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*Between Philosophy and Politics: The Alienation of  
Political Theory* by John G. Gunnell

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new consensus (p. 311).

There are ironies in a collection of essays on critical theory designed for a U.S. audience. The ideas suffer more than a sea change as one reads that *Consumer Reports* represents a critical negation of mass advertising, with no recognition that the consumer project is more rationally enhanced by the presence of such reports. There is irony also in the critical analysis of the Head Start program. While it reveals the broader horizons possible for the culturally deprived, little is made of the legitimation function served by Head Start, and there is no "critique" of the social reproduction of capitalism that takes place in the midst of this and similar programs. Perhaps Adorno was ultimately right when he argued that the only posture for critical theory is negation without resolution. For, in the post industrial age, it seems that a positive or practical application of critical theory may lead unintentionally to a new form of legitimation. The essays in this volume inadvertently pose that dilemma and deepen our interest in critical theory.

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**Between Philosophy and Politics: The Alienation of Political Theory.** By John G. Gunnell (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986. 240p. \$25.00, cloth; \$12.95, paper).

This trenchant work provides a "synthesis, clarification, and elaboration" of arguments made elsewhere by Gunnell alleging the "alienation" of academic political theory (p. ix). Not the first to suggest that dominant practices in this field are forms of intellectual masturbation, Gunnell nonetheless presses this central point with considerable zeal and with a delightfully acid tongue. He is thereby sure to provoke contention if not the "transformation" he desires.

Transforming the field requires an understanding of its present-day ills. Hence, the first chapter offers a reconstruction of the intellectual development (or rather devolution) of the field over the last three decades in order to identify a variety of historical forces that in turn help account for the underlying cause of

the alienation of political theory today: its entrapment in and by philosophical and meta-theoretical discourse, or "its absorption with metatheory" (p. 154), or (more creatively) its "philosophization" (pp. 28, 31).

This dreaded disease engenders in political theory a distorted and pretentious self-image. Symptoms include the following: the subject is ensnared in myths (identified on pp. 1 and 194); is unreflective about its parasitic relationship to "the transcendental and epistemological traditions in philosophy which . . . are themselves alienated enterprises" (p. 4); and is unable to achieve an authentic appreciation of its actual relationships to politics and political inquiry. Though fruitful relationships are virtually nonexistent, most theorists believe, or pretend to believe, that their estranged and rarified discourse provides authoritative standards, foundations, and illumination for both political practice and political inquiry, and on which, therefore, both are or ought to be dependent. They even believe, or make believe, that much of this discourse, being in some (distant) way about politics, is itself political.

These illusions and delusions serve a variety of purposes, but foremost among them is, of course, the bolstering of self-image and of the conviction that all this talk—about epistemology, methodology, explanation, and interpretation; about metaethics, normative foundations, and facts and values; about the universal dilemmas, fundamental concepts, and philosophical dimensions of politics; about historiography, hermeneutics, and the great tradition of epic theorists—actually constitutes an authoritative script for inquiry and an authoritative and authentic "theoretical and practical engagement of politics" (p. 138).

How might the patient be cured? Academic theory "redeemed"? Discourse "transformed"? Two prescriptions seem crucial. First, theorists must come to recognize and freely admit that political inquiry and politics are autonomous practices, quite capable of getting along without transcendental foundations and legitimations. Second, they must rethink "what theory is and can be in political theory." As we shall see, taking this cure can help theorists "come to grips with the question of the relationship of academic political theory to politics," though it cannot resolve this difficult problem (p. 155).

With respect to autonomy, Gunnell's posi-

tion is the contextualist one that criteria defining practices and standards of good practice are internal to practice; consequently, second-order reflection on practice, no matter how well performed, cannot be automatically authoritative (though it *may* be influential). This position means that science does not need metascience and that politics does not need metapolitics. Like science, politics has its own standards and theories, which may or may not be influenced by academics. But that most of what passes for political philosophy and political theory today could possibly affect practice, Gunnell very much doubts. To suppose it could would be to suppose that it took political practice as its object and that it had an audience with which to interact. In fact, however, it takes philosophical objects, projects, and perplexities and *ascribes* them to politics. Thus, Rawls's work and the cottage industry it has inspired "is not about any human practice; it is not about any state of affairs. It is about concepts and logic." Similarly, MacIntyre assumes in *After Virtue* that moral relativism is a political rather than an academic problem, and that the latter is both the cause of the former "and the site of a solution" (pp. 176, 179).

What all this suggests is that political theorists should engage politics in the manner, for example, of that portion of the feminist literature that confronts an "existential problem . . . and that speaks to and for an actual audience" (p. 122). Such a prescription means only that *metatheory*, not *substantive* theory, be given up. Advancing *substantive*, *constitutive*, or *ontological* theory should be a primary task of academic political theory.

By *substantive* theory Gunnell means "that class of claims that establishes a domain of facility—what exists and the manner in which it exists—and provides the criteria of explanation, description, evaluation, and prescription" (p. 143). An example of such a theory, one on which Gunnell has been working for some years, is provided in the final chapter. It draws on theoretical (not metatheoretical) claims advanced in the philosophies of action and language, and thus postulates ontological claims about social phenomena that are familiar features of the literature on interpretive forms of social inquiry. It just happens to assert the conventionality of politics, thereby undercutting the contrary ontological

positions of transcendentalists while underwriting an interpretive form of inquiry that would require taking conventional politics as its text.

Gunnell tries in this way to unite theory, inquiry, and practice. Because his (corrigible) theory entails the conventionality of politics, inquiry must proceed along interpretative lines. This in turn ensures that conventional politics will be the object of analysis, thus opening the *possibility* of practical engagement. By focusing on conventional political understandings and standards, the theorist just might find an audience interested in what he or she has to say. Of course efficacy is not guaranteed, but the alternative is hopeless. To continue the quest for transcendental political forms and standards is a sure loser even if such entities could be discovered. For these would resolve only transcendental crises and dilemmas and leave politics quite untouched.

It is this essentially political message that makes Gunnell's position a compelling and timely one. Unfortunately, debate will focus on the metatheoretical, methodological, and theoretical claims he advances; the irony of this situation will be examined in great detail; protests aimed at his exaggerations and stinging rhetoric will be heard from many quarters; and the thundering political silence will continue.

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**Aspects of Toleration: Philosophical Studies.**

Edited by John Horton and Susan Mendus  
(London: Methuen, 1985. ii, 180p. \$29.95).

John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* has set the context for modern discussion of the principle of toleration. *Aspects of Toleration: Philosophical Studies*, edited by John Horton and Susan Mendus, is a collection of essays that attempt to put Mill in the context of the 300 years that culminated in his seminal essay, to examine and to clarify his philosophical assumptions, and to link his work to contemporary issues.

The essays in the collection are reworked papers presented at seminars and conferences supported by the Morell Trust based at the University of York, England. All but one of the