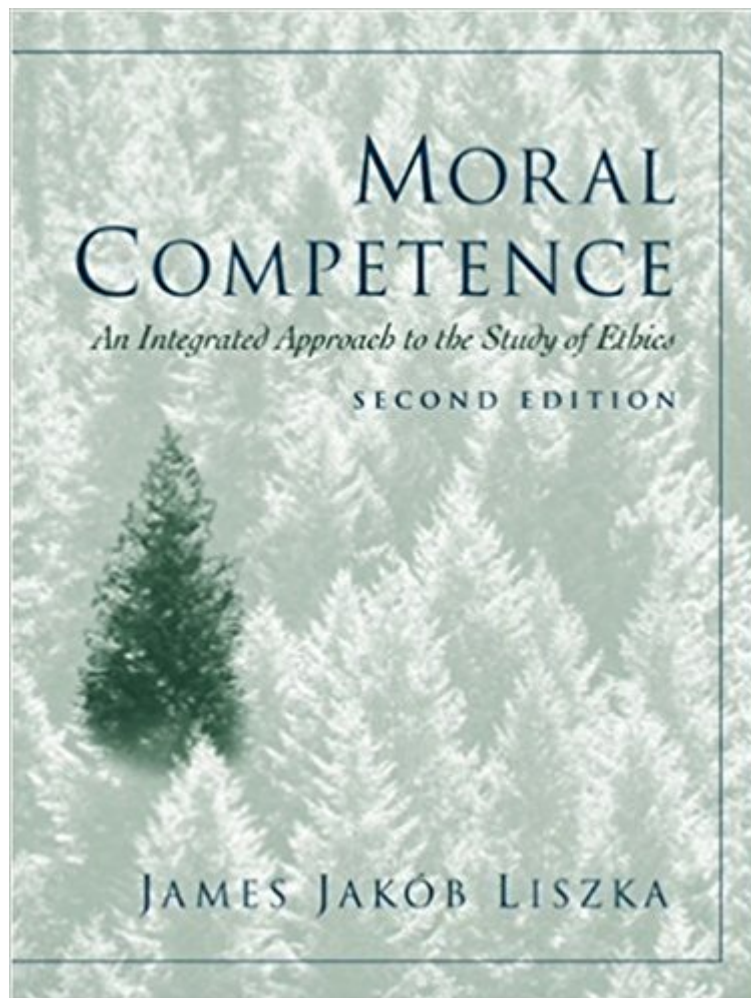




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# Moral Competence: An Integrated Approach To The Study Of Ethics (2nd Edition)



## Synopsis

Moral Competence is a readable, relevant, and uniquely designed book which takes an integrated approach to the study of ethics. It shows how various concepts, issues, approaches, and theories play an important part in understanding the whole of moral life. Topics covered include moral intuition, libertarianism and compatibilism, virtue and vice, wisdom, and more. For anyone interested in the study of ethics.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Moral Competence is a readable, relevant, and uniquely designed text that integrates the most important aspects of ethical conduct into a complete picture of moral life. Drawing on the various traditions in the study of ethics, the text examines the nature of moral sentiment, free will, responsibility, and autonomy. It includes a discussion of a number of the important virtues, an account of wisdom and moral decision making, and an analysis of classical and contemporary moral principles. Case studies, news stories, queries, fiction and film synopses, and dozens of contemporary issues are used to illustrate concepts and theory, and engage the student in reflection on a number of themes. Some of the significant features of the second edition of Moral Competence are:

Don't be too hasty to trust or admire teachers of morality; they discourse like angels, but live like men. &#151;Samuel Johnson Most people prefer theory to practice, under the impression that arguing about morals proves them to be philosophers, and that in this way they will turn out to be

fine characters. ¶ Aristotle Why does virtue consist in having read Chrysippus through? If so, progress is confessedly nothing else than understanding a great deal of Chrysippus.

¶ Epictetus In this revision of the first edition of *Moral Competence*, I have tried to remain faithful to its original intent: to be a readable and relevant text for those interested in the traditional and enduring questions of ethics. I have made every effort here to introduce philosophers, ethical theories, concepts, and problems in a clear way¶and for the benefit of those without much philosophy background¶but in a manner that still preserves their depth and complexity.

Thanks to a number of suggestions and criticisms from students and colleagues, the second edition has a number of improvements, including updated relevant research, more examples and cases studies, significant revisions, and the addition of new material in several places. The basic theme of the text, however, remains the same. *Moral Competence* is an integrated approach to the study of ethics. By that I mean to show how the various concepts, issues, approaches, and theories which make up the panoply of ethical traditions play an important part in understanding the whole of moral life. The effort here is to weave these together into a coherent, contextual picture. Rather, than a pastiche of topics and thinkers, students will see where each topic and concept fits into a larger scheme of things and how each important thinker contributes significantly to the matter of moral competence. In this regard, the book can be viewed not only as a tool of ethical reflection, but also a means of personal improvement. Competence is a term that is used in a number of fields to convey the idea of a person's mastery and internalization of the rules, procedures, and use of a language, skill, a profession, or a body of knowledge. That is certainly the sense here. Moral competence is a mastery that permits general consistency in doing the right thing. It is defined by the interdependence of the elements that constitute good moral behavior. The ability to do the right thing consistently requires a coordination of a desire to do the right thing, the will to do it, a disposition to keep on doing it, knowing how to do it, and knowing what the right thing to do is. A little reflection shows their necessary interdependence. Surely there are many who desire the right thing yet can't seem to muster the will to do it. But even those with strong will may not have the virtuous character or disposition to will the right thing consistently; moreover, even those with virtuous character may not have the wisdom required to know how to do the right thing. Of course, all of these attributes are useless if one does not know what the right thing to do is. To use more traditional language, what is needed to do the right thing consistently is an interconnection among moral sentiment, moral strength, virtue and vice, wisdom, and moral knowledge (see figure below). The text is designed so that one chapter is devoted to each of these aspects; its initial sense is then developed as it is related to the whole¶much in the way in which the events in the first chapter

of a novel acquire so much more significance as the story unfolds. The book is divided into three broad sections: Chapters One to Three on Moral Character, Chapter Four on Wisdom and Practical Reasoning, and Chapter Five on Moral Knowledge (see figure above). The first chapter begins with an examination of moral emotions and general characterizations of duty, honor, and the sense of caring. Theories concerning the acquisition of moral sentiment and pathologies of moral emotion are discussed, with the relevant psychological material included. Moral strength is the topic of the next chapter, starting with a discussion of free will and moving on to questions concerning moral weakness. Responsibility and blame are discussed in some detail. The nature of autonomy is analyzed, and various means of exercising moral strength are listed. In Chapter Three the virtues and vices are catalogued and described, and the issues pertaining to them are addressed. The character of wisdom, prudence, and practical reasoning is discussed in Chapter Four. Finally, questions of moral knowledge, principles, and justification are reviewed in Chapter Five. In the Epilogue several theses concerning the connection among these different aspects of moral competence are presented. The reader will also notice a number of text boxes strategically placed throughout the book. These serve several purposes. Sometimes they are used to summarize the biography and thinking of an important ethical philosopher or thinker, or they may provide relevant information to a topic being discussed. They may also pose a query or problem related to the topic or present a case study for reflection. The end matter of each chapter includes the usual review questions, questions for discussion, and additional bibliographic sources organized by topic. Some chapters include brief summaries of relevant stories and additional case studies. The book is provided with a glossary and also a useful guide for writing ethics papers, complete with hints, general sources, and references to other writing guides and references. There is a complete bibliography of works cited. References in the body of the text are indicated by (author date: page), or where the author is mentioned in body, just (date: page) or (date) alone is indicated. If classical sources are used, an abbreviation of the work is indicated along with its scholarly indexing; for example, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is referenced as (Nic. Ethics 1107a2) . References in the bibliography employ a version of the American Psychological Association style, unless they refer to a classical source; the latter are indicated by author and title, with references to the appropriate translations and their dates. To insure proper gender representation in the text, "he" and "she" are randomly interspersed. throughout the text. Instructors and students are invited to visit my Website ( <http://cwolf.uaa.alaska.edu/~afjll/JamesLiszka.htm> ). There are a number of PowerPoint presentations that have been especially prepared to accompany this text. These can be downloaded and modified by instructors for presentation in class or used by students as tutorials or

for preparation for tests. Students can access study guides, chapter summaries, review presentations, practice quizzes, additional case studies, updates, and other useful information at the site. Please direct any questions or comments you have about the text to me at: [afjil@uaa.alaska.edu](mailto:afjil@uaa.alaska.edu) . James Jakob Liszka

Very interesting book.

I have taught ethics since 1995 at the university level. Unless one needs a shorter book for a lower division course (for which I recommend Judith Boss's Ethics for Life), this is simply the best textbook to use. Undergraduates struggle with anthologies, fail to "connect the dots" between the implications of various viewpoints on various issues with either anthologies or other textbooks, and few ethics textbooks out there on the market actually teach and offer a normative view that persons actually ought to be ethical and ought to cultivate ethical character and behavior over the course of their lifetime. This one does that also. If there is a quibble, I'm not a compatibilist but I don't get into the issue of freewill and determinism either. The book is so well organized that we can easily pick up the ethical dimensions of strength of will and leave out the discussion of freewill and determinism without sacrifice. Nevertheless, it is an outstanding textbook and remains so in its second edition.

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