

ETHICAL WISDOM: THE SEARCH FOR A MORAL LIFE BY MARK MATOUSEK

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The Search for a Moral Life



MARK MATOUSEK

"A riveting, fun, and insightful tour of life's meaning and purpose, essential reading for anyone drawn to the query, 'How ought we to live?'"

—DANIEL GOLEMAN, AUTHOR OF *EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE*

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From Publishers Weekly

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Review

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In this engagingly written and deeply insightful book, bestselling author Mark Matousek explores a perennially troubling question: How can we be both good and evil?

Contrary to what we've been taught in our reason-obsessed culture, argues Matousek, emotions are the bedrock of ethical life; without them, human beings cannot be empathic, moral, or good. But how do we make the judgment call between self-interest and caring for others? What does being good really mean? Which parts of morality are biological, which ethical? When should instinct be trusted and when does it lead us into trouble? How can we know ourselves to be good amidst the hypocrisy, fears, and sabotaging appetites that pervade our two-sided natures?

Drawing on the latest scientific research and interviews with social scientists, spiritual leaders, ex-cons, altruists, and philosophers, Matousek examines morality from all angles in this thoroughly entertaining and helpful guide to crossing one's own murky moral terrain.

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(May)

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Most helpful customer reviews

9 of 10 people found the following review helpful.

Descartes meets Aesop

By Gwennyth Jackaway, Ph.D.

Ethical Wisdom is a remarkable book. In this deeply engaging exploration of some of life's most challenging issues, Mark Matousek achieves a rare synthesis: the successful intermingling of timeless philosophical inquiry, cutting edge academic research and the age old art of the teaching story. Interweaving a breathtaking synthesis of a vast range of scholarship with captivating vignettes and riveting interviews, Ethical Wisdom weaves together an impressive range of disciplines and perspectives, managing to avoid common political, religious and moral pitfalls that often cloud discussions of such issues. Bringing his considerable talents to the challenge of presenting complex concepts in an accessible manner, Matousek achieves that elusive goal: entertaining while educating. As a college professor, I can only dream of reaching, in my classroom what Matousek achieves in these pages.

Gwennyth Jackaway, Ph.D

Associate Professor

Communication and Media Studies

Fordham University

9 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

First impression: Too lite, too superficial, assumes too much

By English Setter

This seems to be intended to be uplifting and inspirational -- "positive" -- rather than particularly thoughtful or searching. It draws on many sources, but doesn't seek out the disagreements and tensions between those sources. It assumes that morality has five common supports or pillars, and therefore, that ethics/morality is more or less universal and stable over time. This seems highly dubious, so I would have appreciated a deeper look at the differences between moralities and mores in different cultures. But it seems that this subject is raised and then abandoned.

The mix here is Buddhism + Judaism + feminism + liberalism + contemporary American cultural influences + environmentalism + evolutionary biology + brain research. (But none of the inevitable disagreements between these perspectives are really explored.) There's nothing wrong with that -- it's rather congenial to me, but not challenging.

It seems that Matousek doesn't bother to get a lot of little things right, and simply makes stuff up when he wants to. For instance, is it meaningful or correct to say we only use twenty percent of our brains? Another example: A reference to a funny scene in "Being John Malkovich" which misunderstands the reason why everything becomes "Malkovich": The reason is that it's a feedback loop caused by the bizarre situation, **not** that the **director** ventures inside the movie star's head.

In sum: In large and in small, this raises a lot of interesting points and theories but doesn't synthesize them well, or discuss them perceptively, so I don't think it's worth a highly careful read or a thorough critique. It's really more of a feel-good, try-a-little-harder sort of book. Not as deep as your average New Yorker article, and more scattered.

If I'm wrong about this, on second glance, I'll say so, but my gut tells me this isn't a book that's worth the effort.

From **is** to **ought**: There **are** a lot of good, searching books out there, so we **ought** to pay attention to those, and challenge ourselves instead of reading Ethics Lite.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Excellent choice

By Francheska

My husband and I are both enjoying this book. We have had many good discussions stemming from it.

Fantastic book!

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