



Problems from Philosophy

By James Rachels, Stuart Rachels

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"This [text] is an introduction to some of the main problems of philosophy—the existence of God, the nature of the mind, human freedom, the limits of knowledge, and the truth about ethics. The chapters may be read independently of one another, but when read in order, they tell a more or less continuous story. We begin with some reflections on the life of Socrates and then go on to the existence of God, which is the most basic philosophical question, because our answer to it affects everything else. This leads naturally to a discussion of death and the soul, and then to more modern ideas about the nature of persons. The later chapters are about whether we can have objective knowledge in either science or ethics." -from the Preface

Problems from Philosophy represents the final work of author and philosopher James Rachels. In it, he brings the same liveliness and clarity to the introduction of philosophy that he brings to his best-selling ethics text, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. This second edition has been revised by Rachels' son Stuart, who carefully has carefully refined his father's work to further strengthen its clarity and accessibility.

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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.

STUART RACHELS is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Alabama. He has revised several of James Rachels' books, including *Problems from Philosophy* (second edition, 2009) and *The Right Thing to Do* (fifth edition, 2010), which is the companion anthology to this book. Stuart won the United States Chess Championship in 1989, at the age of 20, and he is a Bronze Life Master at bridge. His website is www.jamesrachels.org/stuart.

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