

to get the correct conclusion in Singer's scenario. Would not, for example, an appeal to the Golden Rule suffice? As I would not want to be killed, so I should not kill. Whether the world would be better off in some respect if I were killed, even better off by way of human dignity, may indeed be true; only, no person equal to me may reasonably act for that reason (nor may any government charged with protecting such equality). Indeed, someone who took this classical approach might object that personalism takes a formal, relational feature of human persons—our natural equality—and misguidedly deals with it as if it were an attribute, indeed, a curiously ineffable and incommunicable attribute. Moreover, is not there *some* sense in which the world would be significantly better off if no one had Down syndrome?

I said that I regard Crosby's book as the best available introduction to personalism. This is true not simply because of its dual approach, already mentioned, so appropriate to personalism but also because of Crosby's remarkable virtues as a philosophical writer. He is painstakingly clear and, in a personalist style that takes the reader as an interlocutor, he anticipates objections with patience, always seeking what is right about alternative views and aiming to take this appropriately into account.

Yet, as an introduction, it has two shortcomings, presumably because an introduction can accomplish only so much. First, *Personalist Papers* deals solely with matters of ethics. It gives no inkling as to the directions in which personalism would need to be developed to provide insight into political philosophy or economic theory. Second, the book deals with personalism as if it were inevitably a submovement in realist phenomenology. This is unfortunate because there is no reason in principle why there could not be an Aristotelian personalist, or an analytic philosopher who was a personalist, and not through the mere addition of phenomenological techniques to some other philosophical basis. The book's implicit and incorrect assumption seems to be that the subjectivity of the human person, which personalism must affirm, can be dealt with solely through phenomenological methods.

—Michael Pakaluk  
*Clark University, Worcester, Massachusetts*

### The Politics of Human Frailty: A Theological Defence of Political Liberalism

**Christopher J. Insole**

Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press,  
2004 (200 pages)

This book is a lucid presentation of the modern confusion over the concept of political liberalism. Political philosophy textbooks convey a varied picture of what liberalism has meant through the ages. Some authors claim that we should speak about liberalisms rather than liberalism. Notwithstanding that fact, much harsh criticism directed at liberalism treats it as a homogeneous term that breeds only “destructive individualism and

social atomism” (1). Insole’s book seeks to dispose of some longstanding clichés and stereotypes, its primary concern being the theological aspect of the issue from historical and contemporary perspectives.

The author agrees that there exist kinds of liberalism—“crusading liberalism” or “modern triumphalist liberalism” (6)—which indeed deserve to be criticized. They seem to disregard the condition of man as a contingent, limited, and imperfect creature—things that the author considers to constitute the main ontological foundation for any political or philosophical system. Instead, they unfold naive visions of unlimited, absolutely free, and perfect human beings. Such visions are termed respectively *voluntarism*, *constructivism*, and *progressivism*. Political liberalism is then accused of imposing secularist culture, irreligious attitudes, and atheistic ideology. Religious critics all too eagerly resort to simplified black and white divisions in which the (pure) church is set in opposition to the (impure) world. Thus, they entrench themselves in their views and have little chance to understand the problem.

To put things in order, Insole distinguishes two types of liberalism: early modern liberalism and late modern liberalism. Now the contemporary reevaluation of liberalism should go further, argues Insole, and it will surely arrive at “a healthy strand of liberalism ... compatible with a theological tradition of reckoning with our status as creatures” (13). The author finds this “healthy strand” in the writings of Hooker, Burke, Lord Acton, or even Rawls (at least in some of his statements). They represent the first type of liberalism and show how much it owes to Christendom for concepts such as the responsibility of rulers, the rule of law, and tolerance (8). The above authors, Insole stresses, hold antivoluntaristic, anticonstructivist, and antiprogressivist views. Religion tells us that we are frail, imperfect, and complex. Because we are limited, the use of public power should be limited too (41), which is a well-known postulate of the liberal tradition. Insole puts forward numerous arguments to prove that political liberalism, of its nature, is not hostile to religion.

The author agrees with Augustinian eschatology in the sense that he is against any mingling or conflation of the visible and the invisible (83), of the (invisible) church and the (visible) world, as there is “no visible division of the world into good and evil” (82). References to religious interpretations of the current struggles in politics miss the point. Politicians are all too eager to hold their own political system as an example. Likewise American democracy was thought to be (by one of the American presidents) “a child of Enlightenment reason, of a secular experiment to eliminate traces of bigotry ... in which the business of politics is kept hygienically clean of inappropriate religious enthusiasms and hopes” (97). Insole calls this claim a myth. The fight between good and evil will never be resolved before the end of time; therefore any division of people into clear-cut camps of heroes and villains is unjustifiable.

Insole opposes the positions held by representatives of the so-called isolationist theology (Hauerwas, Yoder), whose views lead to pacifism and separatism, as well as those espoused by the proponents of so-called radical orthodoxy (Milbank, Pickstock) who yearn after a true society and more participatory communities, claiming that liberalism

is founded on ontological nihilism and violence (129). Both of these positions, the author argues, offer no empirical evidence and are characterized by self-righteousness that leads to pacifism or activism. Insole suggests that “a refusal to conflate the visible and the invisible Church” is a way out of the extremes of either position and “towards cautious reform and constant vigilance” (122). He finds such an approach in the writings of Burke, a representative of the healthy strand of liberalism.

Insole seeks to rehabilitate the idea of political liberalism by undermining all the groundless claims. Therefore, he sticks to the Augustinian view that there is a yawning gap between the invisible and the visible church (between the City of Man and the City of God) that can never be bridged by political means (i.e., we shall never succeed in building an ideal community). Anyone who claims the opposite is bound to bring about social disaster rather than peace and harmony.

Insole is well aware that there might be some objections raised against his ecclesiology. On the one hand, we run the risk of engulfing spiritual life in privacy; on the other, political liberalism “can become too acquiescent in relation to the world” (177). Thus, the visible and the invisible churches are apt to split apart. We may overcome this difficulty, Insole suggests, by making the two realities approach each other in the forms of living testimony. It is through witnesses that we avoid entrenchment. At the same time, we manifest our awareness of “both our frailty and fallenness alongside our calling to perfection and redemption” (177).

Insole propounds a “principled neutrality on theological matters” (155). This neutrality arises from “a sense of humility, of being chastened by the pain of religious conflict, the need for self-restraint, and a charitable commitment to the importance of tolerating difference” (155). The liberal state is silent on religious truth because it is not able to discern it; hence, it has no right to use power to save souls (155). Insole is very optimistic about that and believes that in a liberal state various groups, previously marginalized, are allowed to voice their concerns because the state is silent about religious truth.

It is our natural state, Insole seems to be saying, to vacillate between a sense of belonging and unity, on the one hand, and, on the other, our drive toward individualism and autonomy. The liberal state does not intend to relieve this uneasy situation. We are frail, fallen, imperfect, and yet responsible human beings who can still make decisions. It is far safer to let people fulfill their commitments on their own than impose on them any prearranged and happiness-producing institutional procedures. It is better to let them be free because “freedom, in the sense of purposive self-limitation, is ... one of our highest glories where we imitate the divine by fulfilling our created purposes, rather than by denying that we are creatures” (77).

—Jan Klos

*John Paul II Catholic University, Lublin, Poland*