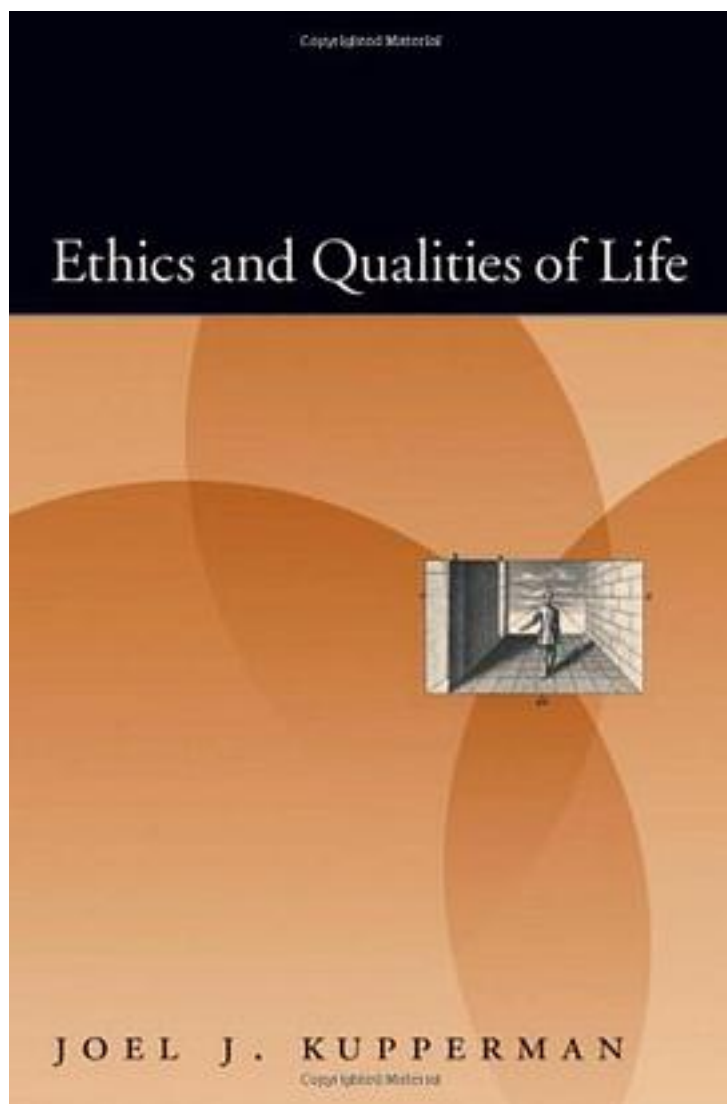


Ethics and Qualities of Life



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Ethics and Qualities of Life looks at what enters into ethical judgment and choice. Interpretation of a case and of what the options are is always a factor, as is a sense of the possible values at stake. Intuitions also enter in, but often are unreliable. For a long time it seemed only fair that oldest sons inherited, and struck few people as unfair that women were not allowed to attend universities. A moral judgment is putatively part of a moral order in a society that any reasonable person would accept. But what counts as "reasonable" is generally contestable. The unreliability of intuitions leads naturally to ethical theory. Kantian, contractualist, and consequentialist theories all have some important truth in them, but not the whole truth. Contractualism lacks the resources required for a fully determinate account of what counts as "reasonable". Broad general rules are important to Kant and are at the center of everyday morality. But can Kantian ethics explain why they have to have this central role? Our evolving social contract now contains elements (e.g. the rejection of racism and sexism) that once would have seemed counter-intuitive to most people. But could consequentialists have predicted with entire confidence the consequences of social changes that we now think were desirable? The last part of this book contains a double argument. One is that ethical theory is employed by humans in a state of semi-ignorance of relevant factors, grasping at likely truths and evolved intuitions. The other is that consequentialist considerations have a major role at the fundamental level, but much more in justification or criticism than in ethical discovery.

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