

a solid understanding of each field and uses his knowledge effectively in presenting a unified theory of democracy. Particularly impressive is his ability to discuss sophisticated concepts in a very accessible manner. Consequently, the value of this book is not limited to specialists. It demands the attention of anyone interested in democratic decision making.

Van Mill's project is to argue for what he terms "absolutist democracy." His book is divided into two parts. First, he considers the dispute between social choice theory and deliberative democracy. He observes that Arrow's theorem and Jürgen Habermas's theory of deliberation share very similar assumptions about what constitutes a fair decision-making process. Arrow predicts chaos in the form of cycling, while Habermas expects consensus through preference transformation. Van Mill concludes that deliberation cannot overcome the problem of cycling (Chapter 2). Consequently, one of Arrow's moral axioms must be violated if political instability is to be avoided. Van Mill contends that democracy should abandon the condition of universal domain (Chapter 3). Though seemingly unpalatable, restricting participation in the decision-making process is useful because it can ensure political stability. The task, therefore, is to find an acceptable way to reconcile freedom, equality, and coercion.

The second part of van Mill's project is to defend the violation of universal domain and the concept of majority rule. He begins by using Thomas Hobbes's idea of sovereignty to maintain that absolutism is a necessary feature of political decision making (Chapter 5). In the process, he persuasively argues that Hobbes's understanding of absolutism is compatible with democracy and does not necessarily result in tyranny. Van Mill turns next to a defense of democratic absolutism in the form of majority rule against liberal constitutionalism (Chapter 6). He concludes that democracy is best served by giving absolute political power to the people, as opposed to trusting elites or ostensibly limiting the power by institutions.

Deliberation, Social Choice, and Absolutist Democracy provides a competent analysis of the dispute between social choice theory and deliberative democracy, along with a provocative discussion of Hobbes's political theory. One of most valuable aspects of van Mill's book is its emphasis on the limits of democratic decision making. Social choice theory and deliberative democracy offer idealized understandings of democracy. In practice, however, ideals have to be compromised to achieve political stability. Absolutism, in particular, cannot be avoided. Consequently, democratic theory must find a way to "walk the tightrope between freedom and stability" (p. 72).

The concept of majority rule has been challenged most notably by theories of guardianship, constitutionalism, and, more recently, social choice. In the first two cases, majoritarian advocates have already provided forceful if not persuasive responses. Previous rejoinders to the social choice

critique of majority rule have typically tried to overcome the problem of cycling through deliberation or by dismissing its practical relevance. In contrast, both McGann and van Mill accept the findings of Arrow's theorem and simultaneously defend majority rule. This approach is both innovative and valuable. It also demonstrates, once again, the robustness of majoritarianism.

Reflexive Democracy: Political Equality and the Welfare State. By Kevin Olson. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006. 288p. \$35.00.

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Recent work on the welfare state has largely focused on the role of welfare programs in state economies—their redistributive functions and their role in managing incentives for work. *Reflexive Democracy* marks a much-needed shift in focus, offering an analysis and then a reconstruction of the relationship between welfare programs and citizen participation.

Kevin Olson describes his project as an attempt to reconceptualize welfare using political rather than redistributive criteria. This is an ambitious undertaking in which he largely succeeds. To begin, he wants to "reveal deep-seated egalitarian norms at the heart of the welfare state—norms derived not from economic, but political equality" (p. 7). This empirical analysis then serves as the basis for "carefully reconfigured ideals of political equality, democratic legitimacy and citizenship" (p. 7). As is consistent with the tradition of work influenced by Jürgen Habermas, Olson is committed to realizing the normative project through a critical analysis of social and political practice.

At the root of Olson's reconstruction is a fairly straightforward claim about the material bases of democratic equality. Because there is a demonstrable relationship between economic disadvantage and political participation, if we take seriously our commitment to democracy we must take equally seriously our need to support a welfare state that provides the relative equality and security that appear to be a precondition for it. The author demonstrates the depth of his commitment to democracy when he further argues that we must make participation central to the construction and regulation of welfare programs as well. Yet his is not so much an argument that it is "democracy all the way down" as it is an argument that it is democracy all the way around—that is, he avoids the foundationalist dilemma, taking existing practices, specifically the contradictory nature of such practices, as an immanent source of critique.

This is a key attraction of Olson's work—his normative claims for participation emerge not from a purely philosophical reflection but rather from citizen's actual practices, and are the result of neither philosophical nor political imposition. Olson anticipates the question that naturally

arises next: In what sense is a project that sees itself as “revealing” already existing deep-seated egalitarian norms that “arise from citizen’s actual practice” a *critical* project? The critical force of his argument rests on his ability to persuasively draw the distinction between his notion of reflexivity and mere circularity: “It [reflexivity] holds up a mirror to those societies without simply reflecting back the image they are used to seeing. The mirror in this case reveals widespread distortions in our internalized self-image. We see ourselves as democratic, egalitarian societies created for the mutual benefit of all members. Yet we systematically ignore inconsistencies in this view, particularly the extent to which some voices are allowed to dominate political and cultural discussions while others remain quiet” (p. 202). Reflexivity, then, seems to rely on some mechanism for holding people accountable to reconcile their contradictions or distortions.

Olson suggests a potential site of such “reflexivity” as he reviews both historical work and contemporary work on citizen attitudes toward equality. In the American context, Jennifer Hochschild’s (1981) *What’s Fair? American Beliefs about Distributive Justice* and Martin Gilens’s (1999) *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy* provide work that Olson sees as suggesting the complexity and “confusion of people’s intuitions about equality” (p. 193). Survey research suggests that the vast majority of Americans incorrectly depict welfare recipients as predominantly African American, and Gilens links their reluctance to support Temporary Assistance for Needy Families programs to racist attitudes about the work ethic. Hochschild’s interview work demonstrates both the strength of American commitments to an egalitarian norm in political life and Americans’ resistance to it in economic life. Such attitudes, to be consistent, require strong boundary distinctions between the political and economic spheres—boundary distinctions that are difficult to defend in the face of research on participation that illustrates, for example, a significant inverse relationship between income and political participation.

Olson explores both the more immediate and the long-standing consequences of this relationship: unequal voice and unequal “capabilities” for participatory engagement. Reflexive democracy would remedy these inequalities with a more expansive understanding of social rights, as necessary features of equal citizenship and not merely contingent upon empirically demonstrable disadvantage, and with a participatory ideal that maintains two core commitments: 1) the use of agency-supporting policies to *promote* participation and 2) the idea that agency-supporting policies should *result* from participation (p. 98). Ultimately, a reflexive democratic state “allows citizens to become equal in their cooperative interdependence. . . . [It is] centered on promoting agency rather than simply equalizing the possession of goods and resources” (p. 20).

The conceptual interconnections among the participatory ideal, democratic legitimacy, and citizenship are admirably negotiated in Olson’s work. Yet I think he may, in light of his commitment to a political justification for the welfare state, have incurred a debt to extend his analysis. The development of reflexive democracy and of institutions and laws to remedy existing inequalities hinges on making contradictions, many of which have an enduring history, unendurable. This is ultimately a political project. Calling attention to the contradictory nature of our commitments to equality without also attending to the ways these contradictions have been maintained leaves much of the work of restructuring the welfare state undone.

While the justificatory framework for Olson’s argument is both persuasive and useful, his argument for change would be strengthened with a closer consideration of the way systems of structural privilege not only thwart the development of some capabilities but also shape motivations and interests consistent with maintaining patterns of exclusion and nonparticipation, as well as fostering alternative sites for and patterns of participation. He frames his own critique of the existing welfare state around patterns of convergence between disadvantage and nonparticipation. Yet as some more recent empirical work on the welfare state suggests, patterns of participation on the part of the disadvantaged are complicated (e.g., see Joe Soss, *Unwanted Claims: The Politics of Participation in the U.S. Welfare System*, 2000; John Gilliom, *Overseers of the Poor*, 2001). Work like this does not undermine Olson’s vision of reflexive democracy. It supplements its central strength: connecting our normative claims to citizen’s actual practices. *Reflexive Democracy* makes a critical contribution to our rethinking of these practices.

Liberty Beyond Neo-Liberalism: A Republican Critique of Liberal Governance in a Globalizing

Age. By Steven Slaughter. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. 272p. \$75.00.

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Mainstream accounts define globalization as two connected processes. The first is the relentless increase in the interrelation of economic actors. The second is growing recognition of the superiority of “market forces” over state intervention in the economy. Free markets are seen as “natural” forces or “iron laws” of economics that only the economically illiterate or perhaps the insane would limit. Among the many impressive contributions made by Steven Slaughter is the distinction between what he calls “globalization” and “economic globalization.” The former, he argues, is the growing interdependence of economic actors that appears to be an inherent aspect of capitalist development. The latter, however, denotes the contingent