

Cambridge Elements

Elements in Ethics

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DEONTOLOGY

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Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-108-70652-0 — Deontology
Piers Rawling
Frontmatter
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Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
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Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,
a department of the University of Cambridge.

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education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108706520

DOI: 10.1017/9781108581196

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First published 2023

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-108-70652-0 Paperback
ISSN 2516-4031 (online)
ISSN 2516-4023 (print)

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Deontology

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DOI: 10.1017/9781108581196
First published online: January 2023

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Abstract: Deontology is a theory about how we should act, morally speaking. It comes in several varieties, but all share certain doctrines, many of which are close to those found in the so-called common-sense morality of the Western world. And all varieties are united in their opposition to consequentialism, a theory that, in its simplest form, tells us that we should always act so as to maximize impersonal value by bringing about the best consequences. This Element presents some of the different versions of deontology, including the views of W. D. Ross, and, to a lesser extent, Immanuel Kant. It defends certain deontological tenets, while challenging others, and contrasts them with consequentialism. Deontology and consequentialism are two of the main contenders in ethical theory, but virtue ethics is another, and it too is addressed (briefly), with an attempt to see it, in its most plausible form, as part of deontology.

Keywords: deontology, consequentialism, ethics, common-sense morality, duty

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ISBNs: 9781108706520 (PB), 9781108581196 (OC)
ISSNs: 2516-4031 (online), 2516-4023 (print)

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