

Douglas Giles, *Left Wing, Right Wing, People, and Power: The Core Dynamics of Political Action*, 2024. 106pp., self-published, €8.99 paperback, ISBN: 9781735880839

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In his book *Left Wing, Right Wing, People, and Power: The Core Dynamics of Political Action*, Douglas Giles elucidates difficult philosophical concepts for a broad readership. When examining the left-wing/right-wing divide, Giles begins by constructing a theoretical base emphasizing social dynamics. For Giles, communications and actions in society are an individual's expansions into social space. This factor underlies his understanding of power, which manifests a continuum, from near absolute concentrations of power to uniformly circulating power. Power, in turn, is an integral factor in forming an individual's freedom in social interactions, and it appears in a complex array of reciprocal interdependencies among people. These factors permeate all political struggles.

Giles emphasizes the individual's need to receive recognition from others; such recognition is a condition for self-realization. Forms of power aim at constituting the continuity of the self, and an individual's acts of domination over others are the process by which the individual constructs the self. For Giles, these factors must be understood as comprising both the continua of politics and the principle that, when there is a flow of constructive communication, power enables freedom.

Having formed this theoretical basis, Giles then turns to history. Modern conceptions of "left wing" and "right wing" developed from French politics in the 1700s and early 1800s. The French Revolution attempted a radical transformation of France's monarchical power structure. In this context, Giles touches on Rousseau's influential idea of the social contract: a new power structure requiring the participation of every individual in decision-making will yield the general will of the community. For Rousseau, when government is directed by the general will it reflects the interests of the people as a whole, rather than the interests of the few. Rousseau's "general will," however, is inherently un-

stable. As a result, according to Giles, the French revolutionaries' efforts to replace the stable but tyrannical power structure with a Rousseauist power structure contributed, at least in part, to the revolution's failure.

Similar criticisms of the French Revolution were made by Edmund Burke and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: (Giles classifies their political philosophies as "right wing") Burke argued for the application of the values embedded in tradition to new political circumstances, in opposition to the radical values of the French Revolution. For Burke, a nation's traditions are the repository of civilization, the source of ethical life, and even the arbiter of reason itself. Similarly, for Hegel, all institutions and individuals should obey the nation's *Sittlichkeit*, the "ethical behavior grounded in custom and tradition and developed through habit and imitation in accordance with the objective laws of the community." On this basis, Hegel's political philosophy (or the philosophy of the "Right Hegelians") called for a constitutional monarchy – the rule of a sovereign holding power but bound to the law of the constitution, which expressed the interests of the aristocracy.

Giles lays out sometimes starkly different trajectories of right-wing thought, though they share a fundamental belief about how power should be structured. The Federalists in the newly formed United States were anti-monarchists, opposed to the idea of a political structure having a single sovereign and concerned with the preservation of wealth and privilege. Giles then proceeds to a discussion of how the libertarian trajectory of right-wing thinking focused on the right to revolt against tyranny. The political philosophy of Thomas Hobbes is perhaps Giles' most extreme "right-wing" example: Hobbes thought that concentrating power in a single sovereign was optimal for achieving the good, and proposed a power structure in which citizens sacrifice freedom to gain the good of security. For Giles, this is a more extreme version of the concentration of power advocated by conservatives such as Burke, the Federalists and the Right Hegelians.

Rebellious movements, for Giles, are struggles for social liberties, political recognition and material resources. The core of politics is the disagreement over how power should be structured. Left-wing civil rights struggles seek legal recognition and increased equality for oppressed minorities and those who are disempowered in the prevailing power structure. Giles argues that this particular struggle has more numerous dimensions than Karl Marx's vision of a dualistic class struggle

over the means of economic production. For Giles, there is definitely an economic component in power concentration, the focus of Marx and like-minded thinkers, but economic power is as much a product of structural power concentration as a cause of class hierarchy.

For Giles, a misunderstanding inherent to the Left–Right political spectrum is that the political conflict is between individual rights (right-wing) and State authority (left-wing). In fact, for Giles, Burke, the Federalists, and the Right Hegelians show that the right-wing ideological position does not aim to remove power from the state or government but to restrict it.

Perhaps Giles' most important point is that, when social institutions welcome people's input and involvement, power relations are less coercive, and the chance of the malicious exercise of power is reduced. When social power structures are open, people, through their own actions, can enhance or impoverish their social circumstances and power relations. *Left Wing, Right Wing, People, and Power: The Core Dynamics of Political Action* introduces a broad readership to these issues.

