



concern and the conceptualization of morality as the necessity to make choices and assume responsibility. Bauman's emphasis on the culpability of modernity also corresponds with Todorov's argument that the existence of totalitarianism shows that progress is not a continuous and cumulative process.

Todorov's lack of engagement with other scholars' theories, which would have benefited the book, narrows the scope of his argument. Nonetheless, despite the book's addressing a non-academic audience, social theorists will have much to work with in the author's provocative thesis that in international relations 'the difference between totalitarianism and democracy is not as clear as in the domestic sphere, since both types of regime seek world hegemony' (p. 290).

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### **Liberals & Cannibals: The Implications of Diversity**

Steven Lukes

*Verso, London & New York, 2003, x + 180pp.*

*ISBN: 1 85984 595 9.*

*Contemporary Political Theory* (2005) **4**, 97–99. doi:10.1057/palgrave.cpt.9300162

Steven Lukes's prose is robust, and his lively and eclectic approach to his subject makes this book a highly enjoyable and thought-provoking read. In this collection, Lukes centres on the dilemmas of liberalism in the face of multiculturalism, and considers how liberals should respond to the challenges this presents. He examines the claim that liberal values are universal and the counter claim that posits them as particularistic, thus placing liberalism as one among many competing value systems. The related questions of incommensurability and the legitimacy of distinctive communities are also considered. The fundamental difficulty here is that many of the answers are ultimately reducible to the ethnocentric assertion that, put baldly, liberals are right and non-liberals are wrong. Lukes seeks to move beyond this unsatisfactory position, rejecting both cultural imperialism and the relativism of leaving cannibalism for the cannibals.

In each of the thirteen essays, Lukes approaches his subject from a different perspective. In the first four, the focus rests on the claim to universal morality and rationality, and considers the truth of the accusation that liberalism represents Enlightenment hegemony spread globally over time. The following three see a shift of emphasis to the local and particular, and the question of plural, incompatible or relative values. In Chapters 8 and 9, Lukes continues



his analysis by examining the dangers inherent in the hedgehog's worldview; a single explanatory framework or vision of the good may lead to the injustice of ascriptive humiliation, and the following essay concludes that embracing difference and diversity among communities is a safer course, although not to be undertaken unconditionally. The remaining essays are slightly tangential to Lukes's main concern, but highly entertaining. Continuing with the theme of difference, Chapter 11 is a polemic on the variety of communitarianism espoused by the journal *The Responsive Community* and Chapter 12 offers five little fables which demonstrate that human rights are not a complete moral theory, and that rights abuse is not the only injustice. Chapter 13 is Lukes's last word on the fleetingly fashionable Third Way.

Although thematically linked, each essay stands alone. This is both a strength and weakness. It grants Lukes the freedom to present contrasting positions in their extreme forms, which serves his arguments well, but it forces him to neglect some of the nuances and caveats that a more extensive treatment would allow. In the first essay, for example, Lukes approaches the problem of different moralities from the ethnocentric, rationalist and relativist positions and finds none of them entirely satisfactory, but he waits until Chapter 3 before turning to the argument that liberalism is a *Weltanschauung* that underwrites a range of practices and so facilitates different ways of being moral. The space constraints of the essay format also prevent Lukes from pursuing interesting lines, so cannibalism remains a metaphor for the disgusting alien other, whereas liberalism could conceivably accommodate mortuary rituals for incorporating dead kin, although perhaps less surely where enemy dead are consumed. In Chapter 6, he offers a convincing distinction between pluralism and relativism. Following Berlin, he concludes that pluralism is simply an acknowledgement of difference and the messy realities of cross-cultural hybridization, whereas relativism is based on a conceptualization of cultures as bounded, incommensurate and homogeneous units, which rests on a series of assumptions that are unsustainable, implausible and deeply patronizing. But he concludes in Chapter 7 that a relativist stance may be appropriate when confronting the pre-modern; he does not take the next step, namely that if relativism is a respectable position regarding temporally pre-modern societies, then it should be equally respectable for contemporary pre-modern societies. Likewise, in Chapter 5, Lukes allows that local sacred values may be incommensurate, but does not follow the argument through to square rights, which as he acknowledges are surely liberalism's sacred values, with the claim to their universality.

None of these criticisms should suggest that Lukes's treatment is superficial. On the contrary, the essays are densely packed with insights drawn from a range of disciplines, and illustrate Lukes's magisterial command of his sources. His deft handling of arguments and his humour make this collection highly



accessible and it should appeal to a diverse readership. The questions that remain unexamined simply whet the appetite for more.

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**Understanding Habermas: Communicative Action and Deliberative Democracy**

E.O. Eriksen and J. Weigård

*Continuum, London, 2003, viii + 292pp.*

*ISBN: 0 8264 7179 X.*

*Contemporary Political Theory* (2005) **4**, 99–101. doi:10.1057/palgrave.cpt.9300163

Eriksen and Weigård set themselves a monumental task: to make Habermas's social and political theory user-friendly and straightforward. As any student of Habermas will know, understanding his enormous oeuvre is no mean feat. However, they succeed in highlighting the myriad dimensions of his thought on issues as wide ranging as law, constitution making, social learning, nation states, human rights, cosmopolitanism and globalization in a clear and manageable text. What is admirable is that they achieve this goal while managing to also explore the bugbear of his critics, the problem of universality, with aplomb. In the midst of this they also achieve something, about which Habermas himself has had difficulty persuading his detractors: they show that his work, especially on democracy, has an application in the real world.

The book itself is made up of two parts. The first half (and the Introduction) is written by Weigård and deals with Habermas's action theory and social theory. This section covers his theory of communicative action, learning processes and his discourse ethics. The second half, written by Eriksen, brings us up to date with Habermas's contributions to legal and political theory with particular reference to the transformations being wrought by globalization. This section sets out the challenge to solidarity and governance posed by this new social order and shows that Habermas is not the pied piper (albeit a benevolent one) as whom he is sometimes characterized. Eriksen and Weigård place Habermas in context not merely as an idealistic liberal clinging to enlightenment and leading his disciples on a crusade to replace representation with a deliberative (and therefore utopian) alternative. Instead, his work is shown in the context of concerns for issues of citizenship and pluralism, which preoccupy a large number of social theorists and form the basis of a more normative approach to social science. In effect,