What is the good?

Regan receives Guggenheim to pursue philosophical studies

A respected legal scholar who is also an important moral philosopher, Donald H. Regan has been awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for the year 1985-86. Regan, who holds joint appointments in the Law School and the philosophy department, describes himself as a consequentialist in his philosophical views about ethics and politics. “I believe that in the final analysis, the rightness or wrongness of acts or of social institutions is to be judged by the goodness or badness of their consequences,” he explains. His first book, Utilitarianism and Co-operation, won the prestigious Franklin J. Matchette Prize of the American Philosophical Association for 1979-80. In it he explored strategies for promoting the good by asking what criteria ought to be used in judging individual acts.

Regan’s current work focuses on the question of what ends moral action should promote. His view, which is highly eccentric by present standards, has roots in Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and G. E. Moore. “The question what is the good turns out to be effectively equivalent to the question what sorts of activity by rational and moral agents are intrinsically valuable,” he explains. “And the activities which are in fact intrinsically valuable can be subsumed under the general headings of knowledge-able appreciation of the natural world and unifying relationships between people.”

A 1963 graduate of Harvard in mathematics, Regan received his LL.B. from the University of Virginia in 1966. He received a B. Phil. in economics from Oxford in 1968, and began teaching at the Law School that same year. While teaching courses in the Law School, he was enrolled as a student in the philosophy department which awarded him the Ph.D. in 1980.

John P. Dawson

Distinguished U-M alumnus and former teacher dies

by George E. Palmer

Jack Dawson died the other day after a long and distinguished career as a law teacher. He was a member of the Michigan Law faculty from 1927 to 1957, when he left to join the faculty of the Harvard Law School, from which he retired in 1973. But he remained active as a teacher, for he continued to teach until 1981 at the Law School of Boston University and to publish important articles on contracts and restitution.

Through all these years he maintained close ties to Ann Arbor and the University of Michigan Law School. In addition to occasional service as a visiting professor, he gave the Cooley Lectures in 1959, out of which grew his book, The Oracles of the Law, published by the Law School nine years later.

In the 1930s, much of Jack’s writing was concerned with the effect of circumstances that distorted the agreed exchange under a contract, such as fraud (31 Mich. L. Rev. 591, 875, 1933), inflation (33 Mich. L. Rev. 171, 706, 852, 1935), mistake (20 Minn. L. Rev. 481, 1936), and duress (11 Tulane L. Rev. 345, 12 id. 42, 1937). His writings disclosed a bent for comparing our law with foreign law; thus, his study of the effects of inflation dealt with the period 1861-1879 in the United States and the period 1914-1924 in Germany. (Frank Cooper was co-author of the United States study.) And his 1937 study of duress, which was concerned with the laws of France and Germany, was followed by his seminal article on the Anglo-American law of economic duress, in 45 Mich. L. Rev. 253 (1947), as well as his study of...