



Butler University  
Digital Commons @ Butler University

---

Scholarship and Professional Work - LAS

College of Liberal Arts & Sciences

---

1994

## Review of Essays on Kant's Political Philosophy

Harry van der Linden  
*Butler University*, [hvanderl@butler.edu](mailto:hvanderl@butler.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/facsch\\_papers](https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/facsch_papers)

 Part of the [Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

van der Linden, Harry, "Review of Essays on Kant's Political Philosophy" *Ethics* / (1994): 421-422.  
Available at [https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/facsch\\_papers/815](https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/facsch_papers/815)

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences at Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Scholarship and Professional Work - LAS by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact [digitalscholarship@butler.edu](mailto:digitalscholarship@butler.edu).

he writes as if the laws of nature taken together—all eighteen or nineteen—boil down to the Golden Rule (p. 75); at other times he seems to claim that the Golden Rule is stated or implicit in Hobbes's second law of nature (p. 69), which calls on everyone in the state of nature to lay down, for the sake of peace, their right to do and take what they like if others will do likewise. Hobbes himself says that the Golden Rule may be used as a rule of thumb in deciding whether a given action is in keeping with the laws of nature (cf. *Leviathan*, chap. 15, *English Works*, vol. 3, p. 115). Shelton, however, maintains that the Golden Rule is much more than a handy guide: it is nothing less than the key to Hobbes's ethical thought (p. 75). This claim is simply never adequately backed up with textual evidence.

When Shelton attempts in the middle chapters of the book to defend Hobbes's approach to moral theory, it is the basis of his theory in the good of self-preservation that is emphasized, not its connection with the Golden Rule. So it is unclear what the key to Hobbes's ethical thought is after all. In any case, Shelton is more often defending a moral theory loosely inspired by Hobbes than defending Hobbes himself. The defense is marred by a failure properly to define or distinguish between crucial concepts, such as prudence, self-interest, selfishness, and egoism, and it is marred also by a confusing treatment of contractualism (chap. 9). The concluding chapters, on sovereignty, return to Hobbes's text but do not seem continuous with the material on moral theory. T. E. S.

Ball, Terrence, and Pocock, J. G. A., eds. *Conceptual Change and the Constitution*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991. Pp. x + 218. \$12.95 (paper).

At the time of the writing (and ratification) of the American Constitution (1787–90), a number of crucial words—"state," "republic," "federal," "constitution"—were in a state of nearly Heraclitean flux: to generations brought up on the theory of sovereignty worked out by Bodin and Hobbes (e.g.), the neologism "federal state" would have seemed a contradiction in terms, since "foederal" (from *foedus*) suggested treaty relations *between* "sovereign" states, not divided authority and concurrent jurisdiction. The transformation of these key terms during the constitutional period was illuminated by Martin Diamond and Douglass Adair thirty years ago, and this new volume carries on that fine tradition. Most valuable, perhaps, is the essay by Pocock himself, who has thrown such brilliant light on "civic republicanism" from Machiavelli to the eighteenth century; but the contributions of Ball and of James Farr are also very insightful. Highly recommended. P. R.

Williams, Howard Lloyd, ed. *Essays on Kant's Political Philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. Pp. xix + 331. \$32.50 (cloth).

This collection contains previously published essays by R. F. Atkinson, Samuel Fleischacker, Otfried Höffe, Susan Mendus (with a new postscript), Onora O'Neill, Patrick Riley, and Ernest J. Weinrib. The new essays are by Wolfgang Kersting, Peter P. Nicholson, Roger Scruton, Susan Shell, Steven B. Smith,

and Howard Williams. Some of the essays address familiar topics, such as Kant's retributive theory of punishment and his rejection of the right of revolution. Other essays cover less frequently examined issues, such as the political character of the *First Critique*, Kant's view of the political status of women, and the question whether capitalism is compatible with his principle that human beings ought never to be treated as mere means. None of the essays deals in any detail with Kant's work on peace and international law, but the editor is planning another collection of essays with this focus (p. xix).

The collection shows the richness and diversity of the current research on Kant's political thought and should be read by anyone involved with this research. The short introduction, the lack of integration between the essays, the rather technical character of many of the essays, and the absence of a bibliography on Kant's political philosophy seem to make the collection less suitable for beginning travelers of the critical road. H. V. D. L.

Gray, John, and Smith, G. W., eds. *J. S. Mill's "On Liberty" in Focus*. London: Routledge, 1991. Pp. vii + 286. \$55.00 (cloth); \$15.95 (paper).

Gray and Smith combine a new edition of *On Liberty* with several essays by British and American political philosophers written over the last thirty or so years. The editors also include an interesting introductory essay of their own which explains the focus of the critical pieces. These latter include papers by Isaiah Berlin ("John Stuart Mill and the Ends of Life"), Alan Ryan, J. C. Rees, John Gray, C. L. Ten, G. W. Smith, and Richard Wollheim. The subject of the essays is, for the most part, the dispute in Mill studies between so-called traditional and revisionary readings of his work. The traditional school (headed by Berlin) claims that Mill never was able to reconcile his utilitarianism with the moral and political commitments of liberalism defended in *On Liberty*. Revisionists attempt to synthesize the two within a single complex moral theory. This is an excellent addition to the numerous versions of *On Liberty*, as the critical pieces (although familiar) have not previously appeared together. And while the introductory essay explains this debate lucidly, it must stretch the point to cover all of the articles in the collection. Smith, for example, is concerned in his essay with Mill's notion of "freedom" (though more of a case could have been made that the notion of freedom Smith eventually works out for Mill has much to do with the complex conception of "happiness" that is at the center of the interpretive debate over Mill's consistency). J. C.

Buchanan, Allen. *Secession: The Morality of Political Divorce from Fort Sumter to Lithuania and Quebec*.

Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1991. Pp. xviii + 174. \$38.50 (cloth); \$14.95 (paper).

Allen Buchanan claims that the problems he discusses in this book have long been of great practical importance and that they have been almost entirely ignored by the great political philosophers. Buchanan is right on both counts