

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Moral Concerns by Brenda Almond

Review by: Richard Keshen

Source: *Ethics*, Vol. 99, No. 1 (Oct., 1988), pp. 159-160

Published by: The University of Chicago Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2380937>

Accessed: 27-02-2018 13:32 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



The University of Chicago Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Ethics*

position and the basic structure are at odds with each other. For although the parties do not know the specifics of their society, they know that they all belong to the same one and that they are choosing principles for ordering and assessing its basic structure. It is thus quite misleading to characterize them as “societyless” (p. 30 and p. 43). And since the parties know the general facts of social science and so forth, they ought to be able to deal pretty well with various possible institutional contingencies for underwriting rights, as indeed their consideration of the issue of stability would suggest. Of course, working out the specific arrangements for a particular society is another matter, and it is here that Martin’s book may prove to be especially valuable.

To be sure, these qualms about *Rawls and Rights* do not amount to a defense of a different interpretation of justice as fairness. They are preliminary to any such defense and are merely meant to suggest that Martin’s book does not always make it easy to see just how and where he departs from Rawls’s position. Naturally, as I hope I have made clear, there should be no doubt that this book is essential reading for those interested in (and familiar with) Rawls’s theory, to which it makes a valuable contribution in its own right.

BART SCHULTZ
University of Chicago

Almond, Brenda. *Moral Concerns*.

Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, 1987. Pp. xiii+152. \$25.00 (cloth).

Liberals have often been characterized as wishy-washy compromisers who stand for nothing but a cowardly neutrality. One of the happy results of the work of liberals like Rawls and Dworkin has been to put the lie to this image. This, too, is a principal aim of Brenda Almond’s collection of essays (many of which were formerly published under the name “Brenda Cohen”). The topics of the eleven essays range from practical issues to do with sex, the environment, and education to more theoretical issues of moral epistemology. Yet through the essays runs the theme that there is a coherent set of liberal values which the liberal ought to use as a vehicle for social betterment.

In the theoretical pieces, Almond particularly wants to combat the notion that the liberal, because of her commitment to toleration and pluralism, should feel insecure about promulgating her own values. It is indeed a fallacy, Almond argues, to think that there can be purely personal values, such that a person could consistently adopt some value but not also believe that this value is right for others. In this sense, the liberal must be, and has a right to be, dogmatic. This theme is interestingly explored in the essay “An Ethical Paradox,” where principles such as “everyone ought to do what he thinks he ought to do” are criticized. I am sympathetic to Almond’s position. It should be said, however, that in the end her remedy for what she calls the liberal’s “insecurity of evaluation” rests on the principle of universalizability and is therefore only as strong as that disputed principle.

A number of Almond’s essays bring theoretical and applied issues into fruitful contact. In her essays on educational policy, for example, Almond defends the fact-value dichotomy and accordingly the view that even the liberal’s commitment to impartiality and rationality must finally rest on a kind of choice. At the same

time, Almond argues that the liberal has every justification for advocating the introduction of moral and political issues into the school curriculum. Some issues—war and the environment, for example—are of universal concern, and therefore their introduction does not contradict the liberal's commitment to pluralism. Other issues, such as those having to do with sex, racism, and poverty, raise problems children bring with them to school. The school can either ignore these problems or discuss them systematically. Either option involves a moral choice, and the latter, Almond argues, is the right choice.

Another essay deals with the state's regulation of our personal relations. The liberal will be for as little intervention as possible. Almond, however, has some cautionary insights. Increased freedom in personal relations may lead to more marriage breakups, ironically necessitating increased state regulation on behalf of children. As well, when loyalty to family is weakened, then one of the main psychological bulwarks against totalitarianism is removed.

Although this book does not open any new vistas, it is nevertheless a worthy contribution to the recent resurgence of liberal thought.

RICHARD KESHEN
University College of Cape Breton

Dunn, Robert. *The Possibility of Weakness of Will*.

Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1987. Pp. x+175. \$25.00 (cloth); \$14.50 (paper).

In this 1984 Johnsonian Prize winning book, Robert Dunn argues that full-fledged weakness of the will is a genuine possibility. He does so by arguing against what he takes to be the strongest grounds for denying its possibility: a necessary connection between all-out present-tense summary evaluative thinking and a corresponding volition. He divides his argument into two parts, arguing (1) that present-tense summary evaluative thinking is not constituted in part by volitional thinking, and (2) that there is no nonconstitutive necessary connection between summary evaluative thinking and volition.

In fact he argues for the linguistic counterpart of (1), that it is not part of the meaning of terms apt for expressing summary evaluative judgments ('good,' 'right,' 'ought,') that they are used with an illocutionary act potential that carries volitions with it. There are three kinds of illocutionary act that have been thought to carry volitions with them—directives (acts that tell someone to do something), commissives (acts that express an intention to do something), and connatives (acts that express a desire to do something). Although Dunn denies that directives are the vehicle for expressing a speaker's volitions, his argument against them, if correct, is sufficient to detach the meanings of 'good,' 'right,' and 'ought' from all three of these illocutionary forces. His argument runs as follows.

First, explicit evaluative verbs (e.g., 'evaluate,' 'appraise') belong syntactically to one class of verbs used in representative illocutions (e.g., 'call,' 'describe'), not with explicit directive, commissive, or connative verbs. Second, there are contexts in which reports of evaluative thinking can be detached from any directive, commissive, or connative force ("You should leave immediately, but in saying this I am not committing myself to acting likewise in situations like this"). Finally, 'good,' 'right,' and 'ought' are also used in connection with beliefs and desires,