

in the Protestant Christian tradition—in favor of a more abstract “Platonic” foundation. This is a particular Plato whose references to the religious character of philosophy are taken to be defensive camouflage. Here Gottfried is close to the alternative interpretation of Plato offered by Eric Voegelin (see pp. 73–87). For a thousand years, “Platonism and theology were inseparable for both Plato’s pagan and Christian proponents. Why should Strauss’s reading be assigned more credence than what Plato’s students and their students believed they had learned from their teacher?” (p. 135, fn. 8).

Strauss’s outlook opposes neither the growth of government in the modern welfare state nor the aggressive projection of American power to remake the world. It is an open question how far Strauss cared for customary constitutional restraints on political power. “According to Strauss, only a reunion of philosophy and politics in pursuit of Justice could help the modern West reverse its path toward nihilism” (p. 50); “Strauss generally viewed revealed religion, from classical Greece onward, as extraneous and occasionally harmful to the philosophical enterprise” (p. 51). Gottfried thinks that Strauss’s critique of modern rationalism went only so far; in fact, “[Strauss’s] thinking about the Greeks indicates (to this reader) a modern rationalist perspective in his understanding of Greek philosophy” (p. 52).

Gottfried concludes that Straussians are “clannish and defensive,” “not engaged in open dialectic as much as they are battling Evil”; nevertheless, they have achieved “limited good” (pp. 154–7). They have enriched the study of politics and of the history of political thought and have defended a humanistic approach to that study. Yet, Gottfried insists, the Straussian aim is ultimately practical: “to reshape a national party . . . to design a prodemocratic foreign policy” (p. 170). Except to the old Right, this might sound like praise. Gottfried’s Strauss turns out to be a more or less mainstream liberal. This densely argued book adds to the debate over Strauss and his legacy by its comprehensive assessment and its argumentative stance. It is worth serious reflection.

Pragmatist Politics: Making the Case for Liberal Democracy. By John McGowan. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012. 264p. \$75.00 cloth, \$25.00 paper.

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— Patti Tamara Lenard, *University of Ottawa*

Although John McGowan does not present it this way, *Pragmatist Politics* has two distinctive projects. One offers a revitalized account of pragmatist politics, so that it is better able to cope with contemporary political challenges. The second offers an account of liberal democracy’s ethos, which can serve to underpin the transformative politics McGowan believes should be adopted by the American Left in its attempt to rejuvenate collective political

life in the United States. Both are motivated by frustration at the American Left’s inability to find a “story” that will capture the hearts and souls of Americans in ways that might encourage political action toward remedying contemporary ills, and both are timely and critically important.

American social and political life is riddled with egregious inequalities, which effectively deny millions of Americans genuine access to the political sphere. Whereas a democracy truly committed to being inclusive—as recommended by the pragmatist political tradition—will find ways to reduce or eliminate inequalities that prevent citizens from accessing the public sphere on fair terms, American democracy is teeming with inequalities—the result of a “ruthless capitalism” that characterizes contemporary America—that erode the sense of community and cooperation on which genuine liberal democracy rests (p. 174). Without a remedy for these inequalities, the liberal democratic ethos that McGowan seeks will struggle to emerge.

The *blame* for liberal democracy’s struggles can be jointly apportioned between the American Right and the American Left. The American Right has been successful in constructing the conditions under which the “public sphere has been emptied and the public treasury plundered by the most privileged,” who in turn have “abdicated all responsibility for the general welfare while avoiding all participation in the commons” (p. 173). But the American Left has failed, also. It has failed to step into the fracas, to take up effectively the banner on behalf of those who are doing less well as a result of the Right’s successes. The American Right has “has eaten the left’s lunch over the past fifty years” (p. 178), which is especially frustrating because the Left knows the policies that must be pursued to protect the inclusivity that pragmatism advocates—“vigorous state regulation and progressive, redistributive tax policies” (p. 178)—but it has failed to offer an account of why Americans should endorse these policies. Says McGowan, the liberal Left “has not made a persuasive case for its vision of the good society” (p. 179); to do so it must offer citizens “plausible visions of an alternative future, visions that can inspire fearful (and rightfully so) citizens to demand more” (p. 50).

Pragmatism, properly reinterpreted, can provide the tools for underpinning a revitalized leftist politics that might be able to capture the imagination of disenchanting American citizens. Over the course of the book, McGowan highlights three features of the pragmatist tradition that require emphasis in any revitalized political movement: 1) Individuals are necessarily social beings, who define themselves in relation to others (pp. 3, 14) and who form goals and purposes in relation to the communities in which they live (p. 84). 2) Political (and other) progress is possible and desirable, but not certain (p. 60), even as perfection is a pipe dream. 3) Communication across difference is *the* democratic objective. Communication is central to democracy because “it is the basis for our acknowledge-

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.

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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