

humans—“biologically, filmically, or politically” (p. 54)—is consistent with democratic values. Being entertained by other human beings, using them as an object for our delight, even rewarding them with our unrequited empathy, weakens the mutual acknowledgment of each other’s subjectivity necessary for strong democratic bonds. Dienstag advances this criterion to take the measure of our representative institutions: Do they support citizens’ “mutual regard”? This above all: “whatever representative institutions we tolerate must be, at the very least, floated on a warm sea of mutual regard and directed by its currents” (p. 55). *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence* is a lesson in the casualties of founding a modern democratic state. The price of civic freedom—the exclusion of the polity’s outsiders—is too high to ever pay in full. No one would want to be a representative if they properly reckoned with the loss involved in the enterprise. Even the winners, those elected to representative government, are losers, because the representative must give up his or her own sense of self.

Dienstag’s final two chapters show what representation has to offer a democratic people: evil-consciousness and time-consciousness. “Representation,” Dienstag says, “can improve on direct democracy not by filtering evil out of a population but, paradoxically, by accentuating it or, at least, by bringing it clearly into view and focusing our attention on it” (p. 106). Here Dienstag admires Lars von Trier’s Rousseauian suspicion of representation and his faith in film to show us parts of the world that we resist seeing. Von Trier evolves from an idea that evil will appear if you simply point a camera at it to an understanding of evil as the absence of good, in which case the filmmaker needs special effects to show it. Dienstag’s final chapter focuses on the *Up* series, which documents a group of girls and boys as they grow up. Here we have films that try to capture human lives as accurately as possible, over time, and yet the subjects in them do not feel adequately represented. What is revealed in these films is surprise: one man is careening toward doom, and then, suddenly, his wheel of fortune turns and he is elected town councilor. Dienstag writes, “The surprise of the unexpected future is a powerful indicator of the unknown substance of individuality—we are much more than our hopes and expectations, and it would be incredibly limiting if we were not capable of exceeding our own imaginations” (p. 126). Representation can say more than subjects could say about themselves by imagining future possibilities beyond any one subject’s ken or ability to articulate. Good representation, then, can force us to see ourselves as we evolve over time—both our past and our future, in wide picture.

Writing in a linear style, Dienstag carries the reader sequentially through the films with brevity, clarity, and enviable elegance. He guides us through key scenes in the films, pointing out clues in the form of dialogue, cinematography, the look on an actor’s face; by the end of each

chapter I felt certain Dienstag had solved the case. This is a book I will carry with me—indeed, already have. While teaching a film that Dienstag does not discuss—Douglas Sirk’s *Imitation of Life*—I found myself giving my students a very Dienstagian reading of Sirk’s ironic “happy ending.” Dienstag’s warnings about the lure of optimism are especially prescient in our current political moment, when vacuous happy talk, blatant lies, and willful blindness are dangerously afoot.

I did push back at Dienstag’s rigid division between consumers and producers. Whereas Rousseau’s “let the spectators become an entertainment to themselves” seems to undo that division or holds out hope for another kind of entertainment, Dienstag never acknowledges that we might be inspired by our entertainment or representatives to later participate in entertainment-making or representation ourselves, as Dienstag himself was in representing these films to us through his interpretations.

Both books are excellent in showing us how artistic works can open our field of vision to things we could not see before. For Shapiro, a Cézanne painting “situates viewers and challenges the phenomenology of subjective perception” (p. 126). Perception becomes unstable as the viewer’s easy expectations are foiled by being forced to view a Cézanne slowly in order to understand what it is that he or she is seeing. Dienstag similarly says the best representation “would be like a cubist painting where the different perspectives framed on a single canvas referenced different temporal frames as well as different spatial ones” (p. 145). Art can help us see reality again, to use a wonderful James Baldwin line. Both books are lively and engaging user’s guides to start us on that journey.

The Theology of Liberalism: Political Philosophy and the Justice of God.

By Eric Nelson. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019. 232p. \$29.95 cloth.
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Eric Nelson’s book is the latest addition to a growing number of studies reexamining the relationship of liberalism to Christianity. In recent years, several, sometimes contradictory, arguments have been made. According to Pierre Manent, for example, liberalism began as an attack on Christianity, and he begins his story with Machiavelli and Hobbes. Larry Siedentop, in contrast, sees liberalism as originating *in* Christianity, and he uses medieval canonists to make this case. In separate books, Brad Gregory and James Simpson argue that liberalism is the unintended consequence of the Protestant Reformation. Each of these narratives defines liberalism in a different way, but they are all critical of liberalism, especially in its modern form. Each

author claims that at a certain point in history—the exact date varies among them—something went terribly wrong. There was a loss of meaning, virtue, and human wholeness, and the unfortunate result is the liberalism we have today.

Among these recent histories, Eric Nelson's is by far the most original. It is also the most complex. Partly this is because his is not a work of traditional intellectual history, but one that aims to bridge what are customarily seen as three separate disciplines: theology, the history of political thought, and normative political philosophy. During the premodern period, Nelson notes, the boundaries between theology and political philosophy were "effectively non-existent" (p. xii). To distinguish sharply between them when studying that period is therefore anachronistic. Moreover, "getting the history right" matters (p. xi) if you want to do good philosophy. This multidisciplinary approach makes Nelson's book a challenging read for those of us trained in more traditional approaches, but it is also rewarding and well worth the effort.

Nelson's main argument can be briefly summarized as follows: Anglophone liberalism owes its existence to a Christian heresy called Pelagianism. In the 1970s, however, it took "a fateful wrong turn" (p. xii) because of John Rawls. In his *Theory of Justice*, Rawls effectively cut liberalism off from its theological roots, thereby rendering it incoherent for all those who followed. More specifically, the arguments that many liberals today make to justify the redistribution of wealth do not hold water. The principle of justice does *not* vindicate a redistribution of wealth the way Rawls proposed.

The first part of Nelson's book explains Pelagianism, its influence on "protoliberal" thinkers, and Rawls's "fateful wrong turn" in the 1970s. Named after Pelagius, a British heterodox theologian of the fourth century, Pelagianism was an attempt to answer the "theodicy debate." Nelson tells us that the early modern philosophers who contributed most to the birth of liberalism were all involved with this debate. It revolved around a classic question: Is justice just because God wills it (the "voluntarist" position), or does God will it because he is just (the "rationalist" position)? Both the voluntarist and rationalist positions posed problems. By establishing a standard of justice seemingly above or independent of God, rationalism compromised his omnipotence and even risked making him superfluous. But by grounding justice in an act of mere will, voluntarism seemed to turn God into a tyrant.

"Protoliberals" took the rationalist route. They were thus confronted with a number of new problems. If God is both omnipotent and just, how can we explain all the suffering we see in the world? Why would he permit evil? How can we explain the idea of hell? Why would a just God create flawed human beings only to punish them for it? Saint Augustine gave the orthodox answer. Because of original sin, human beings are utterly deformed in their

natures and incapable of avoiding sin. They are therefore themselves the cause of evil in the world, and God rightfully punishes them for it. Pelagians, however, denied that human beings are so depraved. They argued instead that human beings are endowed with free will and, by exercising it correctly, can merit salvation from a just God. The evil in the world is simply the price that human beings have to pay for the blessings of freedom. Without it, human beings would not be able to exercise their free will, please God, and be saved. Of course, both of these positions again posed problems. The orthodox Augustinian answer reaffirmed the theodicy problem by essentially turning God into a tyrant. The Pelagian response vindicated God's justice, but by denying original sin eliminated the need for Jesus. This is likely why few, if any, Christians ever called themselves Pelagian, even when they reasoned as though they were.

"Protoliberals" like Milton, Locke, and Kant chose the Pelagian response. From God's justice they each inferred that human beings have the freedom to choose the good and thereby to merit salvation. As Milton writes, God trusts man "to be his own chooser." According to Locke, the path to salvation is through "the voluntary & secret choice of the mind" (p. 19). These thinkers all believed, as Kant asserted, that there had to be "freedom from coercion" for a choice to have any moral value. This also meant that an individual needed a sphere within which to exercise his or her freedom to choose. Nelson rightly reminds us that such ideas were at once theological and political: Locke writes, "Woe to the legislator who wishes to establish through force a polity directed to ethical ends" (p. 20).

It is not difficult for a modern reader to recognize these ideas as distinctively liberal. But Nelson notes that today's liberals rarely speak in such terms; they no longer speak about merit, freedom, and God quite this way. And this, according to Nelson, is because of John Rawls. Rawls effectively pulled the rug out from under liberalism when he rejected the Pelagian notion of merit. He introduced an incoherence that continues to afflict liberalism.

Before becoming a philosopher, Rawls had planned to become an Episcopal priest. At Princeton University, he studied neo-Orthodox Christian theology and became a convinced anti-Pelagian, as his undergraduate thesis clearly shows. Borrowing language from a long list of Augustinians, Rawls called Pelagianism a "Judaizing" form of pride and, borrowing from Marx, a "bargain basis" (p. 57) view of election. Distressed that "Pelagius rendered the Cross of Christ to no effect" (p. 52), he rejected the idea that human beings could ever merit God's favor. Rawls eventually lost his religion, but according to Nelson, he never let go of a certain anti-Pelagian disapproval of the notion of merit. He continued to think *as if* he believed in the doctrine of original sin. We can see this, Nelson

convincingly shows, if we look at Rawls's notion of moral arbitrariness and the role it plays in his philosophy.

A central idea and effectual starting point in his *Theory of Justice* is that a person's social position and natural endowments are "arbitrary from a moral point of view." The idea is that human beings have done nothing to deserve their assets or endowments. Not only their intelligence but also any qualities like industriousness are "morally arbitrary." Nelson argues that this claim leads to a number of problems and inconsistencies that would plague liberalism after Rawls. For one thing, it essentially sidesteps or even denies the individual's freedom and thereby results in a contradiction "between liberalism's commitment to the fundamental dignity of human beings as choosers and the conviction that vast numbers of choices cannot be attributed to human agents in the morally relevant sense" (p. 50). We are led to ask why we should value freedom so much if our choices are morally irrelevant. Until Rawls, the very point of freedom had been to enable merit and thus to vindicate the justice of God.

Having in the first half of the book explained the Pelagian origins of liberalism and Rawls's anti-Pelagian move, Nelson then proceeds to analyze and evaluate the plausibility of the arguments of those theorists who followed him, whether they are luck egalitarians, "institutionalist" egalitarians, or either left or right libertarians. Methodically, he picks apart their arguments, showing their inconsistencies. Thanks to Rawls, liberals have cast away their long commitment to the idea that individuals are responsible for their fates and have come to see their attributes as the products of mere chance or luck. And yet, strangely, their morally arbitrary endowments are also held to be unjust or unfair, necessitating a certain amount of redistribution from the wealthier to the poorer members of society. This raises many seemingly unanswerable questions, among which are the following: *Why* are these differences between people's endowments unfair? According to whom are they unfair? On what basis and how should the "injustice" be repaired? And what would a more "equal" distribution look like? Nelson concludes that post-Rawlsian theorists have taken up "untenable positions" in the theodicy debate, because they have, wittingly or unwittingly, dropped the Pelagian roots of liberalism.

Nelson insists that he is not against redistribution per se. He simply means that a new justification for any redistributive measures needs to be found. The last words of his book are "it is up to us." Having so masterfully dismantled the reigning justification for redistributive justice, we can only wish that he now uses his extraordinary intellect and vast erudition to help us devise a new one.

The Revolution Will Not Be Theorized: Cultural Revolution in the Black Power Era. By Errol A. Henderson. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019. 514p. \$95.00 cloth, \$24.95 paper.

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Errol Henderson's *The Revolution Will Not Be Theorized* presents a substantial analysis of Black Power organizations (BPOs), one that begins with a critical appraisal of Malcolm X, the movement's major ideological personification and symbolic intellectual and inspirational leader. Henderson focuses on the ideological formulations that Malcolm X articulated between 1963 and 1965, before and after his break with the Nation of Islam (NOI) and its leader Elijah Muhammad. Certain Black Power exponents took up Malcolm X's late thought and attempted to forge a new secular Black solidarity movement and religious program, appealing to his contemporaries and the emergent generation in the early 1960s. Black Power movement "revolutionists" in key cities throughout the United States took responsibility for building on the revolutionary implications of proto-Black Power theories of cultural and political revolution through Black cultural nationalism. For Henderson, these revolutionists, in turn, not only misread the revolutionary political implications of their American circumstances as part of broader international developments, but also did so by duplicating the "reverse civilizationist" cultural perspective of Malcolm X himself. Henderson defines "reverse civilizationism" along the lines negotiated between the competing interpretations of Black nationalism offered in historians Sterling Stuckey's and Wilson Jeremiah Moses's studies of Black nationalism, slave culture, slave insurrections, religion, and sources of Black culture in the United States. These analyses in turn build on and against nineteenth-century notions of African underdevelopment, backwardness, tribalism, and the effects of Negro Christian missions on their un-Christian African cousins led by Christian Black nationalists. The revolutionists in turn leave on the ideological floor an array of proto- and preexistent theoretical orientations that privileged the raw material of Afro American culture, labor relations, class structures, religiosity, and war histories and that were readily available.

This book traces the Black cultural revolution across three major eras in Black cultural and political development: the antebellum period, the post-World War I period, and the Black Power period. Culture is defined broadly in the text as "a system of shared beliefs, traditions, customs, practices, techniques, values, symbols and artifacts and material production associated with a particular group, organization, or people.... One of the dynamic aspects of culture is its capacity, at times, to generate