

## BOOK REVIEWS

Audi, Robert and Nicholas Wolterstorff. *Religion in the Public Square: The Place of Religious Convictions in Political Debate (Point/Counterpoint)*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996. 190 pp. Paperback, \$11.95.

Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff demonstrate the complex realities surrounding religious and political arguments concerning the need for a consistent ethical rationale for determining the proper presence of religious principles in political debate. Their arguments highlight the contemporary dialogue between political liberalism and theologically based responses. Both authors defend the legitimacy of liberal democracy, but differ on the epistemological basis for interpretation and implementation of church-state relations within government law and policies.

Robert Audi makes extensive use of notes for qualifying numerous points. He draws on works by others and also by himself, including his new book *Religious Commitment and Secular Reason* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Nicholas Wolterstorff uses only eighteen notes, compared to Audi's seventy-eight, and identifies his epistemological study entitled *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) as a basis for significant aspects of his argument.

Audi's essay argues that the separationist principle of neutrality is applicable both to government and to individual religious citizens. The obligation for morally upright citizens to be politically responsible is fulfilled within a liberal democratic society by following what he calls a "theo-ethical equilibrium," composed of an overlap between certain moral and civic virtues. This equilibrium acts as an independent guide to moral rights and religious obligations of a religious person while he or she participates in political processes involving coercive laws and policies. When endorsing a coercive action, religious citizens and institutions must have at least one adequately justifiable freestanding secular rationale. In other words, no coercive action may be endorsed on religious authority alone if there is lacking a corresponding secular rationale and motivation. Essentially, Audi transforms the Constitution's first-amendment restraint on Congress into an ethic of self-restraint for religious individuals and institutions.

Nicholas Wolterstorff responds that Audi assumes the separation principle to be inherent in, and the restriction principle implied in, the concept of liberal democracy. Further interaction by the authors on this aspect would have greatly enhanced the book. If the two principles were not inherent to liberal democracy, would liberal democracy still be liberal? Wolterstorff believes so: liberal democracy imposes no such ethical constraints.

Wolterstorff's first essay penetratingly analyzes the epistemological basis of the liberal rationale for the "religious-reason restraint" in political debate as articulated in the two most influential versions of the liberal position, namely,

the traditional (John Locke) and the contemporary (John Rawls). Wolterstorff concludes that no one, including Locke himself, ever successfully developed a science of morality and Locke's counter-critique of his own position effectively undermined the basis of his rationale.

Wolterstorff then assesses Rawls's position that political decisions and discussions are based on what the *consensus populi* yields as the guiding principles. Wolterstorff effectively counters that a consensus of everyone is out of the question, because unreasonable persons make it impossible for all to agree on what is reasonable.

Wolterstorff rightly insists that the liberal requirement to restrain the role of religion in political considerations is an inequitable infringement on the free exercise of religion and ignores the cruel brutalities of modern comprehensive secular ideologies. He argues for politics in which individuals listen to others and their particularities. This means discarding the liberal principles of religious restraint except in the manner, laws and provisions, and goal of political justice in public discussion and debate—matters applicable to *all* citizens. Wolterstorff calls his perspective the *consocial* position, which agrees with the liberal position but rejects the "religious reason restraint" principle and interprets the neutrality principle of the Constitution as requiring government to *impartially* treat religion.

Audi's essay and response reveal his excellent ability to differentiate and qualify Wolterstorff's positions as much as his own. His position is well developed and sensitive both to the need for religious involvement in political discussion and to the potential for coercion. Audi makes it clear that his position is much less restrictive on the role of religious reasons in political matters than those versions Wolterstorff addresses—a point the latter concedes while adjusting the line of his argument to include Audi's version. Wolterstorff aims at resolving the theoretical paradoxes of the liberal position in order to harmonize the theory of liberal democracy with the reality that all liberal democracies are *more or less* liberal democracies. As a result, he seems indifferent to the potential of religious coercion through political means.

Wolterstorff's focus on paradoxes limits his articulation of the practical ramifications of his consocial position. His interpretation of neutrality as impartiality has merit for resolving the inequitable economic burden that religious parents assume in providing religious education for their children. However, he fails to explain the paradoxes that impartiality raises in other church-state issues. For instance, how does impartiality operate equitably in the public school system for religious parents who want religious education for their children in the public schools? Furthermore, in exchange for the unrestricted involvement of religious reasons in public debate and economic equality for religious schools, representatives and educators must assume the burden of competence in religious matters, a burden the founding fathers considered the officers of the state as incompetent to bear. To be fair, Wolterstorff attempts a daunting task by addressing the paradoxes of liberalism *and* by redefining liberal democracy as consocial in light of the fact that liberalism in the United States has had several centuries of studied refinement.