
Reviews

Arthur J. Dyck, *Rethinking Rights and Responsibilities: The Moral Bonds of Community*. Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1994. Pp. x+441. ISBN: 0-8298-1006-4.

With this book, Arthur Dyck, who has served in various capacities at Harvard University over the past 30 years, both extends and modifies the direction set out in his earlier work, *On Human Care*. He extends and develops his account of the moral bonds of community, but significantly modifies Roderick Firth's ideal observer theory which plays such a central role in the previous work. The context for this evolution in Dyck's thinking is the topic of rights, one which he thought would find strong support in the philosophical literature. His research, however, convinced him that, "1. Human rights are being seriously violated not only in practice but in theory. 2. Theories of rights . . . foster separation and undermine the human relations that make communities possible. 3. Theories of rights . . . that insufficiently protect individual human life appear to be gaining in strength . . ." (p. 2). In light of these findings, Dyck sets out to discover the source of the problems in rights discourse and to clarify how we can overcome them.

He proceeds in three parts. The first consists of an historical survey in which Dyck takes Thomas Hobbes, John Calvin, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Nicolai Lenin and Alan Gewirth as paradigmatic figures representing significant milestones in the development of human rights discourse. In the second part of the book, Dyck offers an account of the conditions that make it possible for communities to exist and to reproduce themselves. It is in these conditions that Dyck finds sufficient grounding for human rights. In the final section, Dyck moves to a concrete application, suggesting what his differently grounded account of rights would mean for an understanding of justice, as applied to divorce laws and health care reform in the United States.

As Dyck recounts the history, he finds that all his interlocutors all share a significant mistake, in spite of significant differences between them. All devalue the relationships which bring persons into being and nurture them. For Hobbes, all human associations are artificial and essentially coercive (23). Calvin does not deny the essentially social nature of human beings as Hobbes does, but his emphasis on law as external constraint on egoistic impulses obscures the moral significance of parenting and other relationships (39-40). For Bentham and Mill, rights must be justified by the principle of utility, which cannot transparently ground what Dyck takes to be a foundational right, i.e., the right to life (67). Marx, Engels and Lenin view rights as the product of corrupt societies and take for their standards a vision of the ideal society of the future (94-5). Gewirth, who treats rights as universal and natural, still understands the moral agent as an autonomous individual, without acknowledging the webs of relationships which enable that person to become an agent (116).

In developing his phenomenology of community, Dyck identifies several prerequisites of community which are, at root, moral. These include a knowledge of the past, a hesitancy to take human life, commitments to speak the truth, to respect property, and to be faithful to one another in sexual relations (Ch. 5). Moreover, these communities tacitly hold to a "natural theology" which exhibits faith that a cosmic moral power exists, that goodness is more powerful than evil and that morally-responsible behavior is ultimately vindicated (Ch. 6). It is in our recognition of these conditions, Dyck contends, that we can know our responsibilities for one another which ground rights that are therefore "natural."

Dyck clearly argues that we can know, in a substantive sense, what these rights are. Here, Dyck stakes a claim between skeptics or relativists on one side and objectiv-

ists on the other. He argues that moral knowledge is rooted in the emotional attachments that are nurtured in communities. These emotional attachments are the “felt necessities” or basic facts of morality. Of special interest to readers of this journal will be Dyck’s explicit and extended use of Michael Polanyi’s description of science as an endeavor in which knowledge begins with felt necessities (“intuitions”) and is generated by participation and training in a particular community (211-223).

Once one makes emotions (specifically, what Dyck calls, “loving impartially”) the basis of moral knowledge, however, one becomes vulnerable to the criticism that self-love or love of one’s own community in fact can and does distort moral commitments by narrowing them to only a select few. Dyck acknowledges the concern, but counters that these are instead the building blocks of all morality. “Put very simply,” Dyck says, “individuals cannot know how to behave toward themselves and others unless they have positive affection for themselves and others” (206). In the end, what keeps self-love or love for one’s community from being restrictive is what Dyck calls “Ideal Companionship.” It is here that Dyck departs significantly from Firth, as the ideal is no longer a dispassionate observer, but a participant who is able to relate empathically to all other persons (Ch. 9). The ideal companion functions for Dyck as something like Reinhold Niebuhr’s “impossible possibility” by providing a goal which we seek to attain in an ever more comprehensive manner.

There is much to commend about Dyck’s work. It offers a very readable and accessible criticism of human rights theories and points to a promising way of reconstructing them. It is an engaging book, drawing from a number of sources aside from the philosophical, such as studies in psychology. Dyck’s proposal will resonate with and find allies in several other fields. His emphasis on community will strike chords with communitarian strands of political theory, while making emotions central to cognitive processes will find its allies among feminist thinkers and others working on the moral centrality of the passions. His work thus proceeds in conversation with significant movements in the scholarly community.

A weakness of the book is that community remains for the most part, an abstract noun. While much of what Dyck says seems intuitively reasonable, a thick description of a variety of communities from around the world would strengthen the author’s position that there are indeed universally-occurring conditions in which communities flourish and which provide the leverage needed for developing an intelligible and defensible account of rights. Additionally, there are some discussions that beg for more comprehensive development. For example, given his concern for the preservation of innocent life, Dyck’s position would seem to commit him to defining life as biological functioning and to nonviolence, but those positions are not explicitly articulated or clarified. Finally, there are some implications of the work that could be profitably explored. One important implication concerns the general utility of seeking to provide a theoretical grounding for human rights. If Dyck is right that moral cognition is indeed grounded in emotions, then perhaps what we need to develop is a set of strategies and practices that will help us become sensitive to the humanity of those who differ from us.

Perhaps the greatest value to the work is that the author seeks to bridge modern and post-modern perspectives. At the same time that Dyck wants to work in a broadly communitarian direction, he continues to affirm much of the Enlightenment project’s search for universal moral standards which will enable us to live at peace with one another. One might thus describe his proposal as a kind of Kantian communitarianism. Some will therefore likely find his work to contain a juxtaposition of positions that are incompatible with one another. Conversely, others will find it fruitfully creative. I suspect that those who read the book sympathetically will find it to be the latter.

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Notes on Contributors

John Apczynski teaches at Saint Bonaventura University; his book *Doers of the Word* (1977) draws extensively on Polanyi to do theology. Additionally, Apczynski has published a number of articles in *TAD* and other journals using Polanyi; he set up and is the moderator for the electronic discussion group sponsored by the Polanyi Society.

Colin Weightman is an independent scholar working also as a Uniting Church in Australia parish minister in northern New South Wales. He has university qualifications in pure mathematics, education, religion, and theology and works mainly in multi-disciplinary areas which utilize this background. His doctorate was completed at the Department of Studies of Religion of the University of Queensland. He has presented papers on the relationship of theology and science and other topics to several conferences and is the author of the 1994 book discussed in this issue, *Theology in a Polanyian Universe: The Theology of Thomas Torrance*. Weightman can be reached by post at 18 Figtree Avenue, Junction Hill, New South Wales, Australia or by e-mail (cwei@nor.com.au).

R. Melvin Keiser is Professor of Religious Studies at Guilford College, Greensboro, NC 27410. He has been a member of the Polanyi Society since its early days and has published through it “Lived Time: A Polanyian Meditation on the Self and God in Augustine’s Confessions” (*Convivium* 18 [March 1984]: 4-13) and “Reflection, Structure, and Psyche in Post-Critical Perspective” (*TAD* 14:1 [Fall 1986]:21-20) as well as essays in several other journals. He is coeditor of a volume of essays by Stanley Romaine Hopper as well as author of two books on H. Richard Niebuhr, *Recovering the Personal: Religious Language and the Postcritical Quest of H. Richard Niebuhr* (1988) and *Roots of Relational Ethics: Responsibility in Origin and Maturity in H. Richard Niebuhr* (1996) discussed in this issue. Keiser was a Niebuhr student during the last two years of Niebuhr’s life; through Niebuhr, he encountered Polanyi’s writing and came to hear Polanyi’s Terry Lectures at Yale in 1962.

Charles S. McCoy is Professor Emeritus at Pacific School of Religion/ Graduate Theological Union (1798 Scenic, Berkeley, CA 94709). McCoy’s several books on theology, ethics, and religion and higher education make significant use of Polanyi’s philosophical ideas as do many of his articles, such as “The Polanyian Revolution: Post-Critical Perspectives for Ethics” (*TAD* 18:2 (1991-92): 33-39). McCoy discovered Polanyi’s writing in the mid fifties shortly after completing his doctoral work with H. Richard Niebuhr with whom he had some conversations about Polanyi. For many years, McCoy regularly taught graduate seminars on both the thought of Polanyi and the thought of H. Richard Niebuhr at the Graduate Theological Union.

Phil Mullins teaches in an interdisciplinary program at Missouri Western State College, St. Joseph, MO 64507 (e-mail: mullins@mWSC.edu). Since 1991, he has been the *TAD* editor; for several years prior to that, he was the coordinator for the Polanyi Society annual meeting. Recently, Mullins assembled a Polanyi Society WWW site (<http://www.mWSC.edu/~polanyi/>) which pulls together a variety of resources on the Polanyi Society, *TAD* and other Polanyi journals as well as the “Guide to the Papers of Michael Polanyi.” Mullins has written a number of articles on or using Polanyi’s thought; other recent publications focus on emerging electronic culture and the ways in which religious ideas and practices are being reshaped by digital media.

Electronic Discussion Group

The Polanyi Society supports an electronic discussion group exploring implications of the thought of Michael Polanyi. For those with access to the INTERNET, send a message to "owner-polanyi@sbu.edu" to join the list or to request further information. Communications about the electronic discussion group may also be directed to John V. Apczynski, Department of Theology, St. Bonaventure University, St. Bonaventure, NY 14778-0012 PHONE: (716) 375-2298 FAX: (716) 375-2389.

Polanyi Society Membership

Tradition and Discovery is distributed to members of the Polanyi Society. This periodical supercedes a newsletter and earlier mini-journal published (with some gaps) by the Polanyi Society since the mid seventies. The Polanyi Society has members in thirteen different countries though most live in North America and the United Kingdom. The Society includes those formerly affiliated with the Polanyi group centered in the United Kingdom which published *Convivium: The United Kingdom Review of Post-critical Thought*. There are normally two or three issues of *TAD* each year.

The regular annual membership rate for the Polanyi Society is \$20; the student rate is \$10. The membership cycle follows the academic year; subscriptions are due September 1 to Phil Mullins, Humanities, Missouri Western State College, St. Joseph, MO 64507,. Please make checks payable to the Polanyi Society. Dues can be paid by credit card by providing the following information: subscriber's name as it appears on the card, the card name, and the card number and expiration date. Changes of address and inquiries should be mailed, faxed or e-mailed to Mullins (e-mail: mullins@griffon.mwsc.edu ; fax: USA 816-271-5987).

New members must provide the following subscription information: complete mailing address, telephone (work and home), institutional relationship, and e-mail address and/or fax number (if available). Institutional members should identify a department to contact for billing.

The Polanyi Society attempts to maintain a data base identifying persons interested in or working with Polanyi's philosophical writing. New members can contribute to this effort by writing a short description of their particular interests in Polanyi's work and any publications and /or theses/dissertations related to Polanyi's thought. Please provide complete bibliographic information. Those renewing membership are invited to include information on recent work.