



Thinking How to Live

Allan GIBBARD

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Philosophers have long suspected that thought and discourse about what we ought to do differ in some fundamental way from statements about what is. But the difference has proved elusive, in part because the two kinds of statement look alike. Focusing on judgments that express decisions--judgments about what is to be done, all things considered--Allan Gibbard offers a compelling argument for reconsidering, and reconfiguring, the distinctions between normative and descriptive discourse--between questions of "ought" and "is."

Gibbard considers how our actions, and our realities, emerge from the thousands of questions and decisions we form for ourselves. The result is a book that investigates the very nature of the questions we ask ourselves when we ask how we should live, and that clarifies the concept of "ought" by understanding the patterns of normative concepts involved in beliefs and decisions.

An original and elegant work of metaethics, this book brings a new clarity and rigor to the discussion of these tangled issues, and will significantly alter the long-standing debate over "objectivity" and "factuality" in ethics.

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This is a remarkable book. It takes up a central and much-discussed problem - the difference between normative thought (and discourse) and "descriptive" thought (and discourse). It develops a compelling response to that problem with ramifications for much else in philosophy. But perhaps most importantly, it brings new clarity and rigor to the discussion of these tangled issues. It will take some time to come to terms with the details of Gibbard's discussion. It is absolutely clear, however, that the book will reconfigure the debate over objectivity and "factuality" in ethics.

--Gideon Rosen, Professor of Philosophy, Princeton University

Gibbard, author writes elegantly, and the theory he develops is innovative, philosophically sophisticated, and challenging. Gibbard defends his theory vigorously and with admirable intellectual honesty.

--David Copp, Professor of Philosophy, Bowling Green State University

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Ricardo Hempel:

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