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EDITOR'S NOTE:

THE BOOK REVIEW—WHAT VALUE?

This is the fourth in a series of remarks on the value and purpose of various segments of a law review.

It has been said that book reviews are the most valuable pieces appearing in the law reviews. They are apparently read for various reasons, ranging from a simple desire to keep up with the latest books being published to pure enjoyment. Regardless of which of these services they provide, there seems little doubt that book reviews are of definite merit and are usually well-received. Although the style of individual book reviewers varies significantly, their work tends to fall into one of two general categories: (1) "reporting" and (2) "editorializing."

In the "reporting" review the reviewer concentrates his attention on the size of the book, its content, the ease with which it can be read, the sufficiency of the index, the value of the book as a reference work, etc. Altogether too often, the reporting approach is the result of little more than a brief look at the table of contents. It may have a legitimate place in a law review if kept exceptionally short—perhaps only a few paragraphs. Its value is certainly limited to keeping readers informed of significant books being published and warning them about the latest "junk" on the market. This type of review can be written quite adequately by students, and in most cases it is preferable that they do so.

The "editorialized" book review, on the other hand, is one which places limited emphasis on the book itself and its specific content. Instead, the reviewer reveals his thoughts about the subject matter of the book and his reactions to the manner of treatment. Occasionally, the reviewer departs from the book entirely and delves into one of his own pet theories that he has been able to relate to the book. Obviously, this type of book review allows the writer significantly more stylistic freedom than do other kinds of legal writing, and herein lies its uniqueness. Unhampered by the requirement that major propositions be carefully footnoted, he is free to be more imaginative and creative. Furthermore, while opinions are seldom appropriate in the normal law review article without well-reasoned arguments and careful documentation, it is precisely the writer's opinion which is the heart of the editorialized book review. It seems safe to conclude that this approach offers refreshing reading, and the more succinctly it reviews the specific content of the book and moves on to the reviewer's commentary, the more refreshing it seems to be.

Thus, if the purpose is to publish something which is a piece of legal journalism in its own right, only the editorial approach will suffice. In addition to its other features, it offers an especially good opportunity for introducing readers to areas which are peripheral to the law. Having a professor or an attorney review a non-legal book, for instance, can point out its significance to the legal profession. Furthermore, successive reviews can establish a forum for debate among prominent reviewers, allowing them to engage in a fascinating exchange of opinions on the particular book or the subject matter treated therein. The total result is usually interesting and refreshing reading—a commodity too seldom found in most law reviews.

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Editor-in-Chief
1966-1967