

# Giving Empirical Evidence its Due

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*European Journal  
of Political Theory*

© SAGE Publications Ltd,  
London, Thousand Oaks  
and New Delhi

ISSN 1474-8851, 3(3) 347-356

[DOI: 10.1177/1474885104043590]

**George Klosko** *Democratic Procedures and Liberal Consensus*. *New York: Oxford University Press*, 2000. 271 + x pp., £37.50, ISBN 0-19-829234-1

Liberal political theorists have long maintained that if a governance framework is to secure the conditions needed to establish and sustain a just and stable polity, it must be voluntarily supported by those who are subject to its strictures. However, with each successive generation of 'liberal' citizens and the accompanying proliferation of demands for rights and protections, the difficulties associated with satisfying such a caveat have seemed to increase both in number and severity. In the latter part of the 20th century, a number of liberal theorists began to argue that securing the necessary support in contemporary pluralistic societies would require confining the scope of one's concern to the 'realm of the political' – i.e. to questions such as 'who has the right to vote, or what religions are to be tolerated, or who is to be assured fair equality of opportunity'.<sup>1</sup> In other words, only by distinguishing between political and nonpolitical matters and seeking public agreement on a framework for resolving only the former is it possible to obtain the sought-after support. This school of thought was labelled 'political liberalism', and in its relatively brief existence it has attracted a significant amount of attention and proven to be one of the most provocative and influential developments in contemporary political theory.

John Rawls is unquestionably the most famous champion of political liberalism. He can properly be credited with bringing both the term and the idea of political liberalism to the forefront of contemporary political theory. Yet, despite the impression to the contrary that one may secure from much of the related discourse, Rawls has not been the only noteworthy theorist to develop a conception of political liberalism.<sup>2</sup> Others, such as Charles Larmore, Bruce Ackerman, Judith Shklar, J. Donald Moon, and Gerald Gaus – to name a few – have also produced their own conceptions<sup>3</sup> that they believe differ in some significant sense from those of their fellow political liberals.<sup>4</sup>

George Klosko is another theorist who has been active in the discourse surrounding the concept of political liberalism, contributing a number of essays during the course of the preceding decade.<sup>5</sup> In *Democratic Procedures and Liberal Consensus* Klosko develops a conception of political liberalism that he labels the 'liberal consensus' model, which, he contends, embodies 'the most defensible account' of political liberalism currently available (p. 8). The basis for this conclusion is found in Klosko's understanding of the proper relationship between empirical evidence and a viable conception of political liberalism.

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## The Importance of Empirical Evidence

Like many, Klosko credits Rawls with articulating the basic question that animates the project of political liberalism: namely, 'how is just moral and political union possible in pluralistic, contemporary societies' (p. vii). However, Klosko does not believe that Rawls's approach to this question is 'the most appropriate' (p. vii). Klosko argues that the 'major questions of political liberalism have a deeply empirical dimension' (p. vii) that must be effectively addressed by any proposed conception if it is to offer a framework capable of securing a 'just moral and political union' in contemporary pluralistic societies. And though Rawls's earlier work on political liberalism claims to be cognizant of the empirical implications of his project, had he truly acknowledged and seriously attempted to respond to the empirical realities of contemporary pluralistic societies, he would have developed a discernibly different conception. According to Klosko, an explanation for this disjuncture is available in some of Rawls's later work, which suggests that he basically chose to abandon the 'practical and empirical side' of political liberalism for fear that to do otherwise would require that he make his conception 'political in the wrong way' (p. vii): which is to say, it would render the validity and viability of his conception vulnerable to the whim of political power and bargaining, and, subsequently, unacceptably unstable (e.g. p. 199).

Klosko believes that, in abandoning the 'empirical dimension' of political liberalism, Rawls critically undermined the potential success of his project. In essence, Klosko contends that political liberalism can provide a just and stable governance framework for contemporary liberal democracies only if its claims concerning the existence of both an ineliminable pluralism and a general support for certain 'fundamental ideas' are valid (pp. 8–9). Obviously, to make such a determination one must possess a detailed knowledge of the character and beliefs of the citizens of such societies. Thus, the ability of political liberalism to achieve its stated goals is a measure of its cognizance of existing beliefs. According to Klosko, the best source for such information is survey and public opinion research.

Klosko recognizes that there are a number of potential problems associated with using survey and public opinion research as the basis for one's conclusions. In particular, he notes three principal categories of difficulties associated with the use of such research: sampling error, measurement error, and specification error (pp. 32–3). With respect to sampling errors, or the failure to ensure that the sample of the citizenry surveyed is 'representative of the population as a whole', he suggests that such 'pitfalls are relatively easy to avoid' (p. 33). Regarding measurement errors, or problems stemming from the ambiguous or biased wording of questions and their order of presentation (to mention only two examples), Klosko concedes that, for a number of reasons, such errors are a constant concern in the studies he references (p. 36). However, it is specification errors, or 'problems in determining exactly what attitudes given survey questions measure', that pose the greatest concern according to Klosko (p. 37).

Klosko also recognizes the need to be wary of generalizing the applicability of specific data. He readily acknowledges that his conclusions reflect the findings of research completed primarily in the United States, though he also occasionally refers to data contained in studies conducted in Canada and United Kingdom. He suggests, however, that the conclusions presented in the research upon which he relies are generally replicated or applicable in many other contemporary liberal democracies.

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In the final analysis, despite the various potential problems associated with the use of survey and public opinion research, Klosko maintains that not only does such research often offer the best available evidence, but ‘there is no real alternative’ (p. 39). If one dismisses such research, all that remains is ‘anecdotal evidence’, ‘impressionistic assessments’, and ‘armchair sociology’ (pp. 40, 123). He maintains that, provided one remains ‘continually . . . on guard for specification and other problems’, the evidence provided by survey and public opinion research offers a valid and, indeed, essential tool (p. 40).

Political theorists, however, have generally ignored the evidence available in such research; strangely, they seem willing to ‘appeal to the facts of liberal societies to pose their questions, but not . . . to answer them’ (p. 9). In disregarding survey and public opinion research, theorists overlook valuable information and in so doing undermine the potential validity and viability of their arguments. By contrast, Klosko suggests that the most ‘distinctive feature’ of his conception is its ‘heavy reliance on findings of recent social science, especially survey research on the beliefs and attitudes of liberal citizens’ (p. 1). Such an approach is necessary, he argues, if one is to develop a framework that accommodates the *actual* beliefs and attitudes of those who must live within its parameters; and only by doing so can a framework offer the respect and equality of treatment needed to secure and sustain a just moral and political union.

Hence, the principles animating a polity’s governance framework need to reflect the observed beliefs and values of its subjects if it is to succeed in establishing the conditions for political justice and stability. An understanding of the empirical evidence related to such matters is thus essential to the development of a ‘just moral and political union’. So, what does empirical evidence have to tell us, both about the beliefs of the citizenry of contemporary liberal democracies and, by extension, the political principles appropriate to govern public behaviour in such societies?

## The Tale Told by Empirical Evidence

According to Klosko, existing evidence indicates that the citizens of contemporary liberal democracies overwhelmingly support ‘the basic commitments of liberal theory . . . including rights to equal treatment and to some measure of respect’, though often in ‘rough forms, with considerable disagreement over details’ (p. 10). However, the evidence also reveals a tension between the type of principles that many citizens support in the abstract, and those that they *actually* accept in practice. Disagreement often arises when these abstract principles are applied to concrete cases, producing situations in which ‘general norms, such as principles of religious freedom, conflict with other significant values, such as the majority’s right to make laws’ (p. 48). Klosko suggests that this tension is a consequence of the fact that ‘the broad, abstract principles to which people subscribe actually contain numerous tacit qualifications, though people may not be aware of this until they face uncomfortable positions’ (p. 57). The disconnect between citizens’ expressed support for liberal principles and their willingness to act in an illiberal manner in specific situations can thus often correctly be understood to be the result of their qualified application of the principles in question, rather than the product of an absence of general support for these principles.

Klosko classifies the principles subject to such qualification as ‘weak rights principles’. They are ‘weak’ insofar as they allow themselves to be ‘balanced against a range of other

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moral values' (p. 58), thereby providing for various exceptions respecting their application. By contrast, 'strong' rights principles can be restricted in their application only if it is necessary to do so to 'prevent harm and serious offence' (p. 59). According to Klosko, evidence reveals not only 'a lack of consensus on strong rights principles in American society' (p. 70),<sup>6</sup> but also a relatively widespread affirmation of weak rights principles (p. 61).

Evidence also suggests that citizens qualify rights principles primarily 'to allow repressive action' to 'resolve' distasteful situations in their favour (p. 62). When forced to choose between competing values, a large number of citizens are willing to support intolerant measures if they believe that doing so will enable their chosen value(s) to secure primacy. Such intolerance is often 'a response to a perception of threat' (p. 65) and frequently takes the form of anti-democratic behaviour. Klosko argues that the manner in which people perceive threats to their core values, and their subsequent willingness to act in an intolerant or prejudicial way, is directly and inextricably related to the character of the comprehensive doctrines they affirm. To support this claim, Klosko reviews a number of studies that examine a 'major source of intolerance and anti-democratic attitudes in modern liberal societies': namely, religion (p. 80).

Klosko observes that existing research 'repeatedly note[s] connections between religion and intolerance' (p. 81). In particular, 'certain religious orientations, subscribed to by large percentages of the American population, have been found to be strongly connected to anti-democratic attitudes' (p. 80); these 'orientations' embrace 'a particular cognitive style', which has been referred to as 'authority-mindedness'. Individuals who exhibit this cognitive style value authoritativeness and obedience 'as a matter of principle' (p. 97), and rely 'almost entirely . . . [on] arguments from authority' (e.g. the Bible) to support their claims (p. 102). This trait is most apparent among religious fundamentalists and others who believe 'that there is one set of religious teachings that clearly contains the basic, intrinsic, essential, inerrant truth about humanity and deity' (p. 96). Unsurprisingly, authority-mindedness has proven itself to be closely associated with prejudice, intolerance, and other anti-democratic attitudes (p. 81); indeed, in general, those who practice authority-mindedness are the most intolerant group (pp. 85, 98). To make matters worse, the characteristics of this group are not unique to 'religious' segments of society (p. 105).

As one might expect, people who affirm 'authoritative epistemologies' will not easily be convinced to support or participate in a democratic consensus (p. 112). The severity of the problem posed by this fact will significantly depend upon the percentage of the population that exhibits such a cognitive style. According to Klosko, the relevant 'cognitive factors' are sufficiently widespread to pose a significant problem for those seeking to establish a liberal consensus (p. 81). For example, a recent study suggests that 20–5 percent of the American populace affirms what could be considered authoritative epistemologies (e.g. pp. 106, 111). Klosko notes that, while it would be relatively easy to identify a reason to exclude such individuals from the scope of concern, 'given the high percentage of the population with the views in question, for both normative and practical reasons, liberal consensus argues for inclusion rather than exclusion' (p. 112). Excluding from consideration the views of such a significant percentage of the population would make it impossible to secure the type of general public agreement – and, by extension, the justice and stability – being sought by a liberal consensus.

Moreover, according to Klosko, 'More important than what people believe is how they behave. Though large numbers of people express non-democratic sentiments, they are

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generally too apathetic to act on them' (p. 47). The specifics of the comprehensive doctrine which one affirms are thus irrelevant so long as s/he is willing to act 'reasonably' – i.e. willing to cooperate with others, to assist the preservation of civil peace, and 'willing to accept decisions made by fair procedures' (p. 23); those who are willing to do so are 'owed' justifiable political principles (p. 23). Contra Rawls, then, 'Religious fundamentalists and other authority-minded citizens do not forfeit their rights to be governed by principles they can accept, as long as they are willing to live co-operatively with their fellows' (p. 112).

However, if disagreements between adherents of different religions and other comprehensive doctrines are unavoidable and ineliminable and, consequently, consensus on strong rights principles 'and on modes of reasoning necessary to establish them' is impossible (p. 115), then the ability of citizens to live together cooperatively will depend upon their having access to mechanisms by which to adjudicate disputes (p. 78). According to Klosko, evidence suggests that democratic procedures and institutions can offer the necessary mechanisms (p. 80). The findings of various studies indicate that, 'in spite of lack of consensus on rights and liberties, [large majorities of] liberal citizens generally support democratic procedures' (p. 116).

Evidence thus recommends a type of *procedural* liberalism that focuses on the importance of democratic procedures and institutions for securing a stable consensus on a single governance framework to regulate behaviour in the public realm. Research indicates that it is necessary to assign primacy to 'procedural' principles if one is to secure the type of public support for the governance framework essential to the establishment and maintenance of a 'just moral and political union'. When one supports 'procedural' principles, s/he is endorsing 'the means through which decisions are made', as opposed to 'what is decided', which is a 'substantive' matter (p. 116). This is not to suggest that procedural principles have no substantive repercussions: indeed, '[the] maintenance of suitably democratic procedures has important substantive implications concerning the distribution of rights and liberties and other values throughout society' (p. 116).

Not surprisingly, then, the fairness, or justness, of the procedures through which decisions are made – i.e. the degree of *procedural justice* – greatly influences the perceived legitimacy of, and, subsequently, support for and commitment to, the related political institutions. This relationship is a consequence of the ability of procedural justice to 'cushion' the impact of unpleasant decisions. This cushioning effect is referred to as the 'fair-process effect' (p. 210). Provided individuals believe decisions are the product of 'fair' procedures, they are willing to accept such decisions, even should they disagree with them (p. 226). Procedures are generally considered 'fair' if the resulting decisions are 'made honestly, on the basis of the facts, with a lack of bias, and not (unduly) influenced by political considerations; and if decision-makers are trustworthy, i.e. motivated to be fair, and respectful of people's rights' (p. 226).

In turn, political institutions that exhibit procedural justice are able to secure the support and allegiance of citizens who affirm a diversity of often competing and conflicting viewpoints. Procedural justice thus enables the establishment and maintenance of a consensus on a general governance framework for pluralistic societies, 'even in the absence of agreement on important moral principles and even if, as is inevitable, decisions are far more advantageous to certain groups than to others' (p. 228).

## Securing a Liberal Consensus

According to Klosko, existing evidence indicates that the pluralism that characterizes contemporary liberal democracies effectively precludes the possibility of identifying a single set of substantive (i.e. 'strong') rights principles that could secure the voluntary support of *all* (or even a majority of) citizens: 'In spite of respects in which they agree, people with different comprehensive views interpret central values differently' (p. 183). This is especially true with respect to democratic rights, about which 'liberal citizens differ in how they define their scope and their force, as indicated by the circumstances under which they believe rights can be overridden by other concerns' (p. 183). Klosko argues that if a voluntary public consensus cannot be reached on a set of substantive rights principles to regulate behaviour in the public realm, then securing a democratic agreement on what constitutes an acceptable regulatory regime 'can be assumed to be the most desirable alternative, especially because democratic decision-making is generally accepted and so able to be justified to almost all members of the population' (p. 145). Indeed, only by focusing on democratic procedures, 'rather than a specific conception of rights or principles of distributive justice' (p. vii), is it possible to produce a governance framework that can secure and maintain a widespread, voluntary consensus among the citizens of a contemporary liberal democracy, and thereby generate the institutional legitimacy and public support needed to establish and sustain a 'just moral and political union'.

In turn, 'The principle that democratic procedures should set the contours of democratic principles can [and must] be extended to democratic procedures as well' (p. 145). Klosko labels this principle 'the "procedural norm of democracy"' (p. 145). He concedes that use of this procedural norm renders the principles upon which a liberal consensus is based vulnerable to possible abuse. 'If the majority of citizens are strongly opposed to a given minority group', then using the procedural norm of democracy to determine the form of existing political structures could well result in the rights of said minority group being curtailed (p. 147). While Klosko recognizes the seriousness of such a potentiality, he suggests that its presence does not unacceptably detract from the relative attractiveness of democratic procedures in terms of their effectively serving the needs of a liberal consensus. Democratic procedures remain the best available means by which to 'settle controversial moral and political issues' (p. 12), and thus enable the maintenance and ensure the success of a liberal consensus.

Moreover, Klosko emphasizes that not just any principles agreed upon will be acceptable: 'Acceptable principles must conform with central moral commitments of the liberal tradition' (p. 9), especially the 'basic commitment . . . that political principles should be able to be justified to each citizen, at the bar of his or her own reason' (p. 19). So, for example, if a given principle advocates racial or religious intolerance, 'then neither it nor other principles that follow from it should be viewed as acceptable or as justified' (p. 28). Indeed, if they are to function properly, 'democratic procedures require general respect for an important range of rights', including freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of association, among others (p. 231).

Unacceptable procedures would include 'practices such as weighing certain votes more than others, allowing some people to vote more than once, placing significant barriers to certain people's ability to vote, or using threats or intimidation to influence votes' (p. 139). In essence, what is needed is 'a combination of reasonably fair procedures and an absence

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of obviously objectionable features' (p. 139). According to Klosko, if decision procedures are to be understood to be 'reasonably fair', then they 'must be established and supported, with general agreement on how they are to function and that the norms they embody are acceptable' (p. 7). The legitimacy and success of a governance framework will be a measure of its ability to satisfy these prerequisites.

Obviously, if the necessary conditions are to be fulfilled, then the political principles in question will need to be acceptable to 'high percentages of the population' (p. 11). Given the pluralism that characterizes contemporary liberal democracies, any political principles that are to satisfy this caveat will necessarily have to be 'neutral' in character (p. 13). More specifically, they will need to offer neutrality of justification, which is to say, they will need to be 'justifiable' to the adherents of a diversity of competing and often conflicting comprehensive doctrines (p. 14), from the perspective of each person's reason.<sup>7</sup> By offering such neutrality, political principles avoid being the source of unmanageable controversy and, subsequently, divisive conflict and instability.

This need to identify principles that can secure the voluntary support and allegiance of the adherents of a diversity of comprehensive doctrines recommends a particular approach to the task of developing a viable governance framework for pluralistic societies. According to Klosko, effectively responding to the challenges presented by such a task requires that one first try to identify 'areas of agreement between existing comprehensive views' and in so doing determine 'the range of principles' that can be justified to the citizens in question (p. 190); then, from within these principles, develop others 'that different members of society would view as normatively preferable' (p. 190). In other words, reverse the two stages of Rawls's method of political construction. Klosko refers to this approach as the 'method of convergence', and he uses it to develop his liberal consensus model of political liberalism (p. 190).

The consensus secured using the method of convergence is similar to Rawls's overlapping consensus insofar as both are founded upon an 'agreement on a range of central principles, which people interpret differently from the perspectives of their own comprehensive views' (p. 183). However, Klosko contends that, while an overlapping consensus may be desirable, it 'is difficult to defend, absent convincing evidence for its existence, or at least its plausibility' (p. 192). Given the presence of an ineliminable pluralism, 'a narrow form of consensus' similar to the 'constitutional consensus' proposed by Kurt Baier,<sup>8</sup> though less than morally ideal, 'can be adequate for both the normative and sociological [i.e. practical] requirements of liberal consensus' (p. 31).

According to Klosko, a review of existing evidence reveals that despite significant and ineliminable disagreements between proponents of different comprehensive doctrines, there does exist a set of principles that can serve as the basis for a sound liberal consensus. Specifically, the basic commitments of liberal theory, such as the right to respect, equality of treatment, and a range of basic liberties, 'can be justified to almost all members of society' (p. 184). Indeed, among the citizens of contemporary liberal democracies, there already exists a 'strong consensus' on these principles, which, in turn, provides support for such things as democratic procedures, distributive norms based on merit, and equal economic opportunities.

However, Klosko emphasizes that a consensus on such principles can and does exist only at an abstract level. The specific, preferred form in which these principles should manifest themselves in public policy is the subject of 'widespread disagreement' (p. 231). Hence, the

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principles that form the foundation of a liberal consensus ‘constitute an outline that needs to be filled in’ (p. 230). A liberal consensus thus requires a mechanism to resolve disagreements about the more precise and concrete manifestation of its foundational principles if it is to be successful. Klosko contends that democratic procedures can and should ‘provide [the] means of resolving disagreements not only about other liberal principles, but about the form and scope of democratic procedures themselves’ (p. 184). The ‘core ideas’ of Klosko’s liberal consensus thus ‘centre more on means of resolving disputes than on detailed stipulations of what resolutions should look like, though of course there are parameters within which resolutions must fall’ (p. 231).

Klosko believes that a governance framework founded upon his liberal consensus model of political liberalism embodies ‘the political principles that can be most clearly justified to the large majority of liberal citizens, because people either hold them already or they follow from other important principles they accept’ (p. 29). In so doing, his model offers not only the most suitable framework for contemporary liberal democracies, but, indeed, the only framework capable of securing and sustaining a ‘just moral and political union’ in contemporary pluralistic polities. Klosko recognizes that his conception is not without its shortcomings. Foremost among the problems confronting it, according to Klosko, are ‘the limited conception of rights it is able to support and the degree of economic equality it is able to foster’ (p. 231). Also regrettable is both its inability to secure universal support, and the fact that it ‘could leave certain classes of people unprotected’ (p. 236). However, Klosko notes that ‘[t]hese problems touch on difficulties as old as political theory itself’ (p. 236), and his liberal consensus model of political liberalism does as much (and often more) to address these concerns as does any other existing conception of justice.

### Does Klosko’s Model Succeed?

Klosko’s liberal consensus model offers a strand of political liberalism that more seriously confronts the empirical dimensions of political liberalism than does any of its familial rivals. Though others – especially Rawls – make much of the need for political liberalism to reflect the shared public values of those who must live under its constraints, it is in Klosko’s conception that this requirement finally receives the empirical treatment it demands. In assigning such an important role to empirical evidence, Klosko hopes to avoid what he believes to be a critical problem plaguing Rawlsian political liberalism: namely, its reliance on empirically unsubstantiated conclusions concerning the beliefs of citizens of contemporary liberal democracies.

By failing to provide evidence to support the validity of his claims respecting the principles that citizens would voluntarily and reliably support, Rawls is, in effect, forced to rely on assumptions that may prove to be incorrect, a fear that is, according to Klosko, vindicated by existing research. For Klosko, the principal problem with Rawls’s reliance on ‘intuitive ideas’ – as opposed to empirically validated observations – seems to be that it renders the validity and viability of his conception dependent upon citizens’ support for beliefs that they ‘are not necessarily aware of holding but to which they are committed because of their other beliefs’ (p. 194). Klosko (logically) suggests that a proposed framework is much more likely to be able to secure and sustain widespread, public support if its animating principles are ones that people knowingly support (p. 195).

However, it seems that one could reasonably ask whether Klosko’s model does not also,

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at least to a certain extent, suffer from the problem noted. Recall that, according to Klosko, existing support for the procedural norm of democracy, something that is critical to the validity and viability of his proposed framework, may be unrecognized (p. 145). Equally noteworthy is his concession that not all of the political principles that animate his model are ones that people necessarily explicitly affirm, but include principles that ‘follow from other important principles they accept’ (p. 29). This ‘implied’ approach seems uncomfortably similar in character to Rawls’s use of ‘intuitive ideas’. Admittedly, Klosko’s reliance on principles that ‘follow from other important principles’ that citizens *knowingly* support is a notably less problematic approach than that adopted by Rawls. Nevertheless, it would seem that *any* reliance upon principles that are not explicitly recognized and supported generates uncertainty and, insofar as it does, is undesirable and potentially problematic.

Another curious feature of Klosko’s study is that it never significantly confronts the question of how he might respond to critics of both his conception and, more generally, political liberalism. Though he briefly discusses a means by which those who disagree with the idea of a liberal consensus could nevertheless be convinced to support it (via the notion of political obligation),<sup>9</sup> he never directly engages theorists such as Ronald Beiner, for example, who argue that all liberals, ‘political’ and otherwise, drastically misunderstand and misrepresent the ‘true’ purpose of political theory. For Beiner and his ilk, liberals’ overwhelming concern with developing doctrines that can provide the basis for a public agreement on a single governance framework represents the bastardization and debasement of the true aim of political theory. True political theory, it is claimed, neither requires nor supports the search for compromise and consensus that consumes liberalism; it does not seek ‘to offer sensible guidance on the conduct of social life, but rather to probe the normative adequacy of a given vision of social order by pushing that particular vision as far as it will go’.<sup>10</sup> True political theory is ‘radical, extravagant, probing, biting, and immoderate’,<sup>11</sup> and it is impossible to achieve these qualities and simultaneously seek consensus.

Beiner claims that the ‘practical’ theorizing practiced by Klosko and his fellow political liberals deprives political theory of the ‘intellectual resources’ needed to identify what is ‘sordid, empty, mechanical, and dispiriting’ about our existing social order.<sup>12</sup> In other words, practical theorizing leaves political theorists unable to ‘pass judgment’ on the value of contemporary life – the *raison d’être* of political theory. Such theorizing thus betrays the ‘essential mission’ of political theory: namely, to help us ‘understand ourselves at a deeper fathom by exposing ourselves to the challenge of . . . alien thought-worlds’.<sup>13</sup> Such an objective can be achieved, Beiner argues, only if theorists abandon the goal of practicality and embrace the type of ‘intellectual extremism’ that is the hallmark of the ‘grand tradition of political philosophy’.<sup>14</sup> If it is to regain its once robust and heroic character, political theory must first be emancipated from the chains of modesty that currently constrain it. According to Beiner, nowhere are these chains more evident or forcefully promoted than in contemporary liberal theorizing. Hence, the type of liberal/empirical approach Klosko recommends is neither desirable nor useful, and, indeed, should be purposely avoided for it effectively buries the heroic and essential ‘spirit’ of political theory.

Arguably, Klosko’s failure to engage such theorists does not significantly undermine the value of his study. He readily acknowledges the foundational role played by certain ‘liberal’ beliefs, such as the requirement that the governance framework generally be acceptable to those who must live within its parameters. This type of a priori liberal parameter is clearly evident and emphasized throughout the study, beginning in the

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Preface. Subsequently, it should not be surprising that Klosko does not devote any significant energy or space to trying to convince theorists such as Beiner of the appropriateness and value of the liberal consensus model of political liberalism.

For those who believe that political theory should offer *more* than 'grand' or 'heroic' visions of worlds that can never be, and that it best serves humanity when it seriously confronts practical sociopolitical concerns, *Democratic Procedures and Liberal Consensus* provides an excellent example of political theorizing worthy of emulation. Klosko should be applauded for producing a study that is not only engaging and insightful, but also original and a valuable contribution to both the existing literature concerning the character of a viable conception of political liberalism and, more generally, the ongoing debate surrounding the nature of an appropriate conception of justice for contemporary pluralistic societies.

**Notes**

1. John Rawls (1993) *Political Liberalism*, p. 214. New York: Columbia University Press.
2. Of course, given Rawls's principal role in introducing, developing and publicizing the notion of political liberalism, and understanding that the overwhelming majority of related literature is dedicated to an analysis of his arguments, such an impression is quite understandable, if, in certain respects, unfortunate.
3. Charles Larmore (1987) *Patterns of Moral Complexity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (1990) 'Political Liberalism', *Political Theory* 18(3): 339–60. (1996) *The Morals of Modernity*. New York: Cambridge University Press. (1999) 'The Moral Basis of Political Liberalism', *Journal of Philosophy* 96(12): 599–625. Bruce Ackerman (1980) *Social Justice in the Liberal State*. New Haven: Yale University Press. (1994) 'Political Liberalisms', *Journal of Philosophy* 91(7): 364–86. Judith Shklar (1989) 'The Liberalism of Fear', in Nancy Rosenblum (ed.) *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, pp. 21–38. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. J. Donald Moon (1993) *Constructing Community: Moral Pluralism and Tragic Conflicts*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Gerald Gaus (1996) *Justificatory Liberalism: An Essay on Epistemology and Political Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
4. This is not to deny that, 'In spite of possible differences between their precise interests and approaches, proponents of political liberalism generally agree on central concerns, especially problems posed by contemporary pluralism'. George Klosko (2000) *Democratic Procedures and Liberal Consensus*, pp. 5–6. New York: Oxford University Press.
5. George Klosko (1993) 'Rawls's "Political" Philosophy and American Democracy', *American Political Science Review* 87(2): 348–59. (1994) 'Rawls's Argument from Political Stability', *Columbia Law Review* 94: 1882–97; (1997) 'Political Constructivism in Rawls's Political Liberalism', *American Political Science Review* 91: 635–46.
6. Recall that claims about the character of American society should be assumed to be generally applicable to other contemporary liberal democracies.
7. As do all political liberals, Klosko notes that the requirement of neutrality pertains 'to governments rather than to individual citizens' (n. 4), p. 14.
8. Kurt Baier (1989) 'Justice and the Aims of Political Philosophy', *Ethics* 99(4): 771–90.
9. Klosko (n. 4), pp. 242–6.
10. Ronald Beiner (1997) *Philosophy in a Time of Lost Spirit: Essays on Contemporary Theory*, p. ix. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
11. *Ibid.*, p. x.
12. *Ibid.*, p. xii.
13. *Ibid.*, p. xiii.
14. *Ibid.*, p. x.