

Jose V. Ciprut, ed.

Ethics, Politics, and Democracy: From Primordial Principles to Prospective Practices.

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Ethics, Politics, and Democracy: From Primordial Principles to Prospective Practices, edited by Jose V. Ciprut, provides a selection of essays that were presented as part of the annual Penn State seminar cycle, *Cross Campus Conversations at Penn*. Positively, numerous essays in the volume are excellent. Negatively, though Ciprut writes in the preface that the articles are ‘intimately braided’ pieces, each ‘discerningly aware of, and discriminatingly attentive to, its others,’ this is clearly not the case. A tough decision was averted to omit thematically unsuitable and academically remiss articles. In general, however, despite the unevenness of the quality of the contributions, this book should be stimulating to those working on ethics and democratic theory.

Ciprut pens two essays, an introductory chapter outlining the contributions, and a concluding chapter discussing ethics and democracy. In the concluding chapter he poses the question that he hopes these essays have helped to answer, namely, ‘What kind of transformational ethic ought to be pursued in the twenty-first century toward a broader-encompassing, worldwide more humane mode of willed freedom and active associational democratic self-governance for all?’ (320).

Excluding these two chapters, the book, as explained by Ciprut, has three four-chapter sets. The middle and final sets work thematically fairly well. The former focuses on ethics, the latter (except for one essay) on democracy. The first ‘set’ of articles is the least cohesive. It contains a solid, if very general, overview of ancient Near Eastern social thought by Barry Eichler, one piece on medical ethics, largely listing some issues of concern in this area, and an undisciplined article on animal ethics. These latter two articles hardly fit thematically, and the volume would have been improved by omitting them. The highlight of this section is an excellent article by Paul Guyer, ‘On an Ethic of Peace Grounded on Justice: An Eighteenth-Century Voice’. It deals with a philological difficulty in Kant’s *Toward Perpetual Peace* (1795) arising from the fact that Kant argues that peace is attainable only on the basis of moral (thus free) decisions while simultaneously indicating that there is a ‘guarantee’ of achieving this peace. The quandary is that of guaranteeing a behavior that, as free, we might or might not embrace.

The next set of essays (treated here together with Chapter 13, which fits better with it thematically) deals with ethics. In ‘Ego and Ethos’ David Williams argues for a ‘new ethics’ based on existential humanistic personality theory. It builds on the ‘humanistic assumption’ that a developed person ‘favors choice of actions that are both self-actualizing and pro-social’ (144). The presentation of basic ideas of phenomenology here is excellent, and the essay is quite suggestive of ways to integrate developments of

Rogerian, Moslowian, and Eriksonian psychology into metaethics. Yet, it is not at all clear how this ethic improves on existing *normative* theories derived from Aristotle such as Nussbaum and Sen's capabilities approach or MacIntyre's virtue ethics. Nor are the metaethical considerations problem-free: for either research will bear out that the aforementioned presupposition is true, and we are psychologically better off being ethical, or it will not bear it out, in which case we will be faced with the question of whether we should do what is ethical and shun mental health or do what is mentally healthy and shun ethics. This potential dilemma highlights the need for such a position to face up to the naturalistic fallacy. Finally, the essay also exaggerates in ways typical of proclamations of 'new' ethics: it makes suggestions for metaethics—sometimes the 'new' ethics are for areas of applied ethics instead—but that probably make no difference for normative ethical theory. In any case, no difference is shown here.

Paul R. Kleindorfer, in 'Trust, Ethics, and Markets', evaluates the problems ensuing because of a loss of trust in contemporary U.S. markets. He notes failures of deregulation and market purism (such as the Exxon Valdez incident and the Enron scandal), points to various environmental injustices, and presents some results of studies on the foundation of trust and cooperation. Kleindorfer underlines that markets require cooperation and trust. His hope is that executives acquire this knowledge and regulate themselves before costly external controls are required (178).

J. J. Mulhern's 'Ethics, Morals, and the State: Rereading the Classical View' provides a valuable analysis of the antique Greek and Roman views of 'morality' and 'ethics', contrasting these views with contemporary ideas. In general, for the ancients, ethics was not so much a study of conduct as a study of things related to *ēthos* or character (186). For them, such ethical issues are inextricably related to the political, and they are to be studied with the practical intention of aiding in the development of good character (186) and a good polity. In particular, Mulhern highlights the importance of understanding that these diverse areas, including custom (Latin *mos*) and character (*ēthos*), are mutually influencing: the development of the individual's character is tied in a feedback mechanism with the customs and the development of good institutions (195ff.). For the contemporary context, Mulhern thinks it is especially important to note that it is not exclusively state institutions that are related to character formation, but that various nonstate institutions are also similarly related (196ff.).

In 'Ethics, Morality, and Religion: Directional Transitions and Trends, East and West', Don Baker provides an excellent and broad-sweeping comparison of the philosophical grounding of Eastern and Western ethics. While the Abrahamic religions fundamental in shaping Western views of morality have viewed laws as passed down from a personal God, who commands them, there has been a tendency among Eastern traditions of philosophy to emphasize that the very nature of reality entails moral norms. In Buddhism, for example, actions are wrong not because Buddha forbids them, but because they lead to greater suffering (207). So, too, Confucianism has downplayed the role of the gods, but is centered on an ethical teaching. Baker thinks that the Eastern traditions of philosophical ethics offer a compelling critique of the widespread Western view that ethics must be grounded in (theistic) religion.

Chapter 13, 'On the Need and Requirements for a Global Ethic of Communication', by Thomas W. Cooper and Clifford G. Christians, pleads for a global communication ethic. The chapter provides a somewhat discontinuous sampling of normative views from around the world that could be of relevance to a global media ethics. However, the authors' argument that we should cement one global media ethic from these is not convincing. Since media ethics is an area of applied ethics rather than a normative theory, it remains unclear why one global view might be needed. In a pluralistic world an approach to the practical problems of media ethics from plural perspectives seems more compelling. That being said, it may still be desirable to attempt to achieve enough overlapping consensus among the various normative perspectives to allow the formulation of a *code of ethics* that those from these diverse traditions might sign onto. But this is something different from the questionable global ethical system for which the Cooper and Christians argue.

The last set of essays in the volume (all of which are excellent) deal with democratic theory. In 'Exclusion, Fear, and Identity in Emerging Democracies' Jeff Spinner-Halev indicates the ways in which power relations have worked in exclusionary ways in all democracies. He also clearly discusses issues of great importance for the emergence of liberal open democratic societies.

Kevin Cameron's 'Politics of Ethics: Toward an Ethic of Egalitarian Democracy' argues that both the liberal focus on freedom and the leftist focus on egalitarianism should be understood as partisan stances toward politics. The problem, as he sees it, is that the liberal focus on freedom has succeeded in propagating itself as above partisanship. It is the default stance of existing Western governments and criticizes egalitarian movements that challenge it of being partisan and even of tending toward authoritarianism. This liberal/libertarian tradition, in Cameron's view, reflects a truncated view, failing to see that the sources of power exuded by nonstate actors are a concern of politics proper (259).

In 'The Problem of a Democratic Ethic' Richard Schuldenfrei argues that Plato still serves as a valuable guide to understanding particular problems with democracy. For Plato the discussion of democracy is tied to his typology of human character. Among the character types, Plato thinks lovers of wisdom (dominant in kingships), lovers of honor (dominant in aristocracies), and even lovers of money (dominant in oligarchies) all have a kind of discipline lacking among democrats, who are lovers of freedom; namely, they all control 'lower' desires insofar as these begin to impinge upon their main love(s), be these wisdom, honor, or money. Democrats, by contrast, view all desires as equal and all character types as equal. Because democrats lack higher aspirations, by default pleasure becomes the overriding value in society (277), and in the wake of this a democracy threatens to slide into tyranny as individuals are subdued by their desires and become susceptible to promises of a 'champion of the people' (281). Schuldenfrei argues that we should take seriously this threat; he worries 'that the constitution, which guarantees our freedom, guarantees it in a way that leaves us free to become the kind of people who will not defend our own constitution' (281). In order to prevent this degeneration, we need a

‘supplementary ethics’ that helps to protect the constitution and our freedom, one that is ‘rationally persuasive to the majority’ (282). The details of this, however, remain vague.

Though the contributions to this volume do not form a unified point of view, Ciprut, in his conclusion, indicates hope that they help clarify important contemporary political and ethical issues. In general outline, he argues for pluralism—more particularly, that in the search for a form of good life in the contemporary and globalized context, it will not due to revert to an Aristotelian pursuit of *one* overarching human good. Rather, with C. D. C. Reeve, he agrees that ‘(w)hat experience has taught us is that there are many different human goods, many different good lives’ (321). Still Ciprut assumes that self-legislative democratic rule is part of each of these. He hopes, at least, that we are moving toward a world with more inclusive democratic forms of rule (326), albeit not ‘under a one-size-fits-all label’ (324) but, instead, where both plural routes to democracy and plural forms of democracy are possible (324).

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