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Jeffrey Stout. *Democracy and Tradition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004. Pp. xv + 348. \$35.00 (cloth).

[1] Jeffrey Stout is seeking a way to move beyond the current impasse between secular liberalism and theological traditionalism. On the one hand, the secular liberalism of John Rawls and Richard Rorty provides little to no place for religious reasons in political arguments. Initially, Rawls prohibited religious premises from public argument because they cannot form part of the basis upon which citizens reason in common. Subsequently, Rawls softened this view to allow for religious reasons provided that they are later supplemented by arguments based on the social contract. But as Stout remarks, religious reasons here stand only as IOUs for a legal tender comprised of contractarian reasons. Rorty's exclusion of religion from political argument is more pragmatic. The expression of religious reasons tends to derail what otherwise might be a productive public conversation. Thus, Rorty sees religion as a conversation-stopper: generally it is an exercise in bad taste. On the other hand, traditionalists, such as John Milbank, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Stanley Hauerwas, claim that democracy and the politics of liberalism lack the resources for transmitting the virtues from one generation to the next. In response to a secular liberalism that has defined the world for several centuries, Milbank calls on theology to refuse secular reason and the secular state; MacIntyre claims that followers of a tradition of the virtues must reject modern democracy; and Hauerwas starkly claims that "if the gospel is true, then the politics of liberalism must be false" (140). Getting beyond the current impasse between these antagonistic positions will be no easy task.

[2] Stout attempts to chart a path between secular liberalism and theological traditionalism by arguing that democracy itself is a tradition. There is one thing, according to Stout, that secular liberals and theological traditionalists agree upon: the erroneous view that democracy is essentially opposed to tradition. In fact, much in the current debate between liberals and traditionalists stems from this misunderstanding of democracy. In the first part of the book, Stout provides his alternative vision of democracy. Whitman and Emerson figure prominently in a sketch of an American democratic tradition which inculcates certain habits, attitudes, dispositions, and love for the virtues. Stout focuses especially on the virtue of piety, conceived as the appropriate response to the sources of one's existence and progress

through life, because of its centrality to the present debate over the role of religion in political life. Stout hopes that his portrayal of the democratic tradition can become a basis for consensus between Emersonian perfectionists, such as himself, and democratically-inclined Augustinians.

[3] Unfortunately, I think Stout overestimates the attractiveness of his portrait. Augustinians will probably not be terribly impressed with the self-reliant piety that is central to Stout's view of the democratic tradition. It is more likely that they will recoil from it, wary as they are of the devices and desires of the human heart. I think Stout's invitation to Augustinians to identify with the tradition of democratic social practices will strike some as a call to abandon their primary identification with the moral and spiritual practices of the church. Some traditionalists will see the price of admission as too high if they feel they are being asked to leave behind their most cherished loyalties

[4] Having deflated the claim that democracy is opposed to tradition, Stout turns in the second part of the book to the mediation of the conflicting views of secular liberalism and theological traditionalism by means of immanent criticism. Through sensitive and sympathetic readings of Rawls and Rorty, on the one hand, and Milbank, MacIntyre, and Hauerwas, on the other, Stout uncovers the internal inconsistencies and blind spots of their respective positions. His criticism reveals that both perspectives trade on dubious understandings of democratic culture, and opens up the possibility that both sides may dispense with their fallacious assumptions and discover some common ground or consensus. If Rawlsian liberalism does not provide an adequate account of democratic culture, then one can reject liberal theory without rejecting our political culture. Drawing largely on the work of Christopher Hill, Stout offers a rather benign theory of secularization wherein religious folks can participate fully in political discourse without having to discount their own theological beliefs. In fact, Stout claims, the theological beliefs of Christian orthodoxy are not the source of the antidemocratic sentiments expressed by the theological traditionalists. As the examples of George Hunsinger and Nicholas Wolterstorff show, one can be an orthodox Christian and also demonstrate a commitment to democratic culture.

[5] Stout's immanent criticism of liberalism and traditionalism is, in my view, his greatest contribution. His critiques of secular liberals and theological traditionalists are consistently intelligent and highly engaging. More importantly, his immanent criticism clears away some of the obstacles between secular liberalism and theological traditionalism, and opens up genuine possibilities for conversation. This will be the enduring contribution of Stout's work. Whether the conversation will proceed along the lines set out by Stout is another matter. I have my doubts.

[6] The major weakness of Stout's project comes in his constructive proposal for the convergence of secular liberalism and theological traditionalism around a form of pragmatic expressivism. Pragmatism, for Stout, is "democratic traditionalism": it seeks "to bring the notions of democratic deliberation and tradition together in a single philosophical vision" (13). Despite the *caveat lector* in the introduction, I fear Stout will lose much of his intended audience in the third part of the book where he lays out his version of pragmatism. His argument relies heavily on technical discussions of the philosophical literature and occasionally gets bogged down in detailed treatments of individual thinkers. More

substantively, there are problems with Stout's discussion of justification and truth. He labors mightily to maintain a distinction between the concepts of justification and truth, trying to avoid Dewey's collapsing of the two notions in his definition of truth as warranted assertibility. While justification is a contextual and relative affair, according to Stout, truth is not. Technical quibbles aside, it seems that Stout's main motivation for maintaining this distinction between justification and truth is that it fosters a type of conversation he sees as central to the democratic tradition. Stout's non-relative conception of truth allows him to claim that some of our currently justified beliefs must be false. This gap between justification and truth promotes a spirit of self-criticism and open-ended inquiry that he sees as important for democratic conversation. The concept of truth for Stout is used primarily to support a certain type of conversation.

[7] Interestingly, Stout's conception of truth reverses the relationship between truth and inquiry that was articulated in the classical pragmatism of C. S. Peirce. For Peirce, a spirit of self-criticism and open-ended inquiry served the purposes of truth, not the other way around. The point for Peirce was not that some of my beliefs may be false, so I should be humble and tolerant of other views because they may be true. Rather, truth is more like plotting the position of a star. No two observations are ever the same. However, the more observations we have, the better able we are to plot the star's position. Certainty about the star's position would require an infinite number of observations. The spirit of self-criticism and open-ended inquiry are the means of moving ever closer to the truth. Not only do I think a Peircian understanding of truth (especially as articulated by Hilary Putnam) more defensible than Stout's, but also I think it is more likely to be attractive to theological traditionalists. If Stout is seeking consensus with theological traditionalist I do not think his version of pragmatic truth for the sake of conversation will do it. It will sound too much like the university professor whose idea of heaven is one of endless conversation. The appeal to theological traditionalists will be stronger if the version of pragmatism which underlies our democratic practices could claim that the spirit of self-criticism, tolerance of other viewpoints, and open-ended inquiry are a means to moving along the path to truth. I suspect that this version of pragmatism would have more appeal to religious people who know a thing or two about human folly, the need for repentance and reconciliation, and the spirit of self-sacrifice for the sake of a truth that will be fully revealed only in the future. I do not think that Augustinians will be able to identify themselves with the tradition of democratic social practices in the way Stout proposes. I think it is more likely that they will seek consensus with others in modern democratic societies, who understand their discursive practices as provisional stops along the way towards the consummation of human history and the final revelation of the truth.

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