD, 1986, 363 pp., \$31.95 cl.; \$14.50 pbk. 0-8191-5197-3

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There exist a great many introductory texts in ethics, so it is natural to inquire what, if anything, is distinctive about any addition to their number. Yezzi says of *Directing Human Actions* that it takes a more classical approach to ethics than is found in most other texts—though approximately half of the philosophers considered turn out to be twentieth century authors—and that by including discussions of Freud, Marx, Skinner, and Edward O. Wilson, the book broadens the scope of ethical inquiry beyond what is found in standard accounts of the subject. These claims are true, and the result is a wide-ranging and challenging introduction to ethics which should prove stimulating to any able student.

The book has an interesting and complex format. Five major issues are considered: “What is the Good Life?”, “How is the Directing of Human Life Affected by Conceptions of Human Nature?”, “What Ought to be the Relation of an Individual to Society?”, “Can Human Beings be Morally Responsible?”, and “How Can the Good Life be Known?” Leading thinkers or positions are introduced under each topic heading; for example, the relation of an individual to society is examined from the perspective of Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Rousseau, Stirner, Mill, Marx, Dewey, Rawls, and Nozick. In treating such issues Yezzi combines his own exposition and summaries of views with brief and pertinent quotations from the theorists under consideration. Yezzi also provides sample applications of philosophical theories to issues of contemporary concern; the positions of Hobbes and Rousseau, for instance, are contrasted by tracing their implications with respect to issues of nuclear deterrence. In addition, Yezzi attempts to deepen the student’s comprehension of competing views by offering a well-chosen set of objections to the positions considered along with possible replies to leading sorts of criticism. This is supplemented by provocative study questions and exercises which should assist the serious student in mastering the diversity of philosophical approaches discussed in connection with a given issue.

*Directing Human Actions* is clearly and engagingly written, and any reservations a prospective teacher might entertain about it would be apt to derive from its character rather than the author’s execution of his project. Thus, for example, the discussions of various philosophers are brief and highly compressed; this book is not the place to turn if one desires a complete or sophisticated treatment of Mill, Dewey, Rawls, or any other of the theorists considered. Again, many teachers of ethics prefer to use anthologies of classical and/or contemporary readings at the introductory level, and in consequence would decline to consider even a well-constructed single-authored text. For teachers not so committed, however, *Directing Human Actions* has much to recommend it. Of the many topics or issues which are standardly treated in introductory ethics courses, very few fail to receive at least some coverage in the present volume. At the same time, there are interesting discussions of issues which tend to be neglected by introductory textbooks in the field. Yezzi’s evident enthusiasm for his subject can hardly fail to be communicated to students. Teachers of courses in introductory ethics may find in his book an appealing and attractive approach to the subject which is rarely matched in other texts.

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