

Moral Aims: Essays on the Importance of Getting It Right and Practicing Morality with Others

Cheshire Calhoun



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We rely on two different conceptions of morality. On the one hand, we think of morality as a correct action guide. Morality is accessed by taking up a critical, reflective point of view where our concern is with identifying the moral rules that would be the focus of the requiring activities of persons in a hypothetical social world whose participants were capable of accessing the justifications for everyones endorsing just this set of rules. On the other hand, in doing virtually anything connected with morality--making demands, offering excuses, justifying choices, expressing moral attitudes, getting uptake on our resentments, and the like-we rely on social practices of morality and shared moral understandings that make our moral activities and attitudes intelligible to others. This second conception of morality, unlike the first, is not shaped by the aim of getting it right or the contrast between correct and merely supposed moral requirements. It is shaped by the moral aim of practicing morality with others within an actual, not merely hypothetical, scheme of social cooperation. If practices based on misguided moral norms seem not to be genuine morality under the first conception, merely hypothetical practices seem not to be the genuine article under the second conception. The premise of this book, which collects together nine previously published essay and a new introduction, is that both conceptions are indispensable. But exactly how is the moral theorist to go about working simultaneously with two such different conceptions of morality? The books project is not to construct an overarching methodology for handling the two conceptions of morality. Instead, it is to provide case studies of that work being done.

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