



# The Ethical Project

*Philip Kitcher*

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## **The Ethical Project** Philip Kitcher

Principles of right and wrong guide the lives of almost all human beings, but we often see them as external to ourselves, outside our own control. In a revolutionary approach to the problems of moral philosophy, Philip Kitcher makes a provocative proposal: Instead of conceiving ethical commands as divine revelations or as the discoveries of brilliant thinkers, we should see our ethical practices as evolving over tens of thousands of years, as members of our species have worked out how to live together and prosper. Elaborating this radical new vision, Kitcher shows how the limited altruistic tendencies of our ancestors enabled a fragile social life, how our forebears learned to regulate their interactions with one another, and how human societies eventually grew into forms of previously unimaginable complexity. The most successful of the many millennia-old experiments in how to live, he contends, survive in our values today.

Drawing on natural science, social science, and philosophy to develop an approach he calls "pragmatic naturalism," Kitcher reveals the power of an evolving ethics built around a few core principles-including justice and cooperation-but leaving room for a diversity of communities and modes of self-expression. Ethics emerges as a beautifully human phenomenon-permanently unfinished, collectively refined and distorted generation by generation. Our human values, Kitcher shows, can be understood not as a final system but as a project-the ethical project-in which our species has engaged for most of its history, and which has been central to who we are.

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