

Foundations of Liberalism by Margaret Moore (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) 222pp.

Reviewed by Eyal Mozes

Foundations of Liberalism, by Margaret Moore, is a critique of "liberal" theories of justice, and a defense of communitarianism. The book consists of six chapters, other than the introduction; the first five each critique one or two "liberal" writers; the last chapter, titled "an alternative foundation for political and ethical principles," presents Moore's positive case for communitarianism.

I placed the word "liberal" in quotes in the above paragraph, because Moore has a very narrow idea of what liberalism is. Moore never mentions any libertarian writers (other than two very brief mentions of Nozick); she never mentions any neo-Aristotelians such as David Norton or Henry Veatch; most notable (to me at least) in its absence is any mention of Ayn Rand, or of any of the neo-Aristotelian, classical-liberal writers influenced by her, such as Tibor Machan, Douglas Rasmussen or Douglas Den Uyl. If Moore had written her book in the 1970s, we might have assumed that she simply never heard of the many views she ignores. For a book on this subject completed in 1992, this no longer seems plausible, unless she did an extremely sloppy research job; rather, one suspects that Moore is trying to choose opponents who are easy to demolish, trying to bolster communitarianism by pretending that the particular brand of "liberalism" she critiques is its only competition.

Moore's critique of David Gauthier

The first part of the book, ludicrously mistitled "Individualist Liberal Theories," contains three chapters: ch. 2 on Alan Gewirth's *Reason and Morality*; ch. 3 on John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*; and ch. 4 on David Gauthier's *Morals by Agreement*. Moore's central theme in these chapters is that theories of justice based on the Kantian requirement for an impartial perspective suffer from two related problems: "the integrity problem" - how the impartial perspective can be related to the perspective of the individual - and "the motivation problem" (also known as the "why be moral?" problem) - what reason an individual has for acting according to the dictates of the impartial perspective. Both Gewirth and Rawls, with their reliance on a strictly impersonal perspective as a basis for justice, and their total separation of morality from the self-interest of any actual person, are easy pickings for Moore, and her critiques of them are entirely predictable.

Gauthier seems at first glance to present a harder challenge, since he claims to base his theory on individual self-interest. But Gauthier becomes an easy target as well, because of his abstract conception of self-interest, based on his Hobbesian model of human beings as "mutually unconcerned utility-maximizers." As Moore points out, the existence of relations of love and friendship limits the relevance of Gauthier's theory to actual human beings; "Gauthier's method of proceeding opens up a gap between people in the real world, who frequently act on the basis of concern for other (particular) people, and the essentially external relations between people embodied in Gauthier's principles of justice."¹

Moore also points out that even if Gauthier's model of human nature is accepted, there are serious technical problems in his arguments, for example, in his argument that it is rational to comply with agreements one has made. Gauthier differentiates between "straightforward maximizers," who decide in each case whether complying with an agreement they have made would maximize their utility; and "constrained maximizers," who act to maximize their utility subject to the constraint of always complying with their agreements. Gauthier argues that people can often ascertain the dispositions of others, so constrained maximizers will often be able to identify straightforward maximizers and avoid dealing with them; and, assuming that the population contains some threshold percentage of constrained maximizers, the risk of being taken advantage of by judging others incorrectly are low enough, so that a constrained maximizer will have better opportunities overall than a straightforward maximizer to benefit by dealing with others; therefore, being a constrained maximizer is in one's self-interest. The problem Moore points out is that Gauthier has no explanation, given his model of rationality, as to how the threshold number of constrained maximizers would arise in the first place, given that before such a threshold number has appeared, it is in any individual's self-interest to be a straightforward maximizer. She identifies this step in Gauthier's argument as an implicit communitarian appeal; "those who make up the threshold number [of constrained maximizers] must have arrived there, become moral, not through self-interested calculation but through the adoption of the collective standpoint. They must have ceased to think in terms of self-interest and identified themselves with the interests of the whole, of the collective body."²

But the problem Moore identifies are not problems with individualism, or with liberalism, or with the idea of morality based on self-interest; rather, they are problems with Gauthier's peculiar method of justifying these ideas, based on his Hobbesian conception of what self-interest consists of. To support her claim that there is a problem with morality based on self-interest, Moore would have to confront Aristotelian accounts of self-interest as self-actualization, and classical liberal accounts of its implications for interpersonal ethics, such as the account in Den Uyl and Rasmussen's *Liberty and Nature*. Regarding the reasons for complying with one's agreements, or more generally for avoiding predatory behaviour, Moore would have to confront Ayn Rand's account of the virtue of honesty, and her argument that there are no conflicts of interest among rational men. Regarding the relevance of concern for other particular people, she would have to confront Aristotelian and Randian accounts of the profoundly selfish nature of love and friendship. Moore writes: "the failure of Gauthier's resolution of the motivation problem is itself important, because it represents another failed attempt to derive morality from self-interest and so suggests that the true explanation and justification of moral motivation would concentrate not on its individual self-interested rationality but on the adoption of the collective standpoint;"³ one gets the impression that she was using Gauthier as a convenient whipping-boy, as the easiest path towards appearing to have justified the above statement.

Moore on Raz and Kymlicka

The second part of Moore's book, titled "Revisionist Liberal Theories," consists of two chapters. The first chapter (ch. 5 in the book) discusses Rawls' later papers, responding

to communitarian critics of *A Theory of Justice*. Moore easily disposes of Rawls' responses, demonstrating that to the extent that his theory is coherent, it becomes indistinguishable from communitarianism in its arguments and in the policies it supports.

Moore's ch. 6 titled "Perfectionist Arguments for Liberalism," discusses Will Kymlicka's *Liberalism, Community and Culture*, and Joseph Raz's *The Morality of Freedom*. Both of these writers are different from Moore's previous targets, in that they try to base liberalism on a theory of the good life. Both Raz and Kymlicka argue that liberalism can be justified on the basis of a theory of the good life, a theory offering an objective list of substantive values, with individual autonomy among them.

Moore's basic argument against Raz and Kymlicka is: "The ideal of personal autonomy is a formal conception, concerned with the *way* in which the person conducts her [sic] life and acquires her values, goals, and commitments, while other values on the objective list theory of well-being are substantive values, concerned with the *content* of the person's goals, ideals and values, [therefore] there is always the possibility that the two may come apart, that the person may freely choose to adopt ways of life that are contrary to the ideal."⁴ She therefore questions whether a theory of the good life can justify giving priority to autonomy, allowing the individual political freedom to act on his values even when the political or community authorities judge them to be objectively bad.

Kymlicka's central argument, why autonomy should be given priority, is that objective values can only be values for a person if he recognizes them as such;" [even if I make a mistake, no one] can come along and improve my life by leading it for me, in accordance with the correct account of value. On the contrary, no life goes better by being led from the outside according to values the person does not endorse. My life only gets better if I am leading it from the inside, according to my beliefs about value."⁵ This is the beginning of a valid and very important argument; but in Kymlicka's version, it is incomplete. Moore's response is that those who seek to suppress someone's way of life, which they regard as wrong, are not typically concerned with improving the life of those they are suppressing, but with improving the community by eliminating corrupting influences, or improving the lives of future generations; and that Kymlicka's argument does not address this motive for coercion. Kymlicka gives the example of religious coercion, stating that a person coerced into a religion will go through the external motions of praying but will not really adopt the faith, and so his life would not be improved even if the faith were objectively good; Moore counters, citing Brian Barry, that religious coercion is clearly effective in inducing religious faith in future generations, as evidenced by the many devout Christians or Muslims today whose ancestors were coerced into adopting the religion.

Again, it looks like Moore has chosen convenient opponents. The idea of the good life as the basis of ethics is closely associated with Aristotle, so it seems especially strange that Moore has not cited in this chapter any neo-Aristotelian writers (neither Raz's nor Kymlicka's book even lists Aristotle in the index). If we assume that Moore would not cite, e.g. Douglass Rasmussen or Tibor Machan, because of an aversion to citing any genuine, classical liberal, individualist writers, she might at least have cited David Norton. Neo-Aristotelians have more solid defenses of why autonomy is necessary for the good life, and more complete and plausible versions of the "argument from internal value,"

which would have been harder for Moore to dismiss. Most important, the Aristotelian framework demonstrates the fallacy in Moore's distinction between autonomy, "concerned with the *way* in which the person conducts her life," and "substantive values, concerned with the *content*;" on an Aristotelian, virtue ethics, *all* major values constituting a good life are concerned with the way a person acts and conducts his life, and there is nothing unique about autonomy in this regard.

Here is also where the lack of any mention of Ayn Rand is most jarring. Rand provided the strongest case for ethics concerned with the good life leading to a politics in which liberty is the most important value. On Rand's argument (to summarize it very sketchily), reason is man's basic tool of survival, and so use of one's reason is the most important condition for the individual's survival. Since rational thinking can only be performed by an individual, this makes independence a primary virtue. At the social level, therefore, the ability to use one's mind independently, and live by one's independent conclusions, is the most important value. The point is *not* that liberty is the most important value for an individual; the point is that liberty is the central *social* condition for the ability to conduct one's life by reason, and is therefore the most important value, the most important condition for survival, *specifically at the social level*. (On this particular point, however, I do not suspect Moore of ignoring an argument that she cannot answer. This argument about the connection of reason to liberty is unique to Rand, and has not been developed or emphasized by any of the academic writers influenced by Rand; so it is quite plausible that Moore was genuinely unaware of this argument, even with a reasonable research job. This indicates the importance of Rand's argument on this point, and that Randian-influenced classical liberals should pay more attention to it).

Conclusion

The third part of Moore's book consists of her final chapter, defending communitarianism. There is little of interest in this chapter, repeating standard communitarian arguments, as supposedly the only alternative to the "liberals" she had disposed of in the previous chapters.

Overall, the main lesson we can learn from Moore's book is that classical liberalism, on an Aristotelian or Randian basis, is the only effective response to communitarianism. If communitarians are allowed to pretend that "liberals" like the ones Moore discusses are their only competition, they will have no difficulty in emerging victorious.

Endnotes

1. Moore, p.105.
2. p.92.
3. p.92.
4. p.147.
5. Kymlicka, p.12.