

threat and terror. If the liberal subject is so thoroughly terrorized by the emergent character of its own life (p. 90) and there is no longer any clear sense of inside/outside within this biopolitically driven formulation of liberal rationality (p. 81), then one cannot help but wonder about the potential for the emergence of resistance. Perhaps an admission of the less than totalizing effects of liberalism and its penchant for adaptability might indeed serve to sustain his call for a “new political imaginary” (p. 199) that would provide us with the “reasons to start believing in this world” (p. 200). But as things stand, Evans’s desire for “a truly exceptional politics that demands the impossible” would seem ill suited to confronting this new leviathan. His attachments to a privileged space of “the political” (p. 40), where power and politics can realign (p. 98) to disrupt the biopolitical imperative, is hinted at but never fully developed. His attachments to the political constitute the standard reply to such bleak and foreboding critiques of liberalism, but one cannot help seriously doubting our chances for (re)creating a sense of *joie de vivre*.

Defending Politics: Why Democracy Matters in the Twenty-first Century. By Matthew Flinders. New York:

Oxford University Press, 2012. 224p. \$29.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.
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— Stephen Bird, *Clarkson University*

Matthew Flinders has made an important contribution to the ongoing question of the importance and relevance of democratic politics today. *Defending Politics* functions in part as a fiftieth anniversary revisit of Bernard Crick’s *In Defence of Politics* (1962). While the approach and themes of the books share some similarities, their contexts are very different. In the past fifty years, we have seen democracy peak as a choice among nations in 2005 but recently start to decline. Public trust in government, particularly in the United States and UK, is at all-time lows, and levels of polarization in the United States and other countries are extremely high.

Flinders outlines how these discussions of political concern are tied to well-known paradoxes in the conceptualization of politics by the public. He characterizes these as “gaps.” For instance, the *perception* gap describes how the public adulates *their* representatives and glorifies the right to vote and the inherent concept of democracy, but is unhappy with Congress or Parliament (or the president/prime minister) and believes that many politicians are crooks, lazy, or both. The *demand* gap demonstrates how the public’s political demands are incongruent with the associated costs of their political ambition. Finally, the *social* gap is the idea that the public wishes for politicians who are just like them (someone they can have a beer with), yet who are also

able to solve many enormously complex demands, expectations, and problems.

The author sets out his chapters in different variations of the “defence” theme. The first is to defend politics against itself. By this he means primarily the politics of expectations, including those that politicians set themselves on the campaign trail. He presents a lucid and useful reminder of the limitations that politicians face in governing, and also the successes that democracies have achieved in terms of stability, addressing collective interests, improving economic well-being, and restraining populism. He reminds us that politicians rarely emphasize those successes, and instead set up expectations of other sorts that are much more difficult to address. Other chapters are organized as defenses against the market, against crises, against denial, and against the media.

The chapters on the market and denial are both well developed. Flinders reminds us that the “Logic of the Market” and privatization/deregulation reforms have often weakened the democratic state’s ability to address collective-action problems and to maintain standards of fairness for disadvantaged groups. Like Crick, Flinders views the democratic state as a counterweight to the pure market. The chapter on denial extends this concern to the depoliticizing effects of liberal market ideology. The author points out that an increasing range of powers has been removed from the realm of the political, which has fundamentally weakened the democratic process and the underlying influence of our political leaders.

This book is not a typical political science text. Flinders is explicitly following a tradition with little current adherence within the contemporary academy, seeking to bridge the gap between academic and public writing. The author appropriately critiques the discipline of political science for failing to write on topics of broad importance in a way that is relevant and understandable to a mainstream audience. And he successfully furnishes an example of engaged writing without compromising the power of his ideas.

I have two concerns in the underlying logic of the book. Flinders argues that politics works better than we admit, and that we underestimate its achievements. In this I agree completely. What is not clear is whether recent antidemocratic trends are alleviated by this understanding. He does account for several disturbing tendencies since Crick’s writing, and these in part explain his need to update Crick’s approach. Included are the increased reduction in democracy (albeit from a recent high-water mark in 2005), the retrenchment and reduction of the social compact within capitalist democracies, and increased monetary and extremist chaos in Europe. Polarization, inequality, and distrust have all increased substantially since the 1960s, and social capital has decreased. The nature of political campaigns, the media, digital communication, and social activism have also changed. Wars on “terrorism” have reduced civil liberties.

The author's goal is to change the mind of the public (i.e., to improve its confidence in, and engagement with, politics). However, it is not clear that doing so can mitigate or reverse the decisively problematic trends we have seen in Western democracies over the last fifty years. Thus, my concern focuses on *whether improved understanding, engagement, and education can ameliorate global antidemocratic tendencies*. Flinders could arguably spend more time on this relationship. Further, we might presume either that a more understanding and engaged public can address antidemocratic developments or that the overall level of democratic functioning has been relatively static since Crick's writing. Even then, the following concern is *why* and *how* the public might change its antipolitical perspective and thus its behavior. Flinders can certainly argue that such a question is grist for another book, but to some degree it is the harder and more important question.

Causally, the author's explanation assumes that improving public engagement and understanding will lead to better democratic politics. However, as Bo Rothstein and others have argued, this causal model might actually be understood in reverse. The successful design of democratic institutions and outcomes affects civic engagement and understanding. Further, it leaves out the question of whether other important factors—globalization, communication revolutions, and the digital era—fundamentally make the improvement of democratic tendencies more difficult. Flinders argues that governing now is more difficult than it was in the past. Further, he argues that the risks of a more individualized perspective are greater than in the past because the problems of the twenty-first century require social-trust and collective-action approaches more than ever.

Ultimately, Flinders argues that this is a book primarily about managing public expectations for politics. However, the concern is that in the twenty-first century, it is possible that the public has been *systematically* misguided for a wide variety of reasons. Alternately, if one rejects a Chomskyan *Manufacturing Consent* explanation, it may be that in the context of ever more complex systems of markets, justice, and policy, it is easier for the public to lack understanding about the nature of political decision making (probably closer to my own view). Thus, the question is whether we have institutions that can improve the public's level of understanding and expectation.

Flinders implies that it is more about reducing demand (of the expectations for normatively good outcomes) than increasing the supply of "functionally useful government." However, when there are indications that more of our politics is being co-opted than previously, it seems useful to argue that we do indeed have to change the structure and institutions of democratic politics from the perniciousness of either powerful interest groups or more complex systems of governance. In the early twentieth century, we saw a vast series of progressive reforms to improve political institutions in the United States and elsewhere. One could argue that to

change the expectations of the public, we need a new set of progressive reforms—institutions that protect pluralism and the political process from Joseph Schumpeter's "upper class accent."

I have quibbled slightly with Flinders over the implications of his argument, and the nature of the balance between increasing the supply of good government versus the expectations for it. That said, this text is a superb overview of the fundamental problems facing democratic politics. It is a reminder that we need a public that understands both the limitations of democratic politics and the need for engagement in the political process. Flinders successfully reinforces for us that democracy matters more than ever, and that finding public support for it means overcoming critical gaps in our current institutional relationships and processes.

Against Obligation: The Multiple Sources of Authority in a Liberal Democracy. By Abner S. Greene. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012. 352p. \$49.95.

Ordered Liberty: Rights, Responsibilities, and Virtues. By James E. Fleming and Linda C. McClain. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013. 384p. \$49.95.
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— Susan P. Liebell, *Saint Joseph's University*

When Arizona Governor Jan Brewer vetoed a bill that would have allowed businesses to deny services to gay and lesbian customers on the basis of religious belief, she waded into a longstanding legal and political battle. The Supreme Court took up these issues of religious authority and equal citizenship in *Sebelius v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.*, ruling that the religious convictions of the company's owners permitted the company's insurance plan to deny birth control coverage to employees (as, for instance, is permitted to Catholic hospitals and universities). Two recent works in political theory interrogate the proper power relationships among individuals, religious groups, civil society, and the state by skillfully combining liberal democratic theory with important case precedents regarding religion, reproductive freedom, education of children, and marriage equality. Whereas Abner Greene favors the authority of the individual or group, even in defiance of Federal or State law, James E. Fleming and Linda McClain would empower the government to insist on equal protection for citizens.

In *Against Obligation*, Greene argues that American citizens are *not* obliged automatically to follow the law or interpretations of the Supreme Court. He urges citizens to reject complete or plenary sovereignty in favor of *permeable* sovereignty in which the state *explicitly* justifies obligation for each law, executive action, or judicial decision (pp. 51, 118). Citizens should recognize multiple sources of authority that may complement or override