



## **Democratic Distributive Justice**

Ross Zucker

*Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001*

*ISBN 0-521-7903-36.*

*Contemporary Political Theory* (2002) 1, 245–246. DOI: 10.1057/palgrave.cpt.9300033

A curious feature of Anglo-American political theory in recent decades has been the divide between democratic theory and liberal political philosophy. Comparing and contrasting classics of each, notably Dahl's *Democracy and its Critics* on one side and Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* and *Political Liberalism* on the other, reveals the democratic theorist's suspicion of regarding substantive social and economic rights as primary democratic rights, and the theorist of justice's suspicion of the capacity of merely procedural democracy of the broadly polyarchal (or perhaps 'aggregative') kind to produce just outcomes. In *Democratic Distributive Justice*, Ross Zucker argues in impressive and often meticulous detail for the view that 'a political system does not qualify as a democracy unless it brings about a just economic order as well' (p. 277). In this way, he argues that procedural conceptions of democracy — which he sees as dominant in democratic theory, as exemplified by Dahl's major work — are inadequate, since they fail to recognize and therefore to embrace the importance of a certain form of income equality between citizens.

Zucker deduces this substantive economic democratic right by a complex process of reasoning. The essence of the argument is that, in a capitalist economy, wealth is a product of orientations and preferences of consumers as well as producers. All members of the economic system make a contribution to the creation of economic value, since 'Produced commodities will not have value — will not form particles of wealth — unless they are wanted or needed' (p. 85). This contribution needs to be recognized, as commonly it is not. The form that such recognition should take, according to Zucker, is a collective commitment to the equalization of a portion of income: 'since individuals make some equal indirect contributions to value, they are due proportionate benefits' (p. 280). Much of the book buttresses the varied elements of this deductive argument. Key sections and chapters address liberal theories of property, the ethics of community as they should be applied to the economy, the nature and implications of the endogenous formation of market preferences, and the current state of democratic theory with regard to economic justice. Many parts of the argument are compelling, such as the critique of the liberal 'hidden premise of subjective personality' and



the dependence of capitalist economies on a sub-structure of economic community.

The book is erudite, closely reasoned and tightly written, and its tone engaged and serious. Importantly, Zucker gets to the nub of key issues involved in the democratic theory debates he wishes to influence. He sets out with commendable clarity, for example, his view that ‘current “democracies” that lack the redistributory property right do not qualify as true democracies along this dimension’ (p. 6). There are many arguable points, starting with the promotion of unambiguous end-state reasoning at a time when even Rawlsian theorizing has adopted a brand of deliberative proceduralism (whether hypothetical or actual), in the face of criticism of the idea that the reasoned deduction of democratic rights may be a sufficient basis for their acceptance. However, Zucker’s thesis deserves widespread attention both for its tight and comprehensive character and for its substantive importance at a time of widening inequalities in market economies.

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