Pragmatism, Rights, and Democracy

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Published by Fordham University Press

Singer, Beth J.
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PREFACE

Composed, for the most part, as separate papers, the chapters of this book can all be read independently. They are unified, however, by the fact that in each of them I attempt to develop implications of the theory of rights presented in my book *Operative Rights*. Originally written for different audiences, most of whose members could not be expected to be familiar with the content of that book, the chapters necessarily contain some repetition, although in editing them for publication I have endeavored to eliminate some of this. But partly in response to comments from others—readers and reviewers of the book as well as those who commented on and contributed to discussion of papers I presented at conferences and in lectures at universities in this country and abroad—and partly as a result of my own attempts to articulate my position more clearly, I have been compelled to rethink and reformulate certain statements that I made earlier. Therefore, some of the recurrent explanations of my central concepts aim at further clarification. In addition, in its application of the principles and theses I had enunciated there, the collection as a whole goes beyond *Operative Rights* and in so doing should serve to amplify as well as clarify my position in that work.

In Part I of the present volume, Chapter 1 is devoted to critical analysis of what I take to be widespread, central features of traditional and contemporary theories of rights as well as criticisms of those theories. In Chapter 2, I introduce my own, alternative theory, and Chapter 3 is a discussion of three modern philosophers whose views run counter to the established tradition of "natural rights" theories. In Parts II and III, I apply the principles of my own theory to pressing issues in social and political philosophy today, including the question of minority rights and problems of social conflict, ethnic conflict in particular. In Chapter 8, after discussing the views of John Dewey and George Herbert Mead
concerning rights and the democratic process, I show some of the relations between my own view and theirs.

Throughout the book, a central role is assigned to the concept of community, construed as the indispensable context and condition of individuality and identity as well as rights. Understanding the mutual interdependence of identity and community, on the one hand, and the way those rights that I contend ought to be operative for all members of all communities serve to protect the integrity of those communities, on the other, should help to resolve the current conflict between communitarianism and individualistic liberalism. Analyzed in terms of shared perspectives and the development of social norms, the same concept of community is designed also to serve as the basis for an effective theory and methodology of conflict resolution. The theoretical perspective at work in this book incorporates elements of other philosophies, and Pragmatism itself is notably diversified, but in view of the centrality to my own thought of George Herbert Mead and John Dewey, I consider myself to belong to the Pragmatist tradition.

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