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## Boekbespreking van: Pragmatism and Political Theory

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overlap, as each chapter more or less repeats the policy process for the several proposals. Also, there is a lack of balance. The rather cursory analysis of the energy policies in the member states – an overview of the European energy situation is absent – did not lead to a very perceptive evaluation of the states' policy preferences. In contrast, the role of the EU institutions is strongly emphasized by its prominent and detailed presentation. This, on the one hand, weakens the empirical conclusions and, thus, the theoretical implications of this study. On the other hand, the book gives us much detailed information about the actions of the institutions. This will undoubtedly stimulate and ease further investigations of the impact of European integration on the member states' energy policy and the consequences for the supply and use of energy in Europe.

Aad Correljé

Matthew Festenstein, *Pragmatism & Political Theory*. Polity Press, Cambridge, 1997, ISBN 0-74561-627-5, £ 13.95

In *Pragmatism and Political Theory*, Matthew Festenstein addresses the question "what resources pragmatism has to offer normative political theory" (p.1). To answer this question, Festenstein examines the writings of John Dewey, Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam and Jürgen Habermas. The first part of his study is devoted to the moral and political theory of Dewey. Festenstein criticizes the – still widespread – belief that Dewey's political thoughts should be understood as a theory which provides the analytical tools for the solution of technical problems only. By contrast to this belief, Festenstein argues that Dewey's political theory is grounded in a moral theory, based on the assumption that the aim of moral deliberation is self-realization or growth. The notion of moral deliberation is closely associated with Dewey's concept of positive freedom, which requires social institutions that are fit to help shape individuality, while being open to change. The second part of *Pragmatism and Political Theory* critically examines the political theories of Rorty, Putnam and Habermas in relation to the insights put forward by Dewey.

According to Festenstein, political thinking in the area of political philosophy can be reconstructed on the basis of a set of concerns common to the philosophers mentioned above.

The first topic of pragmatism is the rejection of "metaphysical realism" in moral and political theory. At first sight, the term "metaphysical realism" might be confusing for readers familiar with the writings of the founding father of pragmatism: Charles Sanders Peirce. In Peirce's philosophy, the term 'realism' refers to the belief in the reality of generals (e.g. laws of nature). In Festenstein's definition, however, the term "metaphysical realism" does not refer to the belief in the reality of generals, but stands for the claim that the outside world (including the social world and the world of

values) is an object accessible to knowledge independent of human emotions, choices and self-understanding. Underlying this type of realism, Festenstein holds, is an epistemological dualism of known subject and known object. Pragmatism rejects this dualism of subject and object. Following Peirce's theory of the *Fixation of Belief*, Dewey insists on the "centrality of practical problem-solving to inquiry" (p.5): inquiry aims at the settlement of an opinion in order to deal with practical problems. The rejection of "metaphysical realism" and the insistence on the centrality of problem-solving is taken up by modern pragmatism. Rorty ridicules what he perceives to be the "mirror theories" of knowledge and language, while arguing that theories of knowledge, as well as moral theories should be relevant to our needs and interests. Similarly, Putnam attacks the pretensions of a "God's eye point of view" which claims that a single, objective representation of the world is possible. In a less radical fashion, Habermas attempts to develop a pragmatic equivalent of Kant's "transcendental vantage point" on the basis of an analysis of the moral assumptions underlying the performance of speech acts in a particular community.

The second topic dealt with by pragmatism is the rejection of scepticism. Festenstein distinguishes two types of scepticism (p.106): *subjectivism*, that claims that what is valuable for a particular person is a matter of his or her subjective and irrational desire or choice, and *cultural relativism*, that claims that the validity of moral values can only be justified relative to the set of beliefs of a particular community. The first type of scepticism has been sharply criticized by Dewey. Dewey argues that pragmatism has to acknowledge the plurality of actually existing moral, political and ideological conceptions. This external – sociological – observation, however, should be accompanied by the internal perspective of moral theory which aims at the formulation of grounds on which existing conceptions can be questioned and ideological conflicts can be rationally addressed. Putnam and Habermas likewise criticize cultural relativism by arguing that this type of relativism is the result of taking the "observers perspective" only. In addition, moral theory should take a "participant's perspective" and recognize that no given set of beliefs is immune from moral criticism. The task of moral theory, then, consists of the articulation of the criteria and conditions which make rational moral criticism possible. The position of Rorty with respect to cultural relativism is more ambiguous. Rorty has – in my view rightly – been criticized by Putnam for embracing relativism by holding that an improvement in our values and standards does not imply that they are better "by reference to a previously known standard, but just better in the sense that they come to seem clearly better than their predecessors." (p.183) Although Festenstein attempts to defend Rorty against the accusation of moral relativism, his study fails to demonstrate how Rorty can uphold his self-proclaimed anti-relativistic position with respect to his claim that rational criticism is only possible within the familiar procedures of a given society.

The third topic of pragmatism is the articulation of a moral theory which avoids the pitfalls of both metaphysical realism and scepticism. As was indicated above, Dewey's moral theory takes as its starting point the self-realization or growth of

human individuals through moral deliberation. His moral theory aims to clarify the way in which different moral positions may be subject to rational criticism within a particular society. Both Putnam and Habermas attempt to develop the pragmatistic idea of moral deliberation. The arguments of Dewey – and of his predecessor Peirce – are thoroughly developed into a moral theory in Habermas's work in particular. Habermas accepts the plurality of moral concepts, but argues that a rational foundation of moral discourses remains possible. The validity of norms, Habermas argues, consists in their "rational acceptability": "Only those norms are valid that meet (or could meet) with the approval of all affected in their capacity as *participants in a practical discourse*." (p.150) Habermas thereby refers to his notion of the "ideal speech situation". Not surprisingly, Rorty's moral theory differs significantly from the positions of Dewey, Putnam and Habermas. Rorty's anti-foundationalist programme rests, in the words of Festenstein, "entirely on the 'ethnocentric' recognition that certain political values are acceptable to 'us' solely because of the history 'we' happen to have had." (p.7) Once more, this raises the question of whether Rorty indeed can be considered as a pragmatist in the tradition of Dewey or should be regarded as a sophisticated relativist.

The final theme of pragmatism is the nature of liberalism and democracy. All the writers discussed by Festenstein embrace the liberal-democratic ordering of society. According to Dewey, liberal-democratic politics should rest on a concept of positive freedom, which in its turn rests on the above mentioned assumption that the aim of moral deliberation is self-realization or growth. Freedom, Dewey holds, consists in "participation in shaping the social conditions for individuality" (p.70). Democracy, therefore, is more than just a peaceful way of settling disputes: it strives at the achievement of a genuinely shared common good. Dewey's theory of democracy is taken up by Putnam. According to Putnam, democracy is the "precondition for the application of intelligence to social problems", whereas participation in democratic procedures clarifies our real needs and interests: "We don't know what our needs and interests are and what we are capable of until we engage in politics." (p.179) This claim by Putnam – which is sharply criticized by Festenstein – goes far beyond the merits attributed to democracy by Dewey. A more solid foundation of the pragmatistic concept of democracy is offered by Habermas. Especially in his later work – e.g. in *Faktizität und Geltung* – Habermas considers democracy as the application of his theory of moral discourse to politics. Democratic procedures warrant the validity of legal norms, albeit only temporarily and under specific conditions: "Majority rule justifies the presumption that the fallible majority opinion may be considered a reasonable basis for a common practice until further notice, namely until the minority convinces the majority that their views are correct." (p.163)

*Pragmatism and Political Theory* is a well-structured, clearly written introduction to some of the major concerns, merits and demerits of pragmatistic political theory. I especially enjoyed reading the first part of the book, where Festenstein critically reconstructs Dewey's political theory and demonstrates that Dewey's conception of

democracy is grounded in his theory of moral deliberation. Regrettably, the two most interesting contemporary representatives of pragmatic thought discussed by Festenstein – Putnam and Habermas – are dealt with in one chapter only. As Festenstein himself also recognizes, this sometimes results in a "rather caricatural sketch" of the complicated theories of these philosophers (p.173). Still, *Pragmatism and Political Philosophy* remains an interesting study which lives up to its own pretensions: to be a non-exhaustive, yet fresh look at a tradition which deserves attention from political theorists.

Wouter G. Werner

Beverly Crawford and Arend Lijphart (eds.), *Liberalization and Leninist Legacies: Comparative Perspectives on Democratic Transitions*. University of California at Berkeley: International and Areas Studies 1997, ISBN 0-87725-196-7

Nine years after the 1989 revolutions in Eastern Europe the scholarly attention to the sources of democratic consolidation and economic development in the region, as well as in other societies undergoing the process of transition from an authoritarian past, is as alive as ever. The articles assembled in this volume – some of which appeared earlier in *Comparative Political Studies* (June 1995) – contribute to these debates by providing an account of how the various legacies of the (communist) past impact on the direction of regime change in Eastern Europe. The focus of the book is on the process of institution building, in the sense of creating both political and economic institutions, and on the structure of constraints and incentives for post-communist elites to build a stable liberal capitalist democracy. In this respect, the volume is rooted in a particular stream of democratization literature, which emphasizes the behaviour of, and relationships among, political and economic elites, and the role of institutions in the process of regime change. The book is not explicitly concerned with the definition or quality of democracy that is emerging in Eastern Europe – a prominent aspect of many recent debates on democratization – nor with isolated components of mass political culture and the social and economic conditions surrounding the demise of communism – characteristics typical of studies working with modernization theory.

The introductory chapter by Crawford and Lijphart outlines two distinct approaches to explaining how post-communist transformations are likely to be shaped: the 'legacies of the past' approach and the 'imperatives of liberalization' approach. These two perspectives are a set of assumptions on the dominant conditions underlying the regime change, which are subsequently employed in each of the six empirical chapters to formulate questions and guide the investigation. The legacies of the past approach assumes that ideological, political, and economic structures inherited from the communist period will produce anti-liberal and anti-capitalist outcomes, rather than a stable democracy and market economy. The peripheral status of Eastern