Are Liberty and Equality Compatible?

Are the political ideals of liberty and equality compatible? This question is of central and continuing importance in political philosophy, moral philosophy, and welfare economics. In this book, two distinguished philosophers take up the debate. Jan Narveson argues that a political ideal of negative liberty is incompatible with any substantive ideal of equality, while James P. Sterba argues that Narveson’s own ideal of negative liberty is compatible, and in fact leads to the requirements of a substantive ideal of equality. Of course, they cannot both be right. Thus, the details of their arguments about the political ideal of negative liberty and its requirements will determine which of them is right. Engagingly and accessibly written, their debate will be of value to all who are interested in the central issue of what are the practical requirements of a political ideal of liberty.

Jan Narveson is Distinguished Professor Emeritus at the University of Waterloo. His previous publications include The Libertarian Idea (1989), Moral Matters, Second Edition (1999), Respecting Persons in Theory and Practice (2002), and You and the State (2008). In 2003, Professor Narveson was made an Officer of the Order of Canada in recognition of both his scholarly work and his lifelong promotion of music in his home cities of Kitchener and Waterloo, Ontario.

James P. Sterba is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame. His previous publications include Justice for Here and Now (1998), The Triumph of Practice over Theory in Ethics (2005), Does Feminism Discriminate Against Men? A Debate (2008 – co-authored with Warren Farrell), and Affirmative Action for the Future (2009). Professor Sterba is past president of the American Philosophical Association (Central Division) and of several other philosophical associations.
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James P. Sterba
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