

BOOKS

Good Philosophy
Made Simple**The Freedom Principle.***By Lansing Pollock.**New York: Prometheus Books.**1981. 130 pp. \$14.95.*

Reviewed by Douglas J. Den Uyl

I am always pleased to see books like *The Freedom Principle* by Lansing Pollock come on the market. I say this not simply because it advocates principles with which I generally agree, but because books on moral and political theory written for the intelligent lay reader are relatively rare. My delight is further intensified when I discover an effort that succeeds.

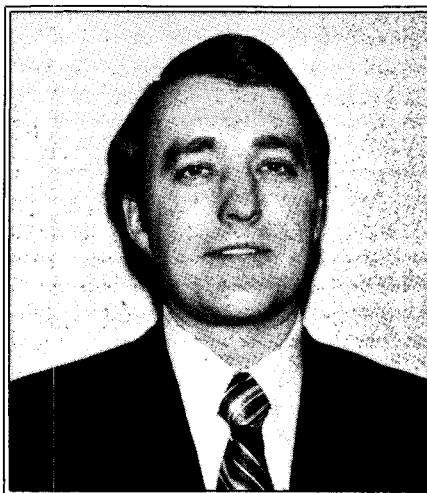
Most of us in academia teach students of normal intelligence without much background in philosophy or political theory. We also often have friends and family members who are interested in philosophies promoting individual liberty, but who will not plow through scholarly works full of technical jargon. It is therefore helpful to have something to hand these people that is serious and readable while not presupposing any philosophical training. With these criteria in mind, I recommend this book without reservation, even though I may disagree with some of Pollock's arguments.

Pollock claims (unfortunately, at the end of the book rather than at the beginning, where it belongs) that he is writing a book "that can be understood by persons with no formal training in philosophy." Nevertheless, what philosophers *think* is intelligible to the lay reader and what actually *is* intelligible are not always the same. The only way to test Pollock's claim was to give it to some lay readers and see what they thought. I did just that with some of my students.

These were students who fit the picture described above and who were also "middle of the road" politically. Not only did these students have no trouble understanding and appreciating what was being said, but they were uniformly impressed by the logic of the argument. Pollock succeeds in showing how a moral principle ("the freedom principle") is something that many would accept on the face of it and yet not realize all its implications. I was thus happy to see the

book "open the eyes" of students about the logic of freedom. And I intend to continue recommending the book to my students.

The first chapter of the book offers an account of the freedom principle ("each person ought to grant other persons an equal right to be free") in terms of autonomy. Persons are autonomous in the sense that they are capable of acting according to their own conceptions of value and of making long-range plans. Our equal autonomy is the basis for our equal right to freedom. In connection with these basic concepts, Pollock discusses such related issues as duty, obligations to aid others, equality, and utilitarianism. In these discussions the



Lansing Pollock

freedom principle takes on the status of a categorical imperative, thus giving the right to freedom a deontological character.

For the most part I have no objections to the foundational discussions of this first chapter. Nevertheless, someone might object that Pollock does not spend time justifying the freedom principle itself. Rather, he simply begins with it and explores its meaning and implications. I am not bothered by this objection, since I think the book works much better without a lot of metaphysical or metaethical baggage. Given the purposes of this book, I therefore find the relative lack of metaethics a virtue rather than a vice.

After the first chapter there are six others concerning the topics of paternalism, punishment, property, government, utopia, and morality. I had numerous points of disagreement with specific proposals Pollock offers. For example, he asserts that it does not violate

the freedom principle for someone's wife to have the court commit him to an institution because of his heroin habit. Moreover, Pollock seems to suppose there will be public parks and public roads in a free society.

But I try to keep the purpose of the book continually in mind. Thus these kinds of objections seem minor to me. Indeed, what is valuable about the book, whether or not one likes all of Pollock's conclusions, is that most of the major areas of controversy are at least touched on in the various chapters. Not only do the discussions cause the unsophisticated reader to think about issues, but there is enough substance in the chapters to cause those of us who are "more sophisticated" to think again about these issues, especially if we find ourselves disagreeing.

Pollock's chapter on property was the least successful. Apart from the fact that he seems to believe there will be sizable holdings of public (government) property in a nonstatist, free society, his main problem stems from an unargued bias in favor of a Lockean conception of natural resources (things valuable for human beings but not produced by them)—that is, resources are conceived to be a common trust. This view leads Pollock to advocate a "resource tax" whereby those who have access to the resources will have to compensate those who do not and thus whose "freedom is diminished."

This modern-day version of Henry George's "single tax" may be more than a minor point of contention of the type mentioned above. When it comes to resources, I have never been much impressed by worries over "Lockean Provisos" and what will happen to others who did not have the entrepreneurial foresight to "get there first." But this is a large issue that cannot be debated here.

Another large issue is Pollock's claim that the government can justifiably take measures to protect the "rights" of future generations—rights that Pollock *asserts* are there rather than argues for. It is thus the weakest link in the logical chain emanating from the freedom principle.

The urge to talk about pollution, original acquisition, taxation, etc., in a chapter on property is quite understandable. Yet the chapter would have been more acceptable if Pollock had devoted his energies to discussing the objections to private property per se. This would have firmly established the logical connection between freedom and private property—which still seems to me to be

the major philosophical issue, especially if one indicates that the kinds of nominal ownership systems employed by most "welfare" states today are not systems of private property.

But I do not want to end on a negative note, for the book does not deserve it. Even the chapter on property raises a number of other important issues and handles them correctly. For anyone interested in contemplating the moral foundations of a "free society," this book serves as an excellent introduction to principles of freedom.

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Safe, Secure . . . and Stagnant

The No-Risk Society.

By Yair Aharoni.

Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House.
1981. 228 pp. \$25.00/\$12.95.

Reviewed by Jack Kirwan

Webster's Third International Dictionary gives two synonyms for *risk*. The first is *danger* and the second is *venture*. It is no accident that the *danger* material is almost three times longer than the *venture* part, for this reflects our current social perspective.

Risk taking is encouraged and approved of in vigorous, growing societies. When Horace Greeley advised, "Go West, young man," he didn't add anything about pensions or guarantees—or about Arrowcare in case of Indian attack. However, in a stagnant or declining culture, the risk taker is something else again. Not only is he considered a danger to himself (keep off those cliffs, sonny) but he's a menace to public order and stability as well.

The big difference, of course, is that in the livelier society, the risk taker is focusing on the possibility of success. In the other, the probability of failure is the overriding concern. It is with such questions in mind that Yair Aharoni, who teaches business policy at Tel Aviv University, has written *The No-Risk Society*.

It is a book of jumbled values. Aharoni is a long way from being an uncompromising advocate of the free market: "By now," he writes, "we all recognize that perfect competition cannot exist in practice and a capitalist economy must be a mixed one." However, this doesn't mean

he sees safety and predictability as the only virtues or that he wants to turn the marketplace into a well-padded cell. "Governmental involvement creates dependency and dependent people are not free. . . . Dependency creates a dynamic demand for more government intervention; if the public pays the bills, the government feels entitled to tell the individual how to behave. . . ." Actually, the whole book provides a detailed look at the tension between the desire for security versus the danger of stagnation. And it makes for very interesting reading.

For one thing, Professor Aharoni writes very well. He has the happy knack of putting a lot of theory into a few words. He writes that "the more government protects the individual against risks, the more it feels entitled to restrict individual choice. Societal assumption of risk means not only the coverage of benefits but also concern to reduce the size of payments through added safety. An individual who suffers injury through neglecting the use of a safety device should not be allowed to receive indemnity, or his insurance costs should be increased. But if that individual is eligible for health or disability insurance, many would claim that he still should be compelled to be cautious, since it is society

loathed the extremely unpleasant and dangerous overland trip to the mining country of the Yukon (given their druthers, they would have preferred a comfortable train to climbing the Chil-koot Pass any day). At the same time, however, sportsmen in Europe were taking trains to the Alps specifically to risk their lives climbing far more dangerous mountains. Except for first ascents, the summits were not really their goal. Their purpose was the rewarding risk involved in getting to the top.

Either way, back then, those who wanted no part of such things just sat back and let the crazies risk their fool necks. Not so today. As Aharoni shows again and again, we have progressed to the point where there is no end to volunteer and professional eagerness to protect us from ourselves. The anti-growth neo-Luddite movement is intimately connected with the no-risk mindset.

The No-Risk Society is a thorough, well-documented study. Aharoni presents the problem well enough but is short on solutions. "To live in an interdependent world," he writes in the last sentence of the book, "a moderate balance must be struck between private rights and social obligations, between individual freedom and societal restraint." It will have to be another book that builds on Aharoni's work with an emphasis on individual freedom.

Jack Kirwan is assistant editor of The Energy Journal.

Political Pollution

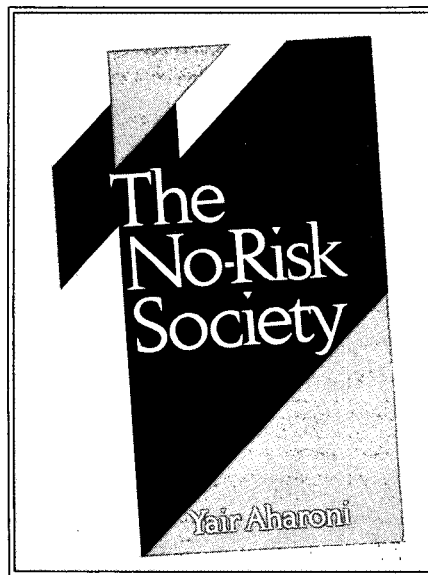
Clean Coal/Dirty Air

By Bruce A. Ackerman and William T. Hassler.

New Haven: Yale University Press.
1981. 193 pp. \$5.95 paper.

Reviewed by David T. Fractor

In 1970, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was created to administer all important federal environmental programs. The event was applauded by most individuals who value a clean environment. While it is true that the EPA had no internal mechanism that would force it to look at the costs and benefits of its actions—so that it would then support only those proposals where benefits exceeded costs—it was believed that its actions would at least enhance the quality of the environment. The one



that covers the cost. . . . In this way, expanded social insurance reduces freedom. It also reduces the incentive to be cautious."

There are basically two different types who take risks: those for whom risks are an unpleasant, but necessary, means to an end and those who enjoy riskiness for its own sake. In 1898, for example, almost all the Klondike gold hunters