

Prompted by the increased appreciation for matters of history and context in moral theory, I take up a number of normative and meta-ethical questions in *Casuistry and Modern Ethics: A Poetics of Practical Reasoning* (University of Chicago Press, 1996). In its heyday, casuistry was mocked for its sterile modes of reasoning, excessive permissiveness, ideological blindness, and inability to address institutional corruption. With those problems in mind, I weave the book together by using each chapter to tackle a substantive controversy and to address challenges that are characteristically put to case-based reasoning. I describe practical reasoning not as applying abstract theory to cases in a deductive manner but as exploring how concrete issues and broader moral concepts and traditions shed light on each other in a mutually reflexive way. Because moral experience involves a range of contexts and experiences, I insist upon the importance of drawing on a variety of interpretive tools from such fields as philosophy of science, legal reasoning, theology, literary theory, hermeneutics, and moral philosophy to guide the practice of practical reasoning. The book's cases include the first Gulf War, liberalism and its discontents, Roman Catholic sexual ethics, violent pornography, fetal tissue transplantation, and the academic study of religion. Working through (and out of) these cases, I conclude by arguing practical reasoning is a non-formal intellectual virtue that can coordinate diverse interdisciplinary resources to enrich the moral imagination and organize our perception of salient particulars in moral experience—instantiating what I call a poetics of practical reasoning.