Review: INDIVIDUALITY OVERCOMING DOCILITY
Reviewed Work(s): Individuality and Mass Democracy: Mill, Emerson, and the Burdens of Citizenship by Alex Zakaras
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Source: *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 72, No. 4 (FALL 2010), pp. 738-740
Published by: Cambridge University Press for the University of Notre Dame du lac on behalf of Review of Politics
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/40961157
Accessed: 03-04-2018 22:54 UTC

Cambridge Platonists, Rousseau, Goethe, and Kant. These thinkers rejected the self-alienation and emotional barrenness of Locke's moral philosophy, turning away from the materialism of Locke—and Hobbes and Descartes—toward an inner and nonphysical realm of moral sentiments, intuition, and knowledge. Readers can find evidence of this counter-Lockean turn in an expression of Emersonian individualism in the 1841 essay "Self-Reliance." In one of his exemplary turns of phrase, Emerson urges, "Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string." For many critics, especially those who see parallels between Emerson and Nietzsche, the exhortation sounds like antinomianism: the only rule we can "trust" is that we must make our own rules. But if read in light of the anti-Lockean tradition that Dolan proposes, a different sense emerges. Emerson does not advocate for an easy moral narcissism. To the contrary, the hardness of the "iron string" conveys the quality of steely discipline. Emerson alludes to the strenuous exertions by which a person—alert to his own moral sense, even when it places him in fierce conflict with social convention—strives to adhere to the immutable law that binds together the soul, nature, and the cosmos.

A universe held together by moral law, much less one where people have souls, is not an antifoundationalist or postmodern universe. And that is Dolan's point. Perhaps he undervalues the galvanic power of Emerson's language, its capacity to inspire the creative misreadings that he warns us against. But Dolan wants to estrange Emerson from contemporary readers and not accommodate him to us. And in his painstaking recovery of Emerson's political worldview, he provides a resource for specialists and nonspecialists who wish to deepen their grasp of the inseparable relationship between the literature and the liberalism of Emerson.

—Edmund R. Goode

INDIVIDUALITY OVERCOMING DOCILITY

Alex Zakaras: *Individuality and Mass Democracy: Mill, Emerson, and the Burdens of Citizenship*. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. Pp. 252. $49.95.)

doi:10.1017/S0034670510000719

Alex Zakaras's *Individuality and Mass Democracy* is an important and timely book. Written in clear, engaging prose, it succeeds both in setting forth a crucially important problem in contemporary political theory, and in summoning the intellectual resources from a long bygone era for its possible resolution.

Like many books about contemporary democracy, *Individuality and Mass Democracy* begins with the worrisome premise that democracy at present is not functioning as it should be: fewer and fewer citizens can be relied upon

to vote; knowledge of political issues among voters is poor or nonexistent; and citizens are increasingly susceptible to manipulation and propaganda. Much of what ails democracy, Zakaras claims, is subsumable under a larger problem: that citizens in mass democracies are increasingly susceptible to what he calls "docility." Docility is a "democratic sickness" (24). Citizens are infected by it when they withdraw from politics altogether or else when they allow "their own voices to be manipulated in service of someone else's ends" (16).

There are two ways, we are told in the book's first chapter, to begin accounting for democracy's deficiencies: one structural or institutional, the other focusing on the failures and limitations of political agents themselves. While he acknowledges that "both approaches are indispensable" (4), Zakaras's book is primarily about citizens, not institutions. Yet this binary focus on institutions *or* citizens is spurious in part because it ignores the complex interplay between the two—a point, incidentally, that both Mill and Emerson saw clearly. Democratic laws and institutions tend to produce better democratic citizens, and conversely, an engaged and enlightened democratic citizenry is more likely to design laws and institutions that reflect deeper democratic sensibilities. It is probably impossible, moreover, to assign strict causal ascendancy here. As Hegel long ago theorized, the juridical workings of the state and the ethical dimensions of civil society stand to one another dialectically, in a sort of chicken-and-egg relationship, each requiring the other for its intelligibility. Thus it is somewhat confusing when Zakaras writes, in the book's concluding section, that "neither Mill nor Emerson believed that government could do much to promote individuality other than protect individual rights, prevent power from accumulating irreversibly in the hands of any single person or group, and help preserve the integrity of participatory and representative institutions" (225). Readers should be forgiven for thinking that that sounds like an awful lot, and that the connections between democratic institutions and democratic individuality—between democratic politics and democratic persons, very roughly speaking—are therefore deeper and more mutually reinforcing than Zakaras sometimes seems to suppose. Still, Zakaras is right to highlight the "disparity between what democracy seems to require and what modern citizens seem able to give" (14). This is a crucial problem indeed, and *Individuality and Mass Democracy* does an excellent job at bringing it into vivid relief.

The book is organized into four main parts. The middle two parts feature Zakaras's careful and illuminating readings of Emerson and Mill. These chapters focus on the conceptions of individuality in Emerson's and Mill's writings, and the important docility-combating role both philosophers assign to that ideal. These chapters are wonderful; they would make a fine book by themselves. They achieve that rare balance between painstaking scholarly research and broad synoptic vision. Mill's and Emerson's texts are throughout interpreted carefully and loyally, but always with an eye to contemporary

problems. These chapters will be read with profit both by scholars specializing in Mill and Emerson and also by political theorists without that specific expertise.

In contemporary discussions, individuality is often regarded as antithetical to engaged, democratic citizenship. To the extent that individuality flourishes, the idea goes, civic participation wanes. The ideal of individuality is often depicted as an ideal of Romantic inwardness, of personal authenticity. It is thought to belong to the snobby, private, idiosyncratic part of our nature, not the democratic, active, and participatory part. One of the central accomplishments of Zakaras's book is its powerful case—made through, and on behalf of, Emerson and Mill—that this common understanding is mistaken and incomplete. Zakaras argues convincingly that individuality is an ideal with a profound democratic dimension, one that demands "that we take responsibility for our public and private commitments alike" (214). Individuality has also for a long time been the rallying call of the Right—it has been defended as the companion ethical ideal to "rugged individualism," "self-reliance," "limited government," and other stock phrases of the libertarian Right. Perhaps the greatest achievement of this book, in my judgment, is its ability to reframe the problem of individuality, not in the service of some doctrine about the limits of state coercion, but rather in the hopes of recapturing a robust ethical ideal of democratic citizenship.

The work of George Kateb looms large in *Individuality and Mass Democracy.* Indeed, readers are likely to feel as though Kateb's writings throughout form a sort of background against which many of Zakaras's ideas are viewed and tested. There are moments in the book during which it appears as though Zakaras is merely tweaking and repackaging some of Kateb's ideas. (I am thinking in particular of Kateb's *The Inner Ocean: Individualism and Democratic Culture* [Cornell University Press, 1992].) It is welcome, therefore, that Zakaras spends some time distinguishing his views from Kateb's and makes more explicit his criticisms and points of departure from that important work (211–20).

In the end, *Individuality and Mass Democracy* has many virtues. It is a book all political theorists would benefit from reading.

–David Rondel

MUSCULAR, AMBITIOUS, PRACTICAL ASSERTION OF TRUTH

Susan Meld Shell: *Kant and the Limits of Autonomy.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009. Pp. viii, 434. $55.00.)

doi:10.1017/S0034670510000720

Susan Meld Shell's *Kant and the Limits of Autonomy* is less about the limits of autonomy than its emergence: its emergence in the minds of men and