Michael Langford. *An Introduction to Western Moral Philosophy: Key People and Issues*. Cambridge Text Education Ltd. 2018. 240 pp. $26.96 USD (Paperback ISBN 9781789710007).

As preliminaries, I note that the book's printing and binding are very well done: not an unimportant consideration these days. It will take rough handling. There's a helpful glossary and an index. The editing is good. (I noted only two typos). More substantially, the book accurately describes itself as *An Introduction* ... 'based on lectures, given in Canada and Cambridge, at first year university level.' However, it opens paths beyond introductory study, especially in exploring the 'relationship of philosophy to religion' and 'the issue of free will.' Langford's proposal for 'a moral philosophy' that is 'generally acceptable' to contemporary culture is both engaging and challenging. It uses 'critical reasoning' in meeting foundational interests and needs of students in philosophy, but also of students in the sciences, arts, and professional faculties, especially law. General readers will also find it an accessible and valuable orientation to moral issues.

The first five chapters track the main figures associated with moral reflection and political / legal thought in the ancient Greek world and the systems it produced. Chapters 6 to 10 do the same for the period from Aquinas to Kant. Chapter 11 provides a broad review of contemporary trends and dynamics shaping moral experience today. The final chapter draws some conclusions, and sketches several recurrent philosophic questions that ground Langford's own vision for rational moral thought and behaviour today.

The book sets out to provide a 'meta-ethical' survey of considerations that sustain ethical discourse in our time. It does not offer closure on that discourse, or propose final answers to the unresolved moral dilemmas. The book does cite moral questions posed by acts of environmental irresponsibility, and maps some other key moral challenges that contemporary culture faces, but not all. In particular, I note one surprising omission: in a book introducing 'Western moral philosophy' one might expect, if only to orient the project, reference to the holocaust and to the recurrent twentieth century genocides. Acknowledgement seems required, if only to focus readers' attention on the 'meta-ethical' issues actually under review that such a monstrous history threatens even the possibility of any legitimate, continuing, moral reflection.

Langford takes a 'critical' approach to the issues raised, reflecting his own scholarly experience with, among others, Hobbes and H. L. A. Hart's legal theory. But his broad moral vision is informed by understanding of Aquinas' 'virtue theory' (based on Aristotle), and on the work of contemporary philosophers like Martha Nussbaum and Alasdair MacIntyre.

The author's writing is lucid and accessible. Generally free of overly scholarly notes or references, he focuses on exploring issues as issues, not on reciting intricate arguments or cataloguing personalities. There is also a helpful 'workbook' element set out in the text at the end of each chapter, and in some well chosen passages from key figures. He accurately directs readers along many paths that the West has actually taken, for good or ill, in the journey to its current state of philosophically structured moral consciousness and tested practice.

The book also has, I think, an important pedagogical value. In assessing philosophy's relationship with religion, Langford presents the two as compatible modes of rational behaviour constituting moral experience. His book helps clarify the role of each in contemporary moral, political, and economic debates. Informed conscience and consciousness are treated as compatible and valid dynamics, not as proxies for changing tastes.

Langford's reliance on 'what is acceptable' as the criterion guiding his own proposed moral philosophy may seem strange. Consensus and preference will not likely satisfy all those who worry

about the 'naturalistic fallacy' that, allegedly, confuses what 'must be' with what is 'taken to be.' But his approach is wisely non-prescriptive. It takes people—philosophers included—where they are. His vision for contemporary moral thought reflects this approach. The author's proposed moral philosophy is, I think, both 'generally acceptable' today and more than that, it seems to be '*protreptic*' as well.

That is, Langford takes a lead from Aristotle, whose *Nicomachean Ethics* tries to motivate his listeners and readers 'to engage in their own philosophical inquires, as applied not only to concrete political and moral questions, but also to the most abstract and inapplicable forms of philosophy' (D.S. Hutchinson and M.R. Johnson, *Protreptic Aspects of Aristotle's* Nicomachean Ethics, Cambridge University Press 2014, 381). Motivation isn't 'generally acceptable' as a concern of academic writing today, at least not overtly, for fear that it may appear to entail a bias or to threaten scholarly 'objectivity.'

But validly courageous testing of motivational context is central to any accurate, trustworthy, scholarship. This courage emerges prominently in Langford's final chapter, where he reaches back to some 'fundamental... abiding questions.' These questions, 'fundamental' and 'abiding' to moral and to all philosophy, are not themselves posed as 'moral' questions so much as epistemic ones. I'll summarize his concluding remarks in my own words, I hope accurately.

Real disagreements between persons who are trying to speak truthfully reveal truths in the contradictions they acknowledge and explore rationally. Language isn't neutral. It implicates those listening to the words they share with others, and to the intentions reflected in those words. That is how 'objectivity' is assured in moral, or any, valid rational argument. Anyone actually participating in moral reflection risks too much to let untruth pass, as Socrates showed in the fourth, and final, argument of the *Phaedo*.

Religious experience, in its variety, compliments philosophy as a distinct, but potentially final, act. Thus, insight into human rights demands what Langford calls 'critical reasoning' (but might be called 'analysis' in other vocabularies). Langford also argues that values aren't really geographical. Using 'Western' or any such circumstantial description, to define a moral philosophy is a category mistake. Moral values either define universally those who practice them, or not at all.

Langford offers a disarmingly simple, responsibly focused introduction to an immensely complex and consequential human project. He approaches it with humility, the only way such a study can be successfully introduced or pursued. And he succeeds in restoring some major themes that need to be restored and carefully argued, in our time of too many 'alternate' truths and vacuous moral claims. His concluding comment reads:

> Seeking to achieve ... a revolution in which we recognize the intrinsic dignity and worth of all human beings (does not lead) to a formula as to how to live or a system to which to conform; it is more like the call to a creative adventure.

His book can stand up to some rough handling in pursuit of that adventure.

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