

In Memoriam

Lewis White Beck (1913–1997)

Born in Griffin, Georgia, on 26 September 1913, Lewis White Beck died in Rochester, New York, on 7 June 1997. He received his early university education at Emory University in Atlanta (AB, 1934) and did his graduate work at Duke University, earning an MA in 1935 and a Ph.D. in 1937. In 1949, he arrived at the University of Rochester as professor and chairman, after having held a fellowship at the University of Berlin in 1937–8 and after serving as instructor at Emory University (1938–41), as assistant and then associate professor at the University of Delaware (1941–8), and as professor at Lehigh University (1948–9). At Rochester, Beck was chairman of the philosophy department from 1949 to 1966, associate dean of the graduate school from 1952 to 1956, and dean in 1956–7. In 1962, he was appointed Burbank Professor of Moral and Intellectual Philosophy, and he retired from the university, but not from active participation in the life of the department and in the education of its graduate students, in 1979.

Lewis White Beck received honorary degrees from Hamilton College, Emory University, and the University of Tübingen. During his long and rich career, he held visiting appointments and lectureships at George Washington University, Columbia University, the University of Minnesota, the University of Western Ontario, Sir George Williams University, the University of California at Berkeley, and the Rochester Institute of Technology. In 1974, he was Cassirer lecturer at Yale University. He also was a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and served as President of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association and as member of the Board of Directors of the American Council of Learned Societies and of the editorial boards of the *Journal of the History of*

Ideas and of *Kant-Studien*. In 1985, he participated in the formation of the North American Kant Society.

Most of Beck's work was devoted to Kant's philosophy. A partial list of his publications includes his *Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason* (1961; German translation, 1976), *Studies in the Philosophy of Kant* (1965), *Early German Philosophy: Kant and his Predecessors* (1969), *The Actor and the Spectator* (1975; German translation, 1976), *Essays on Kant and Hume* (1978), *Kant's Latin Writings* (1986), as well as numerous articles. His translation of *Kant's Critique of Practical Reason* (1949 and later) continues to be used widely.

He played an active and vital role in North American academic and intellectual circles and quickly achieved national and international fame for his Kant scholarship. Under his guidance, the University of Rochester's doctoral programme in philosophy gained international recognition, and he continued to be a mainstay of that programme even after his official retirement. He looked favourably upon the dictum that retired Kantians become Nietzscheans but this did not in the least prevent him from participating, in the 1980s and 1990s, in the Rochester department's education of its graduate students in the philosophy of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. This participation took the form of numerous meetings with a small circle of students (by private invitation), a circle which quickly came to be known as 'Beck's privatissimum'. This continuing work and contact with students provided both parties with immense satisfaction and lapsed only after the conclusion of the fall semester 1996.

Greatly respected for his scholarship and for his service to the profession and to his university, Lewis White Beck was also loved for his wit, charm, and courtesy both by us at Rochester and by all who came into contact with him. His death is a permanent intellectual and personal loss. He is survived by his wife, Caroline, of Rochester, two sons, Brandon of Virginia, and Hamilton, currently teaching in Moldova, and two grandsons. A memorial service was held at the university's Faculty Club on 21 June. The North American Kant Society will devote one of its 1998 meetings to his work and influence.

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