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978-0-521-10057-1 - Modality, Morality, and Belief: Essays in Honor of Ruth Barcan Marcus

Edited by Walter Sinnott-Armstrong

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Modality, morality, and belief are among the most controversial topics in philosophy today, and few philosophers have shaped these debates as deeply as Ruth Barcan Marcus. Inspired by her work, a distinguished group of philosophers explore these issues, refine and sharpen arguments, and develop new positions on such topics as possible worlds, moral dilemmas, essentialism, and the explanation of actions by beliefs. This “state-of-the-art” collection honors one of the most rigorous and iconoclastic of philosophical pioneers.

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Modality, Morality, and Belief

Essays in Honor of Ruth Barcan Marcus

Edited by

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In collaboration with

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Preface

Ruth Barcan Marcus is, and always has been, an iconoclast. Again and again she has shattered conventional wisdom, forcing us to look at old problems in new ways. Like any intellectual pioneer, she has often faced an onslaught of skepticism, but a brief survey of the current philosophical literature, including the essays published here for the first time, testifies to the enduring influence of her views.

Marcus is probably best known for her seminal work in philosophical logic. In 1946, she published the first systematic treatment of quantified modal logic, therein turning aside Quine's famous attack on the coherence of combining quantifiers with alethic operators. She later extended the first-order formalization to second order with identity (1947) and to modalized set theory (1963). Marcus's writings in logic either inaugurated or brought to the fore a number of issues that have loomed large in subsequent philosophical theorizing. Of special importance are the axiom known as the Barcan formula (1946), the theorem about the necessity of identity (1963), a flexible notion of extensionality (1960, 1961), and the idea that ordinary proper names are contentless directly referential tags (1961). This last laid the groundwork for the theory of direct reference later elaborated by Kripke, Donnellan, Kaplan, and others.

No less a revolutionary in moral theory, Marcus undermined the entire structure of standard deontic logic in her paper titled "Iterated Deontic Modalities" (1966). She later (1980) argued against some theorists that moral dilemmas are real, and against others that moral dilemmas need neither derive from inconsistent rules nor imply moral antirealism.

More recently, in a series of papers on belief (1981, 1983, 1990), Marcus has repudiated theories that identify beliefs with attitudes to linguistic or quasilinguistic items (sentences of English or "Mentalese," for example). She claims instead that for an agent *A* to believe that *p* is for *A* to be disposed to behave as if *p* obtains (where *p* is a possible state of affairs). Unlike its "language-centered" competitors, Marcus's analysis applies straightforwardly to the beliefs of nonlingual and infralingual systems. Perhaps most

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important, it mobilizes a conception of rational agents as seeking to maintain global coherence among the verbal and nonverbal indicators of their beliefs.

The essays published here were inspired by Marcus's work. Those in Part I concern themes from her writings on modality; those in Part II criticize or develop material in her papers on morality; and those in Part III treat issues addressed in her work on belief. Taken together, these essays illustrate the span and depth of her influence.

Marcus has been honored by many prestigious appointments and awards. Among other things, she was Professor of Philosophy and Chair of the Department at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Professor of Philosophy at Northwestern University, and, until the time of her retirement in 1992, Reuben Post Halleck Professor of Philosophy at Yale University. She has been a fellow of the Guggenheim Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Stanford Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, the Edinburgh Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, the Mellon Foundation, the National Science Foundation, and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. In 1986, she was awarded the medal of the Collège de France.

In addition to her scholarly contributions, Marcus's tireless service to the international philosophical community has been widely recognized. To cite just a few examples, she was elected Chairman of the National Board of Officers of the American Philosophical Association, President of the Association for Symbolic Logic, and President of the Institute International de Philosophie. She has also served on the editorial boards of numerous prominent journals.

Ever ready to engage in dialectic on virtually any topic, insistent upon absolute rigor in philosophical argument, and unflinchingly generous with her time and support, Marcus has had a profound influence on generations of students. The editors of this volume have been privileged to have Ruth as a teacher and as a friend. We look forward to learning still more from her in the future. It is to her, with esteem and affection, that this volume is dedicated.

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