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Review of "The Colonial American Origins of Modern Democratic Thought"

Richard Holtzman

Bryant University, rholtzma@bryant.edu

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Reviews

Social & Behavioral Sciences

existing vocabulary of political violence, problematizing the received vernacular of "terror" and "terrorism." As she notes, "While violence against the helpless is becoming global in ever more ferocious forms, language proves unable to renew itself to name it." Cavarero examines the shortcomings of the term "terrorism," which imprecisely refers to a phenomenon whose objective is not terror—a physical manifestation of the fear of violent death in order to advance a strategic objective. Rather, those engineering shocking displays of contemporary violence seek horror—an ontological crime that negates the singularity of the human body while maximizing suffering, transforming its victims into lifeless, indistinguishable heaps of flesh. In addition to Cavarero's overarching claim, the reader gains countless valuable insights about the role of women in propagating horror, horror's lineage throughout human history, and broader themes of war, vulnerability, helplessness, innocence, and dignity. **Summing Up:** Essential. ★★★★★ Upper-division undergraduate, graduate, and research collections.—*R. W. Glover, University of Connecticut, Storrs*

46-6463 BR115 2008-22659 CIP
Forster, Greg. **The contested public square: the crisis of Christianity and politics.** IVP Academic, 2008. 254p index afp ISBN 9780830828807 pbk, \$24.00

This work is an easily read introduction to the history of Christian political thought. Forster's masterful coverage begins with the fact that despite its apolitical beginnings, Christian political thought has made enormous contributions. Forster (director, Program in American History, Economics, and Religion, Kern Family Foundation) focuses on the natural law tradition taught by Augustine, Aquinas, William of Ockham, Luther, Calvin, and others. The author's goal is to provide readers with material for discussing the decline of the natural law tradition and the current political crisis of liberalism. Coverage is similar to political theory texts used in undergraduate political theory courses, but attends to the Christian elements. Side bars are used generously to present succinct summaries of important political philosophers such as Locke, Spinoza, Burke, and others. Readers unfamiliar with Christian political thought will find Forster's treatment a valuable introduction. It would be a very good addition to undergraduate and graduate libraries. It could be used in undergraduate or graduate courses in political philosophy or political theory and would be especially valuable in Christian schools, colleges, universities, seminaries, and for adult study groups. **Summing Up:** Recommended. ★★ All readership levels.—*A. J. Waskey, Dalton State College*

46-6464 JA76 2007-44343 CIP
Gilman-Opalsky, Richard. **Unbounded publics: transgressive public spheres, Zapatismo, and political theory.** Lexington Books, 2008. 362p bibl index afp ISBN 9780739124789, \$85.00; ISBN 9780739124796 pbk, \$37.95

This important and timely study rethinks public sphere theory in the 20th century. Gilman-Opalsky (Univ. of Illinois) provides a thoughtful examination of Habermas, Arendt, and Mills. Furthermore, the author astutely problematizes the refigured national framework and brings back into focus the unique agency of nonbourgeois public spheres. Chapter 3, "Habermas's Classical Theory in Light of Nonbourgeois Public Spheres," includes a lucid synthesis of the most important scholarship in English responding to Habermas's study. The upshot is that when political science fixes merely on the democratic state and its dominant public sphere it leaves out too much for a "truly empirical" analysis. Beyond this inadequate type of scholarship there are studies hobbled by a national/transnational

dichotomy that, on the wings of a naive cosmopolitan identity, fly too quickly to a "transnational public sphere." The author's move toward a "theory of transgressive public spheres" provides an alternative exemplified in practice since 1994 by the Zapatistas and Subcomandante Marcos from Chiapas, Mexico. Increasingly, democratic publics transgress the boundaries between national and transnational and, politically, participate in a multidimensional struggle in both national and transnational contexts. The resistance of professional academics to a rooted cosmopolitanism committed to democratic politics will be shaken by this study. **Summing Up:** Highly recommended. ★★★ Upper-division undergraduates and above.—*H. G. Reid, emeritus, University of Kentucky*

46-6465 JC257 2008-31068 CIP
Laski, Harold J. **The state in theory and practice,** by Harold J. Laski; introd. by Sidney A. Pearson Jr. Transaction, 2008. 299p ISBN 9781412808316 pbk, \$29.95

There is an unwelcome similarity between the financial crisis of 2009 and the debilitating economic conditions in which Harold Laski wrote this 1935 work. Sidney Pearson's introduction to this new edition emphasizes the important lessons to be learned from that commonality and from Laski's Marxist analysis, now that the specifics of the Soviet Union can be separated from the theory of dialectical materialism. The relevance is clearly present and merits consideration. An additional reason to read (or reread) Laski is his treatment of the philosophic conception of the state. This is classic political philosophy at its most entertaining—substantive, provocative, and eloquently penned. From philosophy Laski proceeds to the major portion of the work, which is an analysis of government in "the real world." Much of this section is familiar Marxism, but Laski also diverges, contending, for example, that the economic conditions in the US would be more likely to lead to fascism than socialism. Still, the way Laski clings to the certainty of the basic Marxist model imparts a timely cautionary message to modern readers seriously searching and perhaps overly eager for answers to difficult economic problems. **Summing Up:** Recommended. ★★ Upper-division undergraduates and above.—*A. C. Wyman, Missouri Southern State University*

46-6466 JC421 2008-6770 CIP
Maloy, J. S. **The Colonial American origins of modern democratic thought.** Cambridge, 2008. 214p bibl index ISBN 9780521514385, \$75.00

Maloy (Oklahoma State Univ.) makes important contributions to the understanding of modern democratic thought with his close reading and analysis of Colonial American political theory. His examination of this "neglected phase of the history of ideas" challenges the conventional interpretation of democratic accountability as the establishment of popular consent through elections. Maloy convincingly establishes an alternative notion of accountability based on "popular control through non-electoral institutions." His research provocatively confronts prevailing historical narratives that trace the genesis of democratic principles of accountability to the American and French revolutions and constitutional debates of the late 18th century by locating these principles in the political thought of the "first modern democrats" who were found in 17th-century Virginia, Bermuda, and southern New England. Maloy also demonstrates the normative implications of his findings for contemporary considerations of elections, deliberation, and constitutional design. His conclusion on establishing new democratically accountable institutions based on popular control, such as a "constituent jury" with periodic and episodic powers, is brief but intriguing. Overall, Maloy's nuanced theoretical and historical argumentation is a challenging read,



but it is well worth the effort. **Summing Up:** Highly recommended. ★★★ Upper-division undergraduates and above.—*R. G. Holtzman, Bryant University*

46-6467 JA71 2008-122 CIP
Montesquieu and his legacy, ed. by Rebecca E. Kingston. SUNY Press, 2009. 336p index afp ISBN 9780791476215, \$85.00

Kingston (Univ. of Toronto) has brought together 15 thoughtful essays from a distinguished group of international scholars on the thought and intellectual legacy of Montesquieu. Originally presented at a 2005 conference commemorating the 250th anniversary of the death of Montesquieu, the essays are wide-ranging, covering what Montesquieu actually said, how he has been read, and what he might teach us today. Together they demonstrate why Montesquieu must be taken seriously not only by historians of ideas but by contemporary theorists who are rethinking the principles that guide a liberal society. A unifying theme to the book is the importance of Montesquieu's notion of morals and manners to his major works and to that of later thinkers in France, England, Scotland, and America. Kingston has done an excellent job getting the contributors to fine-tune their messages into concise essays that can be easily read alongside one another. These are scholarly essays that demand familiarity with Montesquieu's thought and the general development of political thought in the modern era. But they are well crafted and deserving of a close reading by specialists in a variety of disciplines. **Summing Up:** Recommended. ★★ Upper-division undergraduate, graduate, and research collections.—*E. J. Harpham, University of Texas at Dallas*

46-6468 BR517 2008-26673 CIP
Murphy, Andrew R. Prodigal nation: moral decline and divine punishment from New England to 9/11. Oxford, 2009. 232p bibl index afp ISBN 9780195321289, \$29.95

Murphy (Rutgers Univ.) offers a history of the "American jeremiad," defined as a political-theological rhetoric of decline that identifies historical turning points and calls for spiritual renewal, but also assumes the divine "chosenness" of America and the guiding hand of providence in its history. This definition surely applies to the sermons and writings detailed in Murphy's careful second chapter, on the Puritans. But it is harder to apply it to Murphy's later, "progressive" jeremiahs (Lincoln, FDR, and M. L. King), whose rhetoric is not exactly one of decline but of "promise," much less to examples like Robert Putnam and Bill O'Reilly, who do not make much of providence and "chosenness" in their critiques. What is left of the initial premise is an often interesting but frequently meandering look at some different kinds of American social criticism—and a pretty short one at that, at less than 200 pages. Murphy's extensive bibliography (on Puritan political rhetoric, Lincoln's religious thought, and antebellum Southern political theology, for example) is almost worth the price of the volume, though it is hard at times to see where he has moved beyond it in his treatment of American jeremiahs. **Summing Up:** Optional. ★ All readership levels.—*J. John, Southern Virginia University*

46-6469 QC981 2008-17047 CIP
Political theory and global climate change, ed. by Steve Vanderheiden. MIT, 2008. 228p bibl index afp ISBN 9780262720526, pbk, \$24.00

This collection of essays attempts to apply serious theoretical frameworks to the very practical predicament posed by human-caused climate change. The approaches vary with regard to both scope and

methodology. There are chapters dedicated to specific examples such as the impact of climate change in the Arctic and post-Katrina New Orleans, and theoretical chapters from neo-Marxist, post-Rawlsian, and critical studies perspectives addressing environmental justice issues in the face of complex geopolitical and economic trends. The contributors do not attempt to demonstrate the facts of climate change or their cause. This approach is advantageous in that the authors can go further in their arguments than they would otherwise if they had to address skeptics. That said, it would be helpful, if only for the sake of argument, to include a dissenting approach. The virtue of this volume is that readers of all political persuasions can witness serious theoretical grappling with a very practical problem. A potential weakness, given the quickly changing nature of the field, is how quickly such a volume can become dated.

Summing Up: Recommended. ★★ Upper-division undergraduates and above.—*M. J. Watson, Union University*

U.S. Politics

46-6470 E873 2008-36958 CIP
Auten, Brian J. Carter's conversion: the hardening of American defense policy. Missouri, 2008. 344p bibl index afp ISBN 0826218164, \$44.95; ISBN 9780826218162, \$44.95

This revised doctoral thesis asserts that classical realist theories explain the Carter administration's turn toward more militant defense policies better than domestic-political or international-structural theories. While the overall story of Carter's 1979 turn is familiar to foreign policy analysts, the story Auten (intelligence analyst) tells is more about the conversion of policy makers serving under him. Defense policy specialists might find Auten's archival work helpful in exploring the details of nuclear targeting strategy or defense spending during the Carter years. Political scientists, however, will be disappointed to find an overabundance of detail overtaking the analytical framework. They will find that Auten's heavy reliance on the acronyms and jargon of defense policy detracts from the testing of rival theories. In the end, he argues that Carter's administration unwisely delayed a confrontation with Soviet power and was forced to succumb to its reality. But the wider political context—at both the domestic and the structural level—helps explain the shift without any additional theoretical innovation. Thus, the book will be of greater interest to historians than to political scientists interested in theory-testing, or to students who know little about the MX missile or neutron bomb debates. **Summing Up:** Optional. ★ Graduate, research, and professional collections.—*S. Waalkes, Malone College*

46-6471 JK511 2008-11037 CIP
Before the rhetorical presidency, ed. by Martin J. Medhurst. Texas A&M, 2008. 356p index afp (Presidential rhetoric series, 19) ISBN 1603440712, \$49.95; ISBN 9781603440714, \$49.95

Few books have influenced the study of the presidency like Jeffrey Tulis's *The Rhetorical Presidency* (1987). Tulis argues that modern presidents—from T.R. Roosevelt forward—appeal directly to the public in an effort to force Congress into action. Medhurst (rhetoric and communication, Baylor Univ.) and most of the contributors argue that Tulis overstated his case. Focusing on eleven 19th-century presidents, the contributors to this edited volume, mostly from the field of communication studies, argue that these presidents likewise sought to influence Congress, if by slightly different rhetorical means. The