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Review

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add a whit” to the justification of my belief that it is a whale; what the realization does is simply to help give me knowledge that my belief is justified (170). But that seems to give perceptual awareness the wrong role.

Part III, “Completing the Causal Theory”, offers novel answers to two traditional puzzles for causal theories: what distinguishes deviant from non-deviant ways in which objects may cause visual experiences?; and what distinguishes the stage of a causal chain that is the thing seen from all the other stages that are causally necessary for S’s experience but are not seen? On the first puzzle, Vision proposes a new form of counterfactual condition for non-deviance (ch. 7). On the second puzzle, his proposal is this: the object S sees is the only cause of S’s experience for which it is a *conceptual* truth that changes in the visually detectable properties of the cause would be tracked by changes in the character of S’s experience. The weight here is on “conceptual truth”. Thus, it is true that changes in the properties of S’s retinas, say, would systematically affect the character of S’s experience: but that is an empirical truth; and the fact that it is a merely empirical truth distinguishes S’s retinas, which are an unseen cause of S’s experience, from that cause of S’s experience which is seen. This proposal strikes me as strangely indirect. The worry is not that the proposal is open to counter-example. The question, rather, is whether, when all the details are in, Vision’s view will be an improvement on simpler views (Strawson’s, for example) that appeal directly to facts about how things look to the subject. Such views work by developing the common-sense truth that, although my retinas are causally necessary for the experience I have when I see a whale, it does not look to me, when I have that experience, as though my *retinas* are thus-and-so. In the spirit of what he says in Part II, Vision might object that seeing does not require the kind of match between the actual nature of the thing I see and the character of my experience that would be needed to make this proposal work. But it is not clear to me that the Strawsonian proposal needs anything more than Vision’s own idea of an experience’s matching “visually detectable properties” of what is seen (231).

The book has many merits. It provides an extremely thorough and comprehensive coverage of its subject matter. Vision follows the argument wherever it goes, is painstaking in considering the views to which he objects, and bends over backwards to do justice to arguments in their favour. He displays a great deal of common sense and good judgement. On the other hand, his book is not always easy to read. It is long—some 150,000 words, by my reckoning. Some parts of the argument are dense and rather indirect; a lot is demanded of the reader. But Vision’s own views are frequently appealing and are always worth thinking about. And his criticism of others’ views seems to me often to get things exactly right.

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### **Partisan or Neutral? The Futility of Public Political Theory.**

MICHAEL J. WHITE. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997. Pp. xiii, 193.

The political philosophy of recent American liberalism has been designed to answer three questions: how to justify egalitarian principles of distributive justice that should be compelling to any rational individual; how to defend a view of government according to which it is required to be neutral between rival concep-

tions of the human good, while guaranteeing the liberties of the adherents of each to pursue the achievement of their good, as they understand it; and how to elaborate an idea of public reason that restricts the kinds of argument that are permissible within the political sphere to those that appeal to principles shared by all reasonable citizens, so excluding appeal to comprehensive religious or philosophical doctrines of the human good. John Rawls has of course made the single most important contribution to answering these questions and it is therefore unsurprising that Michael J. White's book, which aims to undermine each of these projects, is a notable addition to the body of philosophical writing devoted to Rawls' work. Yet it is a good deal more than this.

Part of the interest of White's book derives from his insightful and incisive criticisms of other philosophical positions. But its unusual importance is more a matter of his own central theses. White's argument begins from the historical facts about the origins of liberal regimes and the sociological facts about liberal politics in the contemporary United States. Liberalism after all has its roots in a postReformation *modus vivendi*, a set of *ad hoc* arrangements for the coexistence of what had been destructively warring points of view, arrangements shaped by the contingencies of the outcomes of their struggles. And liberal democratic institutions and procedures nowadays both embody and provide a means for arriving at piecemeal and provisional compromises between contending standpoints, compromises that secure consensus or at least acquiescence from the citizenry.

The pragmatic political justifications for such makeshift arrangements have never seemed adequate to liberal theorists, who have therefore tried to provide a set of rationally justifiable principles, not only as a theoretical underpinning for liberalism, but also as standards by appeal to which institutions and procedures might be criticized and reformed. It is White's contention that, in offering principles and philosophical arguments as a basis for political agreement that would be superior to the negotiated and patchwork compromises of actual political life, such theorists have typically moved from the less to the more controversial, appealing in their arguments to considerations that are less likely to secure consensus and stability than are the pragmatically arrived at arrangements that the theorists' principles are designed to justify or to criticize. This objection to liberal theorizing is reinforced by another.

Liberals need theoretically justifiable principles. They cannot rest content with the contingent outcomes of political conflict, even in societies with democratic institutions. Some outcomes are and must be shown by appeal to principles to be, from a liberal point of view, superior to others. But the only sets of principles that can provide for liberalism what it requires are perfectionist, embodying some comprehensive conception of the good, determining "which among various human desires, goals, and commitments are worthy of political protection and support, and which are not" (p. 178). Government in accordance with such principles cannot be neutral, but will be partisan in the most fundamental controversies. "And it is reasonable to suppose that the better it is at justifying a particular liberal political agenda, the more perfectionist and controversial it will be" (p. 178). But liberalism, as those theorists whom White takes to be the exemplars of contemporary liberalism understand it, is committed to the rejection of perfectionism. So liberalism confronts a dilemma to which it has no adequate response.

The contrast between liberal political attitudes and those recommended by White emerges most clearly in his discussion of toleration and civility. It is on a

liberal view principles of justice that mandate public toleration, within prescribed limits, of advocacy of conceptions of the good, behavior and speech that we may abhor as private individuals. And White quotes Rawls as asserting that it is a moral duty of civility to be able to explain to one another how principles and policies that we advocate “can be supported by the political values of public reason” (p. 113; Rawls 1993 p. 217). Principles of justice and duty, that is to say, enjoin toleration of and civility towards those who advocate measures of which as private individuals we disapprove.

Against this White argues that we have no good reason to tolerate what we judge to be bad, except when prudence so dictates. What prudence dictates depends upon the political and social context, but it is often the case that attempts to suppress the advocacy of evils will have worse consequences than those of toleration. And this will generally be so in a religiously and morally pluralist society. Intolerance and incivility will prevent the “amity requisite for the effective pursuit of other aspects of the common good” (p. 116) and will foster a range of evils. So there are strong prudential, consequentialist grounds for upholding the First Amendment.

Rawlsian and other liberalisms are not the only doctrines whose advocates claim that they deserve the allegiance of all reasonable individuals, whatever their other fundamental commitments. On White’s view, the proponents of all such doctrines will be apt to find themselves confronting the same type of dilemma that liberals confront. He considers the case of what he calls the neonatural law theorists, Germaine Grisez, John Finnis and Robert P. George, who have argued that there are a set of basic human goods, whose inviolability must be acknowledged by any reasonable individual. These theorists have attempted to present the precepts that enjoin respect for those goods as independent of metaphysical and theological foundations and presuppositions, so distinguishing their view from traditional presentations of natural law theory. White contends that in so doing they are in some ways close to postEnlightenment liberalism. For, although their doctrines of toleration and of religious neutrality on the part of government are significantly different from those advanced by liberals, they too appeal to what they take to be principles compelling to all reasonable individuals in order to identify the scope and limits of toleration, upholding, as White notes, a view of liberty of conscience “that is virtually identical to the liberal conception” (p. 145). White’s response is similar to his response to liberal theory. By depriving what they take to be the precepts of the natural law of that content which those precepts derived from their metaphysical and theological presuppositions, the neonatural law theorists have made those precepts open to too many interpretations for them to function as a basis for a rationally grounded consensus.

Indeed in contemporary democracies not only does consensus not derive from justificatory theory, but something less than consensus is generally needed for a viable politics. White follows Nicholas Rescher in holding that what is generally needed for stability and legitimacy is no more than acquiescence “rooted not in *agreement* with others but rather in a preparedness to get on without it” (p. 107; Rescher 1993 p. 166), in a refusal to quarrel with the imperfect compromises of the democratic process.

White has made an excellent case that badly needs answering. It invites at least two critical responses. One is that White has been too quick in dismissing the claims of a perfectionist liberalism. He quotes Joseph Raz on toleration with approval, but he never examines Raz’s version of liberal theory with its rejection

of neutrality in favor of a certain kind of perfectionist pluralism. And White's own arguments warrant only the conclusion that it may be difficult to combine liberalism and perfectionism successfully, not that it is impossible. So here White needs to say more, and especially more about Raz's arguments, if he is to convince us.

Another critical response puts White's own position to the question. Granted that everyday American political life is for the most part a matter of negotiated and patchwork compromises, it is surely the case that there are better and worse compromises and, more importantly, wholly unacceptable compromises. These may be less rare than White seems to suppose. Consider the vast extent to which in the contemporary United States differences in access to effective public decision-making and to the resources of the legal system are determined by money. The outcome is that compromise is generally in the interests of the rich and acquiescence in compromise is imposed by powerlessness. Is such compromise acceptable? Does such acquiescence legitimate? And do we not have urgent need of theoretically grounded principles to answer these questions?

## REFERENCES

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**Utilitarianism, Hedonism, and Desert.** FRED FELDMAN. Cambridge University Press, 1997. Pp. ix, 220.

This is a collection of ten of Fred Feldman's previously published articles along with an introduction. The essays concern three main topics: the nature and structure of consequentialism, the nature of pleasure, and the moral relevance of desert. The introduction provides a very useful overview of how the pieces fit together and of their general significance. In addition, each article is preceded by a very crisp synopsis.

In 1973 Hector Castañeda raised questions about how the notion of alternative actions should be understood in act consequentialist theory. Suppose that a heart surgeon has the choice about whether to perform heart surgery on a patient, and that performing the surgery has much better consequences. It would seem that act consequentialism should hold that the surgeon has an obligation to perform the surgery. But this act involves cracking the patient's ribs, which would seem to have worse consequences than not cracking the ribs. Hence cracking the ribs seems to be morally forbidden. But then the surgeon has a moral obligation to perform the surgery, which empirically requires cracking the ribs, which is forbidden. There's a problem somewhere!

Feldman's solution, developed in "World Utilitarianism" (and in his book *Doing the Best We Can*), is to reject the appeals to the notions of alternative actions and to the consequences of actions, and to focus instead on the notion of alternative life histories. A life history for a given person is complete specification of the actions he/she performs from birth to death. At a given time of a given world for a given person some life histories are within the agent's