

## EDITORIAL FOREWORD

The phrase ‘essentially contestable concept’ has operated as the last refuge of thinkers who find themselves unable to resolve disputes over the application of significant concepts in contexts of approval or opprobrium. Some of us have long suspected that the term conceals a subtle *argumentum ad ignorantiam*, clothing the inabilities of its users in respectable garb, or perhaps concealing assumptions or confusions that have not yet come to light. But, until Michael R. Rhodes’s work, use of the expression has continued in philosophy, social science, and even law, bolstered by the account given by its inventor, W. B. Gallie.

In this penetrating work, Rhodes begins with a devastating, original criticism of the notion of the essentially contestable concept, arguing that its application to the concept of coercion conceals unfinished conceptual analysis; by implication, he indicts all applications of the phrase. He then proceeds to argue that the root mistake is in regarding a term like ‘coercion’ as evaluative as well as descriptive; thus, identifying an act as coercive, and thus to be disapproved, confuses reasons for and against its moral acceptability with whether the act is accurately described. Rhodes argues for a straightforward, preevaluative sense for the term, and then proceeds to describe how different ethical traditions can sort instances of coercion into the permissible, the impermissible, and the morally neutral.

In the course of his work, Rhodes explicates and deals authoritatively with numerous accounts of coercion: those of Harry G. Frankfurt, Michael Gorr, Robert Nozick, Friedrich A. Hayek. He is appreciative of their respective contributions to our understanding of the varieties of coercion, threats, offers, and “throffers,” but skillfully provides effective counterexamples that defeat these competing accounts. *Coercion: A Nonevaluative Approach* thus emerges as a piece of analytic philosophy at its best: dealing with fundamental issues at the level of the tools of philosophy, then proceeding to their application, refined, to significant concepts, and situating the entire discussion in an exhaustive review of relevant literature. And as a contribution to the Value Inquiry Book Series, Rhodes’s work stands as a paradigm of clarity and relevance.

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