



# Civic Liberalism: Reflections on Our Democratic Ideals

*Thomas A., Jr. Spragens*

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## **Civic Liberalism: Reflections on Our Democratic Ideals** Thomas A., Jr. Spragens

In *Civic Liberalism: Reflections on Our Democratic Ideals*, prominent political theorist Thomas A. Spragens, Jr. asserts that most versions of democratic ideals—libertarianism, liberal egalitarianism, difference liberalism, and the liberalism of fear—lead our polity significantly astray. Spragens offers another alternative. He argues that we should recover the multiple and complex aspirations found within the tradition of democratic liberalism and integrate them into a more compelling public philosophy for our time—or what he calls civic liberalism. Civic liberalism, Spragens contends, endorses both liberty and equality although neither can properly be understood as a maximizing principle. Instead, liberty should be seen as the constitutive threshold good of autonomy; and equality should be seen as a moral postulate and instrumental good. Moreover, civic liberalism explicitly embraces forms of 'fraternity,' civic friendship, and civic virtue consistent with respect for social pluralism. Therefore, a better understanding of our democratic ideals will free us from the constrictive orthodoxies of the left and right, lead us toward better public policy, and help us become a well ordered society of flourishing, self-governing civic equals.

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