

George Klosko. *Jacobins and Utopians: The Political Theory of Fundamental Moral Reform.*

Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003. xii + 200 pp. \$17.00.

UTOPIANS AND UTOPIAN SCHOLARSHIP often do not adequately consider the means by which ideal societies might be brought into existence, according to George Klosko. By examining how such ideal societies might in theory be realized, Klosko hopes to reveal the real obstacles that radical reformers must overcome. In a survey of remarkable breadth and depth, *Jacobins and Utopians* considers the ancient lawgivers, Lycurgus and Solon; Socrates and Plato; Thomas More, Nicoló Machiavelli, and Jean Jacques Rousseau; the French Revolution Jacobins, Maximilien Robespierre and Saint-Juste; and the Marxist tradition, including Mikhail Bakunin's critique and Vladimir Lenin's radical modification of Karl Marx's thought. By considering these exemplars Klosko aims at drawing lessons regarding the realization of fundamental moral reform. In the end, Klosko is not sanguine about the possibilities of realizing such reform, concluding that the confluence of conditions necessary for such reform requires faith in what Plato refers to as "some divine good luck" (*Republic* 592).

Education or reeducation is central to any discussion of radical moral reform in Klosko's view, since such reform requires the denizens of the society to conform to an ideal vision they do not initially accept, needing reform as they do. The intensive education needed for such reform in turn requires extensive control of the educational environment, which includes, potentially, the whole of society. Klosko terms recognition of the need for such education "educational realism." Further, he contends that any theory that is realistic about education must sooner or later deal with the question of political power, for without power the requisite control of the educational environment will prove impossible.

Socrates's approach to fundamental moral reform stands in stark contrast to this "educational realism," since it relies on dialogue to prompt moral change. Yet this approach ultimately led to Socrates's execution at the hand of the people he sought to reform, a fact that in Klosko's view Plato took to heart. Klosko offers a powerful case for reading Plato's early dialogues as a critique of Socratic practice, highlighting as they do the usual failure of Socrates's interlocutors to achieve insight and virtue. Thus, Klosko understands Plato's *Republic* as offering an alternative to Socratic persuasion.

Accordingly, Plato's *Republic* is best understood not as a pure utopia, a common view, but as a vision of society that Plato was genuinely interested in bringing into existence, as evidenced by his own forays into the realm of politics. Plato is an "educational realist," on this reading, arguing that fundamental moral reform requires drastic educational measures such as sending every person over the age of ten out of the city and educating the children remaining—now free from the demoralizing influence of their parents—according to the ideals of the philosopher-ruler. Klosko acknowledges the "casual brutality of Plato's proposals," yet finds them nonetheless convincing in their recognition that "if the existing order is corrupt and so deforming the souls of the young, then it must be eliminated" (51). To implement any of these reforms, however, philosophers must rule society. While Plato does not treat this issue in the *Republic*, Klosko shows that in life Plato sought unsuccessfully to convert Dionysius of Syracuse into a philosopher. Ultimately, Klosko contends that since Plato rejects the idea of using force to gain power, he is left to hope that a ruler might be persuaded to become philosophical, or a philosopher might rise to power.

Klosko's treatment of More, Machiavelli and Rousseau emphasizes the political difficulties facing radical reform. Thus, recognizing the difficulty of converting a

ruler to a philosophy, More relies upon the shadowy king Utopus to found his utopia, saying little about his background or rise to power. Machiavelli's contribution to the discussion consists in his reckoning with the political exigencies of moral reform, in particular, the political violence often required. Machiavelli observed that unarmed prophets go to the gallows, and yet also understood that the attainment and use of power is often morally corrosive. This political realism of Machiavelli, in Klosko's view, makes vivid the violence and risk radical reform involves. Klosko's treatment of Rousseau suggests that despite his commitment to an ideal state in theory, Rousseau also recognized the virtual impossibility of instituting such radical reform, as evidenced by his recommendations for the reform of Poland. In the *Social Contract*, when Rousseau confronts the paradox of instituting reforms in a society that, since it needs such reforms, does not yet see the need for their implementation, he introduces the idea of a supremely gifted lawgiver who has almost superhuman insight and persuasive abilities. This lawgiver, like More's Utopus and Plato's philosopher-ruler, seems unlikely to appear. Plato, More, and Rousseau's refusal of violent means to implement reform forces them, according to Klosko, to wait for a miraculous confluence of events to bring the right people to power.

Those committed to the Jacobin ideal, on the other hand, recognize and embrace the need to attain and use political power, despite the potential perils observed by Machiavelli. Essential to the Jacobin theory of radical reform is the idea that since the majority of those in society will not voluntarily conform to the dictates of the ideal vision of the reformers, these reformers have the right to seize power and use it to reeducate citizens in accordance with their ideal. Klosko begins his consideration of this approach to reform with the historical Jacobins, Robespierre and his close ally Saint-Juste. These Jacobins illustrate in gruesome fashion the danger of embracing terror as a means to utopia. The hope entertained by Robespierre and Saint-Juste was that the admittedly brutal means they employed would enable the reformation of society through institutions of education and civil religion. Saint-Juste argued such institutions shape citizens' character and thereby protect the state from future corruption. The lesson Klosko draws from this attempt to realize the Jacobin ideal is that with power concentrated in the hands of the few there is no way of ensuring that those hands remain clean.

Klosko turns to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels for an alternative theory of the revolutionary reform, but contends that Marxism deals inadequately with the means of implementing reform, relying as it does on the idea of spontaneous revolution and faith in the transformative power of revolution itself. In the end, such a theory has "the practical effect [of] leaving the moral status quo intact," according to Klosko (146).

Lenin's development of Marxist theory into something distinctively Jacobin occupies the remainder of the book. Klosko uses what he takes to be Bakunin's misplaced criticism of Marx as a way of understanding why Lenin became Jacobin and why his doing so was disastrous. Bakunin is right, according to Klosko, to worry about unchecked power, but simply wrong in believing people to be instinctively revolutionary. Lenin departs from the Marxist belief in spontaneous revolution, finding the revolutionary potential of the proletariat extremely limited, instead embracing the central role of "the dictatorship of the proletariat." By the end of his transformation into a Jacobin, Lenin thought this dictatorship must continue until the next generation is properly educated into the ideology of the revolution. Government under Lenin, in Klosko's terms, becomes a government *for* the people but not *by* people (170).

Klosko's main conclusion is this: Fundamental moral reform requires intensive education that in turn requires complete control by the reformers. The obvious prob-

lem is that the unchecked power of such reformers often ends in tyrannical abuse, as the historical examples Klosko examines bear out. Consequently, Klosko—siding with Plato—does not rule out the possibility that leaders immune to the corrupting influences of power might with luck arise, but suggests that something less than fundamental moral reform might be a better bet for real, albeit slight, improvement to society.

While Klosko is surely right to direct our attention to the need to reeducate the populace to bring about fundamental moral reform, he gives less attention to the particular means by which this education itself would be conducted. The educational realism central to Klosko's analysis seems to require a *coercive* education aimed at conformity to the state's ideals at the expense of the intellectual freedom of individual citizens. As Rousseau warns in *Emile* (which unfortunately receives almost no consideration in Klosko's book), education cannot be both for the individual and the state; the state's interest is in making citizens, not human beings. In view of the radically antidemocratic nature of the education apparently implied by educational realism, perhaps a reconsideration of the Socratic approach is in order. The Socratic commitment to dialogue stems from the belief that knowing what virtue is is necessary for being virtuous, individually and collectively, and that no one of us yet has such knowledge. Accordingly, Socrates would be dubious about any group's claim to *know* what the ideal society is and what its citizens must be like. In Plato's *Meno*, Socrates reminds us that before we can know whether virtue can be taught we must first know what virtue is, indicating that fundamental moral reform begins, and perhaps ends, with free discussion about political virtue. The Socratic faith is that such discussion, while leaving citizens free, might nevertheless lead to collective agreement and hence fundamental reform. Klosko may be right that Plato thought such faith was unrealistic, but as his book suggests Plato is equally unrealistic in his faith that virtue and political leadership might merge and that such leaders would be able to transmit their virtue to the populous even with the power of the state at their disposal. Klosko's book helps us see why Socrates was right to doubt claims of knowledge regarding virtue, and perhaps more realistic to pursue the path of reform through dialogue rather than coercive state-education.

Ian DeWeese-Boyd
Gordon College

Michael H. Lang. *Designing Utopia:
John Ruskin's Urban Vision for Britain and America.*

Montreal: Black Rose, 1999. xv + 215 pp. \$24. 99.

JOHN RUSKIN WAS A PROLIFIC WRITER and a committed philanthropist whose influence in many areas of social reform has been assimilated but often unacknowledged. In *Designing Utopia*, which concentrates on Ruskin's urban vision, Michael Lang does much to rectify this omission. He is conscious of the fact that Ruskin's own practical social experiments met with little success, but argues that his ideas for urban improvement were absorbed and used by other like-minded reformers who went on to achieve impressive results.

Michael Lang's study is basically chronological in format and falls readily into four sections. The first section focuses on the development of Ruskin's thinking on architecture and urban design within the context of his growing social awareness. Lang is wise to preface his study with some reference to Ruskin's intellectual development because it points up the symbiosis between his aesthetic idealism and the