



Review

Reviewed Work(s): Justificatory Liberalism. by Gerald F. Gaus

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that a book that intends to build complexity into the understanding of art foregoes such complexity in the understanding of politics.

As becomes even clearer from the specific illustrations, the underlying thrust of the book is that art is political: either it is self-congratulatory and elite generated or, at least in the service of elites—a species of “false consciousness” disseminated as widely and effectively as possible (107)—or it is self-critical and self-exploratory. Elites perpetually seek to suppress apprehension by the disadvantaged of the disparities between the forms and reality, and to legitimate their positions so as to keep the club exclusive. Bad art generates illusions (e.g., about the fairness of legal processes, the choices open to welfare recipients, the importance of elections as a source of public influence), while good art debunks those illusions; bad art teaches one to acquiesce in established authority, and good art teaches one to resist it.

This is a book that takes contemporary concerns about bias in the media and the general political influence of, especially, the electronic media to a higher plane and explores the relationships between art and politics more deeply than is customary. Edelman’s cogent evocation of the value of art and suggestions for the integration of art into the study of politics, rely, moreover, on his own authoritative experience of different genres and extensive study of the ideational dimension of our lives. He is well situated to expand for political scientists what counts as a fair consideration of political themes and to increase the ways we can contextualize individual choices and study the sources of political influence. In the end, though, he fails to take advantage of this opportunity.

Edelman’s placing of art in the service of politics inclines us all the more to transform all representations or stories into our stories by translating them into our own partisan terms. While Edelman points several times to the persistence of a limited number of fundamental, transcultural themes of lasting art and notes their accessibility in a way that might prompt a fruitful recognition of commonalities and differences, in the end, he seems to conclude that we only see or express *ourselves* in art and are consequently barred from a genuine encounter with what is other than or different from ourselves. If such an encounter were possible in art, however, art could genuinely be regarded as a counterweight to, and what Edelman goes so far as to call a “relief” (45–51) from, predictable or ritualized political discourse, and could, in any case, afford a fuller experience of the political.

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Justificatory Liberalism. By Gerald F. Gaus. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. Pp. 374. \$55.00 cloth, \$29.95 paper.)

In recent years, the idea of justification has played a prominent role in liberal political theory. The requirement that people be governed by principles they can

accept is at the heart of liberalism, according to John Rawls and many other theorists, including Jeremy Waldron and Charles Larmore. In *Justificatory Liberalism*, Gaus focuses on exactly what this commitment entails: “because there is no such thing as an uncontentious theory of justification, an adequately articulated liberalism must clarify and defend its conception of justified belief—its epistemology” (4). Expressing amazement that liberal theorists have not drawn on the work of epistemologists and cognitive psychologists (vii), Gaus devotes part one of the book to a detailed tour of these studies, working out what he calls “weak foundationalism.” He defends a form of coherentism: a given belief is justified on the basis of its fit with a subject’s other beliefs. The implications are somewhat relativistic, as beliefs that can be justified to one person may not be to another, in accordance with other justified beliefs they hold.

The crucial transition is in part two, “Public Justification.” If the central commitment of liberalism is that people live with others according to principles they can justify to one another, differences in their beliefs present obvious problems. Gaus argues that public reason goes beyond individuals’ actual commitments to principles they would be *justified* in accepting. A given principle, *P*, must be shown to be coherent with an individual’s other justified beliefs. But whether or not the individual actually accepts *P* is not crucial. As long as it can be justified to him, as coherent with his already justified beliefs, he is committed to act on it. The standard of proof is high if an individual’s actual beliefs must be overridden. But Gaus argues that certain political principles can be defended to all citizens. These include basic rights and the erection of political mechanisms to address people’s differences. His position rests on what he calls “nested indeterminacy.” Because of great differences in their belief systems, citizens will disagree irreconcilably on a wide range of issues, for example, principles of distributive justice and social welfare policies. However, decision-making institutions can be justified to everyone, which can resolve these disagreements, allowing harmonious association. Gaus argues (in part three, “Political Justification”) that the mechanisms in question must be constitutional and democratic, must operate through the rule of law, and must have other features generally found in existing liberal societies.

The core of *Justificatory Liberalism* is the connection between a certain conception of liberalism’s moral commitments and the political arrangements these support. Gaus provides a reasonable account of exactly what can and cannot be justified. His procedural liberalism is more firmly grounded than that of other recent theorists, for example, Stuart Hampshire, and more plausible than the wider consensus defended in Rawls’s recent work. His detailed exploration of issues in justification, though perhaps overly lengthy for the use to which it is put, is carried out with care and sophistication and shows command of a wide range of philosophical sources. Accordingly, Gaus’s forceful account of a certain

way of conceptualizing liberal theory is an important contribution to recent debates that cannot be ignored by anyone seriously interested in this topic.

But Gaus's justificatory strategy is lacking in an important respect: he pays little attention to the actual views of liberal citizens. If belief *P* must be justified as fitting within the framework of an individual's preexisting beliefs, a great deal depends on what these other beliefs are. Gaus gives this side of justification short shrift. His discussion of political issues is on the whole abstract and general, resembling what is found in others' works in liberal theory. Once again, his arguments are generally plausible, but because he does not address the belief systems of actual citizens, there is often little distinctively justificatory about them.

Gaus argues (Ch. 9) for the superiority of his position over different forms of "populist" justification, which depend more heavily on subjects' actual assent. Roughly, Gaus contends that we need not be limited by people's actual views, because these can be flawed. He cites studies showing that people commonly hold inconsistent beliefs and mistaken views about inferential norms (133–5). Though material of this kind should perhaps receive more attention from political theorists, it does not necessarily support Gaus's strong claims. The fact that an individual, Betty, makes errors in certain kinds of inferences does not justify setting aside her existing moral views unless the errors are closely implicated in her holding these views instead of those Gaus wishes to justify to her. Demonstrating this in regard to large numbers of liberal citizens raises daunting empirical issues, which Gaus does not address. But it is not clear that he can avoid them. It is not enough to show that Betty makes errors (or, more accurately, is likely to have made errors), in some general way. One has to show that she makes specific errors that disqualify specific principles to which she subscribes from justification.

Gaus devotes little attention to the fact that preferring justification over other concerns is a value choice. For example, imposing principle *P* on Betty, who prefers *Q*, constitutes favoring the value of justification over the value of autonomy, which allows Betty to make her own decisions. This choice is not uncontroversial. In cases where Betty's principles rest on flagrant informational and logical errors, Gaus's position may be defensible. But he does not demonstrate that the cases that interest him involve errors of this sort. Once again, detailed study of actual people's beliefs is necessary.

George Klosko, *University of Virginia*

Machiavelli's Virtue. Harvey C. Mansfield. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. Pp. 371. \$29.95.)

The virtue to which the title of this collection of thirteen essays (twelve of which have been published elsewhere over a period of thirty years) refers is to be