



The Right Thing To Do: Basic Readings in Moral Philosophy

By James Rachels

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Editorial Review

About the Author

James Rachels, the distinguished American moral philosopher, was born in Columbus, Georgia, graduating from Mercer University in Macon in 1962. He received his Ph.D. in 1967 from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He taught at the University of Richmond, New York University, the University of Miami, Duke University, and the University of Alabama at Birmingham, where he spent the last twenty-six years of his career. 1971 saw the publication of Rachels' groundbreaking textbook *Moral Problems*, which ignited the movement in America away from teaching ethical theory towards teaching concrete practical issues. *Moral Problems* sold 100,000 copies over three editions. In 1975, Rachels wrote "Active and Passive Euthanasia," arguing that the distinction so important in the law between killing and letting die has no rational basis. Originally appearing in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, this essay has been reprinted roughly 300 times and is a staple of undergraduate education. *The End of Life* (1986) was about the morality of killing and the value of life. *Created from Animals* (1990) argued that a Darwinian world-view has widespread philosophical implications, including drastic implications for our treatment of nonhuman animals. *Can Ethics Provide Answers?* (1997) was Rachels' first collection of papers (others are expected posthumously). Rachels' McGraw-Hill textbook, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, is now in its fourth edition and is easily the best-selling book of its kind. Over his career, Rachels wrote 5 books and 85 essays, edited 7 books and gave about 275 professional lectures. His work has been translated into Dutch, Italian, Japanese, and Serbo-Croatian. James Rachels is widely admired as a stylist, as his prose is remarkably free of jargon and clutter. A major theme in his work is that reason can resolve difficult moral issues. He has given reasons for moral vegetarianism and animal rights, for affirmative action (including quotas), for the humanitarian use of euthanasia, and for the idea that parents owe as much moral consideration to other people's children as they do to their own. James Rachels died of cancer on September 5th, 2003, in Birmingham, Alabama.

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