

Correspondence

“A Theory of Justice”

To the Editors: I have followed with great interest the discussion sparked by John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*. Most of the debate would seem to hinge upon the difference between an absolute egalitarianism and “equality of opportunity.” In his review of the book in *Worldview* (February) Mr. Alan Emdin almost entirely evades this central question. In one sense his change of pace is refreshing, and certainly it is valuable to have him note, as others have not, that Rawls's idea of how social values are formed is unrealistically distant from such elementary socializing influences as, for example, religion. At the same time, however, it is regrettable that Mr. Emdin fails to focus on Rawls's argument of what “ought to be.” . . .

Conflicting notions of equality seem increasingly central to moral reflection in our society. I would hope that Mr. Emdin and others would address themselves to this issue as it relates to the guiding imperatives of our Western moral, specifically religious, traditions. I believe the serious challenge to Rawls is not, as Mr. Emdin would have it, how he visualizes social formation but whether he is right in saying that equality rather than, for example, some Common Law notion of human rights is the linchpin of social justice. By failing to come to grips with Rawls's central contention, Emdin's review offers little more than a mildly interesting footnote to this important discussion.

E. L. Quittner

South Bend, Ind.

Alan Emdin Responds:

E. L. Quittner poses two criticisms of my review. It is charged that, although I make a few interesting points about Rawls's notion of value

formation, I neglect crucial recent debate on the relative merits of absolute egalitarianism as opposed to equality of opportunity, and also that I do not come to grips with the question of what constitutes the “linchpin of social justice.”

Apparently Quittner and I travel in different circles, and this, I believe, accounts for our differing views of what discussion of Rawls's work hinges on. Perhaps the virtues of absolute equality are a major topic of consideration in the professional journals of academic philosophers. If so, I am reaffirmed in my judgment that one of Rawls's strong points is that through the notion of the original position and the consideration of institutions he moves beyond what seems to me sterile debate over piecemeal philosophical abstractions.

Exchanges I have been privy to have turned on why Rawls's book, appearing when it did, has been the object of such great attention. In my review I attempted to answer this by pointing to the work as the first effort at the creation of a comprehensive system which both overcomes the impasse positivistic philosophy and economics have created for the study of ethics and also incorporates the rigorous methods of analysis developed by welfare economists. Nearly half of my review is devoted to this task.

Nor do I believe that I “fail to come to grips” with the constitution of the “linchpin of social justice.” Quittner misinterprets points in my review addressed to exactly these matters. Quittner writes that Rawls's treatment of socialization is far from realistic, and so it is. But in criticizing the Rawlsian view of authority, religion and the Aristotelian “perfectionism” of intellectual virtue, I indicated my belief that these very things were “linchpins of social justice” and not just the neglected aspects of value formation Quittner makes them out to be. They are among the “guiding imperatives of our Western moral, specifically religious traditions.” Indeed, if we are to believe Edward Corwin, they are the background of Anglo-Saxon Com-

mon Law as well. A book which treated them adequately would surely be a philosophic work of the first order, and thus would constitute a challenge to “Rawls's argument of what ‘ought to be’” on the most serious level. My regrets that my review is not such a work are at least as strong as Quittner's. Still, I believe that I have raised issues compared to which argument over types of equality seems only “a mildly interesting footnote.”

Israel and the West Bank

To the Editors: It is easy to say that all Israeli factions seem agreed upon the necessity of “creating some sort of political entity on the West Bank” (“Israeli Politics and the West Bank,” *Worldview*, February), but Stephen Oren seems peculiarly insensitive to the fact that even this “concession” is emphatically on Israeli terms. In fact I doubt that any Israeli official close to the center of power entertains the possibility of granting non-Israelis any say in, for example, the expansion of Jewish settlements in the conquered territories. There is, contrary to Mr. Oren's implication, no readiness to see a truly sovereign state established that would have control over its own relationship to the contorted “foreign policies” within the Middle East.

In so many essays such as Mr. Oren's one gets the false impression that Israeli leadership is prepared to be “reasonable.” What is not mentioned is that reasonableness is defined in terms of modifying prior outrageous policies. One does not have to accuse Israel of being a minion of U.S. imperialism to recognize the simple power realities by which Israeli leadership perpetuates its oppression of its neighbors—all, of course, in the name of self-defense.

Mr. Oren's admittedly informative article might have been further enhanced had he placed the West Bank issue into the larger context of the long-term prospects for Israel's survival in an Arab world. Is not the

(continued on page 62)