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A Review of Erich H. Loewy, "Moral Strangers, Moral Acquaintance, and Moral Friends, Ethics

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Comments

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Loewy, Erich H. *Moral Strangers, Moral Acquaintance, and Moral Friends: Connectedness and Its Conditions*.

Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1997. Pp. 251. \$18.95 (paper).

Loewy offers a sustained critique of libertarianism, especially H. T. Engelhardt's version, as callous and as failing to realize the full possibilities for human solidarity. More (too?) quickly he also critiques the ethics of care as being unrealistic, paternalistic, and anti-intellectual. Integrating ideas of Rousseau, Kant, and Darwin, he sets forth an engaging view of ethics as motivated by natural compassion and socially constructed within democracies. Much of the book is an impassioned plea for greater moral concern for others.

The book is rich in ideas, such as compassionate rationality and social homeostasis. Yet it suffers from an unresolved tension between two theses: (1) ethics (including rights) are entirely social constructs whose content is decided by democracies, and (2) ethics has a natural basis in compassion together with the worth of all creatures capable of suffering. A related ambiguity is in two conceptions of a general will as (a) "nothing more than a capacity to communicate" (p. 83), and (b) common interests (p. 80). Statement (1) plus (a) seem in-

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sufficient to overthrow libertarianism in democracies that choose to embrace it; (2) seems to refute (1), at least if “compassion” carries as much normative force as Loewy needs to reach his conclusions.

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