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Introduction: What is Liberalism?

Liberalism is a precarious achievement of enduring value. This important legacy of both European history and philosophy – what we sometimes like to abbreviate imprecisely as the Enlightenment – is not simply of local significance to the Atlantic democracies and their close relatives such as Australia and New Zealand. It has a scope and resonance that continues to inspire political emancipation both within Europe and far beyond. Furthermore, it is an achievement that is not subject to the increasingly commonplace charges of philosophical confusion, reductionist individualism, political naivete and irrelevance, or cultural imperialism, or, at least, that is what I contend in what follows. This book offers a restatement and defence of liberalism as a theory about the proper limits to the exercise of political power and about the scope of just political action. Yet liberalism is ubiquitous in both the academy and the public realm, so much so that it is often presented as a hegemonic ideology or intellectual orthodoxy, so why do we need another defence of liberalism? In answering this simple question we open up issues that take us to the heart of the problem of liberalism as an ideology, political movement or approach to normative political theory. The short answer to this question is that most current books on the subject tend to bury liberalism rather than praise it (or at least defend it).[1]

Historians of political thought or ideology often weave complex and interesting tales, attempting to combine ideology, political movements and philosophical position into a coherent whole. Such narratives are always deeply unsatisfactory to someone. Just as Marxists always tend to dismiss characterizations of Marxism as incomplete, partial or distorting, so liberals are equally prone to dispute any attempt to get to the core of what liberalism is really about. So any book that sets out to defend liberalism is bound to face the charge that it offers a distortion, caricature or incomplete picture, that when looked at from another angle shows precisely the opposite of what is depicted. As with many contemporary political concepts and ideologies, liberalism is a deeply contested notion, not least among liberals themselves. A proper history of liberalism would have to try and disentangle the central components of this contested tradition or ideological form. Fortunately I am not concerned with offering *the* history of liberalism as a single ideological form. For a variety of reasons, which are not central to my argument in this book, I do not think such a single history is possible. There is a variety of different national stories that one could tell about liberalism in different countries. Each of these histories emphasizes different concepts, key thinkers and political developments. All of these different national stories are interesting and enhance our understanding of the resources and influences of a complex set of political traditions and arguments. I draw on some of this material selectively in what follows. However, I do not wish to claim that there is a single, true core vision of liberalism. Nor am I concerned with providing a historical account of liberalism as such, although history will play some part in the account of liberalism I present.

Establishing the identity of any historical tradition or ideology is no simple task, if it is even a coherent enterprise. Many contemporary historians of political ideas warn us that ideologies are not really the kinds of things that serious historians should be concerned with.[2] Mindful of this warning and also aware of the need to avoid similar philosophical pitfalls, I claim no more than that the subject of this book is one among a variety of approaches that one can call liberalism.[3] I am concerned with liberalism as a normative political theory, or what with more precision might be called political liberalism. Political liberalism is a branch of the broader liberal tradition that places liberal-egalitarianism distributive principles at its core. It is political for the reason that it is intended to accommodate the plurality of different views about how individuals should live their lives. It does not offer a full theory of personal morality, but instead places limits on the variety of moral and political perspectives that are found in modern democratic societies. These limits are determined by its core normative commitment to the equal status and treatment of each person. Forms of life or third-person moral claims (how I think others should live) are acceptable as public reasons only as long as they are compatible with the recognition of the equal status of others. I can argue for and campaign for my views about how others should live, but I cannot use the power of the state to bring them around to my views. Political liberalism involves the recognition of equal status and what is often referred to as the strategy of privatization. That is the recognition of the need to make controversial moral, political and religious views a matter of private concern, rather than a source of public political conflict. It is important to note, at this point, that political liberalism does not entail moral scepticism. Political liberalism is a moralized political theory; it derives from a recognition of the equal moral worth and standing of all individuals, but it also claims that this view places limits on the scope of moral claims given the fact of reasonable pluralism of moral views in modern democratic societies.

I do not claim that this is all there is to liberalism, nor do I claim that the history of liberalism as a political movement inevitably culminates in contemporary liberal egalitarianism. I wish that were so but it is not. What I am offering here is not a history of the inevitable unfolding of the true character of liberalism. For some, what I defend here will be seen as only a partial offshoot of the liberal family, or even a perversion of classical liberalism. It is merely the current fashion of contemporary political theory since the publication of John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* in 1971. One might argue that an alternative 'epistemological' variant of liberalism, associated with the names of Hayek and Popper, is much closer to the older tradition of classical liberalism, stretching back to the nineteenth century. This epistemological liberalism is still very much alive, although it has indeed been partially eclipsed by Rawlsian political liberalism. However one characterizes liberalism, certain major figures will command attention. I could have told a story that places J. S. Mill, Friedrich Hayek, or Karl Popper at centre stage. Instead, as will soon become clear, my story places John Rawls at centre stage. Alongside Rawls, I also draw on the ideas of Ronald Dworkin and Brian Barry, both of whom develop and extend the Rawlsian legacy. This might be seen to give a peculiarly North American flavour to my account of liberalism. Indeed, some commentators, such as John Gray, have argued that Rawls' legacy has had the negative effect of crowding out other important voices from European liberalism.[4] While there is something to Gray's charge, it remains a distortion to see Rawls' legacy as narrowly north American. Instead the model of liberal egalitarianism he develops is deeply rooted in the European tradition and, perhaps most interestingly, British moral and political theory.

Given all these reasons, it is important to acknowledge that any single interpretation of a complex historical tradition of thought and practice will remain deeply contested. For this reason I want to lower my claims for the variant of liberalism I shall discuss in the rest of this book. Yet I do not want to say that it is merely a contingency of personal taste or prejudice that has made me focus on the political liberalism of Rawls and his followers, rather than the epistemological liberalism of Hayek or Popper. My reasons for focusing on political liberalism are not its historical inevitability, but rather its current political and philosophical significance, which for good or ill cannot be seriously doubted. Whatever its ultimate provenance, liberal egalitarianism remains, in my view, that within the liberal tradition that is most attractive, compelling and least subject to the charge of redundancy. Its appropriateness to the modern democratic state is part of the reason for its hold on the imagination of political theorists in the anglophone world. Whether this connection with the modern democratic state makes the liberal perspective 'the only game in town', the end of history, or merely a contingency that is in the process of giving way to less state-centred forms of political association, is a highly contested topic and one I shall be concerned with in the final section of this book.[5] That said, in a world in which fear of external threats, real or imagined, has put all other political issues on hold, it is more important than ever to recover and restate the principles that derive from liberal egalitarianism and to free ourselves from the corrosive effects of the spurious elevation of community, culture, and majority public opinion over the claims for the equal moral standing of all individuals, whoever they are and wherever they come from.

The conception of liberalism I describe and defend in this book is unfortunately not widely credited in the real world of contemporary democratic politics. Indeed, it has become increasingly fashionable to disparage it. All too frequently, the popular US practice of using the term 'liberal' as a form of political abuse is adopted by both the press and so-called left-of-centre politicians, even in Britain. It is also a common practice, amongst those who should know better, to dismiss concerns about the curtailment of civil liberties as merely the hand-wringing of 'bleeding heart' liberals. What is most disturbing about these responses is that they are not merely the knee-jerk reactions of right-wing commentators and conservative politicians, but are increasingly commonplace amongst those on the left. Yet the liberal egalitarianism they criticize or dismiss is the only adequate principled response that those on the left have to the tyranny of majority opinion and the coercive imposition of arbitrary power. If it does not remain central to the political movement of social democracy, then that tradition has nothing to recommend it beyond its somewhat equivocal history and failure in the economic realm to offer a viable alternative to the marketplace, neither of which are particularly strong selling points.

Another perhaps more surprising realm in which liberal egalitarianism is in retreat is that of the academy. Why this is surprising is that post-Rawlsian liberal egalitarianism is supposed to be the ruling orthodoxy or paradigm for political theory in the anglophone world. Liberalism is often used as a euphemism or shorthand for political theory, ever since the publication of Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* finally contradicted Peter Laslett's premature obituary for political philosophy.[6] Many political theorists still write laments about the difficulty of moving out from beneath Rawls' long shadow, and will no doubt be surprised by my claim that liberal egalitarianism is in retreat in the academy. Yet the hegemonic role of Rawlsian political liberalism is more an appearance than a reality. Non-Rawlsian perspectives still predominate in the teaching and study of political theory, and where the Rawlsian legacy of liberal egalitarianism is defended this is usually in dry-as-dust 'micro-debates' about minor arguments concerning particular pages of *A Theory of Justice*. Liberal egalitarianism is worthy but dull, and no match for the more exciting and esoteric reaches of post-structuralism and deconstructionism, or the flirtation with danger offered by the likes of Nietzsche or Carl Schmitt. Even amongst the worthy, the lure of libertarianism, communitarianism or multiculturalism continues to challenge the coherence and desirability of political liberalism.

As a *liberal* egalitarian I cannot, and do not want to, deny that this plurality of voices is both beneficial and important. It is no part of liberal egalitarianism's aspiration to offer itself as a dogmatic truth beyond the necessary challenges of rival views. That said, the tendency of liberal egalitarianism to become increasingly concerned with the *minutiae* of Rawls or Dworkin, places a responsibility on other sympathetic critics to try to renew interest in the broader liberal egalitarian position. That is primarily what I aim to offer in this short book – not a full philosophical or sociological defence of the liberal egalitarian perspective. Instead my aim is to provide an overview and endorsement of the liberal egalitarian perspective, and dismissal of some of the standard arguments for its supposed philosophical incoherence or political redundancy.

This task is both important and urgent if it is to retain some hold as a civilizing influence on centre-left politics, where, sadly, there is a dearth of defenders of the kind of principled approach to political power that liberal egalitarianism advocates. I remain enough of a rationalist to believe that it is both a necessary and desirable reason for retaining political thought in the university curriculum, in order that it can serve this role of contributing to the education of an active and humane citizenry.

Liberal egalitarianism both needs and deserves a regular restatement and defence – I aim to provide such a defence in this book. But what is liberal egalitarianism? To answer that question will take the rest of this book, which is itself merely a fraction of what would be required for a full philosophical and political defence. Nevertheless, before turning to that longer story I can identify some key features of liberal egalitarianism.

Whereas many commentators and philosophers continue to see liberalism as primarily about liberty, other liberal thinkers have claimed that the core value at the heart of liberalism is not liberty but rather equality. This point has been made most recently and powerfully by Ronald Dworkin, but it is a view widely shared amongst liberal political theorists, and as we shall see it is a view that has deep roots in the history of liberal egalitarianism.[7] But identifying equality as the core value of liberalism raises a number of problems and ambiguities. For many, equality suggests sameness and the denial of difference, and as such is not a value at all but is actually antithetical to liberalism. Many nineteenth-century liberals, for example, saw equality as a 'levelling system', where that levelling was always downwards and thus a denial of the difference, diversity and autonomy that confers value on human existence. Such liberals are anti-egalitarian, seeing the political emancipation offered by democratic movements as a threat to culture and civilization: this was certainly the view of both Von Humboldt and J. S. Mill in the nineteenth century.[8] This common perspective of the ninteenth century was also shared by many twentieth-century liberals such as Friedrich Hayek. Other philosophers, of a less conservative character, still concur with the view that equality is not really a value as such but rather a distributive relation, which might be attached to a host of different values.[9] As a distributive relation (what Joseph Raz calls a 'principle of closure') it can be shown to be anything but valuable by the application of a thought experiment which asks whether, in the distribution of bad things such as illnesses or disabilities, the application of equality as a distributive criterion makes things more or less valuable. Most people would argue that the equalization of circumstances by distributing disabilities is both absurd and repugnant.

In response to these challenges liberal egalitarians claim that equality is a complex of person-regarding values and relations. The core of this position is the fundamental ethical view, claiming that which is of most value is the human person, and however we characterize that value it is something that is exemplified by all human persons – equally. All human beings matter equally simply in virtue of their common moral status as equal moral subjects. There are numerous origins for this belief, both religious and humanistic, but the core idea is neither confined to any of these sources nor does it depend on the truth of any of these comprehensive moral, philosophical or theological perspectives. What does matter is that the idea of equality of concern and respect is both widely held and attractive to individuals and groups beyond the confines of any particular system or culture. Of course, merely agreeing that all persons should be treated with equality of concern and respect does not answer all questions. Not least, we are left with the question of what sort of treatment ensures equality of concern and respect. Liberal egalitarian philosophers and theorists differ in how we should answer that question. However, it is no small achievement to defend fundamental equality of status, as for much of human history and in most parts of the world this idea has been anything but the norm. Social status, race, ethnicity, gender, age, capacity for reason or education – indeed almost any criterion of difference has been used to challenge or deny equality of concern and respect. The contemporary turn towards difference, partiality and group-based identity brings with it the risk of overturning this precious and precarious achievement, so it needs constant restatement as well as defence. The vitality and urgency of this truth is as important as its philosophical defence.

Most liberal egalitarians hesitate at offering any single and conclusive defence of their core commitment. In this, they are no doubt right to acknowledge that there is no single knock-down argument in favour of equality of concern and respect. That said, one must not infer from this fact that there are no reasons for being an egalitarian that are more compelling than the reasons we have for being anti-egalitarian. It is not simply a matter of blind existential choice. While the philosophical arguments for equal moral status are precarious and subject to critique, they are less dubious than the arguments so far offered for the contrary position. All theological and quasi-scientific arguments for natural hierarchy or group difference are more spurious still, and, what is more, they are highly ineffective in persuading those whose status is being denied that they are less deserving of moral consideration than others, and ought to be discriminated against. In the end it has only ever been force and coercion that has sustained social relations of inequality. Although a pure regime of liberal equality exists nowhere at present, we know enough from the experience of more liberal and democratic states that they rely on less coercion and force, at least to the extent of persuading citizens that they are equally deserving of civil liberties, rights and welfare.

We can distinguish two components to the principles of liberal egalitarianism defended in this book. At the philosophical level there is the basic substantive value of equal personhood. At the political level are the principles which distribute the rights and economic resources necessary to protect equal personhood. Although guided by the former, political liberalism is mostly concerned with the shape of political principles that are guided by that basic philosophical commitment to equality.

It is the moral significance of the human person that is at the heart of liberal egalitarianism first and foremost. This makes liberalism an individualistic doctrine. Individualism is often seen as a problem in that it presupposes a false social ontology, by radically atomizing society and dissolving social bonds. Many versions of liberalism are indeed open to such criticisms, but it is not an essential feature of liberal egalitarian individualism that it must be 'atomistic'. Liberal egalitarianism is individualistic in an ethical or normative sense only. That means that in asserting the equal dignity of persons it attaches supreme ethical significance to the human person. This does not entail the denial of any particular social ontology and how persons may well find their identities in, or have their identities conferred by, group membership. It merely asserts that the sociological or social-psychological account of identity is not the last word on ethical or normative significance. Many critics of liberalism still dismiss it out of hand because of its apparent denial of social context and constitutive attachments to others that make up our individual identity. This criticism has been addressed extensively and rejected conclusively. No liberal egalitarian is required to follow Margaret Thatcher and claim that 'there is no such thing as society'. What liberals do claim is that no constitutive attachment, either to state, nation, family or cultural group, must trump the claims of individuals and their basic rights and status.

The equal status attached to all human persons has also often been thought to entail that liberals are primarily concerned with personal autonomy. Yet, whether liberal egalitarians must attach value to autonomy is a secondary matter and depends on how one fleshes out the commitment to equality of concern and respect. The reason that autonomy is often seen as the core liberal value is that it is supposed to be the best explanation of the idea of liberal rights and protections that are central to liberal egalitarians. Liberals undoubtedly cash-out the idea of equal moral status in terms of the distribution of a set of basic rights and titles. These consist of both civil and political rights and protections, as well as claims of economic resources and wealth. These form the subject matter of political liberalism, as we shall see in chapters 4 and 5. These rights constitute protected spheres that place the individual beyond the reach of the coercive claims of the state or society. Of course these protections are only ethical and not practical. Any regime that wants to discard the legitimate claims of individuals can do so. The only force underpinning such protections is moral and is wielded by public opinion, whether national or international. Sceptics often use this fact about rights (a fact which applies as much to legal as to political rights) as a basis for the claim that rights and civil liberties are not much use in the face of the real world of political power and coercion. It is also common to dismiss the culture of rights as an inconvenience that interferes with the real demands of politics. While one can overstate the significance of rights, as sometimes happens in American political theory, we should not lose sight of the power of rights claims as normative reasons, nor should we lose sight of the power of reasons in motivating or restraining political actions.

The civil and political rights at the heart of liberal egalitarianism provide individuals with a morally protected sphere, and it is this that is seen to involve the idea of autonomy. Within this sphere individuals have final discretion about moral, political and religious issues and life choices. This seems to suggest that it is individual choice and endorsement that matters most in determining the authority of any moral viewpoint. Undoubtedly, liberal egalitarians do attach significance to choice or endorsement of moral viewpoints, but it is not obvious that this entails a commitment by them to any strong doctrine of autonomy as the basic value of liberal egalitarianism. If it is merely the case that respect for persons is an autonomy-regarding view because liberals attach value to endorsement and choice, then there is not much to the claim about autonomy and liberal egalitarians might well concede it. However, theorists who attach value to autonomy, especially those in the Kantian tradition, generally use the idea of autonomous choice as self-legislation. This rather complex idea takes us back into the metaphysics of free will and the idea of positive freedom, which we will consider in chapter 4. Strong autonomy theories focus on the idea of the individual's will, so that individuals can be seen as non-autonomous if they make choices of the wrong sort. Liberal egalitarians tend to respect choices, as long as they are not the subject of direct external political coercion and are made within the sphere of an individual's personal discretion. The distinction turns on the role of choice. Strong autonomy theories like those of Kant and Rousseau focus on the kinds of choices made; weak autonomy of theories focus on choice within one's set of rights and liberties, rather than its character. Liberal egalitarians are certainly not committed to autonomy in this stronger sense, although some do endorse such a philosophical position. As the use of the concept of autonomy involves some slippage between these two senses, it is helpful to reserve it for the strong, positive freedom thesis, and instead focus on equal rights and opportunities as being at the heart of political liberalism. Equality of concern and respect is certainly consistent with individuals making life choices or endorsing moral viewpoints that attach little or no significance to autonomy as the source of morality. Instead liberal egalitarianism is concerned with equality as a political value that is concerned with the regulation of legitimate coercion. The imposition of certain moral, religious or political views on individuals by the coercive power of the political community is to deny the equal status of individuals; in that sense it is a denial of equality or concern and respect, and it is that alone which makes it wrong. Thus civil and political rights set the boundaries to the limits of legitimate coercion by the state or wider society and provide similar boundaries to personal discretion. Within that sphere of personal discretion, individuals have, effectively, a right to do wrong.[10] It needs to be stressed here that this right to do wrong follows for the important reason that liberal egalitarianism does not take the view that there are no objective moral values and therefore that individual choices are the sole determinant of what we call values.[11] Some liberals are sceptics and take precisely this view, but it is not necessary that all *must* do so. Liberal egalitarianism, as a political doctrine, is about the legitimate use of coercion or political power, and one can reasonably argue that while some choices are morally wrong or personally harmful, it is not appropriate that they be subject to political coercion or force. Thus it can genuinely be the case that individuals enjoying equal concern and respect can have a right to harm themselves or hold beliefs and values that are false or repugnant to others. This is one of the more demanding features of a liberal egalitarian view and one that is easiest to drop in the face of majority opinion, but in the end it is this view which sustains a humane and civil political community. It is also this view that underpins political liberalism, as it confines the scope of liberal values to the political realm where they underpin fair terms of social cooperation. It is not the goal of liberal politics to foster human perfection or to make men moral.

Another important feature of the liberal egalitarian view about rights and civil liberties is that it is not subject to the political charge that it places too much emphasis on rights and not enough on responsibilities. ‘No rights without responsibilities’ is a platitude trumpeted by New Labour in Britain, by apostles of the Third Way such as Blair, and former President Clinton in the US, as well as communitarians on both sides of the Atlantic, and many social democrats. Yet, like all platitudes, it ignores the central truth of the liberal egalitarian’s understanding of rights.

Liberal egalitarians, unlike libertarians such as the late Robert Nozick, are not committed to the idea that individuals have a narrow set of pre-political rights which place 'side-constraints' on human interaction, this being the end of the matter. Instead, liberal egalitarians have always argued that equality of concern and respect brings with it not only rights as civil protections, but also positive rights to economic justice. Both sets of rights create strong obligations and duties on individuals to contribute their fair share to social justice and the worst-off in society. Different liberal egalitarians give weaker or stronger accounts of the demands of these obligations, duties and responsibilities, but it is simply ignorance to argue that liberals are only concerned about rights and not about responsibilities. The two concepts, as just about every theorist of rights since Jeremy Bentham has acknowledged, always go hand in hand. The issue between different liberal egalitarians is what kind of rights and what kind of responsibilities?

To sum up the basic commitments of the egalitarian political liberalism that will be the focus in this book, we can identify four components, the first two of which refer to its philosophical basis and the second two to its political claims:

1 All individuals are of equal and ultimate moral value.
2 This individualism is ethical and not sociological or psychological.
3 Equality of concern and respect is cashed-out in terms of a set of basic rights, civil liberties and economic entitlements. These rights entail accompanying responsibilities and duties.
4 Ethical individualism and equality of concern and respect does not entail moral scepticism about objective values. It is instead concerned with the moral limitation of coercion or political power.

The early chapters of the book will provide an account of the philosophical origins of liberal egalitarianism and its more recent development as a political theory. The remainder of the book is concerned with its defence against four strands of contemporary criticism. These criticisms overlap, but can be distinguished as those forming an attack on the theoretical foundations of liberal egalitarianism, and those consisting of three political criticisms of liberalism. Defending political liberalism against these three political challenges is as important as defending political liberalism's philosophical credentials. This is so because liberal theorists are not merely engaged in a philosophical exercise but are concerned to connect their theories with the real world of politics. If the political objections hold then the philosophical task, whether completely or partly successful, risks being potentially redundant. That said, the philosophical and political criticism of liberalism is interconnected. The four strands of criticism addressed in the last three chapters are as follows:

1 That political liberalism misunderstands the nature and demands of politics. In the form in which this criticism is advanced by, amongst others, Glen Newey,[12] liberal egalitarianism is a profoundly anti-political doctrine that threatens to displace the demands of politics and to subordinate them to the privileged role of the political philosopher.
2 The second issue turns to the philosophical claims underpinning liberalism. In particular we shall address what I have called the ethnocentric objection, which is not simply that liberalism is based on a false conception of neutrality, but that it posits a set of narrow and culturally specific political prejudices as universal values and principles. This objection underpins both communitarianism and its most common contemporary variant in multiculturalism, with its challenge to liberalism as a disguised version of cultural imperialism. My task in this chapter will not be a full philosophical defence of liberalism, but I will challenge the idea that the conception of philosophical justification that underpins liberalism rests on a disguised politics of cultural imperialism.

I then turn to two claims about liberal political theory and its connection to the state.

3 The first of these claims is raised by multiculturalists and group rights theorists. Here I am not simply concerned with the question of whether egalitarians can take culture seriously, rather I address the more fundamental claim advanced by the likes of Bhikhu Parekh[13] that liberal egalitarians have a narrowly state-centred view of

politics. This criticism reflects a similar claim advanced by Quentin Skinner and James Tully,[14] to the effect that modern liberalism is constrained by the conception of the modern juridical state which underlies it, and that consequently it cannot take seriously the claims of any groups or associations between the individual and the state.

4 The second of these criticisms addresses the potential redundancy of liberal egalitarianism as a consequence of globalization and the retreat of the state. This view has been advanced recently by David Held and Peter Singer,[15] who both argue that the aspirations of liberal egalitarianism are best sought by thinking beyond the boundaries of liberalism in the direction of a cosmopolitan conception of political association.

In the last three chapters I will set out the basic challenge and show that liberalism is either immune to it, or can withstand it. Each chapter will identify the most contemporary and therefore pressing of these persistent criticisms. Obviously, in a short book like this not all the nuances of criticism can be accommodated, but the basic outlines of a liberal response to this persistent wave of criticism can be identified. As pointed out earlier, my main concern is to reiterate the significance and vitality of liberal egalitarianism. If this task is successful, it is up to students and readers to pursue these issues in more detail with the great contemporary liberal egalitarian thinkers. Those who, for perfectly understandable reasons, do not wish to devote themselves to political theory or the history of thought can still derive something of value from the restatement of the liberal egalitarian viewpoint. John Stuart Mill, in his defence of freedom of speech in *On Liberty*, argues for the significance of negative criticism of even true beliefs as a necessary means of maintaining their vitality and significance among the public.[16] Political theory, in the modern university, continues that important source of intellectual training through negative criticism. Indeed, most political theory teaching takes the form of finding 'the three things wrong with Plato's *Republic*, Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* or Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*.' In both the anglophone and continental traditions, constructive theorizing is the exception rather than the norm. There is nothing wrong with this; negative criticism is important for precisely the sort of reasons that Mill suggests, and constructive theory is extraordinarily difficult even for the brightest minds. Yet, just as there is a place for negative criticism and for the rare flashes of constructive theory, there is also a role for positive restatement as part of the same process that Mill identifies. On its own, negative criticism, though supremely important, can have the corrosive tendency towards total scepticism. For the scholar, intellectual or philosopher there are no better reasons for one political view than any other view. Many anti-rationalists influenced by Michael Oakeshott tend to take this sceptical view, although I do not believe that it was Oakeshott's view. This kind of sceptical view is not only wrong, it is also dangerous as it does have an effect on our political culture. To counter it we need positive restatements and defences of liberal egalitarianism, just as much as we need criticism of and challenges to its more hubristic claims. What makes this book a modest defence of liberalism is that I do not propose to silence critics of liberal egalitarianism. What I do intend to show is that the critics do not necessarily have the last word.