



development of ultimately similar institutions, and to emphasize that the understandings of these institutions, which form part of the social imaginary, are still very different today.

In the final part of the book, Taylor considers some other changes that have been brought about by the change in the underlying conception of moral order, in the context of the secular nature of modernity. By 'secular' Taylor does not mean the absence of religion, rather he points to the different place that religion occupies in modern society. This can be seen from the absence of religion in the founding of modern nations. The stories of the origins of societies used to refer to 'higher' time, which contrasted with the 'profane' time of ordinary life. However, the dominant idea in modernity is that a people can exist prior to any political constitution, and can therefore give itself a constitution by its own free action in secular time. Taylor holds that founding stories will then cite the growth and maturation of societies, enabling the establishment of a new order. Modern societies are thus no longer structured by a dependence on God, although religion still plays a role in individual and public life. It is in this sense that modernity is secular.

Taylor's aim in this book was to reveal the differences in modern Western political cultures, which are often masked by the presence of very similar institutional forms. This understanding of difference allows us to recognize the greater differences in the social imaginaries of different civilizations, and to see that Europe offers just one model, not the model, of modernity. It is then, he says, that 'the real positive work, of building mutual understanding, can begin' (p. 196). *Modern Social Imaginaries* is subtle, complex and thought-provoking. It is a valuable contribution to the literature on a wide range of concerns within political philosophy and beyond.

Sarah Marshall
University of York, UK.

Culture and Democracy: Media, Space and Representation

Clive Barnett

Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2003, viii + 226pp.

ISBN: 0 7486 1399 4.

Contemporary Political Theory (2005) **4**, 199–201. doi:10.1057/palgrave.cpt.9300170

Clive Barnett concludes and sums up the main thrust of this work by emphasizing that the 'Dewey-like formula of "culture and democracy" in the title of this book is meant to signal a commitment to a post-foundational,



pragmatic analysis of the interface between cultural and political processes' (p. 196). Key to this analysis is the continual stress on the idea that 'democracy' is, in the well-known terms of Gallie, an 'essentially contested concept'. With this intuition firmly in mind, Barnett uses the early chapters of the book to develop a differential and contested sense of democracy. Here the figures of Derrida, Foucault and Habermas loom large. In Derrida, Barnett finds a notion of democracy that is contingently premised on a 'strictly undecidable structure of action and responsibility', rendering it 'constitutively unstable and paradoxical' (p. 31). In Habermas, he finds a 'public sphere concept' that is open enough to allow for the problematization and contestation of 'political action' (p. 79). In Foucault, he finds a comforting ambivalence concerning both the positive and pernicious nature of power: 'perhaps this ambivalence is faithful to the very structure of modern democratic power itself' (p. 105).

If the first four chapters are concerned with theoretically exploring the contestable nature of democracy, then the final three provide different analyses of democratic logics in a cultural-political context. In Chapter 5 Barnett analyses the legal infrastructure of new and developing communications regulations in the United States, and in Chapter 6 he discusses European Union media policy. Tracking the legal-political emergence and influence of what he calls 'neo-liberal autonomy' in both spheres, he argues that public and media policy in Europe and the US has become unsatisfactorily privatized in scope and function. That is to say, media policy in Europe and the US is, he contends, philosophically underpinned by an essentially atomistic notion of 'autonomy': one 'that is detached and even protected from public participation' (p. 201). From European media policy Barnett moves, in Chapter 7, to discuss the potential role of the media in the democratization of post-apartheid South Africa. Everything here is said to hinge on whether the media can promote or facilitate a 'culture of legitimate and extra-parliamentary opposition', and a 'culture of tolerance, criticism and openness' (p. 194).

Barnett's *Culture and Democracy* is clearly best read as a normative political theory of the media. By critically understanding and analysing media or media practice against the backcloth of normative political concepts (e.g. 'autonomy') he is able to provide an analysis which is singularly different from much of what passes as cultural theory or cultural studies approaches to the media. For example, rather than engage in an ideology critique of (gendered, ethnocentric, homophobic, class-based...) media representations, he is keen to use the notion of 'representation' as a normative guide in critically evaluating actually existing democratic practice (p. 2). Of course, this kind of normativism is, as Barnett knows only too well, far from unproblematic. I would suggest that there is a discernible tension between such explicit normativism and his commitment to a supposedly 'post-foundational' and 'pragmatic' analysis of 'cultural and political processes'. This tension is particularly palpable in the



conclusion of the book when he argues for the indispensability of 'liberal political theory', claiming that a renunciation of liberalism is 'not a morally serious posture, in the strict Kantian sense that one could not coherently will that others adopt this renunciation as a universal principle of action' (p. 197). This form of transcendental argument (a slightly modified version of the Kantian 'categorical imperative') sits, in my view, rather uneasily with his Dewey-inspired post-foundational pragmatism.

All in all, *Culture and Democracy* is an impressive work that brings important contemporary theory to bear on a normatively inflected, yet concrete, analysis of media policy and politics in three different public spheres.

Robert Porter
University of Ulster, UK.

Gadamer's Century: Essays in Honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer

Jeff Malpas, Ulrich Arnsward and Jens Kertscher (eds.)

The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2002, xiv + 363pp.

ISBN: 0 262 13403 9 / 0 262 63247 0.

Max Weber's Central Question

Wilhelm Hennis (translated by Keith Tribe)

Threshold Press, Oxford, 2000, x + 241pp.

ISBN: 1 903152 01 1.

Max Weber's Science of Man: New Studies for a Biography of the Work

Wilhelm Hennis (translated by Keith Tribe)

Threshold Press, Oxford, 2000, ix + 220pp.

ISBN: 1 903152 00 3.

Contemporary Political Theory (2005) **4**, 201–204. doi:10.1057/palgrave.cpt.9300171

The Federal Republic of Germany, born of political humiliation but heir to a proud cultural and philosophical heritage, was the site of what Manfred Riedel called 'the rehabilitation of practical philosophy' (Riedel, 1972). This practical philosophy was intended to be independent of both Western liberalism and eastern communism. Its proximate sources were German. Given what many considered to be the special relationship of modern German culture to the culture of classical Greece, it was often claimed that practical philosophy also had more distant, Greek sources. What was supposedly being rehabilitated was nothing less than the classical philosophy of ethics and politics. Practical philosophy