

commonalities, however, are the result of equivocations that can get in the way of our understanding of the topic supposedly under discussion: political philosophy's relationship to history.

The term "history" itself is famously equivocal. It can refer either to the course of events themselves or to a certain literary genre that claims to record these events; it can be reality as such, or it can be historical writing, historiography in the original sense. Nor does historiography have any monopoly on claims to depict reality accurately; the sciences (be they natural or social) claim to do the same, as do most species of philosophy. Recent moral and political philosophers who sharply segregate what is from what ought to be, and then focus exclusively on the latter, are perhaps the only scholars who do not see their work as tied to actual existence in this way. Realists, in Floyd and Stears's sense, suggest that this form of philosophical utopianism is a mistake.

In their contribution to the second section, coeditor Stears and Bonnie Honig provide an evaluative taxonomy of the various forms that this "new realism" has taken over the past two decades or so. Sabl, in turn, presents the new realism as originating in an older conflict between Harvard's government department (once home to Judith Shklar and Michael Walzer) and its philosophy department (once home to John Rawls and Robert Nozick). The history department plays no role in his story; the turn to reality can draw on political science and a host of other disciplines in addition to (or even in lieu of) historiography. The question concerning the kind of relationship that political philosophers should have with their historiographical colleagues (discussed elsewhere in the volume, such as in Paul Kelly's and Iain Hampsher-Monk's contributions) is an entirely different question from the relationship that they should have with reality as such.

Contextualism, too, is an equivocal term. In discussions of the Cambridge School of intellectual history, the term "contextualism" is generally used to identify a theory of interpretation: the claim that a text cannot be understood in isolation, but only in the context of the other surviving literary products of its time. Such interpretive contextualism is opposed to "textualism," the claim that careful, open-minded readers can find something to learn from philosophical texts from any time and place, with no additional archival research required. Throughout the volume, however, Floyd uses "contextualism" to identify a form of moral relativism: the claim that we must search for intimations within our contingent cultural context, and the history of its development, in order to find the resources to make moral claims. This moral contextualism is opposed to "universalism," the view that certain moral principles are justified for all human beings (perhaps even all rational beings as such) independent of their historically contingent contexts.

There may be an elective affinity between the two contextualisms. The moral contextualists Raymond Geuss and James Tully explicitly laud the interpretive contextualists Quentin Skinner and J.G.A. Pocock as their inspirations; Bernard Williams, though less likely to be identified with "the Cambridge School," was also part of the contextualist spirit taking hold of that ancient university in the second half of the twentieth century. From the Oxford point of view, all these Cambridge contextualisms may look the same. Yet there is no necessary connection between them. If anything, Skinner's version of interpretive contextualism might count against moral contextualism. A categorical imperative to situate each text in its particular moment could make it impossible for the likes of Charles Taylor or Alasdair MacIntyre to place them in grand, quasi-Hegelian narratives of cultural development or decline intended to make sense of our current moral and political situation. Gordon Graham's stirring call to reclaim the political-philosophical canon from "the dead hand of its history" (p. 84) is thus responding to a very different "challenge of contextualism" than is Floyd's own antirealist contribution to the same section.

Due to these equivocations, a volume on history, realism, and contextualism in political philosophy is actually nothing less than a volume on the discipline of political philosophy as a whole. Far from addressing, as the editors claim, "one of the least scrutinized" subjects in the field (p. 1), *Political Philosophy versus History?* is a welcome contribution to a broad set of discussions that get at the heart of how and why we study politics. Even as we must reject their claim to be tilling previously unbroken ground, however, we can heartily agree that the matters addressed by their book "are far from trivial, far from being merely of 'methodological interest' and far from being tied irrevocably to the future of the Cambridge School" (p. 9). Indeed, the relationship of political philosophy to historiography—and the relationship of each to the underlying realities that they are both trying to capture—have been central issues since Plato and Aristotle were inaugurating the former discipline while Herodotus and Thucydides were inaugurating the latter. This volume will therefore be of interest not only to those working at the intersection of political philosophy and historiography but also to all scholars in either field wishing to reflect on the nature and purpose of their intellectual pursuits.

Strings Attached: Untangling the Ethics of Incentives.

By Ruth W. Grant. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011. 224p. \$24.95. doi:10.1017/S1537592714000243

— Rob Reich, *Stanford University*

Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner's 2009 bestseller *Freakonomics* was built off of the idea that "incentives are the cornerstone of modern life" and that "economics, at

root, is the study of incentives.” For Levitt and Dubner, and for the many scholars and readers inspired by the book, incentives are ubiquitous and come in all shapes and sizes, financial, social, and moral. It is impossible to understand the world and any choice situation without thinking in terms of incentives.

Ruth Grant’s new book is a welcome supplement, and in many respects a corrective, to this commonplace understanding of incentives. Grant agrees that incentives have come to be seen as ubiquitous, and here agrees with the Levitt and Dubner outlook. But she rejects the idea that incentives are in some way foundational. More pointedly, she does not view the idea of incentives to understand choice or human behavior as natural, or good, or benign. *Strings Attached* is an attempt to make visible the ethical dimensions of incentives and to provide a framework for distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate uses of incentives.

The core idea is that incentives are best understood as an exercise of power, not as a characteristic of the choice situation between transacting parties in a voluntary exchange. The use of incentives is to be contrasted with other exercises of power, such as coercion and persuasion. We must evaluate incentives, Grant argues, by asking not whether a trade or action was genuinely voluntary but whether the exercise of power in deploying incentives was legitimate.

The book has eight brief chapters, all clearly and engagingly written. Grant roots the modern use of incentives in a historical account of the practices of scientific management of industry in the early twentieth century; incentives emerged as an effort at social engineering of the workplace (Chapter 2). She then provides her definition of an incentive: an intentional and deliberate offer by an external party (a person, organization, or political institution) designed to elicit a particular response with the aim of altering behavior (Chapter 3), and next develops a framework for distinguishing ethical from unethical uses of incentives (Chapter 4). She then moves to apply her understanding of incentives and her framework for evaluating them to a series of cases in which incentives are routine: plea bargaining in criminal justice, recruitment of subjects in medical research, loan conditionality by the International Monetary Fund, and motivation of children to learn (Chapters 5 and 6). The final chapters summarize and gesture at a new set of questions concerning the effect of incentives on democratic self-governance (Chapters 7 and 8).

Grant’s understanding of the use of incentives as an exercise of power is compelling. The book succeeds in undermining the more conventional and benign view of incentives as simple features of transactions between voluntary agents. It succeeds as a corrective to the *Freakonomics* view of the world. But what of the author’s arguments concerning how to distinguish ethical from

unethical uses of incentives? The framework she defends for evaluating incentives has three criteria (pp. 50–51). First, understood as an exercise of power, does the incentive serve a legitimate purpose? Second, does it allow a voluntary response? Third, what are its effects on the character of the parties involved? Grant later upends this otherwise straightforward framework, calling these criteria necessary but not sufficient for an evaluation of the ethics of an incentive. We also must consider, she says, issues of multiple and competing purposes, effectiveness, impact on institutional culture, fairness, and undue influence (p. 74).

It is a complicated and, in some ways, unsatisfying framework. The first criterion—legitimacy of purpose—seems to beg the question. It asks us to evaluate the legitimacy of incentives by inquiring after the legitimacy of the purpose of the incentives. The second criterion—voluntariness—is important, but it is the same criterion at work in the economic understanding of incentives: Is an exchange between consenting parties genuinely voluntary? So this criterion does not distinguish Grant’s approach for understanding and evaluating incentives from the approach she is most concerned to resist. We are left with the third criterion—effect of character—as her most interesting and novel framework. The idea here is that the deployment of incentives can have a negative effect on the character of the individuals subject to the incentive. Incentives, like market dynamics more generally, can crowd out morality.

Consider, for instance, the tax incentives available in most countries to engage in charitable giving. Our ordinary understanding of charity is that it is a moral virtue, a sign of a generous character. But introduce a tax incentive into the mix and charitable giving can seem partially self-serving, an attempt to diminish one’s taxes in addition to being altruistic. A donor must ask him- or herself, am I giving because I am motivated by the tax deduction or by undiluted altruism? In short, Grant is right that incentives can sometimes have deleterious effects on character, and that these effects are obscured when incentives are viewed strictly as a market mechanism.

The payoff of Grant’s argument is in her exploration of four case studies. Reflecting the complexity of her framework, in none of them does she deliver an unambivalent verdict regarding the ethical use of incentives. Plea bargains are ethically suspect because they stand in tension with the purpose of criminal punishment, except when plea bargains yield, as a condition of their execution, important information about other criminals. Recruiting medical subjects into experimental trials with incentives is ethically acceptable in most cases but not all. IMF loan conditionality is permissible but worrisome because of undue influence and questions about the voluntariness of debtor nations in accepting loans. And incentives for children to learn are understandable but troubling because they potentially interfere with character formation, the creation of self-discipline, and the intrinsic motivation to learn.

Not only is Grant's framework complex; the context for assessing each case is also complex, especially concerning measures of effectiveness of the incentive. Is the social science evidence clear, with causal, not mere correlational, effects of incentives shown on overall effectiveness? How should the time horizon for effectiveness be set? The upshot is that in each case, there is ample room for reasonable disagreement with the judgments reached by Grant, even on the terms of her own evaluative framework.

In the end, the major contribution of *Strings Attached* is found not in the particular judgments reached by the author about particular cases but in the compelling argument to resist the *Freakonomics* view of incentives as ubiquitous and simple features of choice situations. The deliberate deployment of incentives to alter human behavior is indeed an exercise of power, and, as such, they demand our ethical attention. Grant's orients us correctly, even if her framework for evaluating the ethics of incentives is not as powerful or as useful as she intends.

The Responsibility of Reason: Theory and Practice in a Liberal-Democratic Age. By Ralph C. Hancock. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011. 346p. \$95.00.
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— Robert F. Gorman, *Texas State University*

This serious but dense book attempts, as its title proclaims, to identify the "responsibility" of reason in the secularized liberal-democratic age. It is a difficult read, both because of the subject matter and in the way the book is constructed. It consists of the author's conference papers, previously published articles, and book reviews strung together in an attempt to achieve continuity. There is some thematic continuity insofar as questions of political theory and practice, of the relationship of reason to faith and revelation, and of the human tension between worldly immanence and transcendental longing for the supernatural constitute interwoven concerns throughout the book. While these are serious questions, *The Responsibility of Reason* lacks a clear and sustained argument.

Moreover, there are serious gaps in the sweep of political philosophers examined and a failure to deal seriously with historical contexts. Ralph Hancock seems reticent to articulate his own argument, preferring rather to refract it through critiques of other writers. This makes for a confusing argument, even a difficulty in finding Hancock's own voice amid the chorus of conflicting theorists cited. In a critique of Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* Hancock observes that "the author's erudition and breadth of intellectual sympathy are impressive [but] the book is also exasperating in its prolixity and looseness of structure" (p. 290). Ironically, the same can be said of the present book. There is much of worth here, but like prospecting, it requires lots of looking, just enough enticement to keep logging, clever moves to keep ahead of claim jumpers,

intramural sniping, promising leads that do not pan out and occasional nuggets of insight.

Hancock seems to be concerned that the loss of the sense of the sacred in political life has flattened human experience in the liberal age, thus denying the essential human longing for contact with the divine and transcendent order, while immanentizing this natural longing in an idolatry of the modern state. This is most visible in modern dictatorships, but as Alexis de Tocqueville warned, even democracies are susceptible to soft tyranny. How might philosophy and reason restore the sense of sacred wonder and answer the human longing for eternal love? Early in Chapter 1, Hancock seems to answer this question thus: "The most rigorous and responsible understanding of reason, therefore, cannot be reduced to the rule of reason grounded purely in reason itself but must be held open to the claims of God and of duties to other human beings" (p. 5). This is a serious argument, and I agree with it. However, earlier in the same paragraph, he expresses agnosticism concerning the medieval synthesis of faith and reason. So we find at the start of this book a contradiction that persists throughout, and remains unresolved. The author asserts in his preface that "intellectual excellence and moral-spiritual existence cannot finally be separated" (p. xiii). But in the end, he remains undecided whether the claims of the philosopher and the theologian can be reconciled.

Hancock is aware of the tensions and presents his book as a tentative answer to the reintegration of the spiritual longing and the political necessity of human existence. He proposes that Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* contains useful tonics for a potential cure for modern ills, including his observations about the genius of Americans for local associations (often religious in nature) that integrate both the immanent and transcendent aspirations of the soul. But local associations (parishes, monasteries, and guilds, e.g.) were a feature of medieval activity, too. Hancock's tour of the history of political thought begins with the important ideas and texts of Aristotle, Plato, and Augustine. His treatment of the Neoplatonism of Augustine, however, is unsatisfying and incomplete. Hancock largely ignores the Middle Ages and barely mentions Thomas Aquinas, arguably the greatest expositor in human history on the unity of faith and reason as complementary forms of human knowledge. Next, he reviews the works of Luther (no friend of reason), Calvin, and Machiavelli. Nearly half of the book is devoted to two lengthy chapters critiquing the postmodern perspective of Martin Heidegger and Leo Strauss's attempt to recover classical reason as an antidote to postmodernity. He returns to Tocqueville as a possible healer of modern man's flattened cosmology by restoring awareness to the human longing for love and the transcendent desire for beauty and the good. The final chapter reviews the works of John Rawls, Charles Taylor, Michael Gillespie, and Rémi Brague on serious matters of