The Philosophical Quarterly Vol. 00, No. 0
ISSN 0031-8094 doi: 10.1093/pq/pqw050

BOOK REVIEW

Politics against Domination. By Ian Shapiro. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016. Pp. xii + 273. Price £25.95.)

Who is in favour of domination? Surely some people have a strong interest in preserving it, but as this is not publicly confessable and people enjoy picturing themselves as moral, everyone will officially support a non-domination programme. What is more, Ian Shapiro suggests, in circumstances where 'you cannot be confident of your ability to dominate others', it is in your interest 'to create a world that no one can dominate' (pp. 5 and 6). These two aspects probably account for the wide appeal of non-domination approaches in recent political theory: they have the potential to stay clear from the never-ending conflicts about the appropriate currency of distributive justice. And this, from the pragmatic and democratic perspective endorsed by Shapiro, is a crucial feature of a relevant political theory.

Of course, definitions of domination vary from one author to another. Shapiro, in his coalition-building perspective, works with the general idea that it is unjust when someone's freedom is (or is likely to be) compromised by someone's illegitimate use of power when this could be avoided. There are nonetheless two alternative understandings of domination that he must reject. First, he denies Foucault's claim that domination is ubiquitous and thus inescapable, arguing that power can be exercised without domination. This is why he endorses politics as the instrument of resistance against domination. Secondly, he rejects Pettit's suggestion that the mere capacity to interfere arbitrarily in the lives of others counts as domination, hypothesis which accounts, according to him, for Pettit and other republicans' 'schizoid attitude toward the state' (Shapiro 2012: 321, n. 71). Republicans, he argues, are so concerned with vertical domination (exercised by the state) and majority tyranny that the (counter-majoritarian) institutions they favour are likely to hamstring governments, give veto power to powerful minorities, and thus prove inefficient in fighting horizontal domination (exercised by citizens).

Shapiro, for his part, believes that a combination of majority rule with multiple cleavages, low stakes (no conflict over indivisible goods such as religion or ethnicity) and uncertainty of outcomes is the best bet against both kinds of

domination (horizontal and vertical). What we need is governments afraid of being replaced at the next election and minorities hoping to build or join a winning coalition in the future. He therefore argues for single-member districts with plurality rule over proportional representation because the former setting makes governments more accountable, whereas parties in a coalition tend to blame each other for unpopular policies. And he criticizes political systems with multiple veto players—bicameralism, federalism, judicial review—for their paralysing effects favouring those who are happy with the status quo.

The second part of the book is concerned with ways of fighting domination at the global level and warns against reckless military intervention. Shapiro's discussion of 'containment' as the most promising reaction to armed conflicts is illuminating. He highlights three key features of a successful and legitimate intervention in a foreign country: authorization to intervene (both from those suffering from domination and a supranational authority), diverse coalition (in order to mitigate imperialist interpretations) and proportionality (to dissipate the suspicion of a hidden agenda, such as the attraction of oil reserves). Analysing recent international interventions in Libya and Syria, he also insists on the futility and danger of trying to install democracy in countries lacking a strong and organized opposition with genuinely democratic aspirations.

This book is a great example of empirically enlightened political theory. Shapiro combines his wide knowledge of democratic theory and democratic reality to assess the gap between facts and norms and try to bridge it whenever possible. His 'adaptive' approach to politics insists on pursuing only those goals that appear realistic in the light of our knowledge in the social sciences. Therefore, he avoids talking about justice, observing that people agree more on what is unjust than what is just. Hence, he prefers targeting 'proximate goals' (p. 105) such as a high social wage in the domestic context and a global minimum wage. Yet, as he explains in the preface and in a preliminary article (Shapiro 2012), his first ambition was to expand his democratic theory of justice laid out in his 1999 book *Democratic Justice*, by developing a compelling account of non-domination as the 'bedrock of justice'. In the end, partly 'in the interest of saving trees' (p. x) and partly because he wants to focus on concrete political issues, he has decided to leave aside the theoretical foundations of his work and discuss its applications in the real world, discreetly blaming theories of justice for being politically irrelevant.

This invites reflection upon the nature of justice. Given Shapiro's fascinating work on the reasons why democracies show no tendency to reduce material inequalities (see Shapiro 2003 and his forthcoming book *Democracy and Distribution*) and his worry of relevance, it is not entirely surprising that he endorses a view of justice that is 'not intrinsically hostile to inequality' (p. 101). But should pragmatic considerations influence what we take to be just and unjust? Although reducing domination certainly is a more realistic goal than most egalitarian theories of justice, one could want to resist the claim

that non-domination is the bedrock of justice, as many inequalities are morally unjustifiable even if they do not engender domination.

What is to be praised in Shapiro's work is his willingness to show how we might get to better states of affair from where we now stand. He thus combines a normative agenda with a realistic attitude. One difficulty with realism, though, is that it always runs the risk of legitimizing things as they are, or are taken to be, as when Shapiro rejects 'cosmopolitan disdain for parochialism' as 'snobbery' because 'most people are content to be parochial' (p. 118). He also rejects world government as unlikely and anyway undesirable because it would most likely increase domination rather than mitigate it. And this is why he seems to rely on nation-states as primary actors for fighting domination. Yet, he says little about the way tax competition erodes nation-states' redistributive power, merely suggesting that 'the extent of this atrophy can be overstated' (p. 231, n. 53), and is silent on the probable need for global institutions of some form to cope with the environmental challenges that we are facing. Now, one does not need to be a partisan of world government to push beyond nation-states. And the fact that nation-states are currently multiplying rather than being absorbed into larger entities does not make it irrelevant to argue against nationalism.

The kind of political theory practised by Shapiro is very useful. It warns against naïve idealism, false solutions and irrelevance. One can regret that many political philosophers do not engage more with real politics as Shapiro so aptly does. Yet, we'd better not abandon counter-factual ideals of justice and long-term ambitions, even if they look irrelevant in the present. They also have a crucial role to play in the quest for social progress.

REFERENCES

Shapiro, I. (1999) *Democratic Justice*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
—— (2003) 'Democracy and Distribution', in *The State of Democratic Theory*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 104–45.
—— (2012) 'On Non-Domination', *University of Toronto Law Journal*, 62: 293–335.

University of Louvain, Belgium Pierre-Étienne Vandamme