

Book Announcements

The Dynamics of Democratization: Elites, Civil Society and the Transition Process, by Graeme Gill. London: Macmillan, 2000. ISBN 0-333-80197

Among the extensive literature on democratization in the late twentieth century, this text finds an important place, not just as a useful overview of the scale, scope and character of democratization, but also in pressing a powerful argument for the centrality of civil society. In bringing ‘the people back in’ Gill is looking to correct what he sees as an over-emphasis on the role of elites in transitions, and a corresponding narrow methodological focus underwritten by conservative conceptions of democracy. Gill advocates for rethinking ‘elite theory’ in terms of elite-society relations and especially the character of the latter. Fundamentally, he concludes, the shape of transition is determined by the relationship between the regime and oppositionist, popular-based civil society. The nature of the regime internally and the strength of popular forces is crucial. The state can be differentiated as to whether it is unitary or segmented, and society as to whether it is atomized or has an independent civil society. From the four possible combinations that result just one is conducive to democratic transition: a segmented regime and a strong civil society.

Gill convincingly defends his simpler, cleaner, theory through application to a series of case studies, arguing that his theoretical and methodological revision extends to the domain of democratic consolidation, placing greater salience on variables such as popular political culture and the precise character of state-society relations.



History of Shit, by Dominique Laporte. Translated by Nadia Benabid and Rodolphe el-Khoury. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000. ISBN 0-2626-2160-6

Laporte adopts the psychoanalytic approach of Freud and Lacan to explore civilization’s ambivalent relationship with shit. His thesis is that excrement is central to state control and cultural production and
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consumption, the efficient operation of which depends on its repression. The relationship of society to shit is traced from the politics of waste in the sixteenth century through to the height of capitalism. Laporte argues that this relationship is evident in the sterilization of waste and discourse, as well as in a belief in the purifying value of human excrement. Waste, he contends, is central to strategies of state power, including its 'patrolling and controlling of orifices' (63). Particularly interesting is the insight that the Enlightenment privileges the visual over the olfactory: 'Smells have no place in the constitutive triad of civilization: hygiene, order and beauty. In the empire of hygiene and order, odour will always be suspect' (84). The prose is deliberately convoluted, 'a backhanded attempt to reverse the deodorization of language by means of a reeking syntax' (ix).



An Introduction to Philosophy, by Jon Nuttall. Cambridge: Polity, 2002. ISBN 0-7456-1662-3

This is an animated and accessible introduction to philosophy, highly recommended for first year undergraduates, or anyone studying the subject for the first time. It ranges from the question of just what philosophy is to contemporary political issues and covers almost every major aspect of analytic philosophy in between. The main areas in analytic philosophy are introduced by way of some of their central questions with a view to engaging students with philosophical method and thus encouraging them to critically address each step in the arguments themselves.

Nuttall begins with a discussion of Descartes' *Meditations*, through which he introduces the central concerns of modern philosophy. Following this are chapters on perception and reality; knowledge, belief and logic; space, time and causality; the mind; God; morality and, finally, political issues. Nuttall manages to achieve clarity in revealing the links between the differing areas of philosophy, and in elucidating historical and contemporary debates and the relations between them, without being dull, verbose or overly simplistic.