

**Rethinking Democracy: Freedom and Social Cooperation in Politics,
Economy, and Society.**



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BOOK REVIEWS

No doubt it is true that an automaton who blindly follows rules would not seem the best model for moral agency. To that extent, Wallace's preference for active reasoning over passive obedience is acceptable. It will be obvious to most, however, that common moral theories do not in any obvious sense involve this sort of passivity. Anyone who has tried to follow precepts of utilitarianism, Kantianism, or intuitionism must have found his rational capacities actively involved. Each of these has questions, difficulties, and ambiguities of its own which deny the possibility of any simple and automatic adherence. Practical reasoning in this sphere is a difficult, reflective, and certainly active process.

In Wallace's second sense, however, the most active of these agents may seem passive. If active practical reasoning is taken to be exclusively creative, where an agent develops his own morals without any explicit or implicit reference to underlying justificatory principles, then by that definition these theories do not admit of active practical reasoning. They merely require the endless strategic and evaluative struggle of guiding one's actions by the principles one has accepted as supreme. But this latter way of distinguishing passive from active reasoning, while it may show traditional agents to be passive, clearly needs defense. Wallace is caught in that familiar bind: a convincing distinction between the passive reasoning of slaves and the active reasoning of moral agents does not exclude traditional moral theories, while a distinction between passive and active reasoning which does exclude traditional moral theories is not convincing.

Wallace's idea is, I think, a truly interesting one. In this book, however, he does not develop or defend it enough to make it more than an intriguing suggestion. If he returns to the subject his further ruminations might well be a benefit to philosophers.

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RETHINKING DEMOCRACY: FREEDOM AND SOCIAL COOPERATION IN POLITICS, ECONOMY, AND SOCIETY. By CAROL C. GOULD. New York, Cambridge University Press, 1988. Pp. x, 363.

With this work Carol Gould presents a noteworthy contribution to the theory of democracy. The book provides a sustained argument for extending the institutions of democratic self-regulation beyond the sphere of politics into economic self-management; and it provides a careful reconsideration of most of the strands of democratic theorizing that have un-

folded in the past several decades. Gould's arguments are grounded in a theory of positive human freedom that owes much to Marx's early writings, but is responsive as well to a wide spectrum of recent writings on freedom.

The central argument is that democracy depends ultimately on the right of self-development, and that this right has far-reaching consequences for most of the arrangements of modern social life. In particular, Gould argues that the values of self-development and positive freedom mandate economic democracy and workers' self-management. But she also extends her analysis into the theory of human rights (chapter 7), the management of technology (chapter 10), the democratic personality (chapter 11), and the implications of democratic theory for international relations (chapter 12). The breadth of the book, and the variety of topics which it considers, precludes a complete discussion here; so I will focus on several topics of central interest.

Gould's argument is grounded on her theory of freedom as self-development. She characterizes this conception as "the freedom to develop oneself through one's actions, or as a process of realizing one's projects through activity in the course of which one forms one's character and develops capacities" (p. 40). This conception involves several dimensions: capacity for choice, absence of constraining conditions, and the availability of means (p. 40). Joining the old debate over positive and negative freedom, Gould attempts to show that the value of individual self-development within reciprocal social relations entails a right to a family of positive freedoms.

Coordinate with freedom, on Gould's account, is the value of equality. Equality too depends on the conditions of self-development. "I shall argue here that justice should be interpreted as a principle of equal rights to the conditions of self-development, or equal positive freedom" (p. 60). (She returns to two paradoxes that appear to flow from this conception in chapter 5.) The other basic value that Gould develops is reciprocity. At its core, reciprocity refers to "the reciprocal recognition [by persons] of their equal agency" (p. 72). This conception goes beyond the instrumental reciprocity described by Robert Axelrod and others, in that it involves each agent's taking seriously some of the interests of other agents—what Gould refers to as "common interests." Common aims are those "whose achievement realizes a common good or satisfies a common interest, which is not merely an aggregation of particular goods or individual interests" (pp. 74–75).

The requirement that political and economic institutions be arranged democratically flows from these conceptions of freedom and equality, according to Gould. She argues for a regulative principle of democracy: "every person who engages in a common activity with others has an equal

right to participate in making decisions concerning such activity” (p. 84). This principle has implications for both political and economic arrangements. In politics Gould argues that decision making should be participatory when possible and representative when not. And economic institutions should be based on a principle of self-management.

Gould’s account of economic justice and worker self-management is probably her most important theme. She holds that a serious shortcoming of most contemporary theories of justice is their sole focus on distributive outcomes. Gould argues, however, that the particular arrangements and decision-making processes that give rise to the distributive outcomes are equally the subject of the theory of justice. In particular, the requirements of democracy, freedom, and equality have implications for the organization of economic activity. “I propose a conception of economic justice in which the right to participate in economic decision-making in the production process, that is, workers’ self-management, is understood as a requirement of justice” (p. 133). Gould requires that self-management be focused at the level of the firm: workers within a given unit of production make the decisions concerning “planning and organization of production, . . . as well as rates of production, allocation of work, working hours, work discipline” (p. 144); and workers within a given unit would determine income and investment policy as well.

Gould appears to regard these requirements as embodying the central concerns of democratic socialism because they abolish the exploitation of labor by capital. However, the arrangements Gould describes are compatible with continuing exploitation—in this case, exploitation of labor-intensive industries by capital-intensive industries. Here John Roemer’s general theory of exploitation is applicable: It is not the market in labor power but rather the differential distribution of property that gives rise to exploitation (*A General Theory of Exploitation and Class* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982)). So if we imagine an economy populated by worker-managed firms in which there are unequal capital endowments per worker, and if we suppose that each firm aims to maximize its rate of profit, then on Roemer’s line of reasoning, we should expect that resource-rich firms will derive incomes above the social average, while resource-poor firms will derive below-average incomes. This circumstance presents a problem for any theory of decentralized market socialism, but it is a particular problem for Gould because she appears to assume that the economic institutions she describes preclude exploitation.

Some mention should be made here of Gould’s view of the proper method of justification for political philosophy. She holds that an ethical theory may be justified or criticized through consideration of the “social ontology” on which it depends: the assumptions about human nature and social relations that are presupposed by the theory. In this way Gould

BOOK REVIEWS

hopes to steer a course between foundationalism and subjectivism in ethics (pp. 114ff.). This approach requires that we evaluate the social ontology presupposed by alternative ethical theories, and choose that theory with the most satisfactory social ontology. It would appear, however, that Gould attaches too much justificatory strength to considerations of social ontology. She writes, for example, that “the value of reciprocity has its ontological ground in the relational character of individuals, specifically, their interdependence in realizing their projects and satisfying their needs” (p. 131). The latter characteristic, however, could equally be said to ground a Smithian model of rationally self-interested individuals realizing their shared interests through a market mechanism. Gould’s social ontology does not uniquely determine a particular set of values—whether freedom, equality, reciprocity, or democracy. And presumably there are other social ontologies that are equally compatible with these values. So it appears that the social ontology gambit does not take us very far in terms of justifying a particular moral theory.

Rethinking Democracy is a substantial addition to the literature on democracy and democratic socialism. Gould offers powerful arguments for the extension of democratic institutions to the economy and the workplace. The detailed engagement with contemporary debates within political theory is impressive, and the developed theory of freedom and democracy that Gould puts forward will warrant serious attention by political philosophers.

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THE RATIONAL FOUNDATIONS OF ETHICS. By T. L. S. SPRIGGE. New York, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988. Pp. x, 283.

This is an interesting but peculiar book. It is ostensibly directed at two main questions about the metaphysics and epistemology of ethics: (i) Do moral judgments “possess objective truth or falsehood?” and (ii) Is there a rational method for deciding whether to accept a moral judgment, use of which will tend in the long run to produce convergence of moral opinion? (pp. 1, 9). However, the discussion is much more wide-ranging than this ostensible focus might suggest. Sprigge discusses a large number of interesting issues at the foundations of ethics, but their bearing, if any, on the two central issues of the book is rarely explained explicitly.