

relation between language and behavior. Similarly, emphasis on speech as direct action resembles the speech-act theory from J. L. Austin to John Searle, as well as the Habermasian idea of “strategic” (vs “deliberative”) uses of speech. Likewise, the resonance-attunement pair harks back to the more recent yet lively literature on implicit bias as association (pp. 26, 151, 168, 216, 394 *passim*). Finally, their emphasis on context echoes the hermeneutic tradition, all the way to Jacques Derrida even (p. 344). In short, the idea that meaning is irreducible to content and that discourses are plugged into larger forms of life, including whole cultures, ideologies, and political paradigms, is well-acknowledged in the literature. This raises questions about where the content-delivery model the book targets, in fact, dwells (certainly not in the philosophy of language, as the authors acknowledge on p. 28). In my view, this leaves two directions in which the reader might be looking for the novelty in the book’s argument.

The first has to do with how one should take Beaver and Stanley’s claim that the content-delivery model is false. The book oscillates between different ways of cashing it out. The first consists in a critique of neutrality: the discursive conduit for meaning is not neutral. This cannot be the core of their argument, since it is well-established in the traditions I listed. A stronger view would suggest that meaning is not just more than content, it is no content at all—but rather it is all practice. One advantage of this radical option is that it provides a principled reason why the question of explanation is irrelevant to Beaver and

Stanley’s picture: in this scenario, discourses and political behaviors are so bound up within general “practices” that there is not enough difference between them for the question of the nature of their relations to arise (see p. 64). However, this cannot be satisfying. It runs the risk of collapsing into a sort of behaviorism, where meaning is simply inferred from some behaviors (e.g. p. 80). It is a controversial view for other reasons too. After all, Beaver and Stanley themselves account for bigotry by suggesting that “practices carry presuppositions” (p. 224), and it is fairly intuitive to suggest that there must be at least some *grasping* going if it is *this* and not *that* discourse that is to have a political effect. Resonance, if it is to have any effect, must come from somewhere that is not resonance (p. 290), lest we fall into an infinite regress. In other words, some sense of content, it seems, must be retained after all.

Here’s a third way to approach the argument, therefore. There are several places where the authors seem—in passing—to reject not so much the content-delivery model as the reduction of all content to *doxastic* content: what beliefs are about (pp. 191, 258). Perhaps, therefore, one should read the book as a critique of the explanatory role generally assigned to belief, usually via the vaunted belief-desire model (whereby actions follow belief). This is welcome: rejecting the belief-desire model is required by the phenomenon of post-truth politics (a chief kind of hustle targeted—implicitly—in the book) and would open up to further theoretical possibilities.

AMERICAN POLITICS

Watchdogs: Inspectors General and the Battle for Honest and Accountable Government. By Glenn Fine.

Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2024. 232p.
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In *Watchdogs*, Glenn Fine presents his experiences and insights as the Inspector General of the U.S. Justice Department from 2000 to 2011 and as the acting U.S. Defense Department IG from 2016 to 2020. Both assignments took place when events stress-tested the federal IG system. As Justice IG, Fine investigated misconduct by the Attorney General, resistance to oversight by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and politicized firings of U.S. Attorneys. As acting Defense IG, Fine was designated to coordinate oversight of the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee, which consisted of IGs from many agencies with responsibilities related to the COVID pandemic and which

was tasked with preventing and detecting fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement. In 2020, President Donald Trump prematurely replaced him.

What do we learn from Fine’s experiences? Most of the book consists of cases studies from Fine’s point of view, supported by summaries of IG investigations. But first, Chapter Two sets the stage, providing an overview of the need for government oversight and the emergence of the Inspectors General concept as one tool through which the federal government could promote integrity and accountability in its leadership and operations.

Since Fine’s book starts in 2000, it can be seen as a follow-on to Paul C. Light’s *Monitoring Government: Inspectors General and the Search for Accountability* (Brookings Institution Press, 1993) and Frank Ancherico and James Jacob’s *Pursuit of Absolute Integrity* (University of Chicago Press, 1998). These books present the evolution of the federal IG system as an aspirational project that is often needed but not always successful. The fact that the authors are scholarly observers, not central characters, results in a balanced and dispassionate analysis.

Fine quotes the aphorism, “If you have seen one IG, you have seen one IG.” He recognizes the strength and weakness of the book—that it is essentially a narrative of one person’s experience as an IG for two federal agencies. The reader gets a close view of how IGs and their agencies produce reports based on investigations, audits, and evaluations, and how IGs face challenges from agencies, agency leaders, investigative targets, and political leaders who may endorse IG work from a distance but not when an investigation hits closer to home.

The middle chapters summarize IG engagements with particularly interesting agencies, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Navy. Multi-agency cases include those related to the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center and a team of IG agencies focused on spending in response to the COVID pandemic. Fine also describes the “slow-motion Saturday night massacre” of IGs by President Trump in 2020 (p. 139).

The book ends with two chapters offering recommendations for the future of the federal IG system and for IGs individually. Fine grounds his recommendations in the case study chapters. For example, he recommends that the multi-agency approach used to investigate COVID-related spending should be permanently available for oversight of future across-government initiatives. Another recommendation is that IG vacancies should be filled by the President and considered for confirmation by the Senate on an expedited basis.

Fine’s recommendations, however, would have been stronger if backed by additional references, such as standards from IG professional organizations. For example, Fine encourages IGs to promote transparency but does not reference related standards published by the Association of Inspectors General, whose members include IGs from federal, state, and local offices. The AIG’s Green Book Principles and Standards states that “reports should be made available to the public to the extent consistent with the law” (p. 19). Similarly, the Council of Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency publishes Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation, which includes the same expectation.

In the same way, Fine’s chapters on system-level recommendations would have been strengthened by considering state and local IGs and their systems of oversight. For example, Fine recommends that IGs should not oversee more than one agency. However, New York has a single IG office with responsibility for “all executive branch agencies, departments, divisions, officers, boards and commissions, and over most public authorities and public benefit corporations.” Connecticut operates a state-wide IG responsible for oversight of law enforcement agencies. Where lies the flaw in the consolidated approach taken by Connecticut and New York?

Furthermore, while Fine presents IGs and their agencies as essential to promote integrity and accountability in government, many states do not have IG agencies at all. They rely instead on comptrollers, auditors, legislative program review councils, attorneys general, and/or prosecutors to monitor the performance of agencies and public officials. Daniel Feldman and David Eichenthal’s *Art of the Watchdog* (State University of New York Press, 2014) provides a broader treatment of oversight by these traditional watchdog agencies and organizations.

Despite these drawbacks, Fine’s book is an important contribution at a critical juncture. Across the world, and in the United States following the November 2024 elections, democracies are being challenged by populist authoritarian leaders who test fundamental democratic structures and values. Effective public and non-governmental oversight agencies, combined with traditional program auditing and independent journalism, are needed for democracies to survive and continue to thrive. Glenn Fine’s book shows how one IG battled for integrity and accountability to promote public confidence in government.

Agents of Empire: English Imperial Governance and the Making of American Political Institutions. By Sean Gailmard.

New York: Cambridge University Press, 2024. 336p.

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Over a century and a half separated the first permanent English settlement in Jamestown and the Declaration of Independence that led to the founding of the United States government. During that period, the British created new colonies on the North American continent, merged some of those colonies with others, episodically rewrote the terms of settlement that determined relations with the home country, and imposed varying regulatory regimes on imperial trade between the American colonies, other colonies, and Britain. In some respects, particularly with regard to trade policy, scholars have identified an overarching system in which the British governed the Atlantic portion of their empire. In other respects, particularly the governance of the individual colonial societies, scholars have often stressed the idiosyncratic nature of the trajectories that brought the 13 colonies to the brink of revolutionary war.

In *Agents of Empire*, Sean Gailmard has made a worthy attempt to construct a general theory of the individual trajectories of colonial governance, primarily with respect to the political relations between the metropole and the Atlantic colonies. There are three primary actors in this general theory: (1) the crown (composed of the monarch and