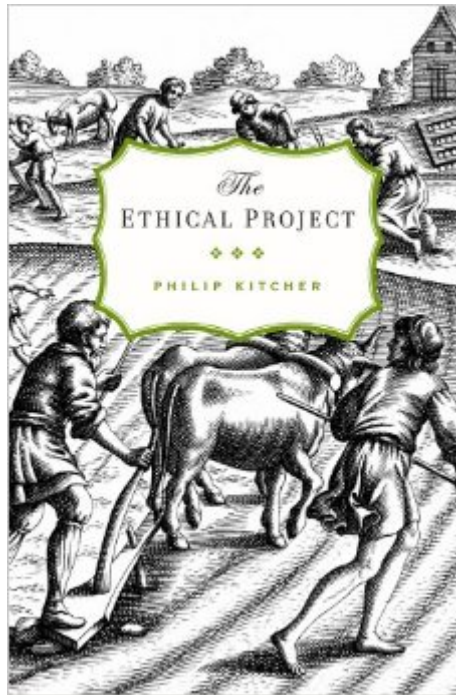# The book was found

The Ethical Project

Synopsis

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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Customer Reviews

The argument defended in this book is fundamentally simple. If we are basically fair-minded and moral, and if we treat one another in accordance with the requirements of mutuality and reciprocity, then our lives will be improved and there will be more social goods available for everybody. That means the shared choice of the moral life style will have consequences for natural selection. The move toward a moral life style will contribute to the evolutionary "fitness" of the organisms which exhibit it. Therefore we can expect a general cultural evolution toward morality over time, and we can explain the progress that has been made through history by reference to the non-zero-sum consequences of these choices.This is virtually the same argument made by Robert Wright in his book, "Non-Zero." But Kitcher's book is a much more compact and easier-to-read than is Wright.s'

A serious work which lays out a secular ethic. When a book helps me clarify my thinking on an important subject, I have to rate that highly. Though clearly written, it is a work of careful and detailed thought, which at times was tedious for me. But definitely worth the effort.

I was very disappointed in this book. It is based entirely on speculation, except for the information that the author got from Christopher Boehm, whose book, Moral Origins, I very strongly recommend.

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