



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

From Personal Duties towards Personal Rights: Late Medieval and Early Modern Political Thought, 1300-1600 by Arthur P. Monahan

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As a non-Marxist, I find Aronson's case for the end of Marxism as an historical project more or less persuasive. Readers having more at stake will no doubt want to examine his arguments more closely than I do here. I think even those who ultimately disagree with Aronson will find him well versed in the relevant literature and scrupulously fair in his judgments. This is not a sectarian book by an author with an axe to grind. On the contrary, it strikes me as a painfully honest work by someone openly searching for his bearings in a changed world. In the end Aronson remains sympathetic to the Marxism he leaves behind, taking with him the still useful elements of its theoretical apparatus and its utopian vision of the future. The new radicalism he envisions has great need of theories, not as static blueprints but as flexible conceptual tools for effecting change; and it has even greater need of utopias to combat the despair which accompanies an interminable struggle and to nurture hope in the future.

STEPHEN L. NEWMAN *York University*

From Personal Duties towards Personal Rights: Late Medieval and Early Modern Political Thought, 1300-1600

Arthur P. Monahan

Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994, pp. xxv, 445

From Personal Duties towards Personal Rights is the second of a three-volume project by Arthur Monahan that details, often with painstaking thoroughness, the development of medieval and early modern political thought. The volume here under review covers the period 1300-1600. It examines the nascent political ideas in the arguments supporting the independence of the Italian city-states, in the conciliarist writings that emerged in the wake of the Great Schism, in the consent theory of Spanish neoscholasticism and in the attempts to resolve the political crises created by the Reformation.

Monahan wishes to counter a "misguided" assumption regarding the study of medieval political thought. Following closely, as he does, the methodology popularized by Quentin Skinner, Monahan denies that the ideas of any historical period are transcendent and hence immediately intelligible to a modern reader. Historical political thought is not the product of minds that were disengaged. However, the author's scepticism regarding the possibility of an unmediated dialogue across the temporal and cultural gulf that separates us from the medievals does not lead him to deny that meaningful conversations can be carried on with the past. He holds to the dialectical notion that "the most important elements in the intellectual baggage humans carry" (xvii) are both historically immanent, and hence open to the exegetical questions of a problematical intersubjectivity, and transhistorical. The uniqueness of social formations does not negate the fact that there are fundamental political issues that all communities must solve. The historian's task is to examine the culturally specific forms that the resolution of these take.

One critical issue common to the various writers Monahan examines is that of right, the idea of which the book details in a variety of literature. However, the organizing principle of *From Personal Duties towards Personal Rights*—the argument is structured around discussions of numerous authors—tends to undermine the continuity of argument. Presenting a coherent picture of the evolution of such a semantically rich and ambiguous term requires rather more thematic focus than Monahan gives it.

Nevertheless, a familial clustering of concepts does emerge from the many brief essays. All of the various articulations of duty, right, consent and so on are bounded by an acceptance that political authority emanates from

God. Much of the genius of medieval political thought was found in reconciling developing notions of popular consent, of the right of the people to resist rulers who act tyrannically, with the divine origin of secular power. One of Monahan's central arguments is that the medievals, for all their accomplishments, did not articulate a fully adequate notion of right. The influence of Paul's Epistle to the Romans enjoining Christians to obey secular rulers as well as the conceptualization of the relation of church and state in Augustine inexorably circumscribed the political thinking of the medievals.

The universal problematic of political life that medieval authors attempted to solve was the reconciliation of the perceived need for authority with the need for popular consent and legitimacy. This is a recurrent theme in political thought because it is a recurrent issue in living political struggle. Peculiar to the medieval period was the articulation of this universally shared problem through a particular set of Christian ideas. Monahan does an admirable job of demonstrating the close family ties in writings that are, on the surface, rather different.

Even though *From Personal Duties towards Personal Rights* leaves a number of questions unanswered—for example, why was all medieval political thinking articulated in religious language?—it is a very carefully researched source work that can only make us wait with anticipation for the upcoming volume.

As a final note, a reviewer would be remiss not to mention that this book contains a 130-page bibliography, much to the credit of both Monahan and the publisher.

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Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding

Walker Connor

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, pp. xiii, 234

Ethnic Conflict in World Politics

Ted Robert Gurr and Barbara Harff

Boulder: Westview Press, 1994, pp. xvii, 206

Walker Connor was one of the few political scientists in the 1960s who saw the ubiquity, and power, of ethnonationalist sentiments. Indeed, he recognized that modernization and attempts at state building were actually consolidating ethnic affiliation and inciting ethnonationalist movements rather than rendering ethnic attachments vestigial (29-66). The volume under review is a collection of articles written by Connor over the past three decades, many of which remain required reading for anyone who seeks to understand the maddeningly complex phenomenon Connor dubbed "ethnonationalism."

Several themes recur frequently in Connor's work. The first is that Western scholarship, and especially mainstream American scholarship, has been strikingly obtuse when confronting ethnic nationalism. Blinded by a misapplication of modernization theory, deluded by the myth of the American melting pot (48-50), seduced by the simplicity of economic explanations of political behaviour (145-64) and imprisoned by the erroneous equivalence given to the terms "state" and "nation," and to "citizenry and "nation" (90-117), students of politics have largely failed to understand ethnonationalism. Indeed, Connor offers fully 17 interrelated reasons for the inability of scholars to come to grips with this subject (69-70). The second primary theme of these essays is the specification of what ethnonationalism is: the subjective, emotional attachment individuals have to the group they designate as their "nation." To Con-