



of all theory, rather than a flaw of Rawls's particular instance of it. If that is so, then Freedman is moving towards a criticism, not simply of the narrowness or inappropriateness, or unreality, of Rawls, but of political theory as a species of thinking about politics.

Freedman concludes this selection by speculating, tantalizingly briefly, on whether, since thinking is an activity, the conventional thought/action distinction might be replaced. He does not pursue the point. Perhaps though the proliferation of hints and allusions, as well as of more substantially pursued arguments, is a necessary and desirable characteristic of a body of work that, by its very refusal of rigid system, continuously raises new and important questions of both interpretation and theory.

Rodney Barker
Department of Government,
London School of Economics, UK.

Identity in Democracy

Amy Gutmann

Princeton University Press, Princeton & Oxford, 2003, 246 pp.

ISBN: 0 691 09652 X.

Contemporary Political Theory (2006) **5**, 103–105. doi:10.1057/palgrave.cpt.9300219

Amy Gutmann's *Identity in Democracy* is a recent addition to the important and continually expanding volume of scholarship dedicated to examining and effectively responding to the conceptual and practical challenges associated with 'identity politics' in contemporary liberal democracies. In this erudite and interesting study, Gutmann employs normative arguments and empirical evidence to reveal 'the good, the bad, and the ugly of identity politics' (p. 37). In the course of doing so, she hopes to provide a useful answer to the following question: How is the achievement and maintenance of democratic justice — understood as a combination of civic equality, individual liberty, and equality of opportunity — either facilitated or hindered by the presence of identity groups and their active involvement in the political process, and what can be done to help minimize the ability of such groups to impede the realization of such a goal?

According to Gutmann, neither the proponents nor the opponents of identity groups have yet successfully articulated the complex relationship between such groups and democracy. The actual role of identity groups in democratic politics has been problematically ignored by political scientists and



subjected to exaggerated criticism by popular commentators. The result is that ‘both academic and popular discourse’ have neglected to engage certain ‘basic questions about the political ethics of identity groups in democracy’ (p. 3). With *Identity in Democracy*, Gutmann hopes to redress that deficiency.

It is impossible to do justice to Gutmann’s study within the confines of this brief review. I will therefore restrict my efforts to reiterating certain conclusions essential to gaining a general understanding of her argument.

Gutmann begins by outlining what she considers to be a number of critical features of identity politics that have yet to be properly understood or analysed. Foremost among such features is the distinctive character of identity groups. Existing discourse has failed to offer a satisfactory definition of identity groups; in particular, it typically neglects to distinguish between identity groups and interest groups. According to Gutmann, the defining difference between the two is that, whereas the latter emerge solely as a consequence of a shared instrumental goal that precedes their formation, the former arise because of a mutual identification (voluntary or otherwise) among individuals who share certain social markers, such as gender, race, class, ethnicity, nationality, religion, disability, sexual orientation, age, or ideology.

Though ‘identity and interests are often closely intertwined’ (p. 12) and identity groups might and often do pursue self-interests, it is, Gutmann argues, incorrect to reduce such groups to mere instruments whose establishment and maintenance is solely for the purpose of furthering such interests. She notes that, unlike interest groups, many identity groups — such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), for example — also *purposefully* pursue the interests of non-members.

Also absent from the debate is the acknowledgment that no single identity group can effectively represent the ‘entire person’; individuals may and generally do identify with others for a number of reasons beyond those captured by a single identity group.

In order to demonstrate both the significance of the above-noted deficiencies and the value of rectifying them, Gutmann distinguishes four different types of identity groups present in contemporary liberal democracies — cultural (e.g. the Pueblo, the Basques, the Old Order Amish), voluntary (e.g. the Jaycees, the Boy Scouts, the Knights of Columbus), ascriptive (e.g. NAACP, the National Organization for Women), and religious (e.g. Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Christians) — and explores certain political controversies and court cases associated with each. For example, she critiques the willingness of theorists and judges alike to both presume ‘that culture shapes individual identity in a comprehensive way’ (p. 39) and, subsequently, to assign political and legal primacy to the claims of the group, rather than to their individual members, thereby, ironically, allowing cultural identity groups to limit the freedom and opportunity of their members inequitably.



Gutmann concludes that identity groups are intrinsically neither good nor bad for democratic politics. When their presence serves to combat negative stereotypes and provides a vehicle for the effective political engagement and influence of disadvantaged people, identity groups can help facilitate the realization of the ideal of democracy. However, identity can also be employed as a weapon to undermine the pursuit and achievement of democratic justice, as when the Ku Klux Klan or Moral Majority promote intolerance and oppression of certain races and those who embrace alternative lifestyles. Not surprisingly, trying to determine 'reasonable' and generally acceptable criteria to distinguish between identity groups that should be encouraged *vs* those that should be discouraged can be an extremely difficult and, indeed, ugly task. Yet, democratic justice requires that such determinations be made. For Gutmann, the presence of identity groups and their active involvement in democratic politics becomes unacceptably problematic only when such groups assign primacy to the advancement of their own particular interests regardless of whether doing so may impede the pursuit and attainment of socio-political justice and peace.

The preceding summary offers only the briefest of overviews of some of Gutmann's central arguments. *Identity in Democracy* constitutes a thoughtful and provocative analysis of the relationship between identity groups and democratic justice in contemporary liberal democracies. In an era when the interaction between identity and democracy seems to be increasing both in frequency and importance, Gutmann's book admirably demonstrates the complicated relationship between the two. Further, though Gutmann is a political theorist by vocation, there is much in this text that will be of interest to scholars and practitioners in a variety of disciplines, including, for example, law and sociology. Not all readers will be persuaded to agree with each of Gutmann's substantive judgments, but no one will be left without food for thought.

Shaun P. Young
York University, Canada.

The Politics of Property. Labour, Freedom and Belonging

Laura Brace

Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2004, viii + 256pp.

ISBN: 0 7486 1535 0.

Contemporary Political Theory (2006) **5**, 105–108. doi:10.1057/palgrave.cpt.9300220

Laura Brace offers a much needed re-examination of the modern notion of property in this informative and clearly written book. Her main point is that