



Contrary to Thoughtlessness: Rethinking Practical Wisdom

Monica Mueller

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Since Hannah Arendt highlighted the stunning “banality” of his “evil” crimes, Adolf Eichmann has served posterity as a prime example of thoughtlessness. This book asks: as civilizations become ever more integrated, how will the complexities of our activities respond to the growing proclivity for thoughtlessness? When administrative necessity eclipses personal responsibility, the result is often complicity and apathy. Mueller argues for a practical wisdom in order to meet the challenge of thoughtlessness that arises in an increasingly bureaucratic world. Her investigations into the philosophical problems of thoughtlessness are motivated less by a concern than a desire to solve puzzles than a concern about the fate of our world, plagued as it is by social, environmental, political, and moral injustices. How might we help one another develop the courage to challenge the common view that the good life must be sought through an unthinking pursuit of ends, even as that pursuit damages and destroys rather than building a better world? This book uses Arendtian notions of reflective thinking and judgment in order to supplement the Aristotelian conception of practical wisdom. This inquiry helps readers to understand the particular modes of thinking necessary to grasp, in a thoughtful, reflective manner, correct aims for action. Furthermore, it shows that experience that enlarges moral imagination by considering alternative perspectives can highlight lived experience in a way that prepares us for virtuous ethical decision-making. Contrary to Thoughtlessness demonstrates that reflective thinking and judgment offer critical avenues for recognizing reliable, yet flexible norms that can serve as reasonable ends for action. This conception of the thinking and judging involved in practical wisdom can enhance ethical deliberations, thereby informing the development of character by clarifying ends for the pursuit of flourishing.



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