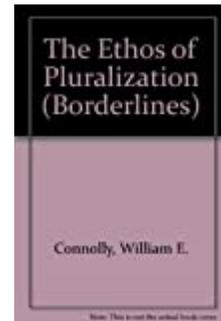


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William E. Connolly. *The Ethos of Pluralization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995. xxx + 243 pp. \$24.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8166-2669-4; \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8166-2668-7.



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Leftist thought on the nature of progressivism and what it means to be a progressive in the United States has undergone some radical shifts in this century, most obviously in the change from an orthodox Marxist, class-based understanding of politics to a pluralist understanding of identity politics. In the 1990s, arguments and theorizing about pluralism encompass a plethora of issues. Some of these debates focus on international phenomena such as the effects of globalization and the collapse of the Soviet Union. A different aspect of theorizing about pluralism, important in the United States, leads some theorists (both the “Old Left” and the Right) to focus on an ever more involuted process resulting in a proliferation of identity movements that partly overlap and partly contradict one another and on the role of “political correctness” in the construction of this process.

William Connolly suggests that, though this shift toward the “pluralist imagination” has resulted in the incorporation of many more perspectives and social movements into the political arenas in which the distribution of resources is contested, it has left fundamentally unexamined pluralism’s own essentialist notions of identity. Pluralism, in purporting to oppose fundamentalism, is plagued with two of the very same conservative elements, which resist the formation of new identities seemingly antithetical to those which are currently accepted.

The first is an essentialist notion of difference, based on current established identities, which resists the possibilities of new bases for identities. The second is a system of moral standards of judgment that is taken from the results of prior political struggles (p. xiv). In order to reconstruct a pluralism that avoids these problems, Connolly advocates a new pluralism, driven by what he calls an “ethos of critical responsiveness” toward new movements. This new ethos would reject the essentialization of identity or morality in considering the place of new movements.

In *The Ethos of Pluralization*, Connolly considers these problems from a variety of perspectives. The book is a collection of essays, two of which are new publications and four of which have previously appeared but have been reworked. The critique laid out above has not been woven explicitly through all of these essays; rather, the introduction lays out the metatheoretical perspective that binds them together.

Chapter 1, “Nothing Is Fundamental,” employs a post-Nietzschean and Foucauldian paradigm to critique the ontological problems inherent in contemporary pluralism. In the next chapter, “The Desire to Punish,” Connolly uses a modified Giraudian framework in a discussion of the competing desires for revenge and punishment involved in the trial of a young black man who has

been convicted of shooting several whites. "Democracy, Equality, Normality" uses the theories of C. B. Macpherson as a foil against which Connolly sets forth his own program. The problem for Connolly in this chapter is to construct a pluralism that is not imbued with forces toward normalization and depoliticization. "Fundamentalism in America," chapter 4, continues this discussion on the topic of fundamentalism and its relationship to liberalism in the United States. In "Democracy and Territoriality," Connolly moves his gaze to the international realm in a critique of theories of international relations that are rooted in a determinist frame of nation-states. Instead, he wants to examine the possibilities for cross-national movements and non-state centered theories.

"Tocqueville, Religiosity and Pluralization," the last and arguably the best essay in the collection, takes up the question of the enactment of identities and critiques of what is variously lumped together as "multiculturalism," "post-modernism" and "political correctness." Connolly argues in opposition to critics who claim that pluralism is becoming pluralized to the point of trivializing very real bases of inequality. He states that diversifying bases of identity does not mean losing the cultural connections through which people can be bound together

and moved to action. He claims that "[w]hen the cultural conditions of pluralization are reasonably intact, differentiation along some lines opens up multiple possibilities of selective collaboration along others. To pluralize, therefore, is not to fragmentize. To dogmatize is to fragmentize. This finding discloses how self-appointed opponents of fragmentation so often work on its behalf" (p. 197).

What exactly would these multiple possibilities of selective collaboration look like? How would the ethos of critical responsiveness be promoted or enacted? This project is not concretized in this collection, and it is a necessary next step if the evolution of progressive thought is to follow the path that Connolly has indicated. Connolly has produced a strong discussion here of the problems inherent in contemporary (what he might call conservative) pluralism, but the work lacks a firm outline for a positive project, for activists or theorists, to overcome these flaws.

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