

Introduction

This symposium is devoted to a book which promises to be one of the most important works on political philosophy in the 1990s. Douglas B. Rasmussen and Douglas J. Den Uyl's *Liberty and Nature: An Aristotelian Defense of Liberal Order* offers a new defense of classical-liberal, neo-Lockean political theory, a viewpoint which has been widely discussed by academic political philosophers during the past twenty years, after being popularized by Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. The book has two features which are especially noteworthy.

First, as its subtitle suggests, the book seeks to plant a liberal theory of rights in neo-Aristotelian soil. In this, its authors part company with other recent attempts to find a ground for rights: whether on a neo-Kantian deontological foundation, or on the alleged requirements of human agency as such, or on an indirect consequentialist basis, or on some form of social contract. Rasmussen and Den Uyl argue that Aristotle's insights concerning human nature and the human good can be extracted from the obsolete dross of his philosophy, and that these insights can withstand the criticisms of modern philosophers. However, they depart from traditional Aristotelianism in emphasizing the diversity and individuality of human activity that can be encompassed under the heading of flourishing, and in arguing that autonomy or self-directedness is the essential form of human flourishing.

The second distinctive feature of this book is its original analysis of rights. The authors argue that rights should not be understood as normative principles on a par with the principles that guide individuals regarding what is good for them or how they should conduct themselves. Hence, the attempt to demonstrate that a self-interested individual has, as such, an obligation to respect the rights of others, is on their view totally misguided. For rights are not directly or primarily concerned with achieving the moral good or with securing right conduct; rather, rights are meta-normative. That is, they provide moral guidance in the creation, implementation, and justification of a legal system whose purpose is to secure a social and political framework within which individuals can apply normative principles to their personal conduct and cooperative endeavors.

The argumentative burden of *Liberty and Nature* is, therefore, to defend a neo-Aristotelian ethical theory and to argue that this theory provides a sufficient justification for a regime of rights which will protect the self-directedness of individuals. In developing this argument, the book offers valuable discussions of many topics, including a defense of the natural right to private property and an argument that the Aristotelian conception of the common good is congruent with natural rights. The final chapter argues that the Aristotelian virtue of friendship can provide the moral basis for "capitalist acts between consenting adults," and concludes that Aristotle's legislative science can be allied with the contractarian theory of constitutions developed by James M. Buchanan so as to provide a rationale for framing a classical-liberal political system.

The first three essays published here were originally presented with a reply by Rasmussen and Den Uyl at a December 1992 meeting of the American Association for the Philosophic Study of Society in Washington, DC, chaired by Tibor Machan, Professor of Philosophy at Auburn University.