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Political Thought (Oxford Readers)



Synopsis

Human beings live together in societies which, by their very nature, give rise to institutions governing the behavior and freedom of individuals. This raises important questions about how these institutions ought to function, and the extent to which actual systems of government succeed or fail in meeting these ideals. This Oxford Reader contains 140 key writings on political thought, covering issues about human nature and its relation to society, the extent to which the powers of the State are justified, the tension between liberty and rights, and the way resources should be distributed. Topics such as international relations, minority rights, democracy, socialism, and conservatism are also discussed by contributors ranging from Plato and Aristotle to Foucault, Isaiah Berlin, and Martin Luther King.

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Customer Reviews

Jonathan Wolff is Reader in Philosophy at University College London and author of *An Introduction to Political Philosophy* (OUP, 1996) and *Robert Nozick* (1991). Michael Rosen is a Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford, coeditor of *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, and author of *Hegel's Dialectic and its Criticism* (OUP, 1982) and *The Need for Interpretation* (Abalone, 1987).

One night while searching for a scrumptious new political book to decorate my room with, I came across this one and it immediately caught my attention. While I tend to be drawn to the more arcane

and iconoclastic regions of political philosophy, this book seemed to possess an alluring simplicity. I guess it reminded me of the kind of book I read in college -- a touch of nostalgia -- and always so much enjoyed. I imagine it is now safe to disclose that my economic and political science classes were the only ones I did not skip on a regular basis. Anything political or philosophical fascinates me -- spinning out philosophical ideas in my head and turning them over and over again is endless, bountiful pleasure. Political philosophy is a large hunting ground, but the editors do a commendable job of breaking it down into its constituent elements. Since the subject matter is so broad the authors must apply a rather strict criterion of which thinkers and material to present. First, they aim to present ideas that have a certain continuity, ones that are perennial in nature and that all societies must confront. Second, they tend to select works that are rigorously logical and factual, so nothing in the way of mysticism or superstition. And finally, they seek to present ideas with a modern resonance, issues that have not been resolved over the ages. (So no commentary on slavery or how many Angels can dance on the head of a pin). The editors think -- and I agree with them -- that it is best not to think of political philosophy as a single entity, but rather as a multi-layered synthesis comprising many building blocks that can be arranged in a variety of ways. To develop a thorough and systematic understanding of political philosophy it is important to scrutinize each building block in turn before placing them in any arrangement. The building blocks include human nature, the justification for the state, liberty and rights, economic justice, alternatives to liberalism, and progress and civilization. Introducing politico neophytes to political philosophy with a section on human nature is I think most fruitful since all the larger questions in political philosophy are at root questions about human nature. Are we greedy or altruistic? Are we cooperative or competitive? Does society shape our nature (as Owen thought) or does our nature shape and give rise to society (as Aristotle thought)? How fluid is gender? Is it rigid, a la Aristotle and Darwin or malleable, a la Alison Jaggar? Human nature is the real source of contention in political philosophy, while the other issues are derivative. While the editors do not emphasize the point to any large extent, I think it would not be uncharacteristically bold to suggest that most of the shifts in the political winds come on the heels of radically new ideas about human nature. The ideas that electrified Europe in the French Revolution and later in the Bolshevik Revolution had their origin in a radically new set of ideas about human nature that were essentially egalitarian, which is in sharp contrast to the aristocratic view of human nature of Aristotle and our Founding Fathers. Also, one point that the editors never make and one that might generate some confusion is that while most of political philosophy is normative i.e. it deals with value judgments, the subject of human nature is empirical. So while no amount of scientific tinkering and fact finding can tell you that majority rule is

better than the rule of law or that Locke's labor justification for property-rights is absolute, it should be possible to frame a predictable and identifiable picture of human nature. This would go along way to resolving a great many political disputes.

School text book

I am really glad I bought this book. It is divided up into sections on different components of political thought, which makes it easier to browse. It is a great overview of the "big ideas" in political science.

I've used this book for class daily. It is well organized, and while pricey its worth it. Great for poli sci majors and minors

Although this was published in 1999, it is by far one of the best texts I've come across for political theory. This is a must have for the political theorist.- M.S. in political science

The only thing i really like about this book is that its cheap. I only bought this book for my Political Theory class, I dont think I wouldve bought it if not for that.

book in good condition like description said. it took longer than i would've liked for the book to arrive- since i needed it for class.

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