crimes and the laws of war as such. The book is written largely from an evolving – if highly contested – Anglophone consensus on what is or is not becoming *sayable* in academic and policy-making circles where the focus is on national politics in (supposedly) peacetime conditions. I miss the clash of real regimes here, not just regimes of truth, such as Howe very clearly and forcefully presents. True, the issues would be all that much more difficult at every level, but given the work that feminists have done on connecting the domestic and national with the international and the global, another chapter would not have gone amiss. However, it cannot be said that many political theorists have an excellent record in this regard, either and Howe's work is certainly admirable on its own terms of engagement.

Terrell Carver
University of Bristol, Bristol, UK

The ethos of a late-modern citizen

Stephen K. White
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In what spirit ought citizens of Western democracies to encounter the moral claims – and indeed the very presence – of others unlike ourselves? In his important new book, Stephen K. White suggests two possible dispositions in which such encounters might take place: those of generosity and hostility. His central aim is to promote an ethos of 'presumptive generosity' for citizens of privileged Western democracies who are faced with the particular challenges of late modernity. White's overall objective is not 'to reduce contemporary democratic politics to the practice of presumptive generosity and the dampening of hostility and resentment', but rather, 'to illuminate why it makes good sense to allow a certain spirit or ethos, to infuse our political stances' (p. x). He is concerned not only with how we should treat our fellow citizens (and other human beings), but with our stance toward being itself, as the ethos of presumptive generosity toward others draws from 'an affirmation of being as a generous presencing or becoming' (p. 107).

White observes that the pressures of globalization and pluralization 'can evoke a continual low-grade fear of, or hostility to, diversity… A late-modern ethos would ask us to develop strategies of the self that work toward dampening that hostility' (p. 30). Yet despite his identification of hostility as the disposition that stands to be dampened by the strategies he is proposing, and his suggestion that the book as a whole 'might be thought of as providing an interpretive frame for… dispositions of generosity and hostility' (p. x), hostility receives relatively short shrift in comparison with generosity. It appears throughout the book as an unreasonable or, at best, pre-reasonable disposition that is informed by a cognitive misunderstanding of one's (mistakenly) presumed status as 'host and center' (p. 110) and an affective (implicitly fearful) surrender to the temptation of resentment. It functions mainly, although not exclusively, in White's argument as that which is to be abjured, rather than explored or presumptively lent some minimal legitimacy as a disposition representing an alternative claim to reasonableness.

The comparatively slight treatment of hostility is especially evident in White's discussion of agonism. Here, he engages critics of liberal subjectivity who seek to put into question the normative figure of the disengaged, capacious and consensus-seeking liberal subject by pointing out that politics is about agonistic struggle. White proposes in the stead of '*unrelenting* agonism' (of the sort promulgated by Schmitt and some of his followers) what he calls '*tempered* agonism' (pp. 34–35). His goal is to show, how agonism does not necessarily point in the direction of no-holds-barred perpetual conflict between a friend and foe of the Schmittian variety. This requires that agonistic subjectivity should be reimagined. Thus, White proposes an ontologically thick and supple 'figure of subjectivity in which two aspects, presumptive generosity and capacious dignity are equi-primordial' (p. 50).

With this move, he hopes to supplement minimalist liberal accounts of human dignity and respect for persons, which are, he suggests, less reliable than we might think especially when it comes to thinking about how to extend the ethos of generosity to distant others. White argues that late-modern thinkers would be well advised to grapple seriously with theistic arguments for dignity, equality and our obligations to others in attempting to grapple with global questions. In his view, the liberal ethos of respect for capacious agency 'is, by itself, not an effective enough source of connectedness. It embodies nothing that enlivens the sort of ethos of attentiveness and concern for the other that might effectively coax our moral imagination across cultural and geographic borders' (p. 56–57). As a supplement to capacious agency, he proposes the consciousness of common subjection to mortality (p. 66).

This discussion offers an important account of liberal understandings of human dignity and an exemplary acknowledgment of the intellectual cost of simply ignoring the challenge of theistic arguments at the level of inquiry into

basic ontological-ethical questions. It is frustrating in its suggestive, but ultimately unconvincing explanation of the salutary ethical potential of consciousness of mortality as an analogue to the sort of connectedness conferred by Christian *agape*. Acceptance of his argument for this potential makes accounts of the ethically uneven behavior of people during situations in which acute consciousness of mortality is non-optional (one thinks here of Thucydides's account of the ethical breakdown occasioned by the Athenian plague), all but unintelligible. There is no evidence in the passage from Homer's *Iliad* to which White refers that consciousness of subjection to mortality plays the dispositive role in determining the outcome of the encounter between Achilles and Priam that he suggests it does; here, consciousness of mortality pertains as much to the human capacity to cause death as much as to suffer it, as suggested by the fact that measures have to be taken to prevent Achilles from killing his guest during this encounter (see XXIV: 583–86).

Despite its questionable normative status, consciousness of mortality is pressed into service not only to foster a sense of community, but also to provide a basis for equality: 'It is the common subjection to this condition [of mortality and inarticulacy] that provides us with a weak ontological illumination of human equality' (p. 91). White is on much stronger ground when it comes to arguing for the ethos of presumptive generosity, but here, too, there are some unanswered questions. He notes that this generosity 'operates as an initial disposition that may be followed by a variety of more typical political dispositions' (p. 105), such as those aimed at coalition building and active resistance. It is not at all clear, however, by what standard ethical citizens should judge that the moment at which they should leave off with generosity and take up some other disposition has arrived. Nor is it apparent under what circumstances (if any) one's duties toward others as a reasonable individual might conflict with one's obligations as an ethical citizen. Unresolved questions such as these can be addressed in the many discussions that should follow from this fine, challenging, and extremely rewarding book.

Suzanne Smith
Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA