University Press, 2004]). When applied to the Senate, such a path-dependent account would suggest that the modern Senate is not entirely what majorities have wanted. Instead, it is the institution with which majorities are stuck, since minorities have periodically exploited the filibuster to block Senate majorities from reforming chamber rules (see Sarah A. Binder and Steven S. Smith, *Politics or Principle? Filibustering in the United States Senate*, [Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1997]). Rather than viewing Senate rules as a product of majority choice, as suggested by Wawro and Schickler, the alternative approach highlights the unintended consequences of institutional change and the reinforcing character of inherited rules.

How might one arbitrate between the competing accounts? The two accounts are ultimately observationally equivalent: both accounts generally predict the stability of Senate rules. This means that scholars will continue to debate the theoretical undercurrent of the Senate's institutional development. Wawro and Schickler provide nuanced accounts of important junctures—including reform efforts and obstruction in 1837, 1891, 1917, and 1975—seeking to establish the credibility of the threat of a rules revolution and how it tamed excessive obstruction by the minority party, forestalling institutional reform. This is precisely the type of evidence that one would want in order to establish such claims, and the authors certainly offer an impressive array of historical evidence. This challenge, however, is extremely difficult because, as Wawro and Schickler argue, these are episodes in which a majority for reform did not emerge. If majorities for change did not materialize in those instances, it may be difficult to establish the credibility of the threat of reform by majority ruling. The alternative interpretation of such events is that filibustering senators may have held the upper hand, untamed by a legislative majority.

Filibuster is theoretically and empirically ambitious. Although a scholar rarely sings the praises of a book that directly challenges his or her own work, I believe *Filibuster* deserves such praise, even if the jury is still out on its provocative argument. For good reason, *Filibuster* will be widely read by students of the Senate and legislative institutions seeking to develop theoretical accounts of the Senate's institutional past and its potential future change.

–Sarah A. Binder

ACCENTUATE THE NEGATIVE

John G. Geer: *In Defense of Negativity: Attack Ads in Presidential Campaigns* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006. Pp. xvii, 201. $47.50, cloth; $19.00, paper.)

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We are all well acquainted with the typical assessments of and charges against negative advertising in political campaigns—negative ads depress

voter turnout, reduce citizens' trust in government, distract the electorate from the important issues of the day, deceive and manipulate voters, and, in general, debase republican government in the United States. John Geer disagrees. His view of negativity in election campaigns can be summed up in five simple words: Negativity is good for democracy.

Before readers raise their eyebrows at such a claim, they would be well served to read this book. The logic behind Geer's positive view of negativity is straightforward. In democracies, the information available to citizens as they evaluate candidates is critical in voters being able to make choices reflecting their preferences. For Geer, negativity significantly enhances the information that citizens have at their disposal. "Citizens benefit from as much information as possible, which includes the good and the bad—the positive and the negative . . ." (p. 13). This argument makes a good deal of sense. As Geer points out, any form of deliberation is almost always improved with the presence of criticism and debate. Why should this not hold true for election campaigns? The claim made here is that negative advertising provides more useful information to citizens, and, therefore, is beneficial.

Geer builds an impressive theoretical and empirical case to support his position. Chapter 2 details the boundaries of the study and the construction of the dataset. It must be noted at the outset that Geer is only interested in how the content of an ad affects the "information environment" available to citizens. He is not primarily concerned with how negative appeals influence voters or with the veracity of the claims put forward in ads, although he does discuss these issues. Geer examines television advertisements aired by the two major presidential candidates or their parties from 1960 to 2000. Negativity is defined simply as "any criticism leveled by one candidate against another during a campaign . . ." (p. 23). While such a definition may be a bit broad, it does have the clear benefit of no ambiguity. Geer evaluates his data at the unit of both the ad as a whole and as individual appeals within advertisements. Ads are coded as positive, negative, or contrast, and individual appeals are coded as positive or negative and are divided into three types: policy issues, traits, and values. The data Geer present in this chapter show that overall negativity has increased dramatically since 1960, confirming the evaluations of many observers.

Chapter 3 contains the theoretical crux of Geer's analysis. He begins by laying out four simple standards to evaluate information provided by candidates in their ads:

(1) "The more issues are discussed, the better;
(2) The more evidence is presented, the better;
(3) The clearer the differences between candidates, the better; and
(4) The more relevant the appeal is to governing, the better . . ." (47).

These criteria certainly seem reasonable, and after a brief defense of his selections, Geer begins investigating how negative appeals stack up against

positive appeals on these four metrics. The remainder of chapter 3 concentrates on criteria 1 and 2 from the above list. Here the empirical results are clear and highly supportive of Geer's positive evaluation of negativity. Negative ads swamped positive ads in terms of providing documentation for appeals. For example, in 2000, 93 percent of negative ads provided evidence to support their claims, while only 5 percent of positive ads did so. This is due to what Geer calls an "asymmetry" between the presentation of positive and negative information in campaigns. In short, a candidate must provide evidence of negative claims about an opponent in order for the public to accept the claims as credible. No such condition exists for positive claims, and thus these appeals often lack corroboration. Negative appeals are also much more likely to address issues than are positive appeals, as is the case for negative and contrast ads versus positive ads. In terms of addressing issues and providing documentation for claims, negativity trumps more positive presentations.

Geer next examines trait appeals and issue-based appeals separately. This examination is a necessity, as much of the outcry against negative ads deals with their supposed reliance on harsh, unwarranted personal attacks and also with a perceived increase in these types of attacks over time. In chapter 4, Geer provides evidence that these concerns about personal attacks are, for the most part, overblown. No matter how one divides up candidate appeals, attacks based on personal traits make up a small percentage of the total, and they have not risen over time as a component of overall negativity. In addition, the bulk of personal attacks focuses on traits that most would agree are central to representative government and also can be documented—experience and the honesty and integrity issue. Unfortunately, Geer does not provide any evidence here that personal attacks are actually backed by documentation, an omission that will cause some readers to remain skeptical of the value in personal attacks. In chapter 5, Geer shows that candidates' negative appeals based on issues (especially appeals made by challengers) correspond closely with both citizen perceptions of what problems in society are important and with important real world developments such as changes in inflation, unemployment, the state of the economy, or the crime rate. Negative-issue appeals are also more likely than positive appeals to provide voters with differences between the candidates, although neither provides as much differentiation as we would like. By the end of chapter 5, Geer has marshaled significant empirical evidence that negativity bests more positive appeals based on his four criteria.

Chapter 6 provides a case study of what many observers consider the most negative presidential campaign in recent years: the 1988 contest between George H. W. Bush and Michael Dukakis. Geer's analysis here supports his findings from previous chapters and also makes a compelling case that perhaps the negativity of the 1988 campaign has been exaggerated. Yes, the 1988 campaign was negative, but that was nothing new. According to Geer, what changed in 1988 was the way the media covered presidential campaigns. In that contest, and in presidential campaigns since, the media have highlighted negativity, particularly within television advertisements.

Almost inevitably these stories are alarmist and grimly warn the public of the damage these negative ads inflict on democracy. It is here, at the end of chapter 6, and throughout the concluding chapter that Geer examines the larger implications of his findings. According to Geer, negativity in presidential campaigns is rising because of increasing polarization in American politics. When candidates and parties are further apart on issues—as they are now—there are more incentives to attack the other side. But as Geer reiterates throughout the book, this is a good thing. It better equips Americans to fulfill their responsibilities as citizens. But rather than embracing this negativity, we curse and bemoan its existence, largely because the media (and many prominent politicians) tell us it is bad. Geer believes that this must change.

This book will be somewhat controversial, as Geer recognizes. It goes squarely against the conventional wisdom. And there are some flaws in the book. In some instances (particularly in chapters 4 and 5), readers may find the empirical evidence offered to back certain claims less than fully convincing. Examining only ads paid for directly by the candidate or the party excludes some of the most notorious ads of recent years, for example, the Willie Horton ads in 1988 and the Swift Boat ads in 2004. Geer discounts the importance of this issue, but I am not so sure. He also acknowledges that he could not come up with a valid way to measure visuals in televised ads, and that his analysis does not get at implicit appeals. Both of these problems represent important avenues for future research. Overall, however, this is a very good book. A meaningful, informed conversation on the role of negativity in campaigns has begun. Finally.

–Mark D. Brewer

EXISTENTIALIST CONSERVATISM

Peter Augustine Lawler: *Stuck with Virtue: The American Individual and Our Biotechnological Future* (Wilmington, DL: ISI Books, 2005. Pp. ix, 262. $25.00.)

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Peter Lawler believes that American political culture suffers from a narrow view of human nature. Rejecting the Lockean individualism that he sees running throughout American life, he worries that Americans think of themselves mostly as free individuals, and thus they ignore their full human nature as "parents, children, friends, citizens, or creatures" (p. xi). The Darwinian sociobiologists rightly challenge America's Lockean individualism by teaching that human beings are social animals by nature. Even this, Lawler insists, is not the full truth about human nature. While the Lockeans tell us that we are only autonomous individuals, the Darwinians tell us that we