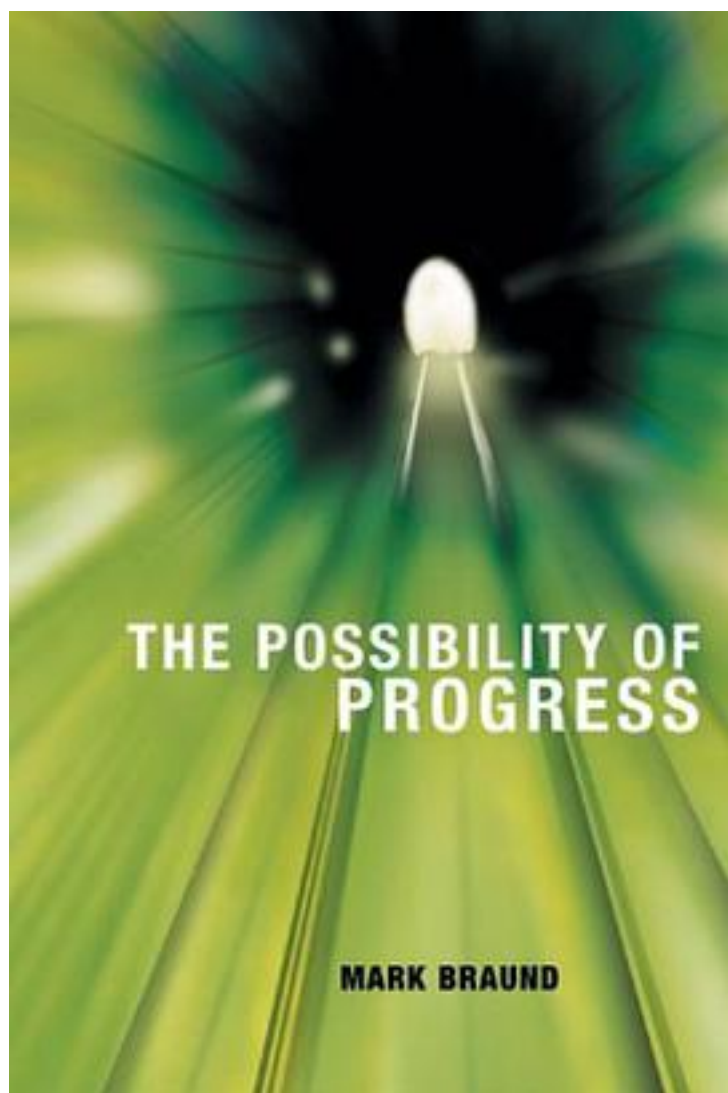


The Possibility of Progress



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出版者:

出版时间: 2005-4

装帧:

isbn: 9780856832260

The crisis over the future direction of the European Union illustrates how conventional politics is failing to address the concerns of ordinary people. On the one hand are modernisers like Barroso, Blair, Merkel and Sarkozy who want to introduce free-market economics to stimulate the stagnant European economy: on the other, those who resist scaling back the European social model. The scale of the problem facing the European economy was highlighted in a recent Business Week article which showed how wage rates in the French and German car industry were close to \$50 an hour compared with \$6 in Slovakia. As a result all new factories are being built in the low wage economies of the accession states, threatening to worsen unemployment in the old industrial heartlands of Europe. The inadequacy of the economic system is not confined to Europe: 3 billion people in the world live on less than \$2 a day. Mark Braund, an economic philosopher by experience, has spent 15 years wrestling with these issues personally and professionally. The result is *The Possibility of Progress* in which he attempts to explain how we got into this mess, and why conventional politics is unable to get us out of it. He argues that contemporary society lacks three essential ingredients: a clear and universal moral basis for social relations; an accurate understanding of economic laws which acknowledges the consequences of inequitable land ownership; and the ambition and belief necessary to turn our aspirations for a more equitable and sustainable world into reality. He explains how the understanding of economics bequeathed us by Adam Smith, David Ricardo and others has been selectively taken up in defence of minority wealth and privilege, and argues that only when we accept the full implications of classical teaching, will there be any possibility of progress towards a more inclusive and just global society. Concluding that a democracy which promotes minority interests at the expense of the majority is clearly failing, Braund identifies a number of ideas which, were they to gain widespread popular support, could finally see the ambitions of the eighteenth century Enlightenment in Europe realised. He argues that if we are to build a more inclusive world, we must first address the underlying causes of poverty, social injustice, alienation and apathy. This process will require an inclusive approach which transcends traditional party politics. *The Possibility of Progress* contains the seeds of a new socio-political paradigm, combining justice with economic efficiency.

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