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Review: Socratic Political Theory

Reviewed Work(s): Socrates and the State by Richard Kraut

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policymakers to avoid considering undesired alternatives and conclusions. Finally, Goodin applies his framework (in a loose way, to be sure) to a couple of policy areas—nuclear power and the priority of defense. Throughout all this, there is never any doubt about the author's formidable intelligence. And, occasionally, the arguments are compelling. But on many more occasions I found myself quibbling with Goodin, so much so that by the book's conclusion his analysis had simply failed to become authoritative.

More importantly, the book lacks political savvy and political vision. While Goodin shows considerable insight and broad learning in dealing with moral and technological issues, he has almost nothing to say about political power. And while power is not all there is to politics, it is in a profound sense the fountainhead of public policy. What this calls for, I believe, is some extended discussion of representative institutions and, more particularly, the three-cornered relation between authorities, experts, and the public. Here, Goodin might well build on John Stuart Mill's thoughts about representative government. But, instead, he lumps Mill together with libertarian writers such as Hayek under the rubric of "liberal." Of course, the element of "choice" is common to these worldviews. However, advocates of "consumer sovereignty" envision a very different society than do advocates of popular rule. Except for an offhand endorsement of market socialism in the chapter on moral incentives and some criticism of nuclear power in light of its latent antidemocratic tendencies, Goodin, in this book, offers little sense of what kind of society and what kind of politics he envisions. In the absence of such vision, Goodin's proposals seem distant and unreal.

Nevertheless, this is a "successful" book in spite of its shortcomings. Goodin is quite persuasive at times: for example, in his insistence that posterity be brought into our calculations of marginal utility. And he is always thought-provoking. Indeed, as they say of oatmeal, much of this book sticks to one's ribs. The book also makes a valuable teaching tool, its episodic structure allowing each chapter to be dissected separately by students until, at the conclusion, the different parts are assembled, and the organism looked upon as a whole.

What such an examination will reveal is a pioneering work—one which is exciting but flawed—in a nascent and vitally important literature which attempts to mesh political theory with public policy. For, while we may or may not have gone "beyond good and evil," we certainly are beyond "Plato to Marx," and probably always have been. Thus it is high time that political theory come into phase with political action. Goodin's book is an early step in achieving this synchronicity.

—IRA SMOLENSKY

### SOCRATIC POLITICAL THEORY

Richard Kraut: *Socrates and the State*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984. Pp. 338 + ix. \$20.00.)

In the *Crito*, refusing to escape from prison, Socrates argues that citizens must obey the laws of their states. His position appears to be that

one is never justified in disobeying the law. But elsewhere he appears to uphold different principles. In the *Apology* he says that if the Athenian courts should order him to stop philosophizing, he would not comply. Moreover, since it is a basic tenet of Socratic morality that one must never do what is unjust, must one obey unjust laws? The task of explaining these apparent conflicts and others like them has attracted a good deal of scholarly attention. Richard Kraut's *Socrates and the State* is the most comprehensive treatment to date.

The first six chapters of Kraut's book, approximately 200 pages, are devoted to a detailed examination of the *Crito*. His main aims are to show that Socrates' position in the work is not "offensively authoritarian," as it is widely regarded (p. 5), and that it has more philosophical substance and sophistication than is commonly allowed. This includes showing that the principles espoused in the work do not conflict with other Socratic doctrine. The final third of the work, chapters 7 and 8, is devoted to locating the main themes developed in the earlier chapters in the context of Socratic philosophy as a whole. Special attention is paid to unraveling Socrates' complex attitude toward democracy and to continuities between the moral and political views of the Socratic dialogues and the *Republic*.

Kraut's analysis of the *Crito* is never less than stimulating and is frequently brilliantly argued. He illuminates numerous points in ways that are not only highly original but also yield what appear to be correct interpretations of the text. For instance, most scholars have seen Socrates' case as comprised of two arguments: the argument from destruction, based on the principle that to disobey the laws is to attempt to destroy the state (*Crito* 50a1-b); and the argument from agreement, based on an implicit contract or agreement with the state into which the citizen enters (50c-54c), which in turn rests heavily on the analogy between state and citizen and parent and child (50c-51c). Kraut forcefully maintains that the argument from destruction is not self-contained (pp. 45-53). Rather, it is part of a wider argument, which includes the parent-city analogy, and is based on "benefits that the citizen never asked for" (p. 48). Kraut's reading of this argument is confirmed by Socrates' prefatory remarks at *Crito* 49e9-50a3—a rare piece of evidence that Kraut overlooks. In regard to these points and others too numerous to recount, Kraut makes important contributions. There can be little doubt that his analysis will provide the starting point for future discussion of Socrates' political theory in the *Crito*.

Kraut's overall attempt to present a more liberal interpretation of Socrates' position is often unconvincing. Frequently, he appears to read too much into the text. For instance, at least three times Socrates says that the citizen always has a choice: he can either obey the law or persuade the city "as to the nature of justice" (51b9-c1; also 51b3-4, 51e4-52a3). Traditionally, this injunction has been interpreted as leaving the citizen little option: he must either obey the law or manage to get it changed. According to Kraut, this reading is unacceptably authoritarian and inconsistent with the command never to behave unjustly—because a citizen who is unable to persuade the city to change an

unjust law would have to obey it. Kraut makes the valuable point that the “persuasion” referred to can take place in the courts, after a citizen has refused to obey and must justify his behavior, as well as in the Assembly, where laws can be changed (pp. 59, 80). His explanation of Socrates’ reference to “private persons” violating the law (50b4) is similarly illuminating (pp. 115-26). But his attempt to weaken the principle, to something along the lines of “try to persuade or obey,” has little textual support. The fact that Socrates does not use such language in his repeated statements of the principle is difficult to get around. Kraut is aware of some apparent “sleight of hand” in his interpretation (p. 69), an impression that he is unable to dispel.

Because Kraut employs principles he has already established—including his reading of “persuade or obey” (esp., pp. 102, 166-67)—to establish further points, his interpretation becomes increasingly tenuous. Few scholars are likely to be persuaded by his account of Socrates’ “complex theory of implied consent” (p. 157) in chapter six. Kraut’s attempt to base the citizen’s agreement on satisfaction rather than residence is unconvincing (pp. 167-86). On the whole, the “authoritarian” reading of the agreement, criticized and rejected on pages 166-67, is far more likely to be correct than Kraut’s view that “the citizen’s agreement to obey the city [is] a large multiplicity of agreements, each corresponding to one law or decree” (pp. 186-87). This boils down to the citizen’s being obligated to obey only those laws with which he has not expressed dissatisfaction.

Kraut’s discussion of the relationship between political theory in the *Crito* and other Socratic dialogues is less satisfying than the earlier chapters. Several themes are carefully developed, especially Socrates’ general sympathy for conventional moral beliefs, his overall pessimism concerning human nature and the possibility of moral knowledge and the subtleties of his attitude toward democracy. But Kraut’s argument for an essential continuity between the political theories of the Socratic dialogues and the *Republic* is subject to criticism. He bases his case mainly on Socrates’ frequent discussion of the importance of moral expertise and his contrast between the moral expert and the ignorant multitude. According to Kraut, Socrates’ position is that, should moral experts be found, political power must be turned over to them (pp. 231-44). This of course approaches the central political teaching of the *Republic*. However, Kraut has difficulty establishing Socrates’ belief that moral expertise justifies political authority. His main evidence (pp. 234-35) is a remark Socrates makes in the *Apology* to explain his refusal to disobey the gods: “. . . To do an injustice and disobey a superior, whether divine or human: that, I know, is bad and shameful” (29b6-7). Kraut also cites *Crito* 47a-c, but the discussion there makes no reference to political authority. According to Kraut’s index of passages, *Apology* 29b6-7 is the single most frequently cited passage in his book. With essentially no other textual support, it is transmuted into “the *Apology*’s undeniable authoritarianism” (p. 238). But the passage will not bear this weight. To begin with, the human superiors referred to in the passage should almost certainly be identified as the “commanders” (*archontes*) Socrates refers to

at *Apology* 28d-e, who possess legitimate political authority, rather than moral superiors, as Kraut believes. Moreover, even if an element of authoritarianism were latent in the passage, this receives no direct discussion in the early dialogues. As Richard Robinson has noted (*Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, 2d. ed. [Oxford, 1953], p. 2), even if P implies Q, the fact that a thinker subscribes to P does not itself prove that he believes Q. It certainly gives no license to place Q at the center of his thought. In addition, Kraut does not adequately discuss aspects of the early dialogues that conflict with philosophical positions taken in the *Republic*, which comprise the foundation for the work's authoritarianism. These include sharp breaks in moral psychology, metaphysics and epistemology, points discussed by numerous commentators.

Let this review not end on a negative note. *Socrates and the State* is a book from which I learned a good deal, and from which, I imagine, others interested in Greek political theory will also learn. Though many of Kraut's contentions are not above criticism, his provocative arguments provide numerous insights and force the reader to reconsider his own opinions. And even where Kraut is least convincing, he still makes valuable reading.

—GEORGE KLOSKO

### THE "LINGUISTIC TURN"

Fred R. Dallmayr: *Language and Politics: Why Does Language Matter to Political Philosophy?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984. Pp. 243. \$22.95.)

Fred Dallmayr's well-deserved reputation as an outstanding interpreter of contemporary European thought to American philosophical and political audiences receives considerable additional support from this new book. Here, however, it is not only, or even primarily, continental European thinkers upon whom Dallmayr works his powers of concise summary and synthesis; recent English and American writers on language, such as Searle, Austin, and Rorty, also receive extensive treatment. In fact, the manner in which Dallmayr has organized his chapters, namely, by theoretical orientation rather than geographical region, makes this one of the best-integrated books of its kind, in the sense of being most completely beyond the geographical provincialism that characterized mid-century Western philosophy.

The chapters are in fact revisions of lectures that constituted a series given at Loyola University of Chicago in 1981. The introduction points to the functional role of language in politics, identifies the book's objective as being that of showing the implications, for political philosophy, of various approaches to language (p. 10), and provides a lucid outline (pp. 23-24) of subsequent chapters. Nominalism, exemplified especially by Bertrand Russell and Rudolph Carnap, and behaviorism (as found, e.g., in B. F. Skinner) are treated first, as varieties of empiricism. Dallmayr suggests that, although these approaches have had much in common in the twentieth century, they may in fact imply quite divergent political