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A Review of Phil Washburn, "Philosophical Dilemmas: Building a Worldview"

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racy and ethics in the light of the new public spheres produced by print and broadcasting media. Thompson claims that media technologies provide access to new realms of experiences, images, and ideas, which make us more sensitive to a wide range of human problems, the interdependency of the human race in a global world, and our dependence on the natural environment. Consequently, Thompson argues that the ethical universe can no longer be thought of as "a world of co-present contemporaries," nor can "the non-human world of nature" be treated simply as "the ethically neutral backdrop to human action and interaction" (p. 262). Thompson argues that we bear responsibility for the world of the nonhuman, as well as nonproximate, others undergoing suffering and oppression that can be remedied, concluding: "In an increasingly interconnected world, the horizons of responsibility extend increasingly to others who are distant in space and time, as well as to a non-human world of nature whose destiny is increasingly interwoven with our own" (p. 263).


This is a serviceable and vigorous anthology of essays, meant to be a primary text in social ethics courses. The chapters cover the waterfront of controversial issues: abortion, euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide, animals and the environment, pornography and censorship, racism, sexism, oppression, the death penalty, affirmative action and welfare, world hunger and global justice, and sexual morality. Each is prefaced with an essay by one of the authors and followed by a bibliography of suggested further readings. Though the fifth edition follows the basic format of previous incarnations, it is much revised and updated: half the readings are new. While classics are carried over (e.g., Don Marquis "Why Abortion Is Immoral"), the authors have taken the opportunity to include recent court rulings concerning affirmative action and euthanasia. Some changes are less helpful: the extraordinary Thomas Sullivan response to James Rachels's "Active and Passive Euthanasia" is gone. Also, the authors now accept uncritically some "politically correct" but question-begging terminology, for example, the study question: "What are the psychological and societal roots of homophobia?" (p. 188). On balance, however, Social Ethics is engaging and functional, an excellent choice for the classroom.


This introduction to philosophy, about half of which focuses on ethics, should find a niche in the curriculum. It exemplifies the best of single-author texts: clear and engaging prose that allows instructors to cover a wide range of complex
material within a manageable time frame. It does well, too, in overcoming the limitations of monographs, in particular, less intellectual tension than in good anthologies. Washburn writes self-contained essays on each side of the issues, followed by sections offering tools for students to work out their own views. He succeeds so well that he risks conveying a sense of sophistry in showing how both sides of issues can be defended without personal commitment.

The book limits itself to classical issues in religion, political philosophy, personal ethics, free will, and epistemology. Most issues center around values, unified under the theme of forming a meaning-giving worldview. For example, the chapter on personal ethics discusses pleasure, happiness, relativism, and the source of moral values. Given the book's focus on meaning, one might have hoped for a chapter on aesthetics, as well as more extensive attention to feminism, non-Western religions, and topics in applied ethics such as personal relationships and work.  

M. W. M.


University-business partnerships in support of joint research interests have grown significantly over the past two decades as the result of government sponsorship and powerful incentives. Bowie provides an objective, resource-rich, yet skeptical treatment of the phenomenon. After tracing the evolution of the partnerships and the growing role of federal and state governments as promoters, Bowie provides a comprehensive overview of the problems with such arrangements that should be of concern to academics regardless of field. The overarching theme is conflicts of values between academic and business institutions.

Universities search for truth by emphasizing peer review and openness in both basic and applied research. Business firms search for profits by seeking competitive advantage in applied research. Partnering of the two has the danger, in the words of Derek Bok, of commercialization of the university. Bowie details the potential problems: publication delay, secrecy, withholding of products, liability, costs of defending patents, conflicts of interest, conflicts of commitment, loss of public good will, and issues of distributive justice.

Bowie includes a section of readings from both supporters and critics, and in a most helpful appendix, provides key conference reports, model agreements, and university conflicts of interest policies and start-up guidelines.

T. W. D.


It's a commonplace that "professionalism" has shifted from connoting goodness to connoting sleaziness. Koehn's aim is "to justify trust in the practice of professionals by showing that ... professional practices qualify as morally