

Book Review

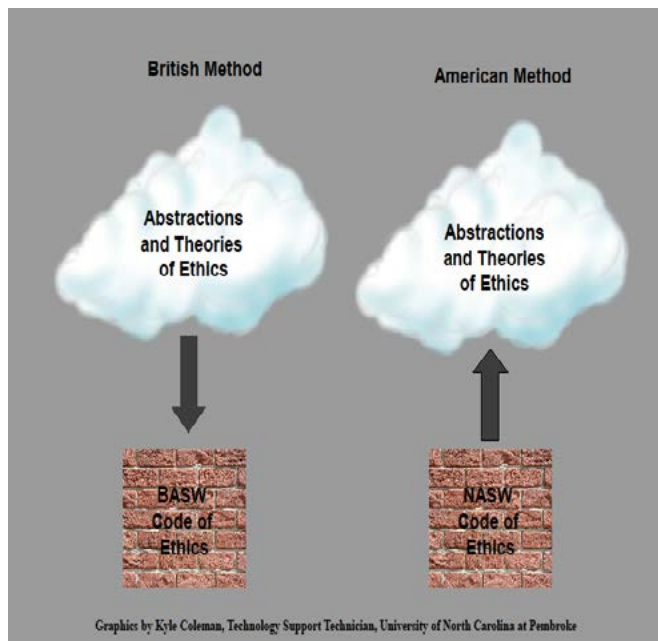
Skorupski, J. (Ed.). *The Routledge Companion to Ethics*. New York: Routledge.

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Many years ago, I published an experimental video editorial in Vol. 4, No. 2, [*Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics*](#). The concept emerged from the manner in which social workers received their ethics training. The graphic below illustrates two divergent perspectives.



The first (on the left) represents a European or British vision of teaching ethics. Here students learn classical theories of ethics and later they are introduced to their professional code of ethics. By learning the theory that undergirds the professional code first, they are expected to understand the rationale behind each specific code.

In the United States, the exact opposite teaching strategy is employed. A survey course in philosophy (or more specifically ethics) is rarely a requirement in American higher education. In most cases, a philosophy course is an elective. Students are introduced to their professional code of ethics without the benefit of understanding how these specific codes emerged as a standard for professional behavior. At this point, students (particularly those who must write an ethics research paper) must review the classical theories upon which the professional code exists.

Whether one learns ethics in an orderly manner as we see in Europe or backwards as we see in the United States, *The Routledge Companion to Ethics* is a valuable resource. For Europeans, this valuable book provides a parsimonious presentation of foundations that can facilitate effective organization when writing a paper for a professor. For American students, the book offers an arena in which the student can find the foundation for a specific ethical code. Here the professor will be profoundly impressed with the student's ability to create a philosophical linkage.

This excellent reference book includes 68 chapters equally divided into the following six sections:

1. History
2. Meta-ethics
3. Ideas and Methods from Outside Ethics
4. Perspectives in Ethics

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5. Morality
6. Debates in Ethics

European students will find the 21 chapters in the “History” section valuable; while college students in the United States will find “Ideas and Methods from Outside Ethics” most useful for the assignments they face. The section titled “Debates in Ethics” can be used as a springboard for a term paper on the topic of abortion (perhaps the most common ethics paper submitted in college). Whether the student embraces the position of “prolife” or “prochoice,” this section will emerge as a valuable citation. In addition, within this section Heathwood offers a chapter titled “Welfare.” Regardless of the social work student’s nationality, this chapter will probably be the most cited.

The major shortcoming of this volume can be found in the section titled “Ideas and Methods from Outside Ethics.” Skorupski offers five chapters presenting various professions. I see a misplaced chapter titled “Formal Methods in Ethics” that is general in nature while the other chapters are linked to a specific profession. Social work professors and students will be distressed because while there is a chapter addressing psychology, there is no chapter that specifically addresses social work.

Whether one learns ethics founded on theoretical abstractions and then moves to the concrete application OR learns concrete standards and then moves to learn the theoretical abstractions, *The Routledge Companion to Ethics* is a volume that is a necessary addition to social work libraries in Europe and in America.