

Campbell and Skinner's book, like Raphael's, centers upon the ethics and economics, but it also offers chapters on Smith's reflections on language and his lectures on jurisprudence, neither of which Raphael discusses. Particularly interesting in the latter is the treatment of political obligation. In the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith had argued that sympathy alone cannot serve as the basis for all of society's moral judgments, and suggested, without further elaboration, that some kind of government or system of magistracy was also required. In his lectures on jurisprudence, Smith takes up his earlier suggestion and explains why he thinks the mandates of a government are enforceable—i.e., why magisterial pronouncements (when reasonable, of course) should be obeyed. They should be, he claims, because they promote utility and are based upon authority, which demands respect. Authority, which Smith considers to be the more important of the two, is further reduced to four main sources. Listed in the order of their importance, they are personal qualifications, age, fortune and birth. Note that "personal qualifications," not "fortune," tops the list (although, of course, the two are not necessarily incompatible). It is simply not the case, as so many have argued, that the "good" man for Smith is the wealthy man. Indeed, any reader of the *Wealth of Nations* is well aware of the almost Marxist-sounding criticisms of unscrupulous capitalists.

Both books are suitable as supplementary texts for undergraduate classes, although I'm not sure that they would be equally helpful on the graduate level. I personally prefer Raphael's book, but that is because I lean towards critical instead of straightforwardly discursive accounts of a philosopher's work. Those instructors who might prefer a more prosaic and historically comprehensive treatment of Smith will find Campbell and Skinner's book fits their purposes just as well as Raphael's fits mine.

*Kerry Walters, Philosophy, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania 17325 USA*

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### **Blacks and Social Justice, Bernard R. Boxill**

Rowman and Allanheld, Totowa, NJ; 1984, 251 pp. \$34.50 cl.

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JOHN LADD

This book is a comprehensive, critical examination by a noted black philosopher of a large variety of theoretical issues connected with social programs for improving the condition of blacks in America. Among the subjects discussed are busing (3 chapters), affirmative action (preferential discrimination in employment and in admissions to educational institutions), and other related matters such as the proper response of blacks to black separatism and to civil disobedience. The book is, however, by no means a political tract. Rather it is a scholarly treatise, a compendium of critical surveys and scrutinies of arguments found in the contemporary philosophical literature. Along the line, we find interesting and insightful analyses of relevant ethical concepts such as harm, self-respect, insult, and so on.

From the outset, the basic issue underlying these controversial programs for blacks is framed in terms of the question: should policies be color-blind or color-conscious? Boxill argues with considerable sophistication for a color-conscious approach, which he defends by appeal to the concept of justice. Justice, he claims, demands compensation for past and present wrongs inflicted on black people, that is, for the evils and insults of slavery and racism.

Unlike most of the other writers he discusses, Boxill's position throughout the book is essentially "non-consequentialist" and the kind of justice that he invokes is "corrective" rather than "distributive" justice. Accordingly, he classifies the arguments he explores, e.g., for busing, into those that are "backward-looking" and those that are "forward-looking" and

although he does not completely dismiss all of the latter, he finds more merit in the backward-looking arguments.

This approach makes Boxill's position on racial issues especially forceful and also, to my knowledge, original. As we read through the book, it becomes increasingly clear that the main problem is racism and that this problem cannot be reduced to other kinds of problems: economic, educational, political or cultural. He opts for a physical definition of race, for this is "the racists' definition"(178). Doing so, he stresses that racism affects all blacks—upper, middle and lower class—and, in this regard, he quotes Justice Marshall approvingly, who writes (in Bakke): "It is unnecessary in twentieth century America to have individual Negroes demonstrate that they have been victims of racial discrimination. [It] has been so pervasive that none, regardless of wealth or position, has managed to escape its impact"(228). Like Marshall, Boxill is no rosy optimist who believes that with time the problems will go away, as do most of the other authors he discusses. "If we wait until we have eradicated prejudice in order to be equal, we will wait forever." For, "in the long run," he concludes, "racial distinctions are unlikely to soon disappear from society"(228).

Accordingly, his stand on racism, on the one hand, is for obvious reasons against assimilationism, which might be considered a white racist solution to the problem. He says that "a black person would cease to be the same person if he ceased to be black"(144), and "stigmas are not likely to be erased because incomes are equalized"(171). At the same time he criticizes black nationalism and Black Power, which includes "the tendency to degenerate into cultural chauvinism, to strike poses and to become infected with the racism of black racial superiority"(51). In this connection, he has some interesting and critical things to say about an array of black writers including W.E. Dubois, Frederick Douglass, Stokely Carmichael, and Thomas Stowell—among others.

Boxill's approach to all the controversial issues he discusses, and he discusses an enormous number of them, is restrained and philosophical. He is quite undogmatic and eminently fair in his critiques and he is often tentative in his conclusions. His method is to argue rather than to harangue. The arguments that he presents against other writers almost always take the form of challenging the assumptions and presuppositions of their various positions, including those that lead to practical conclusions similar to his own. Thus, he systematically examines the positions of eminent writers such as Dworkin, Feinberg, Rawls, Sher, Nozick and many others—not with a view to the correctness of their conclusions but to the soundness of the arguments and the adequacy of their premises.

The virtues of Boxill's book from a scholarly and philosophical point of view, namely, its attention to careful analysis and to detail, will make it difficult to use as a text in undergraduate courses. The huge number of footnotes (40-50 per chapter) alone should indicate something of its quality as a product of painstaking reflection and research. From the point of view of a teacher, some of the analyses will provide useful and perhaps indispensable background material for class preparation and discussion. For example, the chapters on Self-respect and the Limits of Civil Disobedience have much that can be usefully introduced into a course in social ethics. And the critical discussions, e.g., of the literature on such things as justice and reverse discrimination, will provide lots of useful materials for students who want to research these subjects. In sum, the book is a virtual goldmine of materials that could be used in courses, by students and by scholars for working up ethical issues relating to black and social justice.

Before closing, I should like to add some general comments about racism from a philosophical perspective. Here I think that it becomes increasingly clear as one reads Boxill's book that in the final analysis the real stumbling block in establishment liberalism, which in one form or another is espoused by all the contemporary philosophers cited by Boxill, is a certain blindness about what is wrong with racism. Indeed, one might argue that orthodox liberalism

is of necessity racist simply by virtue of some of its characteristic assumptions about values and about ethics in general, assumptions that serve as barriers to any kind of understanding in depth of the moral issues connected with racism. Three of these assumptions might be briefly mentioned.

First, liberalism characteristically takes for granted a general conception of values that is founded on individual interests, preferences, rights and so on, and accepts the corollary that the task of ethics is to show how to distribute these material values (e.g., Rawl's primary goods, rights) fairly (or justly) through the promotion of equalities of various sorts, such as equal opportunity. In a certain sense, this focus on what could be called "middle class values" is a red herring; for, as Boxill points out in connection with preferential admissions to professional schools, the point is not to help more blacks up the ladder to material success but to train them as doctors and lawyers so that they can then go out and help other blacks in need. Considered in this light, Boxill rejects the idea that preferential admissions will lead to admitting unqualified candidates, for blacks are likely to be better qualified for this purpose than many whites whose principal qualification is having good grades on their record.

A second, and perhaps more important reason why establishment liberalism cannot deal coherently with racism is that it is, in principle, a-historical, that is, the basic theories, rules, and objectives advanced by liberals in general are framed with deliberate disregard for the historical context and background of the situations to which they are applied. In doing ethics, orthodox liberalism requires you to forget who you are and where you came from. (Remember the "veil of ignorance"?) For blacks, however, the background of slavery is something that cannot and should not be forgotten. Unlike other immigrant groups, the blacks did not come to this country to be free and to prosper. These facts are part of their history; the past and the "scars" that persist are not that readily wiped out. Indeed, the enormity of slavery and the injustices of racism are part of the American Heritage. Any ethical theory that requires that they be "bracketed" is *ipso facto* nugatory, if not inhuman. Boxill's book makes it clear why a viable ethics cannot exist in a vacuum.

Finally, a third reason why establishment liberalism is unable to deal satisfactorily with racism is that it is essentially individualistic, that is, its ethics applies to individuals or aggregates of individuals only and not to groups. Racism itself, however, is a matter of groups; for it treats blacks not as individuals but as members of a group. Racial discrimination is group defined and its effects are measurable only by reference to the group. The fact that some individual blacks are free does not derogate from the fact that blacks are oppressed as a group. Accordingly, they must be freed as a group. This is the idea behind color-conscious policies, which, as Boxill argues, are based on the acknowledgment that blacks have been victims of injustice as a group and are therefore owed compensation as a group (153). For further argument and applications, the reader is directed to this important book.

*John Ladd, Philosophy, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island 02912 USA*

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### **The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism, Barry Stroud**

Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984, 290 pp. \$10.95.

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#### **MICHAEL WILLIAMS**

This is a very good book. Anyone interested in skepticism will want to read it. Stroud takes a strong stand and supports it by arguments that are painstakingly developed and often very subtle. Nevertheless, his subtlety notwithstanding, he is never unnecessarily obscure. His