



Review

Reviewed Work(s): Democracy and Moral Development by David L. Norton

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difficult to imagine and, in any case, practically out of reach. The best we can hope for is something like progressive social democracy. Nagel regards this alternative as distinctly second best; but even so, achieving and sustaining it will be a daunting challenge to the motivational capacities of people in most industrial societies.

There is much in this short and unsettling book to stimulate serious thought about a wide range of issues in contemporary political theory. Nagel's style is deceptively simple, masking an unusual depth and complexity of view. This is not a book for philosophical amateurs. For those who have read widely in the recent literature of political philosophy, it is a rare treat.

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Democracy and Moral Development. By David L. Norton. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991. 198p. \$29.95.

Since its inception, liberal political theory has been criticized for positing moral ideals that have not been fully realized in practice. In recent years this line of argument, most closely associated with demands for social reform, has been overshadowed by criticism of the ideals themselves. So-called communitarians have decried liberal theory's removal of the individual from a meaningful social context and consequent postulation of an overly abstract conception of the right, regarded as prior to the good. Other critics have appealed to the virtues of the ancient Greeks and their belief in an objective human good, to the realization of which political life should be devoted.

David L. Norton has feet planted firmly in both of these camps. He describes liberal theory as an "ethics of rules" and criticizes it for moral minimalism in two senses. It regards only certain subjects as moral, and prescribes rules in regard to these that hold generally and so cannot require special or developed moral characteristics of their upholders (p. 21). Norton's eudaimonistic moral view, which he calls an "ethics of character," is based on the Aristotelian view that the good life consists of the full development of one's moral and intellectual faculties (intro.). Like J. S. Mill, Norton believes that individual development depends on making one's own choices, discovering one's true nature for oneself. In opposition to liberal individualism, which opposes the individual's self-interest to the interests of other people, Norton argues for an expanded conception of self-interest, which encompasses the interests of others.

Throughout his book, Norton draws from an impressive array of sources, including Plato's Socrates, Mill, Dewey, Emerson, Tocqueville, Maslow, and Oakeshott. His discussion is most valuable in providing a coherent framework for a range of important issues, both theoretical and practical, and in proposing concrete steps for implementing his ideas. Like Mill and John Dewey, Norton believes that active self-government should play an important role in self-development and criticizes "equilibrium democracy" upheld by many contemporary theorists (chap. 2). In the spirit of Dewey, he recommends restructuring education (e.g., by alternating academic subjects and practical experience) and supports youth public service (chap. 3). As one can

imagine, Norton advocates meaningful—as opposed to alienated—work, through which, once again, one's potential could unfold (chap. 4). He takes a broadly communitarian view of the individual's relationship to society (chap. 6) and argues that government, along the lines of Plato's *Republic*, should concentrate on helping individuals to realize their potential (chap. 7). Norton's most sustained philosophical discussion concerns a view of rights based on responsibilities, rather than welfare (chap. 5). Rights should be founded upon what one requires in order to develop properly. Viewed from this perspective, rights, too, blunt the adversarial thrust of traditional liberal theory.

The main problem with all this is that Norton says little about the ideals we are to realize. He does declare that all individuals possess all the virtues *in potentia* (p. 83). Under the proper conditions, with their potential made actual, all would lead meaningful lives, in a society devoid of conflict. Virtually nothing is said about competitive market economies or the economic consequences of proposed educational and vocational reforms. Norton realizes the need to abandon the "closed teleology" of Plato and Aristotle for "a liberal open-ended teleology whose ends require to be discovered through exploration" (pp. 6, 163). But the only definite value he upholds is moral autonomy. In regard to this, one must ask, Autonomy to what end? Without a clear account of the good, Norton's depiction of worlds of meaningful education, meaningful work, and meaningful community are cloying in tone and largely devoid of substance. Indicative of the remorseless hopefulness that suffuses his book is Norton's interpretation of Plato's *Republic* as upholding a political system in which the rulers' power depends upon the consent of the governed (p. 160).

Norton is correct that contemporary liberal theory pays more attention to the public than to the private, to rules of justice than to desirable traits of character, to the right than to the good. But the reason for this is the need to provide a stable framework within which people of diverse moral, religious, and political views can live together in harmony. Norton's open-ended eudaimonism would do little to obviate the need for this task. In emphasizing responsibilities over rights, the place of others' happiness in our own self-interest, and the importance of developing our latent powers, Norton has something important to say. But without a clear account of the good (or goods) that all citizens should pursue, his views provide a supplement, rather than an alternative, to existing liberal theory.

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The State: Its Nature, Development, and Prospects. By Gianfranco Poggi. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991. 214p. \$29.50 cloth, \$9.95 paper.

Gianfranco Poggi is an experienced, learned, and sophisticated political sociologist who has authored several valuable works on political theory. *The Development of the Modern State* (1978) was an impressive short history of the rise of the modern European state. Not only was it interesting for scholars because it summarized so much European, particularly German scholarship, but it was also extremely valuable as a classroom text. Undergraduates found it difficult; but it introduced them to