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***Democracy and Tradition.* By Jeffrey Stout. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004. ISBN 0-691-10293-7. Pp. xv + 348.**

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In *Democracy and Tradition*, Jeffrey Stout addresses a number of issues at the convergence of religion, politics and ethics in the American context. He defends a conception of democracy that emphasizes public reasoning and a place for religious belief as part of the public, political conversation. In proposing his own formulation for what should be at the heart of liberal democracy, Stout wants to differentiate his program from the pervasive influences of John Rawls and Richard Rorty, who largely deny religion a place in public political discourse. Against the new 'traditionalists' such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas who are largely critical of liberal democracy, Stout wants to defend a particular democratic vision or 'tradition' rather than jettisoning liberal democracy on account of its failures. The tradition he ultimately wants to defend is 'pragmatism' wherein "the philosophical space in which democratic rebellion against hierarchy combines with traditionalist love of virtue to form a new intellectual tradition that is indebted to both" (13).

In the first section of the book Stout addresses questions of character and virtue, and describes some of Emerson, Whitman and Dewey's contributions to democratic discourse as it relates to these areas. Stout focuses on ways in which these three authors have contributed to a notion of naturalistic 'piety' and describes how Dewey tried to avoid "the extremes of militant atheism and arrogant traditionalism" (32) although his work is firmly committed to affirming naturalism and denying religious supernaturalism. The piety Stout attributes to these three thinkers, and the kind that he wants to affirm, is a historically self-aware and self-critical piety that properly acknowledges the sources and traditions that one draws on throughout one's life. In this section Stout also looks at the issue of Black Nationalism and how this relates to democratic discourse within democracies that are characterized by diversity and difference. What is needed is a degree of common ground found through 'conversation'; instead of focusing on the diversity and disagreement that are inevitably present in democracies, Stout emphasizes the possibilities for dialogue and substantial agreement through honest democratic conversation.

In the second section Stout offers critiques of MacIntyre and Hauerwas, whom he sees as having the greatest theological voices within American contexts, as representatives of a 'traditionalism' that attacks democracy. The primary issue that Stout raises is how incompatible or compatible faith commitments are as bases for political and ethical discussion. He argues that if religious beliefs are a significant part of one's belief system and values then one's religious beliefs should not be excluded from the public table of discourse and relegated to the personal and private realm. Despite obvious examples where mixing religion and politics have been seen as imprudent or dogmatic, Stout defends the place of religion *within* democratic discourse. What seems potentially problematic with this conception however, at least from a religiously committed point of view, is that 'democracy' as conceived by Stout seems privileged in both welcoming religious bases for personal beliefs

and also relegating them insufficient 'grounds' for shared political beliefs and conclusions. Religion is given a place at the table, but a less equal place it would seem. Although he attacks the pessimistic and anti-liberal attitudes of Hauerwas and others who would place religion above democracy, he does not offer a reason for his conception of democracy trumping all other traditions other than the strong history of it in America.

The third section more clearly outlines the pragmatism that Stout is proposing; while engaging popular strains of liberalism and traditionalism he delves into a variety of philosophers, touching on questions in epistemology and metaphysics that relate to ethics. Stout wants to emphasize that just because there are culturally conditioned beliefs, opinions and 'warranted belief' in one's own opinions, this does not mean that 'truth' is simply relative to each individual. Echoing his earlier work *Ethics After Babel* (1988), he makes a case for a 'moral *bricolage*' of divergent and multifarious ethical points of view that come together to form a common morality that all can share in to a degree, at least within a particular community. And in this view of morality where there are commonly shared frameworks, perhaps even global frameworks, "then confidence might be restored in moral truth, in justified moral belief, and in the possibility of cross-cultural moral judgment."

What Stout does excellently in this book is highlight some of the key thinkers, arguments and positions related to democracy and religion. The book does not appear intended only for those familiar with his themes, however some general background in the key thinkers and ideas is helpful to see the crux of what Stout is arguing. While the book admittedly focuses on the American context and primarily Christian theological challenges to liberal democracy, Stout has written a very engaging book that lays out perennial problems applicable to large variety of political and religious cultures. An area of weakness in the book is related to Stout's optimistic appraisal of democracy, which could almost be construed as a 'faith in democracy,' although I doubt he would care for or agree with the 'faith' moniker. Another area in which some readers will find fodder for disagreement is the primacy Stout gives to democracy over religious beliefs and commitments, despite having welcomed religion to the public table of political democratic discourse. Coming as he does from a 'non-faith' perspective, one wonders how far his suggestions will move those of a religious persuasion whose first commitment is, at least in theory, to their religious beliefs. It would seem for theists that the priority would be democracy fitting into their commitments to religion, while for Stout religion must defer to democracy. Despite these areas of potential stalemate in the conversation, Stout has done an excellent job of making a case for religion in the public square and laying out some of the key issues and thinkers in the American context. I suspect that the deficiencies one may feel in reading the book are likely related more to the fundamental deep commitments people find themselves drawn to, and not in Stout's helpful and timely survey of the land that suggests both dangers and promise for the enterprises of democracy and religion.

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