

BOOK REVIEW

**Jove Jim Aguas. *The Good and Happy Life:
An Introduction to Ethical Systems and Theories***

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With the Commission on Higher Education's inclusion of the subject Ethics in the General Education Core Courses in the new curriculum, several textbooks were published by different authors from different universities in the Philippines. All published books tried to provide a guide on how tertiary students can understand Ethics. As part of the authors' attempt to bring down the level of philosophy to those who are not philosophy major students, they tried their best to provide a definition of ethics and a survey of different ethical systems. Simply put, the published textbooks discussed what ethics is. Ethics is a branch of philosophy that deals with understanding what is right from wrong. Unlike the other branches of philosophy, ethics can be considered as one of the closest philosophical schools to us since it deals with the human person and one's actions. By looking at this perspective, one can see that it will deal with one's decisions in particular situations and experiences. Moreover, ethics helps one seek the answers to the questions on what good is, what right is, and how to live a well-lived life. The said questions were tackled by Jove Jim Aguas in his book *The Good and Happy Life: An Introduction to Ethical Systems and Theories*.

Aguas focuses on answering the question posited from Socrates' dictum, which implied the importance of living well. In the introductory part of the book, Aguas (xv) claims that a well-lived life is a happy life. Making this claim, he enumerates the questions that his statement can confront. These questions tackled the 'whats' and the 'hows' of living well. With such questions, Aguas (xv) then presents the aim of posing these questions as the jumping board to his discussion on ethics and ethical theories. To give an overview of the book, Aguas provides diverse answers on understanding moral philosophy. He uses a thematic-historical approach in which he presents a general perspective on ethics and discusses moral philosophical schools.

The book is divided into three parts, namely, "Ethics and Ethical Theories," "Philosophies of Ethics," and "Selected Primary Texts." In the first part, "Ethics and Ethical Theories," Aguas provides a definition of ethics, distinction between ethics and morality, types of ethics, classification of ethical theories, common ethical theories, and stages of moral reasoning. The second part, "Philosophies of Ethics," provides a survey of different moral philosophical schools in history. Aguas discusses ethical systems from eastern philosophy, ancient Greek philosophy, medieval philosophy, modern philosophy, and contemporary philosophy. The third part of the book consists

of primary texts that can guide readers when studying the philosophical schools in the second part.

Providing a definition and explanation of ethics to non-philosophy major students is a huge challenge that a writer, and an ethics instructor, faces. To put the subject in context, Aguas (3) contends that we are responsible for our actions and their underlying consequences as rational and free agents. Since this is the case, we concern ourselves with what is right and what is wrong because of our freedom and responsibility. Such concern makes us contemplate, since we are rational beings, on the rightness and the wrongness of our actions. Aguas (3) explains that our concerns and contemplation on what is right and what is wrong points to our desire to live a well-lived life. Aguas (3) also infers that while others think of morality as a system that represses their freedom, morality, in reality, guides our actions to do what is right and avoid what is wrong. In addition, since it is a common misconception among students and readers, Aguas (4) distinguishes ethics and morality. He explains that ethics or moral philosophy investigates the morality of an action, rules, conducts while also providing a theoretical interpretation of moral issues. On the other hand, morality or morals pertains to certain standards or rules that guide us in our everyday lives. As the underlying motivation in the study of ethics, Aguas (4) states that it is the fact that people are motivated to become responsible agents of action that enthralls moral philosophers.

Moreover, Aguas provides definitions for good and value. He (5) explicates that good can be understood as objectively the goal or fulfillment of being human. Such understanding can enlighten one that good acts are the driving force for our actions and endeavors. Value, on the one hand, is an assessment of worth. Aguas (6) provides the two types of value: objective value and subjective value. Moreover, he discussed that experience and ethics are always intertwined. Aguas (7) explains Wojtyła's notion of an ethical experience, an experience in which the agent is responsible for the actions the agent committed. Apart from this, the two types of ethics, normative and non-normative, deemed by the meta-ethicists, were expounded. Normative Ethics is the type of ethics that influences what moral standards we should follow. This type of ethics has two areas: General Normative Ethics and Applied Ethics. On the other hand, non-normative ethics does not focus on prescribing any moral standard but explores behaviors and ethical systems. Non-normative ethics has two types, namely: scientific and meta-ethics.

Furthermore, Aguas (10) presents the classifications of ethical theories: teleological and deontological. Teleological ethical theories focus on the consequences of an action to determine the rightness or wrongness of an action. Examples of teleological ethical theories are Hedonism, Epicureanism, Egoism, Classical Utilitarianism, Act Utilitarianism, and Pragmatism. In contrast, deontological ethical theories are ethical systems that are non-consequentialist, meaning there are other considerations to be factored in determining the morality of an action. Examples of deontological ethical theories are Divine Command Theory, Natural Law Theory, Social Contract Theory, Natural Rights Theory, Categorical Imperative, Prima Facie Duties, and Virtue Ethics. Aguas also gives brief insightful explanations to the common ethical theories prevalent today: Ethical Relativism, Conventional Ethical Relativism, Cultural Relativism, Ethical Subjectivism, Ethical Egoism, Utilitarianism,

Act Utilitarianism, and Rule Utilitarianism. Aside from these, he goes into explicating Christian Ethics. This ethical system expounds constant universal moral laws presented by the Church. Conscience and Laws are tackled in Christian Ethics. Aguas enlightens the readers with the Thomistic-Wojtylan Ethics to provide a contemporary Christian moral philosophy. Furthermore, he reviews moral reasoning by Lawrence Kohlberg, which identifies three levels of moral reasoning, specifically: pre-conventional level, conventional level, and post-conventional level (27).

After discussing ethics thematically, in the second part, Aguas surveys different ethical systems and theories in history. He assesses the ethical systems from oriental tradition, ancient Greek philosophers, medieval scholars, modern luminaries, and contemporary thinkers. In his discussion on the eastern ethical schools of thought, he discusses Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. As one of the oldest and influential religions in India, Hinduism was explained profoundly by Aguas. The teachings of Hinduism are to be found in the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, which consists of its central teachings on moksha, samsara, dharma, Brahman, and atman. In addition, Aguas explicates another Indian religion, Buddhism, a religion that teaches us that we can be liberated from the sufferings of the world if we live in accordance with the middle way. This discussion expounded the life and the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama on the Four Noble Truths and the Eight-Fold Path. Subsequently, Aguas discusses Taoism, a Chinese way of life wherein one must be in harmony with the Tao, or Nature. Concepts such as Tao, yin and yang, Te, and wu-wei were unearthed to us. Moreover, the last eastern ethics that Aguas discussed was Confucianism, a philosophical school that promotes virtues' moral cultivation. The Confucian moral precepts were explained so that the readers can grasp what a moral person, the Gentleman, is for Confucius.

Aguas discusses next the philosophies of the ancient Greeks, namely that of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Epicureanism, and Stoicism. Aguas' discussion on Socrates' ethics shows how Socrates helped in the moral transformation of Athens. Furthermore, he expounds on the fundamental theses of Socrates' ethical theory, specifically: every agent aims to attain a complete satisfactory life, knowledge of what constitutes a satisfactory life is necessary for attaining it, and the satisfactory life is a life living the virtues of justice, self-control, courage, and holiness in which they are the application to different kind of situations of the fundamental virtue of knowledge of what the good for humans is and how it is to be achieved (68). Also, he discusses Socrates' ideas on virtue, excellence, and knowledge. Aguas next expounds on Plato's notions of good, justice, morality, human nature, and well-ordered life. Apart from this, he provides simple explanations on Aristotle's virtue ethics. The Aristotelian ideas of happiness, virtues, character, moral responsibility, and mean were all well-presented in a manner that is easy to follow. After discussing Aristotle, Epicureanism was next discussed. Aguas explicates Epicurus' take on how to achieve a happy life. He illustrates Epicurean ideas of pleasure as the purpose of life, active and passive pleasures, knowledge and pursuit of right pleasure, and prudence. Stoicism, which was the rival school of Epicureanism, was tackled in this book. Aguas elucidates the Stoic teachings on a rationally self-determined life, the virtue of a happy man, and the disdain for passions.

Furthermore, Aguas enlightens the readers with his discussions on two medieval philosophers, Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas Aquinas. He explains the ethical principle of Saint Augustine, which focuses on our pursuit of the Divine Truth or God by participating in His existence. Aguas (98) explicates this Augustinian principle as love as our direct participation in God's existence because by expressing love towards others, we express love to God since they are His reflections. Also, he expounds on Saint Augustine's notions on the ultimate end of man, happiness, virtue, and the role of the will. Aside from discussing Augustinian ethics, Aguas delves into Saint Thomas Aquinas' moral philosophy. It was explained in this part that Saint Thomas Aquinas follows the Aristotelian teleological metaphysics in explaining his ethical thought (104). The concepts discussed are the primacy of reason, freedom of the will, nature of the human act, determinants of morality, law, and conscience as norms of morality, and eternal and natural laws. In the discussion on eternal and natural laws, Aguas enumerates and explains Saint Thomas Aquinas' typology of the eternal law, natural law, divine law, and human law.

After discussing medieval scholars, Aguas delves on two prominent luminaries of the modern period, David Hume and Immanuel Kant. These two philosophers influenced many thinkers of the contemporary time, especially in epistemology and ethics. Hume, as one of the most prominent empiricists, analyzed our perceptions as the starting point of his philosophy, which led to his explanations on ideas and impressions, the two classifications of perceptions. In discussing Humean ethics, he clarifies to the readers Hume's notions of ethics based on epistemology, rule of passions, the role of reason, morality based on sentiments, moral evaluation of character traits, nature of sympathy, and natural and artificial virtues. Furthermore, Aguas tackles another prominent figure in modern philosophy, Immanuel Kant. Unlike Hume, Kant synthesized rationalism and empiricism in his philosophical approach. Kant's moral theory accentuates duties, motives, the dignity and worth of persons, and moral law that is absolute and unchanging (120). Aguas starts his discussion on Kantian ethics by providing the aims and method of Kant's moral philosophy. Kant's purpose in his ethics is by addressing the question, "What ought I to do?" he can formulate a very foundational precise statement of the principle or principles on which ordinary moral judgments are based (120). After laying out the foundation of Kantian ethics, Aguas explicates Kantian notions of good will, duty, law, responsibility, categorical imperative, hypothetical imperative, virtue, vice, and the postulates of morality. Even though Hume and Kant are viewed as difficult to understand, I commend Aguas for simplifying their ethical theories to the readers.

The next ethical theories to be discussed are those of the modern philosophers. Aguas dwells on explicating the ideas of some contemporary philosophers, specifically: Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, Soren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, William James, William David Ross, John Rawls, and Max Scheler. The first contemporary philosopher tackled in the book is Jeremy Bentham, one of the main founders of utilitarianism, in which he tried to provide a morality based on pleasure. Aguas simplifies Bentham's notions of the utility principle and the Hedonistic Calculus. The utility principle promotes the greatest happiness for the greatest number, wherein the consequences of the action will be calculated by the Hedonistic Calculus. Also, Aguas provides profound explanations of Mill's utilitarianism. Mill's ethics

improved the existing utilitarian approach of Bentham. Instead of focusing on quantity, Mill focused on quality. In Aguas' discussion, he presents Mill's utilitarianism as a refined utilitarianism. Soren Kierkegaard's ethics was expounded in this book. Since Kierkegaard was a Christian existentialist, his ethical thought was influenced by his faith. Aguas discusses truth, subjectivity, the stages of life, and the Christian. He provides clear explanations on the stages of life, namely: aesthetic life, ethical life, and religious life. Moreover, Aguas (145) expounds on Nietzsche's ethics in which Nietzsche requires a thorough reevaluation of values and the rise of the *Übermensch*, the only one who can rise above all moral distinctions to achieve a healthy life of truly human worth. He provides insightful explanations on Nietzsche's philosophy as pathology and therapy, death of God, nihilism, will to power, master and slave morality, and the Overman.

Aguas also elucidates William James' pragmatic ethics. He defines pragmatism to show the approach that James follows in articulating his philosophical insights. The pragmatic notion of truth, freedom, determinism, and the inner sense of freedom are James' concepts that are also discussed. The next to be discussed is William David Ross's *prima facie* duties, wherein Aguas discusses Ross's intuition of moral rules, *prima facie* duties, and the six categories of *prima facie* duties. In his discussion, he enumerated and explained the six *prima facie* duties, which are: (1) duties depending on one's prior actions; (2) duties of gratitude are those that rest on acts of other people toward the agent; (3) duties of justice are those that rest on the fact or possibility of a distribution of pleasure or happiness that is not in accordance with the merits of the people concerned; in such cases, there is a duty to upset or prevent such distribution; (4) duties of beneficence are those that rely on the fact that there are other people in the world whose virtue, intelligence, or happiness can improve; (5) duties of self-improvement are those that rest on the fact that we can improve our own condition of virtue, intelligence, or happiness; and (6) duties of non-maleficence are duties of not injuring others (161-162). The next to be discussed is the American philosopher John Rawls' theory of justice. Rawls' theory of justice is a liberal conception of what justice is, which is why his theory protects and prioritizes citizens' equal basic liberties. Aguas explains Rawls' principles of justice which are liberty principle and difference principle. Unearthing these two principles, he also expounded on Rawls' notions of equality, reciprocity, and paternalism. Lastly, Aguas discusses Max Scheler's value-ethics. Scheler's value-ethics divides the values into ranks as they are anchored in one's *ordo amoris*, an order of the heart (171). Aguas explicates Scheler's theory of values, nature of values, values as intentional objects of feelings, and the hierarchal order of value. What is commendable in the second part of the book is that Aguas provides biographical sketches for each philosopher. This is a good way of introducing a philosophy since knowing the thinkers' lives can help readers better follow the train of thought of each luminary.

The third part of the book consists of selected primary texts. They serve as reading supplements for readers who want to go over the texts of the philosophers. The selected primary texts are the ones that specifically contain the ethical thoughts of the thinkers. This part is what separates Aguas's book from other ethics textbooks since he already provides the primary texts. With this, students and readers will not have difficulty searching for books and files in the library or the world wide web.

In brief, Aguas provides profound explanations on ethics, ethical systems, and ethical theories. He was able to explain them in a way that the concepts will be accessible even to those who are not philosophy enthusiasts. This book is another example of his prowess in the field of philosophical writing, for it exemplified a style of writing that communicates to different kinds of people. The strengths of this book are the following: (1) the concepts are explained profoundly by using examples that any reader can relate with; (2) the survey on different moral philosophical schools provided diverse perspectives that readers can reflect on and apply in their own lives; (3) the explanations given make this book a good secondary source for philosophy majors to the primary texts; and (4) the primary texts included in the third part make the life of a student easier since they are already provided. However, even though this book is an excellent textbook, there are some recommendations for its improvement. If there will be a second edition of this book, other ethical theories like Levinas' ethics, Ricoeur's ethics, Schopenhauer's ethics, Scanlon's ethics, ethics of care, and other contemporary ethical systems can be added. Since this is a guide and textbook for ethics instructors, suggested activities can be provided so that educators can have ideas on how to conduct assessments to their students. Overall, this book is highly recommended because Aguas did not only explain the philosophical concepts precisely; instead, it provided a guide for philosophy and non-philosophy students in their pursuit to have a good and happy life.

REFERENCE

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