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978-0-521-86725-2 - The Ethics of Modernism: Moral Ideas in Yeats, Eliot, Joyce, Woolf, and Beckett

Lee Oser

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## THE ETHICS OF MODERNISM

What was the ethical perspective of modernist literature? How did Yeats, Eliot, Joyce, Woolf, and Beckett represent ethical issues and develop their moral ideas? Lee Oser argues that thinking about human nature restores a perspective on modernist literature that has been lost. He offers detailed discussions of the relationship between ethics and aesthetics to illuminate close readings of major modernist texts. For Oser, the reception of Aristotle is crucial to the modernist moral project, which he defines as the effort to transform human nature through the use of art. Exploring the origins of that project, its success in modernism, its critical heirs, and its possible future, *The Ethics of Modernism* brings a fresh perspective on modernist literature and its interaction with ethical strands of philosophy. It offers many new insights to scholars of twentieth-century literature as well as intellectual historians.

LEE OSER is Associate Professor of English at the College of the Holy Cross, Massachusetts. He is the author of *T. S. Eliot and American Poetry* (1998).

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*To Christopher Ricks*

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The question, *how to live*, is itself a moral idea; and it is the question which most interests every man, and with which, in some way or other, he is perpetually occupied.

Matthew Arnold

Few artists . . . work quite cleanly, casting off all *débris*, and leaving us only what the heat of their imagination has wholly fused and transformed.

Walter Pater

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I have drawn freely on my 2004 essay in *Philosophy and Literature*, "Human Nature and Modernist Ethics."