



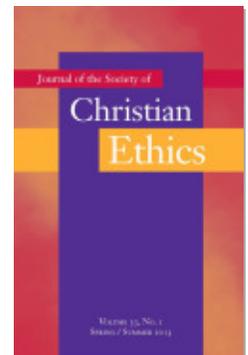
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Why Political Liberalism? On John Rawls's Political Turn by Paul Weithman (review)

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and the lives of people worldwide. Since he specifically addresses the built environment, Gorringer's purview is necessarily anthropocentric and justified by the doctrine of incarnation. Yet the Creator God expresses great wisdom in the laws of nature, and much could be learned from the "built" environments in the animal kingdom. While this line of thought would clearly depart from the rigorous academic method of Gorringer's analysis, the book arose from a feeling that the Lord instructed him to continue working in this area, and attending to other nonrational sources of wisdom could greatly enhance our understanding of God's grace in all the world.

Gorringer acknowledges that the chapters do not unfold linearly, and that he seeks to point out points of confluence. The fluidity with which he addresses theological, political, economic, architectural, sociological, and ethical issues leads the reader to an overall picture of the common good and its powers to liberate us from injustice while an exact map of this process may be difficult to draw. Gorringer clearly and directly addresses both critics and supporters of his previous work on the built environment and solidifies his case for attending to the ways that our built environments could express a common good, grounded in grace, that allows for the fullness of life for all beings.

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Review of *Why Political Liberalism? On John Rawls's Political Turn*

PAUL WEITHMAN

New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. 379 pp. \$65.00

In *Why Political Liberalism?* Paul Weithman takes a bifocal look at political liberalism in the Rawlsian tradition. First he interrogates the rationale for John Rawls's "political turn" from *A Theory of Justice* to *Political Liberalism*. Second, he explores the viability of political liberalism in contemporary Western societies. The soundness of the former—the logic of Rawls's argument, that is—validates the workability of the latter. Weithman argues that the monumental turn in Rawls's thought is based first on his dissatisfaction with how *Theory of*

Justice treated the principle of stability, failing as it did to show that “members of a [well-ordered society] would all judge it good to preserve their ‘firm good will’” (369). Liberalism emerged as a potential answer to the question of stability by further elaborating the criteria for fairness and reasonableness in a civil society composed of citizens desirous of justice and who maintain for themselves a “sense” of justice. Weithman affirms Rawls’s explanation of how the virtue of justice is displayed in fairness and reasonableness. Just how monumental this shift turns out to be, however, depends a great deal on how compelling one finds “justice as fairness” to be.

In recent decades, reasonable doubts have been expressed over the viability of Rawls’s liberal dictum: whether liberty and equality are mutually reinforcing or parasitic, or whether fairness is too morally opaque to shoot for as a political ideal. Weithman seems to believe the principle sound; it is, after all, merely a descriptive explanation of how justice is upheld politically, not a prescriptive project. Rawls concerned himself with the stability and endurance of political liberalism and with how to achieve fair and rational equilibrium. Why Weithman believes the project of Rawlsian liberalism to be fruitful, or at least philosophically successful, is due at least in part to its repeated appeal to reasonableness—that is, the rational promotion of equal liberty for all citizens. Political liberalism, as a theory, affirms and encourages all that the West values in civil society: We must desire and actively support justice for it to be preserved.

This book is intended primarily for Rawls scholars. Weithman assumes his reader to have “fairly sophisticated” acquaintance with Rawls’s major theories and texts, and thus also assumes proficiency in symbolic logic and analytic methods. Weithman furnishes a way around this demand for analytic aptitude from all readers, however, by inviting those “uninterested in textual exegesis” and “content with a general understanding” of why Rawls made his turn to “read selectively” from chapters 3 through 9 (15). Be that as it may, all eleven chapters of this text are dense, rigorous, and tightly argued—standard industry practice in contemporary analytic philosophy. If one can also forebear the methodological vices of analytic philosophy, its propensity for tedious detail and narrowness, then one will eventually enjoy unexpected clarity on the subject under consideration. It will be of value to scholars with interests in the development of Rawlsian thought, the conditions for the possibility of political liberalism, and theories of justice Rawls’s account of liberalism seeks to elucidate.

I doubt one unconvinced by Rawls’s political vision will undergo intellectual conversion upon reading Weithman’s *Why Political Liberalism?*, but that is not the point. His aim is to defend Rawls’s political turn and the project of political liberalism broadly construed. Defense of the former is done rather successfully; defense of the latter may require more voices than Weithman’s.

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