

## Editorial

Various issues in moral, legal, and political philosophy dominate the contributions to this issue of *Reason Papers*. There are also a few forays into arts, culture, and pedagogy. Our issue opens with a symposium on Tara Smith's book *Judicial Review in an Objective Legal System*.<sup>1</sup> The primary purpose of her book is to clarify the role that judicial review should serve within a proper (i.e., objective) legal system in order to make sure that *law* governs. Along the way, she challenges several prominent legal theories. Timothy Sandefur agrees with Smith that law should be normatively anchored and that most of today's legal theories are problematic, but he argues that she dismisses too quickly certain versions of them. He makes a case that there is more legitimate room for historical understandings and creativity in the law than she allows for. Smith counters that Sandefur's depiction of law is a shifting target, which undermines the ability of judges to uphold the Rule of Law.

A second symposium continues a lively authors-meet-critics exchange over Douglas Den Uyl and Douglas Rasmussen's book *The Perfectionist Turn: From Metanorms to Metaethics*.<sup>2</sup> Billy Christmas first summarizes Den Uyl and Rasmussen's project: they provide a moral grounding for a liberal political system, without imposing any particular vision of the good. Such a political system offers "a metanormative obligation to respect each person's sphere of authority over their lives, or in other words, their respective rights to liberty" (p. 49). Christmas is skeptical, though, that metanorms are needed for justifying respect for rights, for such norms constitute a flourishing life rather than being just an instrumental precondition for flourishing. Den Uyl and Rasmussen are wary about Christmas's rejection of the need for metanorms. They argue that such a move blurs the line between the concrete, individual level of ethics and the abstract, general level of political life, thus hazarding the legislation of morality.

Some issues in moral and political philosophy are perennial. William Irwin revisits one such issue: psychological egoism. He not only defends the unpopular view that psychological egoism is tautologically true in an "interesting and nontrivial" way, but also that "altruism is an impossible ideal" (p. 69). Much hangs in this argument on conceptual clarity. Irwin specifies what he means by self-interest and altruism, disentangling them from

---

<sup>1</sup> For a review of this book that appeared in a previous issue of *Reason Papers*, see Carrie-Ann Biondi, "Tara Smith's *Judicial Review in an Objective Legal System*," *Reason Papers* vol. 38, no. 1 (Spring 2016), pp. 182-89.

<sup>2</sup> For Part I of this authors-meet-critics exchange, see the four-article Symposium on *The Perfectionist Turn* in *Reason Papers* vol. 39, no. 1 (Summer 2017), pp. 8-64.

similar concepts, and defends an expanded view of the self. Lamont Rodgers and Travis Joseph Rodgers revisit the Wilt Chamberlain example made famous by Robert Nozick.<sup>3</sup> They focus on unseating Gordon Barnes's claim that libertarians such as Nozick and Eric Mack have failed to defend the historical entitlement theory of justice that drives the Wilt Chamberlain example.

Irfan Khawaja's contribution interestingly blends Mideast politics, rhetoric, and pedagogy. His main focus is pedagogical, carefully setting out the parameters of what constitutes "dialectical excellence" (p. 108) and finding that his teaching experience reveals the abysmal failure of students to manifest this complex set of skills. The test case comes with how well—or poorly—students are able to understand, analyze, and reflect on Osama bin Laden's craftily composed "Letter to the Americans."

Contributions by Gary James Jason and Robert Begley remind us of how powerful art is. Jason reviews a fascinating book by Karen Liebreich that is based on a series of interviews she did in the 1990s with Nazi film-makers. This gives us a chilling glimpse into the Nazi propaganda machine's use of that medium. Begley takes us in a more uplifting direction by lauding director Ivo van Hove's recent four-hour stage production of Ayn Rand's epic 1943 novel *The Fountainhead*. He delves into the details of how this play heroically dramatizes the importance of ideas, providing a welcome respite from the cynicism and naturalism on offer in much of today's theater.

We hope you find this issue's thought-provoking articles as stimulating as we do.

Carrie-Ann Biondi  
Marymount Manhattan College, New York, NY

Shawn E. Klein  
Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ

[www.reasonpapers.com](http://www.reasonpapers.com)

---

<sup>3</sup> Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), pp. 161-64.

