



# **Wittgenstein and Ethical Inquiry: A Defense of Ethics as Clarification (Continuum Studies in British Philosophy)**

*By J. Jeremy Wisnewski*

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While commentators have sometimes taken up the question of Wittgenstein's view of ethics, none has offered a sustained treatment of what positive contributions Wittgenstein has yet to offer contemporary ethics. In this important new book, Jeremy Wisnewski argues that Wittgenstein, though himself often silent on particular ethical matters, gives us immense resources for understanding the aims appropriate to any philosophical ethics. Using Wittgenstein as a point of departure, Wisnewski re-examines some of the landmarks in the history of moral philosophy in order to cast contemporary ethical philosophy in a new light. Of particular interest is the unique approach to Kant's moral philosophy afforded by seeing him through Wittgensteinian eyes: Wisnewski gives distinct and intriguing analyses of the categorical imperative, arguing that our obsession with a certain brand of ethical theory has led us to misread this most famous contribution to moral philosophy. By seeing the doctrines of historical ethical philosophers anew (particularly those of Kant and Mill), Wisnewski shows a new way of engaging in ethical theory - one that is Wittgensteinian through and through. Rather than assuming that ethical inquiry yields knowledge about what we must do, and what rules we must follow, we should regard ethics (including our historical ethical theories) as clarifying what is involved in the complicated 'form of life' that is ours.

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### **Review**

"Wittgenstein and Ethical Inquiry is an important and innovative rethinking of some fundamental assumptions of modern ethical thought" Gordon Hull, East Carolina University

"...will undoubtedly contribute to an important discussion and just might be revolutionary" Larry Wright, University of California, Riverside

"...a genuine attempt to make a contribution to moral philosophy and not just an exegetical work on Wittgenstein's ethics. The book takes a broadly Wittgensteinian approach, but, more importantly, it aims at making a point about the place morality or normativity has in our lives and in our understanding of the world as a whole...Wisnewski's greatest strength is that his clarification of not only the history of ethics, but also our daily morality. That is why I recommend his book to everyone interested in changing the way we view ethics, enriching our understanding of it, and thereby making a real difference in transforming our world into a better place." — Darlei Dall'Agnol, *Notre Dame Philosophical Review*, May 28, 2008 (Darlei Dall'Agnol)

"The task of ethics in a Wittgensteinian (Wian) spirit is to clarify the hazy and troubled human predicament by making explicit our value orientation, which in turn sheds light on the normative dimension of our lives. The only way to achieve this task, according to Wisnewski, is through phenomenological analysis and ethical theorizing which help us to see our way through the world. These are reasons enough to attempt to put ethics into words...The author says some surprising and provocative things about W and ethical theorizing, and some insightful things about a conception of ethics as clarification." — Béla Szabados, *Philosophy in Review*

"...this is a thought-provoking and engaging work with plenty of interesting ideas. Wisnewski makes a strong case for clarificatory ethics in an admirably clear style. It will prove useful to the student of ethics."  
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#### About the Author

J. Jeremy Wisnewski is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at <?xml:namespace prefix = st1 />Hartwick College, USA and Editor of ***Review Journal of Political Philosophy***. His publications include *Wittgenstein and Ethical Inquiry* (Continuum, 2007), *The Politics of Agency* (Ashgate, 2008), *Family Guy and Philosophy* (Blackwell, 2007) and *The Office and Philosophy* (Blackwell, 2008).

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