

ment of our living with plural others, of our commitment to persuasion in lieu of force when we encounter differences that must be negotiated in order for us to continue living side by side” (p. 111).

Democracy, says McGowan, “as a mode of association is measured by the quality of the public interactions among citizens” (p. xxiv). What matters is the act of deliberating, rather than the outcomes of this deliberation. This latter claim is dubious, at least in some formulations. The author does not appear, here, to take seriously the possibility that quality deliberation can produce a commitment to the vision of society that looks more like the Right’s than the Left’s ideal. In any case, his goal is to offer a program for action for the Left, and in his formulation, the New Left politics must find a way to emphasize what we have in common, as social beings inhabiting a political and social space together, to work cooperatively toward building a better future, where we are able and willing to communicate across the differences that only apparently divide us. Our challenges, and the remedies to these challenges, are necessarily collective.

The resources on which McGowan relies are impressive. He draws capaciously from pragmatist political theory, as well as from a wealth of additional traditions. Scholars seeking a detailed evaluation of any one particular scholar or tradition will be disappointed and perhaps frustrated by the quick dismissal of some theorists (Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson’s work on deliberative democracy, for example, pp. 112–13), by the reduction of entire traditions to a few sentences (left egalitarian political theory, for example, pp. 93–94), and by the easy adoption of the central ideas of others. But this minor vice is also one of the book’s significant virtues: It successfully tells a plausible and important story by drawing on resources from across a range of theoretical endeavors.

McGowan’s explanation for the failure of American citizens to act in politics is perhaps the weakest part of the book. The author points to evidence that Americans are dissatisfied with the political system; they are alienated and isolated from the political representatives who govern them. Yet, he says, they remain tremendously active at the local level; they are trying more than ever to create the conditions under which the lives they live are meaningful and valuable (pp. 113–14). McGowan blames the American Left for failing to tell a persuasive story, a story that will draw Americans into political life to fight for progressive values. Yet we are offered few insights into why it is that these Americans, *increasingly* active at the local level, fail to find a way to make inroads into national politics, and why they instead are withdrawing from national political life. Americans’ participation in civic life “illustrate[s] citizens’ power to get things done,” but this “contrasts strongly with the pale and abstract forms of political participation currently on offer” (p. 114). What explains this disjuncture? And why do citizens who are powerful in the

local sphere not share the blame for the failure of American politics to move in progressive ways? Neither of these questions is broached satisfactorily in McGowan’s story.

Part of the explanation is connected to the specific social relations in which citizens are embedded. Citizens’ political focus is on those who are nearest to them. The challenge, McGowan proposes, is to redirect their gaze and their imagination to the broader American community—that is the point of emphasizing the importance of communicating across difference. But achieving communication across difference is easier said than done; we need a story about how we get there. The author dismisses the deliberative democratic emphasis on identifying and then relying on publically acceptable reasons as a way to bind those who are otherwise different (pp. 112–13), but offers too little in its place. The *point* of pragmatism is that it is possible to expand the boundaries of our community, and our sense of what is possible within it, but we are still left without a concrete program for achieving this expansion at the conclusion of *Pragmatist Politics*. Deliberation appears to be what McGowan has in mind. Ultimately, however, he displays an optimism in the power of deliberation to bridge differences that may be unwarranted; at the very least, we need to hear more about the conditions under which deliberation can produce the unity that he desires.

These are minor complaints, however, about what is a beautifully written, persuasively argued book on democratic renewal in contemporary America.

Property-Owning Democracy: Rawls and Beyond.

Edited by Martin O’Neill and Thad Williamson. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012. 336p. \$89.95.
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— Keith Dowding, *Australian National University*

John Rawls has dominated political philosophy since the publication of *A Theory of Justice* in 1971. One reason, perhaps, is that his arguments there and in subsequent books are notoriously ambiguous, and so there is plenty of room for interpretations and thus interpreters. To left-leaning critics, Rawls was an apologist for contemporary welfare capitalism; when Rawls restated his position in 1991, however, it turned out that he was not, but rather wanted a radical new “property-owning democracy” (POD). As the essays in this collection make clear, however, POD too is ambiguous. Rawls adopted the idea from the left-wing economist James Meade but, as Ben Jackson’s chapter makes clear, POD was, and without the welfare provisions of welfare capitalism can still be, an idea of the Right. Many of the chapters in the book contrast the possibilities of POD with those of welfare-oriented state intervention under more traditional capitalist arrangements.

The late Rawls’s objection to welfare capitalism is that vast inequalities in wealth and power do not allow for social justice. Unregulated capitalism leads to massive

inequalities, rendering social justice impossible, even if a welfare state exists to redistribute some of those resources. Redistribution might ensure an end to poverty, but this will do little to stop the owners of capital from dominating politically. The early chapters in the book examine these claims philosophically.

Simone Chambers argues that Rawls's theory of justice is radical, requiring a revolution to bring it about. This sits uneasily with Rawls's process of public reason for overlapping consensus. After all, while capitalism might be criticized, it is surely not unreasonable to maintain the current dominant thesis that individuals should be personally responsible for their own welfare. In other words, it is not obvious that the difference principle would constitute an overlapping consensus. Several of the contributors suggest, therefore, that the difference principle needs to be hard-wired into a constitution. It cannot be up for grabs. Alan Thomas suggests so when defending Rawls against G.A. Cohen's criticism that the difference principle is incompatible with the egalitarian ethos underpinning justice as fairness. Stuart White suggests an ethos of republican citizenship of public duty and engagement is required rather than Rawls's liberal presuppositions. While both Thomas and White make a case for POD, it is not clear that their arguments really demonstrate that justice as fairness requires POD rather than welfare capitalism. Nien-hê Hsieh provides one reason, when he suggests that the existence of passive welfare recipients does not allow for equal self-respect. If everyone is a property-owner with the chance to take responsibility for oneself then equal respect is attainable. Like so many political philosophers today, Hsieh seems to assume that meaningful work is a necessary component of a good life. In reality, for many people, work is simply what brings home the bacon (of course, work conditions can be good or bad, and colleagues annoying or congenial), while meaning is provided by other aspects of life—family, sport, hobbies. It is not clear that respect and self-respect can come about only if one is a property-holder or has a job one considers worthwhile.

Cory Brettschneider looks to fundamental issues of the right to own property, arguing that private property can be just only if everyone is guaranteed a livelihood. In his chapter he does not fully engage with a radical version of POD, since he envisages a state where some will not own property but still have the basic elements of a right to welfare. More is required to justify a right for all to own a broadly equal amount of property. But again the emphasis is on self-reliance for self-respect.

Ingrid Robeyns takes a rather different line. She suggests that POD could increase gender inequality if it enables people to turn their assets into an indefinite income stream, allowing people to withdraw from the labor market. She argues that any defensible care regime will be costly and require a mix of labor market regulations, welfare provisions and state services. While her case does

not undermine POD itself, it does suggest that gender equality requires a substantial state welfare system—unless, that is, we rely upon the slender stem of a shared egalitarian ethos. Waheed Hussain likewise argues that a liberal democratic POD locks people into economic competition, but a welfare corporatist version, as evidenced by public attitudes in such societies, leads people to more public-spirited attitudes. Once again, the argument is that POD requires the welfare state rather than being a stand-alone alternative to welfare state capitalism. David Schweickart compares POD to his own preferred account of democratic market socialism.

Other arguments presented in the book examine the plausibility or political feasibility of POD as opposed to creating a fairer redistributive welfare system. Thad Williamson suggests a fairly modest redistribution from the richest to the poorest US citizens would allow all to be property owners in housing, money, and stock. He does not model the effects of such redistributions on their relative value, however, nor consider transfers across people even with such tax-induced forced redistributions. More modest basic income or stakes is the subject of Sonia Sodha's contribution, though again how close this comes to POD or whether it is just another welfare system inside capitalism is moot.

While individually all the chapters in this book display a high standard of reasoning and argument, together they have an air of incompleteness. The general theme is the relationship between property-owning democracy and Rawlsian social justice. Can POD, and only POD, provide for the sort of justice Rawls wants, or is capitalism with welfare provision, full-blown market socialism, or only a society with a strong and stable egalitarian ethos or republican values capable of delivering justice as fairness? The problem is that no demonstration of such a relationship between institutional forms and such general theory is possible.

One reason for the incompleteness of these philosophical considerations of the nature of constitution for Rawlsian social justice is that the institutional details of general ideal formulations of such constitutions in fact play a vital role in generating social justice. The issue is not so much capitalism versus welfare-provision, or wide property owning versus state ownership, but rather what specific welfare provisions are required given different regulatory systems. And the different regulatory systems might well operate differently when subject to specific economic conditions. For example, historically, agricultural primogeniture clearly provided greater economic growth than more egalitarian distributions of land, which tended to pauperize communities over time. The difference principle might be applied here, with primogeniture alongside welfare redistribution. But what exactly does this tell us about modern asset holding? Is higher growth maintained now only through restricted inheritance? The answer, to say the least, is not obvious. Nor indeed is whether high growth rates are something we should still find desirable. The shift

from general ideal theory to institutional form is too big for one essay, or even one book. Perhaps it is better to keep general theory and institutional details apart. General theory can provide a background, but the specific mechanics of institutions and how they interact with responsibility, welfare, or equality are questions that cannot be regarded as instantiations of general theory.

Choices Women Make: Agency in Domestic Violence, Assisted Reproduction, and Sex Work.

By Carisa R. Showden. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011. 312p. \$75.00 cloth, \$25.00 paper.
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— Nichole M. Shippen, *LaGuardia Community College*

Carisa Showden's book is an ambitious and innovative feminist project that draws upon multiple theoretical frameworks, including feminist political and legal theory, phenomenological theory, and poststructural theory to move feminist understandings of women's agency beyond the modern/postmodern debate over subjectivity as either self-determined or socially constructed. In her analysis, Showden demonstrates how at the practical level, women's expressions of agency refuse such easy categorization of either self-determined agent or powerless victim. Situating agency not only structurally but temporally, she demonstrates the complex and varied nature of women's agency, which she sees as intimately related to the development of subjectivities that are in constant processes of becoming, not in isolation but in relations with others. In doing so, the author identifies the major weakness of the traditional liberal understanding of the relationship between autonomy and freedom that conceives of subjects as fixed entities that either possess agency or do not, which too often leads to the conclusion that there is a "right" choice to be made regardless of context. She demonstrates that this faulty assumption remains highly problematic since it continues to inform public policies that directly impact women's lives.

Showden defines agency as "a product of both autonomy (the individual capacity to act) and freedom (the conditions that facilitate action)" (p. ix). Her unique combination of theoretical approaches captures the myriad aspects of agency originating from the dialectical relationship between the subject and the conditions that shape the subject and her self-understanding to the development of agency as "both a process and a capacity that is shaped by subjects' temporal and relational circumstances" (p. ix). She argues that her combined theoretical approach to women's agency captures a more accurate portrayal of the imperfect realities of women's lives, which in turn validates their expressions of agency more than any one theoretical model alone.

In her analysis of domestic violence, for example, Showden argues that the legal system "guided by fundamental tenets of liberal individualism . . . makes it diffi-

cult for feminist lawmakers and legal advocates to get courts, prosecutors, and legislators to see the structural, extenuating factors shaping women's responses to violent relationships" (p. 47). She highlights the fact that the "victim" of domestic violence is often considered to exercise agency only when she leaves the abusive relationship because this behavior embodies the liberal model of the rational actor. In other words, choices women make in the context of domestic violence are often perceived as those of either victim or agent, and the possibility is not considered that claiming victim status is very often the first step toward leaving abusive relationships. In fact, women do leave abusive relationships, and the author traces examples of women developing the "internal capacities for autonomy" over time, which explains why it takes a woman an average of six to eight times to leave an abusive domestic relationship (p. 37).

To avoid criticisms of essentialism, Showden attempts to be as inclusive as possible by offering a range of multiple and cross-cutting identities that make up the category "woman." For example, she persuasively demonstrates that simply having language interpreters in domestic violence shelters is not enough to actually help South Asian women, who may not speak about domestic violence in the same terms as native English speakers due to cultural differences in their communities. Finally, "failed" agency may be a form of resistance that simply was not successful due to structural failures rather than the individual's lack of agency (p. 75). As Showden argues, "whether or not her acts count as agentic only ever gets judged by the outcome, rather than also by the web of conflicting demands and constraints that led to her choices" (p. 77). In effect, then, she develops the argument that agency is always "partial and constrained" (p. 40).

While her criteria for judging agency are decidedly based in feminist politics, Showden never explicitly identifies the feminist political tradition or tradition(s) in which she grounds herself. What she offers instead are "abstract, guiding norms" based on "recognition, redistribution, and political inclusion" (pp. 34–35). She seeks to make the feminist understanding of agency more generous by demonstrating the various ways women express agency. This understandable reluctance to deny agency to any woman leaves her reader with either a more meaningful and flexible understanding of women's agency or an apolitical understanding of women's resistance precisely because it is not grounded in any specific political tradition. Although she argues that "[o]ne cannot simply say that anything a person does is evidence of agency" (p. xiii), she never gives the reader a firm way of making political judgments about whether or not a woman's expression of agency is furthering the project of feminism to end intersectional forms of oppression. What she does offer is the following: "The primary criterion for whether one is an agent must be whether one's actions foreclose other possibilities, not