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Bonevac, Daniel. *Historical Dictionary of Ethics*. 2nd ed. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2023. Pp. xli + 671. Hardback £195.00, Paperback £175.50, Ebook £175.50.

As I was familiar with Daniel Bonevac’s *Today’s Moral Issues* (2013) and *An Introduction to World Philosophy* (2009, together with Stephen Phillips), I have come to appreciate how he not only views the history of philosophy from the typical narrow Western perspective but also demonstrates a keen interest in and awareness of world philosophy, at least in the latter book. I was curious to see how he had gone about composing this dictionary. But first a little introduction of him. He works as a professor of philosophy at the University of Texas, Austin, with main interests in metaphysics, philosophy of mathematics, semantics, and philosophical logic. He has his own You Tube channel with over 5 million views. On his Wikipedia page it says that in the autumn of 2016 he declared support for Donald Trump together with 145 other scholars. In a 2016 Washington Post article he writes how he has been

“upfront about my conservative views for more than 30 years” while still stating that “I try my best to keep politics out of the classroom.... I try to present views on all sides fairly, keeping my own views in the background.” In May 15, 2024, he filed a lawsuit in federal court, together with colleague John Hatfield, “demanding the right to fail students if they miss class for abortion, and to refuse to hire teaching assistants who have used mail-order abortion medicine.” Bonevac also stated that he will not use “students’ preferred pronouns, and will not allow ‘cross-dressing’ teaching assistants.”

The volume begins with a 28-page long chronological introduction to the most important figures and texts from the history of ethics, divided into historical periods. Then follows a short introduction, giving a bird’s-eye view of the central questions and stances in ethics. The main part of the volume consists of more than 600 cross-reference entries on terms, concepts, theories, and thinkers in the history of ethics. He has a short glossary at the end and a 58-page bibliography divided into significant countries or religions, as well as the main historical eras. In the “Note to the Reader” he writes that the volume “includes figures from Africa, Asia, and Central and South America as well as thinkers from Europe and North America, though the emphasis remains on the latter” (p. xi). Regarding the character of the entries he writes: “The entries are direct and straightforward enough to be clear to readers with little exposure to philosophy in general or to ethics in particular. But they are also detailed enough to be useful to specialists” (p. xi).

While he has entries and bibliographies of the major religions like Judaism, Islam, and others, it is interesting to note that he has no entry and bibliography for Christian ethics. For the entries on “Jewish ethics” and “Islamic Ethics,” for example, he refers readers to relevant subsections. But there is no such entry for Christian ethics. Of course, it may be because Christian ethics has so dominated Western thought that it becomes invisible like the water in which the fish swims. But if this is the case, it comes across as strange that he does not clarify it in the introduction to the volume.

Moving to the one and a half page entry “Biblical Ethics” it reads like a simple survey of well-known ethical passages, nothing that would be new to one with a basic knowledge of the Bible. It is just a summary of the key passages, without any attempt to identify distinct ethical ideas. It does not touch on basic questions like: How is biblical ethics similar and different from other ancient sources? What is the ethical intent behind why the narratives in the Bible are told as they are? What are foundational ethical con-

cepts in biblical law and prophetic literature? Is there an ethical development throughout the Bible, for example, from the OT to the NT, and if yes, what is it? How has the Bible been used in ethical debates? The similarly long entry "Jesus" goes in the same fashion. Half a page is simply a list of the most important parables and where to find them. The other page is basic quotes from the Sermon on the Mount. I wonder if Bonevac's conclusion, "Jesus offers no ethical theory," is simply a reflection of his own lack of effort or interest in understanding Jesus's ethical thought. Further, while there is an entry on, for example, "Divine Command Theory" there is no entry on "Moral Government of God."

The inadequate understanding reflected in several entries on various thinkers also strike me as unsatisfactory. For "Montaigne, Michel de" he presents him as influenced primarily by skeptics like Cicero and Sextus Empiricus, but does not mention Plutarch who Montaigne himself said was a prime influence in his thinking. Cicero he frequently quotes but speaks several times of in derogatory terms. For "Kierkegaard, Søren" he gives a fair summary in mentioning some key ideas, but he does not explain why "inwardness" was so central to Kierkegaard. For Kierkegaard it is only in the inwardness that faith becomes true. Beauty in the aesthetic stage, and reason and tradition in the ethical stage, need to be superseded by the inwardness of faith in the religious stage. For "Levinas, Emmanuel" he sees Heidegger as the main influence, and summarizes: "The crucial relationship, from an ethical point of view, starts when we encounter other people who speak to us, who act, and who awaken us to our responsibilities to others *who are like us*. Our awareness of intersubjectivity, of other subjects who are in various ways *like us*, thus grounds ethics" (p. 328, italics are mine). I would dare to claim that this is a fundamental misunderstanding of Lévinas. This way of thinking about ethics is exactly what Lévinas criticized Husserl and Heidegger for. Yes, Lévinas profoundly interacts with Heidegger, but to locate ethics beyond his phenomenology. The other is encountered primarily as an other that cannot be reduced to the ego and the *oikos*, the same. It is the otherness of the other that grounds ethics, not the sameness. Jacques Derrida—I would think not Bonevac's favourite bedtime reading—is not mentioned even if he is one of the most influential philosophers of the 20th century. Even if there are literary and philosophical readings of Derrida, it is also possible to read him ethically with a distinct ethical agenda. This neglect comes across as odd. For "Wittgenstein, Ludwig" Bonevac mentions his early views of ethics in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and his transitional

“Lecture on Ethics” but does not have anything to say about the ethical thought of the late Wittgenstein with his second major work, *Philosophical Investigations*.

Given Bonevac’s recent political engagement, I was also interested in seeing whether he was able to “keep politics out” of this volume. Being vocal in his political conservatism, his one-page summary in “Conservatism” comes across as a fair and sympathetic summary. It would be interesting, though, to hear if Bonevac has moderated some of his views after one year with Trump II. His two-paragraph discussion of “socialism” is significantly shorter, and with the opening definition by Hayek (“the centralized conscious direction of social forces to consciously chosen ends”) I also understand why in the US many primarily see it as a direct threat to individual freedom.

A little over two pages are dedicated to “Abortion,” where the discussion quickly zooms in on the American debate. As we know, it is rather polarized with hard fronts between the anti-abortion and the pro-choice groups. Bonevac’s discussion tries to balance a fair description of both views, but it also remains within the American context. More nuanced questions about what to do in cases where the mother’s life is threatened unless an abortion is done, or whether general laws are adequate ethical approaches to decide in specific cases, are not addressed. The presentation is locked in the American polarized debate. Still, he is able to give a rather fair presentation of both sides, even if his own voice appears to shine through, as he ends with the anti-abortion arguments and the statements: “You were once a fetus. It would have been just as wrong to kill you earlier as it would be to kill you now. This argument does not depend on whether fetuses are persons, but only on whether persons were once fetuses” (pp. 10–11).

For “Environmental Ethics” he gives priority to consequentialist approaches from the perspective of business companies. It is not difficult to hear the economic focus and skepticism to government officials, as they are said to be driven by “incentives [that] often do not promote the public interest” (p. 178). Toward the end he also mentions deep ecology and eco-feminism. I am glad that environmental ethics is more than what it is portrayed as here.

I do understand that it would be impossible to give extensive references in the short entries, but the frequent absence of any references in many of the entries does not make them function as a guide and door-opener to the primary sources. It is something many dictionaries of this sort consistently

have, but not this one. Of course, the reader can consult the bibliography at the end, but if you are interested in a specific topic or person, the longer lists of bibliographic entries are not convenient bridges into the primary sources. The reader would need to spend some time identifying relevant sources, and since neither the entries nor the bibliography serve as good bridges to the primary sources, I for one would opt for other secondary sources to help me identify relevant primary sources.

Being familiar with the quality of Bonevac's *Today's Moral Issues* and *An Introduction to World Philosophy*, I must admit that I was disappointed with his *Historical Dictionary of Ethics*. I had expected more and better quality entries. My recommendation would therefore be rather to consult some of these other books of his, and see his *Historical Dictionary of Ethics* as a basic and general overview without necessarily having any substantial discussions. Given the price of this volume, you are probably better off looking for free articles on Wikipedia or other trusted websites. There you often find helpful references to primary or secondary sources, and the quality of the entries is likely higher. The convenience this volume offers is to have much in one place, and to allow you to discover authors and topics you may not have devoted time to yet. But then, for serious study, you do want to go to more substantial sources than either of these.

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