

KIRKUS REVIEWS

TITLE INFORMATION

INDEPENDENT JUDGMENT AND INTROSPECTION

Fundamental Requirements of the Free Society

Jerry Kirkpatrick

Kirkpatrick Books (204 pp.)

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BOOK REVIEW

Kirkpatrick argues that a truly free society is impossible without an independent citizenry.

According to Kirkpatrick (Emeritus, Business/California State Polytechnic Univ.; *Montessori, Dewey, and Capitalism*, 2008, etc.), “independent judgment” has both an intellectual and a moral component: They are “correct perception of the facts of reality and courage to acknowledge and assert those facts.” A free society—one in which all people are free of coercion and equally protected under the law—is simply impossible without citizens who are capable of such intellectual liberty, he says, and so its cultivation is of paramount importance. The author provides a wide-ranging defense of robust individualism that’s deeply indebted to the philosophical work of Ayn Rand and her protégé, Nathaniel Branden. Kirkpatrick particularly takes aim at philosophical schools such as materialism and determinism, as well as religion, which he sees as undermining free will and moral accountability. He also provides a powerful, provocative critique of educational systems that discourage creative thought and contribute to an authoritarian mindset. When Kirkpatrick discusses the elemental attributes of a free society, he clearly means one in the classically liberal tradition, typified by laissez-faire capitalism. However, the author ventures further by making independent judgment a necessary ingredient in happiness itself, which issues from a “life of reason” in which one achieves “objectively valid, rational values.” Kirkpatrick intends his work to be a “scholarly book,” and it’s meticulously footnoted as it explains Rand’s theories in a lucid and accessible manner. However, the book’s philosophical depth doesn’t match the rigor of its documentation. For example, the author never makes a persuasive metaphysical argument that the “individual entity” is the “primary unit of reality,” nor does he establish ethical egoism as a theory, or that moral rights exist—a notoriously difficult concept to demonstrate. Even more disappointing, however, is that Kirkpatrick seems to assume laissez-faire capitalism is the only system that engenders freedom, which is an unusual and historically suspect presumption.

A clearly written introduction to objectivism, but one that offers unconvincing arguments for its political conclusions.

Backcover copy, Independent Judgment and Introspection

PSYCHOLOGY/PHILOSOPHY/EDUCATION/PSYCHOTHERAPY

WHAT KIND OF PSYCHOLOGY IS REQUIRED FOR THE SURVIVAL OF FREE SOCIETIES?

One that correctly identifies reality—the world external to our minds, as well as our minds' internal contents and processes—to guide our choices and actions to live happy, healthy lives.

Free, unhampered market societies require citizens who possess an unhampered consciousness, that is, citizens who possess and practice a strong commitment to facts, expressed as independent judgment and independent action. To ensure that we develop and maintain an independent personality, and therefore will support a free society, we must learn the skill of introspection to identify and correct, or preferably prevent, mistaken thinking.

Flawed conclusions about life's events cause anxiety, thwarting and constricting our lives, often leading to dependence and unhappiness, which also often means a diminished likelihood of valuing or accepting individual freedom. The virtues of psychological independence are integrity, courage, and a refusal blindly to obey authority.

This book argues that psychological independence and its monitoring skill, introspection, are indispensable prerequisites of the free society.