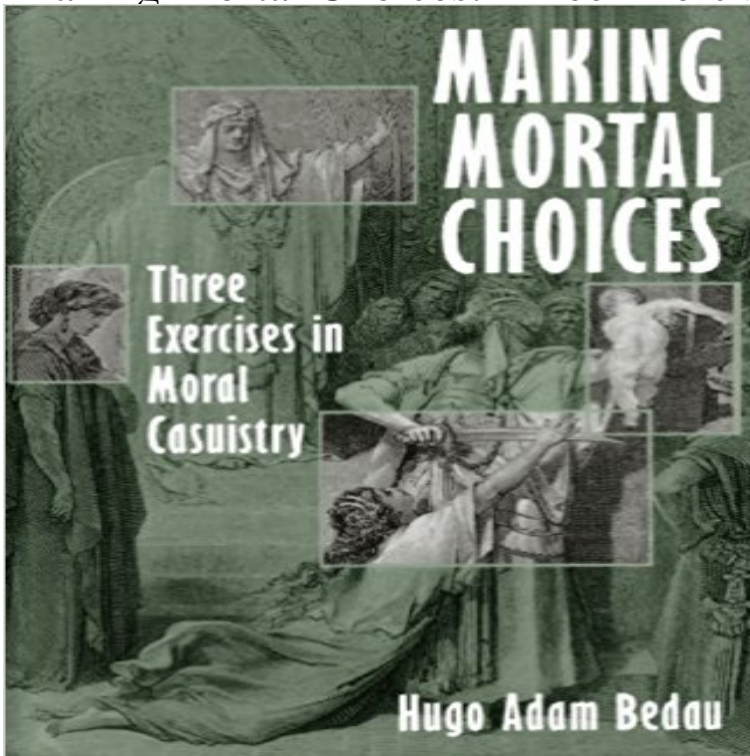


Making Mortal Choices: Three Exercises in Moral Casuistry



The answer, to crew and passengers aboard the sinking lifeboat, must have seemed both grimly obvious and unthinkable alien. To save the lives of many, the lives of some would have to be sacrificed. With seawater crashing over the gunwales, only a lightning of the human cargo would keep the craft afloat. In a procedure that took much of the night, fourteen men and two women were consigned to watery graves. This notorious event, aftermath to the sinking of the *William Brown* in 1841, represents a shocking example of life and death decision-making, a case where cruel circumstance would seem to argue the permissibility of taking innocent human life. In *Making Mortal Choices*, philosopher Hugo Bedau examines this case as well as two similar cases of hypothetical origin, generating a remarkably clear and accessible demonstration of philosophical reasoning in cases where it must be decided who ought to survive when not all can. Bedau's approach, a form of practical ethics descended from the ancient (and oft-misunderstood) method of casuistry, involves solving complex moral problems in careful analytic increments and only after a broad canvassing of possibilities, rather than through the top-down application of some general moral theory or principle. Aimed at both general readers and philosophers interested in the revival of casuistic method, *Making Mortal Choices* illuminates not only how we reason in life and death situations, but also how we ought to reason if we wish both to be consistent and to properly respect human life.

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