



Review

Reviewed Work(s): Political Tolerance: Balancing Community and Diversity by Robert Weissberg

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sentation for marginalized groups, empirical students of representation and the legislative process such as myself are likely to be either frustrated or disappointed by her outline for such arrangements. In particular, I am disturbed by her preference for a voting scheme that advantages candidates rather than parties given the extensive critiques of Congress that are based on the rise of candidate-centered elections. I am puzzled by her disdain for strong political parties given that they may be the best antidote to the empirical realities of interest group pluralism. A PR system such as she proposes should give rise to new political parties with marginalized groups as major constituencies. And I am far less sanguine than is Williams about the advantages of supermajority institutions within the legislature for bringing about the process of deliberation and mediation that she favors. Such institutions are more likely to prevent agreement on new courses of action than they are to achieve it. Still, Williams's arguments in favor of group representation, and their implications for how we conceptualize constituencies and their relationship to their representatives, are worthy of consideration.

Patricia A. Hurley, *Texas A&M University*

Political Tolerance: Balancing Community and Diversity. By Robert Weissberg. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998. Pp. x, 275. \$54.00 cloth, \$24.95 paper.)

Since Samuel Stouffer's *Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties* (Doubleday, 1955), scholars have examined tolerance through survey questions about allowing controversial groups to engage in activities such as delivering public speeches and teaching college. Weissberg claims that this technique has systematically exaggerated the level of intolerance in society, playing into the hands of advocacy groups wishing to promote tolerance through "risky state intervention to shape citizen thinking" (8). Brandishing the twin spectres of "thoughtcrime" and remedial "totalitarianism," Weissberg argues for a political conception of intolerance. Rather than concentrating on what citizens think, we should look at how targets of attitudinal intolerance actually fare in society. He provides detailed evidence that Marxists and gay people have numerous opportunities to organize groups and publicize their views and are subject to little actual oppression. He claims, moreover, that tolerance should not be indiscriminate. *Intolerance* plays an important social role in drawing boundaries and consolidating community morality in opposition to what should not be permitted.

Political Tolerance is vigorously, even polemically, written, and Weissberg delights in deriding his opponents. In several respects he is on solid ground. First, the tolerance literature probably does overstate societal intolerance. This is especially clear in the work of John L. Sullivan and his colleagues, who assess tolerance on the basis of respondents' willingness to allow members of their

“least-liked” groups to engage in the activities noted above. It is a good question whether *this* is the conception of tolerance most relevant for preserving political stability and civil liberties in democratic societies. In addition, Weissberg’s careful examination of how disliked groups actually fare (in chapters 5 and 6) is convincing, and goes some way toward making a case for conceiving of tolerance based on “reality” rather than “hearts and minds.” Finally, some of Weissberg’s targets, especially those who use the value of tolerance to advocate teaching rampant multiculturalism and moral relativism, should be criticized—though they are also easy, and familiar, targets.

But with polemic also comes overstatement. In concerning himself with the arguments of extremists, Weissberg devotes disproportionate attention to unworthy targets, especially strawmen who advocate tolerating *everything* (e.g., 2, 108, 228–58). In Chapter 4, he triumphantly establishes that John Locke and John Stuart Mill, major proponents of tolerance, argue against setting *no* limits. Weissberg’s fear of government “totalitarianism” is obviously exaggerated, while he downplays despised groups’ genuine grievances. For example, in his copious account of gay people’s situation, he gives remarkably short shrift to the fact that sodomy is against the law in a majority of states and regularly, if rarely, prosecuted (172, 183 n. 11).

Weissberg’s critique of attitudinal tolerance is overly categorical. He misinterprets the view of Herbert McClosky and James Prothro and Charles Grigg, claiming that they view high levels of tolerance as necessary for functioning democracy (62, 68). These scholars are actually concerned with explaining political stability in spite of the low levels of tolerance they document. Because the role of intolerant attitudes in repressive outbreaks is not straightforward, it is not clear exactly what is proved by evidence that certain disliked groups can flourish. Would Weissberg argue that widespread intolerance has no effects? Once again, though in certain respects gays are thriving, in much of the country, their sexual practices are against the law.

Because Weissberg argues that not everything should be tolerated and celebrates properly focused public condemnation (90–94), a great deal depends on where one draws the lines. Tolerance, of course, is a normative concept, which must be filled in through normative analysis. Weissberg seems to know little of the relevant literature. Aside from not discussing central works of John Rawls, Joel Feinberg, and other major figures, he cites Locke’s *Second Treatise* from an article that quotes it (81). Weissberg’s only real suggestion here is that we should give precedence to community values and those of parents (243–44). But the question then becomes: in a pluralistic community, the values of *which* community members? Weissberg not only does not grapple with normative questions, but scoffs at attempts to do so (104). But without this kind of analysis, it is impossible to say what should and should not be tolerated, and why. The central issue is not whether we should tolerate everything or only some things, but which things, and, crucially important, the basis for the distinction.

As alternatives to what he views as oppressive tampering with citizens' attitudes and beliefs, Weissberg describes different ways in which groups can live together while still disliking one another. Alternatives range from "legally defined collectives" (196), in which separate groups enjoy state-sanctioned cultural autonomy—but only for certain, recognized groups—to physical or psychological separation of groups. Once again, a great deal depends on exactly which groups are and are not allowed under these arrangements. Permitting all groups would replicate the current, deplorable situation. But without clear criteria for permitting some groups but not others, Weissberg's proposals are potentially far more threatening than the psychological tampering he decries. Under his preferred arrangements, what happens to groups that are not recognized, or to dissident individuals within groups, or individuals who don't fit in any of the recognized categories? While Weissberg goes into considerable detail about possible pernicious effects of "culturally sensitive" education, the far-reaching, illiberal implications of his own alternative proposals are not seriously explored.

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Seeing Like a State. By James C. Scott. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998. Pp. xiv, 445. \$37.50 cloth, \$16.95 paper.)

In *Seeing Like a State*, James Scott examines large-scale attempts by authoritarian governments to engineer their social and agricultural environments, and offers a powerful critique of why these attempts are destined to fail. Social engineering requires the simplification and standardization of complex facts, and in the process, essential knowledge about them is lost. At its worst, the result is tragedy, disaster, and human suffering. At its best, unplanned outcomes are incurred at great expense.

Scott begins by arguing "that the most tragic episodes of state-initiated social engineering originate in a pernicious combination of four elements" (4). The first is a simplification and aggregation of facts. Complex, dynamic, discrete, and often unique circumstances are manipulated into simplified, static, aggregated, and standardized data—unrealistic snapshots that often miss the most vital aspects of the situation. The second element of social engineering is an espousal of "high-modernist ideology," which Scott defines as "a strong, one might even say muscle-bound, version of the self-confidence about scientific and technical progress, the expansion of production, the growing satisfaction of human needs, the mastery of nature (including human nature), and above all, the rational design of social order commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural laws" (4). The combination of these two elements can be devastating when an authoritarian state (the third element) is "willing and able to use the full weight of its coercive power to bring the high-modernist designs into being" over "a