



## Notes on New Books

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## Notes on New Books\*

BECKER, GARY S. *The Economic Approach to Human Behavior*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976. Pp. 314. \$17.00.

The title essay of this volume provides a defense of Becker's unique brand of economic imperialism. In the usual imperialism one country extends its domain to include the territory of others. In Becker's variety the discipline of economics extends its domain over all of human behavior.

Briefly put, the economic approach is one of maximization under constraints. In the essays in this volume Becker applies this approach to the explanation of a wide variety of behavioral phenomena, most notably to marriage, fertility, crime, and altruism. One main criticism of the utility maximization approach has been that it easily can be made vacuous. For instance, if a man does not just pursue his own profit, but also gives to charity, then you can say that the consumption of others is an argument in his utility function; if he pursues neither his own profit nor the consumption of others as fully as he might, then you can say that leisure is an argument in the function. For any conceivable behavior it seems possible to 'explain' it by adding an argument to the utility function.

Many, following the premier philosopher of science, Karl Popper, would deny that such an explanation is scientific since it is clearly not falsifiable. Becker accepts this judgment and so proposes to limit the ad hoc changes that can be made in the agent's utility function. In "De Gustibus Non Est Disputandum" (*American Economic Review*, 1977), a paper written with George Stigler and unfortunately not included in this volume, he suggests that all men have identical utility functions and that the function for each man is stable over time. To explain differences in behavior in terms of differences in tastes is implicitly viewed as the expedient of the lazy or the incompetent. Instead, the economist is to assume that all men want the same generally specified values (e.g., 'esteem'). Differences in behavior are then explained in terms of differences in the individual's human and physical capital and in the costs he faces.

Whether this approach can be extended to cover the whole domain of human behavior is doubtful. But Becker has provided enough illustrations to show that the approach can be carried further than one might initially suppose.

\*The book notes in this issue were written by Art Diamond, Burt Loudon, and Philip Stoffregen.

CLARK, STEPHEN R. L. *The Moral Status of Animals*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977. Pp. xi+221. \$13.00.

In his preface, the author describes his book as “a consciously outrageous publication.” It cannot be the thesis of the book that Clark takes to be outrageous, however controversial it may be. Rather he is admitting that his polemic against those who oppose his view occasionally slips into outrageousness, as indeed it does. Its basic contention is that, whatever moral theory one espouses, “there is no other honest course than the immediate rejection of all flesh-foods and most biomedical research.” Clark attempts to discredit every individual argument, and every moral system, that purports to refute this claim. Among the arguments he disputes are: that it is better for domestic animals to exist and be butchered than never to exist at all, that if we ought not eat flesh then we ought not eat plants either, and that man’s capacity to use language sets him apart from the beasts in morally relevant ways. Clark also considers, and rejects out of hand, utilitarianism (“utilitarianism, whatever its origins, is now merely a final, and entirely vacuous, pretext for doing whatever the speaker himself fancies”), Thomistic ethics, and Kantian ethics. Several chapters devoted to a critique of scientism and the notion that the needs of science justify vivisection contain the most sustained and interesting argumentation in the book.

As the preceding description of topics may suggest, this book is mainly negative in intent, and Clark refrains from offering any positive suggestions as to how his principles might best be implemented in the world. Despite his generally negative and polemical tone, however, Clark does put forward certain positive theses of a more radical and general character. Thus, he presents an argument that no rationalistic moral system can be adequate, on the ground that morality is a function of sensibility rather than of reason. “It is the mark of man as an ethical creature that he recognises what is to be done before he has thought of a reason.” However, this view is not argued for or explained in any detail, and Clark insists that his polemic against flesh eating and vivisection does not rest upon his particular views of the nature of morality. In general, the book is most successful in its polemic against scientism; it is least successful in its abbreviated and unsympathetic attack on Kantian ethics and in its presentation of the author’s own moral theory. In its polemical aspect, Clark’s book is a very useful addition to the growing literature on the moral status of animals.

DEWEY, JOHN. *Lectures on Psychological and Political Ethics: 1898*. Edited by DONALD F. KOCH. New York: Hafner Press, 1976. Pp. 1+462. \$14.95.

*Lectures on Psychological and Political Ethics* were delivered by Dewey at the University of Chicago during the winter and spring quarters of the 1898 academic year. The text was not written by Dewey himself, but is “based on notes taken by an unknown stenographer (or stenographers)” (p. xix). Despite some occasional grammatical and factual errors in the original hectograph copy, as well as a few missing pages in the first set of lectures, the philosophical value of these *Lectures*

is immense, and the Deweyan thought and style will be instantly recognized by those familiar with his published writings.

“Psychologic Ethics,” Dewey notes in his second lecture, “discusses conduct with reference to the agent, with reference to the way in which forms of conduct originate and operate. Social Ethics discusses conduct with reference to the practical situation, the important function of the situation being the vital values summed up in it—i.e., the values produced in past action and representing the raw material for the realization—effectuation—of future action. Psychologic Ethics discusses the How of conduct. Social Ethics discusses the What of conduct” (pp. 9–10).

While Dewey always emphasized that “morality is social” (indeed, such a view of morality is implicit in his fundamental emphasis on experience as the interaction between agent and environment), his published writings in moral and social theory fail to achieve the unity of vision that is present in these *Lectures*. Works such as *Human Nature and Conduct* and the Dewey and Tufts *Ethics* tend to devote more analysis to individual psychology than to the social factor, while *The Public and Its Problems* and *Freedom and Culture* suffer from the opposite defect. As Koch remarks in his introduction, it is the integration of two viewpoints—the psychological and the social, the How and the What—that gives these *Lectures* their special merit and allows us to go a long way toward understanding Dewey’s overall moral theory.

Besides covering topics which the biological and social sciences have since inherited, the *Lectures* explore a wide range of issues in philosophical psychology, philosophy of mind, action theory, ethics, and social and political philosophy. Philosophers working in any one of these fields today rarely have anything interesting to say outside of their own narrow focus, yet Dewey showed their intimate connection to one another by integrating all of them into an amazing two-quarter class sequence. The result is a sort of naturalized *Phenomenology of Spirit*, an evolutionary and developmental account of the social self as a synthesis between agent and environment.

The *Lectures* also give valuable insights into Dewey’s intellectual influences and the development of his own experimental method. The impact of evolutionary theory was foremost, with the growing research in psychology running a close second. (James’s *Psychology* is the most important influence here.) As far as academic philosophy goes, the influence of Green is still present, though Dewey is by this time more critical of idealism than he was in the early nineties. Spencer is often used as an antagonist to develop a viewpoint against. Generally speaking, Dewey cuts a dialectical path between the opposing intellectual camps of the time—between utilitarians and intuitionists in ethics, between socialists and laissez-faire liberals in politics. There are also some more general remarks about the development of western morals and political thought which show how Dewey understood his relationship to the tradition.

In short, anyone interested in Dewey’s social and moral theory or the American intellectual situation at the turn of the century will appreciate Koch’s labors (not to mention the unknown stenographer’s). Koch has also prepared an analytical table of contents and index, as well as an informative introduction, to orient the reader.