

MORAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

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KEY ISSUES, CONCEPTS AND
THEORIES

Paul Smith

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PREFACE

This book is written primarily for undergraduates in philosophy and cognate subjects, such as politics or law. It aims to be accessible, clear and concise. Consequently, it avoids technicalities, complications and details (some of which some people will think should not have been avoided). A book of this length must be highly selective in its topics and their discussion. I have selected some key concepts and theories that are central to moral and political philosophy and some controversial practical moral and political issues. These issues are selected to engage students and to develop their interest in the moral and political concepts and theories. The topic of each chapter has been the subject of whole books that offer comprehensive surveys. However, I have been highly selective, aiming to focus on the essentials of each topic.

The book starts with four chapters on practical moral and political issues that are important, perennially topical, controversial and provocative. As well as engaging with students' interests, these practical issues raise and illustrate general issues in moral and political theory. Arguments about the practical issues appeal to moral and political concepts and principles, particularly to liberty, liberty-limiting principles, rights, equality and social justice. These are explored in chapters 5–8. Discussion of practical moral and political issues and of the concepts and principles continually raises questions about general moral and political theories, which are discussed systematically in chapters 9–12. (The distinctions between issues, concepts and theories are not clear-cut but porous, as they permeate each other.)

The chapters are interconnected and are best read in sequence. However, each chapter is written so that it can be read independently and so they can be read in any order. This necessitates some repetition, but is intended to make the book useful to diverse courses. Each chapter is intended to be thought-provoking and each concludes with questions for discussion, inviting students to think critically about the issues raised and to continue the debate.

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