

## Norms of Liberty: A Perfectionist Basis for Non-Perfectionist Politics

**Douglas B. Rasmussen and Douglas Den Uyl**

University Park, Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press,  
2005 (464 pages)

Because the authors themselves use a baseball analogy (described below), an analogy from the same sport can be used to describe this book's aim. Rasmussen and Den Uyl take a big swing, attempting to "hit one out of the park." There is no "small ball" here. In a dense, thoughtful, and serious work, the authors attempt to address what many regard as the fundamental problem in liberalism: Liberal political order seems necessarily accompanied by atomistic and hedonistic moral philosophy. This criticism is offered by many in one form or another, including Alasdair MacIntyre, who has argued that one must have either Aristotle or liberalism.

Rasmussen and Den Uyl not only deny that liberalism is fundamentally in crisis, but they also believe that they can "give an account of liberal politics from the base of ancient ethics" (15). In this attempt, they aspire to follow the example of Spinoza and deny that liberalism can only follow Locke or Mill.

The essential argument of this work is that liberalism provides metanormative principles and that neo-Aristotelianism properly provides normative principles. Metanormative principles "are most directly tied to politics and concern principles that establish the political-legal conditions under which full moral conduct can take place" (17). The analogy that the authors employ is that baseball has rules that must be followed for the game to be possible but that following the rules does not of itself make one a good baseball player. Playing excellence can only be achieved in a proper environment.

The work is divided into three sections. The first part argues that liberal politics can be separate from ethics. "Liberalism is no more an ethics than it is a theology," the authors assert. It is easy to conceive of liberalism as separate from theology, but the authors contend that classical liberals, too, readily drifted from defending individual liberty to permitting moral minimalism. The solution for liberalism is to see itself as "regulat[ing] conduct so that conditions might be obtained where moral action can take place" (34). In this sense, liberalism is metanormative, rather than equinormative, insofar as "liberalism is designed to transcend the competition between equinormative frameworks" (37).

The authors then turn to the history of liberalism, citing the work of Spinoza as setting precedent for separating politics from ethics, but Rasmussen and Den Uyl argue that this separation neither leads to the "impoverishment of morality [or] the trivialization of rights." Other liberals, such as T. H. Green or Kant, seem to acknowledge some separation of politics and ethics but do not do so in a principled manner. The authors argue, "the nature of politics and the nature of morality are such that it is not appropriate to give politics a moral message" (52). They further argue that the natural-law tradition does not give sufficient attention to the individual, although it provides a "correct foundation for natural rights" (75).

The authors then seek to show that individual rights are necessary for human flourishing. Human flourishing needs society but also needs freedom and individual action. The first part concludes with a brief argument for private property that is grounded within the right of individual action.

The second section of the work further develops the authors' neo-Aristotelian account of human flourishing, which is presented as being an object of personal desire, inclusive of many human goods, related to the individual's capacities, self-directed, and embodied in a social context. In the authors' view, it is important to have more than merely many correct human actions; individual human beings themselves must flourish. Finally, the authors argue that practical reason or prudence is essential to human flourishing. They include a chapter that deals with possible criticisms of their account of human flourishing.

In the final section, the authors anticipate and respond to criticism from various perspectives. Communitarians and social conservatives get the most attention. The authors have not looked for the weakest possible critics but have instead considered the objections and arguments of figures such as Alasdair MacIntyre and the pluralist communitarian John Gray. The essence of their response to MacIntyre is that his account of human flourishing includes too much natural dependence on others for developing our moral capacities. That is to say, it has "little or no personal dimension" (241). They also take on conservative critiques, including the natural-law conservatism of Robert George and eudaimonistic conservatism of Leo Strauss.

The authors conclude with a concise restatement of the argument and then address some other potential criticisms of their position. In their own words, Rasmussen and Den Uyl "have argued that only a principle that protects the possibility of self-direction among others could meet the conditions for [human flourishing]" (285).

This defense of liberalism rests upon what can be regarded as a radical claim: Liberalism does not necessarily undermine human moral development; rather, authentic moral development depends upon liberalism. To unpack all that the authors have delivered would take more than a short review. Their work is certainly worthy of more developed analyses. They have taken a big swing at this matter, and they have hit the ball a long way, but whether it is a home run remains uncertain.

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## What Your Money Means (And How to Use It Well)

**Frank J. Hanna III**

New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2008 (240 pages)

Even for those who disdain it, money occupies a considerable portion of their time and energy. Whether it is a question of working for it, spending it, playing with it, or engaging in the much more difficult task of creating it, wealth has always been indispensable for human existence and civilizational development. Yet money—and the possession