

child the feeling of ethical action and thereby allows it to expiate its own guilt and reinvest in the world of object relations” (p. 84). On political terms, repair lessens the grip of a *ressentiment* that attaches us to law, debt, and punishment and sets the scene for a broader range of attachments to other people. The promise of Laubender’s reading is to create the conditions for—but not the guarantees of—relational connection ... but a connection unbound to mutuality, recognition, or shared ends.

It comes as a relief when Laubender is quick to note that German reparations post-WWI operated with very different notions of “repair” indexed precisely to guilt, debt, and punishment and that subsequent visions of reparation have sought to index various forms of justice. Instead, she connects repair/reparation to explorations of the conditions needed for “different imaginaries for justice” (p. 83). Laubender also notes that reparations theorists, both psychoanalytic and political, often give too little attention to the “ethical pitfalls of identification and... the particular objects both taken up and cast aside” (p. 85). She asks, “Can an individual’s internal feeling of reparative care ever itself be enough?” More troublingly: what happens when one person’s repair is premised on another’s degradation?

In these tensile moments, Laubender quickly retreats to her primary thesis—the clinical is political—and the limits of her juxtapositions become clearer. Sometimes these are conceptual: the nuances that distinguish Klein’s “repair” could be better signposted for political theorists unused to object relations theory and over-used to liberal democracy, while the concepts of “repair” behind political reparations are never explicitly flagged and worked through. As a result, the juxtapositions become a site for potential misfires, where it is easy to assimilate concepts from one domain into the other. More importantly (and more interestingly), over the course of the book, the binary that divides political from clinical spaces itself becomes confining and the reader longs to return to the tensions that perhaps are sites of crucial interpretive friction.

Indeed, there really are three central spaces present in this project—the political, the clinical, and the critical—where the critical space of interpretation mediates between the first two and determines how “political” and “clinical” get cast, by whom, and for which audience. If psychoanalytic thinkers contribute to “prototypical theories of justice,” then *how* and *through which actors* does the psychological field become political, and vice versa? Which norms serve as touchstones for this project, and how does psychoanalysis shade them differently than political theory? To stay with Klein a moment longer, what mechanisms allow certain interpretations of repair (in patients, in psychoanalytic theories) to gather political salience and take root in broader symbolic forms, such as those of the family or the nation? Who and what serves to mediate across the three spaces just mentioned?

A partial answer comes in later chapters that tackle the unorthodox practices of Wulf Sachs, whose (dis-)identification with his South African patient pushes him out of the clinic and into domestic spaces; the rejection of the “domestic containment” of unconscious energies and experiments with commune clinics (p. 191); and the resurgent maternalistic discourses of John Bowlby and others (p. 208). More historical than theoretical, these chapters speculate that psychoanalysis played a role in alternately critiquing and upholding gendered and racialized processes central “to the West’s ideological project of securing capitalism and liberal democracy against... communism” (p. 203). Laubender does the laudable job of weaving together big processes; gender and the maternal are resurgent in the back half of the book, leaving me wishful that she had taken up gender and the family on more explicitly theoretical terms. As her interrogation of border-crossing concepts (authority, freedom, repair, dependency) recedes, so too does the frictive provocation that electrifies the Klein chapter. The book ends on a far-too-modest note of Foucauldian pessimistic activism: everything is not bad, just dangerous.

*The Political Clinic* offers a panoramic, thoroughly researched, and deft intellectual history of the interweaving of psychoanalysis and social change and nuanced interpretations of critical analytic figures. Substantively, these readings open rich terrains for future research; they also model an extraordinary citational generosity, thus making the project a collective one and inviting in new readers. Laubender’s book will be indispensable to future researchers.

**Liberalism as a Way of Life.** By Alexandre Lefebvre. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2024. 285p.  
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In *Liberalism as a Way of Life*, Alexandre Lefebvre asks his readers to entertain the proposition that “Liberalism ... may well underlie who you (and I, and we) are in all walks of life, from the family to workplace, from friendship to enmity, from humor to outrage, and everything in between” (p. 5). “[I]t is a big mistake to overlook how ubiquitous liberal values and sensibilities are in the background culture of contemporary Western democratic countries,” he continues (p. 15). What liberalism, in his view, boils down to is John Rawls’ conception of “society as a fair system of cooperation” (p. 24). Lefebvre follows Rawls in the belief “that citizens of liberal democratic societies by and large already see and structure their societies as fair systems of cooperation. ... [Rawls’] reader ‘knows’ or ‘understands’ what he is talking about ... because they already affirm it as expressing something essential about themselves and their society” (p. 25).

Lefebvre presumably wrote these words in late 2022 or early 2023. They strained credulity even then, but are literally incredible now. Clearly many of the citizens in contemporary Western countries believe that society is essentially competitive, not cooperative and that the spoils go to the aggressive and energetic. Life is not fair—and you are a sucker if you act as if it is. Liberals are hypocrites, spouting their pabulum about equality and justice even as they help themselves (like everyone else) to whatever they can grab.

Cynicism is the besetting sin of our time. Lefebvre has written a profoundly uncynical book. It would be a grievous mistake to toss it aside because it overestimates the hold of liberal values or the existence of liberal sensibilities in present-day Western societies. Can we set aside our professional deformation of unrelenting skepticism for once? Perhaps then the reader can appreciate Lefebvre's extended examination of what liberalism could entail if taken seriously, not just as a set of political values and institutions, but also (as his title has it) as a way of life. Judith Shklar described a "liberalism of fear," one that existed to protect against the myriad forms tyranny takes. Lefebvre is attempting to describe a "liberalism of peace, love, and understanding" (my terms, with apologies to Elvis Costello, not Lefebvre's). This positive vision is not based on what liberalism guards against, but on what gifts (Lefebvre calls them "perks") liberalism bestows on those who practice it wholeheartedly.

The path to this abundant liberalism is through the work (and example) of John Rawls, with a helping hand from Pierre Hadot. Rawls divided public from private by distinguishing a set of "shared principles of justice" (p. 66) that undergird political institutions and practices from "comprehensive doctrines" (74) that undergird an individual's ethical vision of what is meaningful and valuable. In a pluralistic society, we cannot expect and should not demand agreement about comprehensive doctrines, but we can achieve a stable and fair society if all are committed to the shared principles of justice.

Lefebvre follows Rawls in assuming that those shared principles are in place. He does devote some time to talking about the failure to instantiate those principles in our societies, which obviously fall short of the "ideal" conception of justice Rawls offers and to which (supposedly) "we" subscribe. However, Lefebvre's main focus and interest lies elsewhere—as does the value of his book. He wants to explore what it would mean to take "liberalism" as one's comprehensive doctrine. What kind of person, what sensibility, what values, what practices, and what "perks" would liberalism as a way of life produce?

Lefebvre's book can appear sentimental, even New Agey, in places. However, he has the courage of his ambitions, refusing to back away from the inevitable distaste of the sophisticated. "My book is about a political topic (namely, liberalism), yet better classified as a work on ethics, living

well, and a genre I want to lean into, self-help," he writes (p. 13). Lefebvre will double down on his insistence that liberalism provides a robust vision for guiding one's life and produces an admirable sensibility or temperament. His book will provide tips for accessing that desirable way of life.

The result is a full-throated celebration of liberalism, embracing it indeed at a time when even liberalism's advocates speak in hushed apologetic terms and its critics shout from the rooftops about its inability to satisfy the spiritual hungers of the human animal. The exposition starts from liberalism's secular "horizontalization of morality" (p. 94). Sin (or evil or wrongdoing) is no longer a matter of offending a superior Being, but the infliction of "interpersonal harms" in this world (p. 94). "[B]eing a good person comes to mean not harming others. Being a great person means doing nice things for them as well," Lefebvre notes (p. 95). (If the word "nice" in that last sentence grates on your nerves, count yourself a sophisticate.) This orientation toward others leads to the recognition of "reciprocity" as "the cardinal virtue of liberal democracy" (p. 146). Treating others as always worthy of respect and deserving of the material requirements to lead a full, meaningful life explains why liberals find cruelty and its brother, humiliation, particularly odious vices.

One of Lefebvre's strongest arguments for asserting that we Westerners all share liberal values is noting the resentment generated when norms of reciprocity, of extending respect to all, are violated. Injuries of status, class, and discrimination are insufferable in *soi-disant* liberal societies in ways quite foreign to more hierarchical ones. What Lefebvre adds—by way of examining Rawls's engagement with Rousseau's *Emile*—is that reciprocity generates attachment to others, relationships of love that are meaningful and sustaining. He quotes Rousseau: "We seek what serves us, but we love what wants to serve us. We flee what harms us, but we hate what wants to harm us" (p. 153). Different educational and child-rearing practices will influence how individuals understand their standing in the world and the threat or support they can expect from others. In alignment with his earlier books on human rights, Lefebvre wants to explore, to articulate, a politics of love. At a time when anti-liberals are deliberately fostering and mobilizing the forces of hatred, a thoughtful meditation on the resources of love is welcome.

From Pierre Hadot, Lefebvre adopts the notion of "spiritual exercises"—concrete practices to explore, strengthen, and instill values: "Spiritual exercises are voluntary and freely taken up. Spiritual exercises are personal, such that one's own person is a matter of care and concern. Spiritual exercises are practices, meaning they are embodied regular activities. And spiritual exercises are transformative, the goal of which is to alter the person practicing

them” (p. 142). In the most surprising move in his book, Lefebvre then adopts three familiar Rawlsian ideas as spiritual exercises to be actually practiced: the original position, reflective equilibrium, and public reason. Space constraints mean I cannot lay out Lefebvre’s exposition here—or the “perks” he believes engaging in such practices will deliver. However, his advocacy of these practices both shifts our understanding of their function in Rawls’ work and provides a good overview of what liberal “character” looks like.

Damn the torpedoes (your intellectualist nitpicking, your sophisticated anti-sentimentalism, your seen-it-all cynicism) and read this book. Yes, it is special pleading and will not convince you on every page. However, must sober, clear-eyed realism banish all advocacy from political theory? Let us christen Lefebvre’s book “speculative theory” and give it an honored place on our bookshelves. Clearly, skepticism, a distaste for sentimentalism, and the self-congratulatory realism I keep displacing onto “you” is my own. Lefebvre’s book is an invitation to set aside my professional deformations. Taking it seriously on its own terms could prove a spiritual exercise that lifts this demoralized liberal out of the doldrums in this dark time, indicating fruitful, even joyous, paths forward. As long as liberalism remains our best hope for basic decency in our political and everyday dealings with our fellow human beings, it is salutary to read a full-fledged account of the many goods (societal and personal) that liberalism has to offer.

**With Power Comes Responsibility: The Politics of Structural Injustice.** By Maeve McKeown. London: Bloomsbury, 2024. 280p.

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Maeve McKeown’s ambitious book, *With Power Comes Responsibility*, is inspired by Iris Marion Young’s work on responsibility for structural injustice. It engages Young’s work critically and builds on it to better account for power relations. The book is divided into two parts. In the first, McKeown fleshes out her account of structural injustice with a focus on power, and in the second, she focuses on the appropriate conceptions of responsibility that apply once we adopt her account.

The basic intuition animating work on structural injustice, including Young’s, is that ordinary people’s everyday actions can embroil them in social-structural processes that produce unjust outcomes, even if those actions violate no apparent legal or moral norms. Indeed, “it seems impossible to participate in everyday life without somehow contributing to structural injustice” (1),

McKeown notes. For Young, this means that responsibility for structural injustice cannot be understood on the traditional liability model that involves blame and punishment but needs to be theorized through the social connection model. By this, Young foregrounds our entanglement with these unjust social processes and proffers that such connections ought to produce a forward-looking orientation to ameliorating these injustices. McKeown takes Young’s approach as the starting point of her work and builds on it by differentiating between the roles played by ordinary people, on the one hand, and certain collective agents—most notably, multi-national corporations and states—on the other. This difference, she argues, requires reconceptualizing both structural injustice and the responsibility for it.

The book’s most important theoretical innovation is McKeown’s redefinition of structural injustice. She breaks it down into three types: “pure,” “avoidable,” and “deliberate.” Young’s theory only covers pure structural injustice. That is “when the injustice is unintended, unforeseeable and there are no agents with the capacity to remedy” it (45). McKeown points out, however, that most cases of structural injustice, including Young’s iconic case of housing deprivation, do not fit in this category. She argues persuasively that the most significant cases of structural injustice are avoidable and deliberate, and she dedicates a significant part of her book to working through carefully selected examples. She argues in some detail that the global garment industry with its reliance on sweatshop labor, far from being a case of pure structural injustice, is one where there is a “deliberate *maintenance* of the injustice in order to continue extracting profits” (88). In turn, McKeown illustrates avoidable structural injustice through the example of global poverty. Much can be done to alleviate global poverty, including debt relief to countries of the Global South (100), she points out, yet such actions are not taken by the agents who have it in their power to do so.

McKeown argues that finding examples of pure structural injustice is difficult because there usually are powerful agents who can avoid or mitigate injustices but choose not to do so or deliberately maintain the status quo. Still, she offers climate change as a possible contender because even though certain agents have caused, and continue to cause, more global warming than others, only a complete systemic overhaul of the global capitalist economy can remedy it. For that reason alone, she “tentatively suggest[s]” that the climate catastrophe could be approached as a case of pure structural injustice (104, 112).

Once we accept that much of the structural injustice we experience, however, is either avoidable or deliberate, then it becomes much easier and politically urgent to conceptualize who (or what) is responsible. Here, McKeown argues that, most of the time, there are identifiable