

## **The Pretenses of Loyalty: Locke, Liberal Theory & American Political Theology**

John Perry, *The Pretenses of Loyalty: Locke, Liberal Theory & American Political Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. £62. pp. x + 264. ISBN: 978-0-19-975654-4)

In the contemporary political climate, John Perry's *The Pretenses of Loyalty* remains as relevant as when it was first published in 2011. As the title indicates, Perry aims to address the issue of competing loyalties to one's religion and one's state (or "the common good"), and he argues that the Western concept of "tolerance" is an inadequate framework for contemporary questions of competing loyalties. Perry delivers a carefully-argued assessment of American political theology, pointing out crucial issues with the liberal theory of tolerance through a consideration of John Locke's concept of "the pretences of loyalty." Religious and civic loyalties, he argues, cannot be as easily separated as liberal theory would suggest, because this theorisation "fails to account for how humans actually understand their obligation" (6).

In Part I (Chapters 1–2), Perry addresses the conflict between civic and religious loyalties by analysing Johnannine liberalism from John Locke to John Rawls, and by considering historical attempts to harmonise these loyalties. In Part II (Chapters 3–5), Perry interprets John Locke's approach to tolerance. In Part III (Chapters 6–7), Perry examines the contemporary American response to liberalism in light of John Locke's theories, and proposes various amendments to this theory.

Perry's style of writing draws his readers into his argument. He begins by presenting case studies such as the story of Antigone, debates about homosexuality, and bans on religious attire. These case studies buttress the theory he proposes, allowing his readers to grapple with concrete issues rather than abstract concepts.

This book is not meant to provide a solution to the problem. Perry suggests that "improvised responses to concrete cases—that is, something more like casuistry—will work better than we suspect" (8). While Perry clarifies from the beginning of the book that his aim is to point out problems rather than to propose solutions, as a reader, I still wish that Perry had proposed solutions to the problems of liberalism rather than simply offer a casuistic approach to discovering potential disingenuous loyalties to state and religion.

Perry will be challenged for what he calls "dialogic and disciplinary pluralism" (12), a concept with which he supplants "interdisciplinarity." While he successfully combines political theology and political theory, his argument inevitably raises disciplinary questions. Experts in both fields may find certain theories proposed that they deem unimportant or irrelevant, and will likely see such pluralistic work as non-conformant with the expectations of their discipline. As interdisciplinarity is the trend toward which our education system is moving, this challenge will not be unique to Perry, but will be faced by all those who wish to work in an interdisciplinary field.

Americans take for granted that their nation is Christian without considering what this Christianity means, or how this version of Christianity was brought into their culture. It is dangerous for a nation to be unaware of its tendency to consider the state as a neutral agent, and of placing religion in the service of the state. *The Pretenses of Loyalty* is an attempt to heighten awareness of the origins of America's religious context and theological ethics.

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