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

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Comments

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Washburn, Phil. *Philosophical Dilemmas: Building a Worldview*.
New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pp. 383. \$26.00 (paper).

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.