of citizens who meet each other in the public square, ready to talk, listen and to solve collective problems” (p. 154). Although this conclusion seems rightly to focus on liberalism’s deliberative or conversational core, it encourages us to ask if liberal education can secure all of the goals that Newman seems to anticipate. After all, even if young citizens are encouraged to participate in respectful dialogue about public issues, some might remain intransigent on, say, LGBT or other minority rights. Issues of cultural value or sexual orientation may be so close to their personal morality, or so bound up with inherited beliefs about the right way to live, that their respect for dialogue may not amount to a willingness to engage with all views.

The book shows awareness of these challenges, however, and offers a realistic way forward through forms of education that would help to institutionalize a culture of respectful public reasoning, even when deep disagreements arise. These practices encourage students to think about, talk about and collectively tackle controversial political issues, and are, for Newman, liberalism’s best hope (Chapter 6). The point is engagingly illustrated through the character of Michael, an evangelical Christian who does not view himself as liberal but who accepts the public values of compromise and reciprocity (p. 136). Liberal education encourages us to adopt a generous, open-minded dialogue when it comes to public issues in a very practical sense. Accordingly, the final chapter focuses on suggestions that both home-schooled and public-schooled students in the United States learn deliberative skills through volunteering. Model United Nations, and civic youth initiatives such as Chicago’s Mikva Challenge (p. 149).

The detailed discussion in these chapters is also commendable for squarely tackling the difficult issues that arise from the likely outcomes of liberal education, what civic educationalists have called its “spillover” effect. Students of very conservative social backgrounds would tend to become more liberal in other areas of their lives, in such a way that might weaken the more restrictive or repressive aspects of their faith. Newman concedes that the liberal spillover is exactly the worst-case scenario from the perspective of fundamentalist parents. Yet by appealing again to “domain-differentiation,” and the fact that humans generally can reason differently in various areas of their lives, she wishes to say that these worst fears regarding the complete dissolution of faith are likely to be, in most cases, overstated (p. 136).

This view seems helpful. It avoids the exaggeration of value conflicts that seems to pervade much public discourse about the integration of religions in liberal democracy. However, it also invites a further, final question concerning the book’s concentration on the experience of evangelical Christians in America. Would similar proposals, or a similar pedagogy, be realistic for non-Western liberal democracies or European states?

Experiences of decolonization and immigration in these states may depart crucially from the interdenominational controversies and struggles over church-state separation in America. For instance, in parts of Europe, a stronger form of republican state neutrality historically demanded more categorical religious restraints than in the United States. Newman’s pedagogy might confront different challenges in these contexts.

The rise of anti-Semitic expressions in some European states might prompt further thought about the potential of cosmopolitan liberalisms to protect vulnerable minorities through the public reasoning and debate recommended in Liberalism in Practice. For Jewish communities, who historically had to restrain signs of their religious identity in public schools, the issue is perhaps not whether to accept this pedagogy. Rather—although this is a larger debate than the book itself could have addressed—it may be that the effects of this education, and the expression of perhaps problematic views that it might unintentionally “tolerate,” create different quandaries through which to navigate practically.

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In recent years, political theorists and philosophers have begun to question the relevance and primacy of the utopian premises of ideal theory—working assumptions that existing social and political institutions as well as individual actions are guided by principles of justice, and that current environmental and socioeconomic conditions are favorable to establishing or maintaining a fully just society. Whether or not normative judgments about, or prescriptions for, the real world can be meaningfully derived from analyses that assume idealized conditions that rarely, if ever, hold in that world has become a methodological controversy among scholars. Some advocates of nonideal theory merely emphasize the need to account for the context of nonideal circumstances in deriving or applying justice principles, while others use the distinction to reject analytic approaches to political theory altogether.

Referencing the nonideal circumstances against which many normative issues related to climate change arise, in which agents fail to comply with just terms of cooperation in mitigating climate change or to assist those adversely affected by its impacts, and where ecological scarcity threatens to become more than moderate, Clare Heyward and Dominic Roser aim to “merge” the “growing interest in climate justice and the growing calls for non-ideal theory” (p. 9). They take an “ecumenical” (p. 6) approach to the ideal versus nonideal theory
distinction, referencing the debate within the introduction but rarely engaging it directly in substantive chapters. The majority of contributors rely upon ideal theory premises and methods, but all focus upon the gap between the ideals of justice and the decidedly nonideal circumstances associated with climate change. All fourteen original chapters in one way or another grapple with the social, political, and environmental conditions under which humans cause and are increasingly affected by climate change, utilizing justice ideals or principles to constructively engage with these circumstances.

None of the contributors takes the hard line pursued by some critics in declaring ideal theory “normatively useless” in distinguishing justice from injustice, even if several seek alternative modes of theorizing that avoid abstraction away from existing injustice. Darrel Moellendorf’s chapter, for example, seeks normativity in the expressed commitments of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, rather than abstract principles that might be invoked to justify them. In so doing, he responds to the skepticism expressed by critics of ideal theory that analytic theorizing cannot provide an adequate normative foundation for justice in a context like climate change, despite his embrace of such approaches elsewhere. One might view his chapter, along with those included in Parts II and III (entitled “Less Injustice” and “Dealing with Controversy”) of this well-organized volume, as developing a “public philosophy” that aims to distill the often obscure and abstract theoretical methods of scholars into policy-relevant diagnoses and prescriptions that are accessible to nonspecialists without being unfaithful to their philosophical bases.

One area in which nonideal theorizing seems particularly compelling concerns personal duties to reduce individual contributions toward climate change, or personal carbon emissions. In the field of climate ethics, philosophers commonly rely upon the ideal theory premise of full compliance, asking what each is obligated to do to mitigate climate change on the assumption that all will do as they ought. A common approach starts with an imperative like refraining from harm, deriving from this the duty to become carbon neutral so that one does not contribute at all toward climate change, or a goal like preventing more than 2°C Celsius of warming. This requires calculating individual or societal carbon budgets on the basis of an equitable assignment of remedial burdens, whereby full compliance would be sufficient to realize the temperature objective. Here, politics, policies, and states as well as other institutions play at most a peripheral role; they are merely charged with implementing norms that are derived without any acknowledgment of their existence.

By neglecting politics and institutions, and thus what distinguishes political theory from purely analytic approaches to ethics or political philosophy, however, they may also be accused of neglecting considerations relevant to individual ethical obligation. Or so at least Simon Caney claims in his contribution, which starts with the fact that humans have not fulfilled their obligations to avoid contributing to climate change, giving rise to the further question of what (if anything) others must do to compensate for this failure. Under ideal theory, persons would be obligated to contribute the same share of mitigation burdens regardless of whether or not others also did, but Caney doubts that this exhausts the plausible ethical possibilities. Insofar as the 2°C target defines the global temperature goal that justifies and informs mitigation duties, he suggests, perhaps some ought to be assigned greater burdens when others fail to do as much as they ought. Conversely, perhaps the widespread failure to comply with justly allocated mitigation burdens lowers, rather than raises, the required contributions of those participating in a cooperative scheme to mitigate climate change, given the unfair competitive disadvantages they face as a result. While Caney ultimately dodges the question of whether only partial compliance requires the reallocation of burdens, he makes a compelling case for theorizing from nonideal circumstances rather than setting aside such inconvenient facts as irrelevant to normative analysis.

The noncompliance of others might give rise to new or additional duties of justice, as well as affecting existing ones. As Aaron Maltais argues in his chapter, it might be that justice in the sharing of mitigation burdens requires as a precondition that obstacles to full compliance be identified and eliminated, generating a subsidiary duty to create the conditions under which more primary duties are likely to be fulfilled. Similarly, as Holly Lawford-Smith argues, individual obligations might be structured by state actions, with the latter also dependent upon the former for support, in which case justice requires institutional coordination of individual actions in order to overcome collective-action incentives and provide assurances of compliance. Likewise, Dominic Roser proposes a kind of second-order obligation to make possible the compliance with first-order justice principles, addressing issues of limits on personal motivation to act on a problem of global scope when it makes no discernible difference. All three take nonideal circumstances, institutions, actions, and motives as relevant to theorizing about climate justice, infusing politics into questions that have elsewhere too often been treated by scholars as if it were irrelevant.

Collectively, the chapters provide an effective treatment of normative issues in climate politics and policy, with a uniformly strong set of contributions that are coherently organized and well informed by the realities of climate politics as well as the methods of and debates within political theory and applied ethics, and so the book should be of interest and use to scholars both of justice and of environmental politics and governance. While the separate chapters only occasionally address one another directly, they speak to common themes and
could thus prove suitable for use in graduate-level teaching, as well as provide a primer on current questions in and approaches to the scholarly field of climate justice, with the variety of normative theories and methods that Climate Justice in a Non-Ideal World seeks to apply to this important contemporary environmental problem.


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Politics has been built on a series of defaults. The presumed subjects of political action have long been assumed to be a certain kind of person, whether of a specific legal category (citizens, for example) or of a more diffuse but no less powerful sort (such as whiteness or maleness). Scholarship truly attentive to the operations of power has long recognized the disempowerment of those individuals who do not match these criteria, as well as their location outside of questions of desert, rights, and even life itself.

One of those defaults still operative in liberal and individualist presuppositions of politics is ability. Just as the “unmarked” citizen is implicitly male, white, straight, and middle class, so too is he nondisabled. Physical disabilities can operate in the political imagination: Veterans’ injuries, the technologies of Braille or wheelchair ramps, and handicapped parking spaces are often considered issues for public decision making, even when (as happens often) efforts made to provide access prove halfhearted. Cognitive and emotional disabilities, especially those not immediately legible, fare far worse in the public consciousness. Such disabilities are often used to overtly deny people legal and political standing, from Hobbes’s refusal of law to “natural fools, children, or madmen” to Oliver Wendell Holmes’s justification of eugenics with the declaration that “three generations of imbeciles are enough.”

Such a default can operate only so far as it remains unacknowledged, however. In Civil Disabilities, a range of authors from multiple disciplinary perspectives identify and attempt to rectify such invisible attitudes. Nancy Hirschmann and Beth Linker have compiled a set of arguments both impressive and accessible, each of which loosely addresses the history and conceptualization of disability in relation to the political questions of inclusion, representation, and identity. As a whole, the volume takes these questions seriously without falling into familiar debates about normative legal issues or simplifying all disabilities into the expected categories of wheelchair access. The editors and authors seize the opportunity to rethink issues of citizenship and collectivity in societies intrinsically based on concepts of normativity and admittance, which repeatedly disadvantage a sizable proportion of the population. Taking into account congenital disability, illness, age, and institutions, these approaches cover a wide and evocative set of antinormative political positions. This volume thus takes its place alongside similar treatments of the politics of disability emerging recently, such as Lennard Davis’s The End of Normal (2014), Margaret Price’s Mad at School (2011), and Alison Kafer’s Feminist, Queer, Crip (2013), (as well as the Barbara Arneil and Hirschmann edited volume Disability and Political Theory [2016]).

Many of the analyses in Civil Disabilities are based in history. Catherine Kudlick examines the complex traditions of blindness in French society, highlighting how nationalism reshaped the relationship of the blind to the sighted: first as outsiders, then as potential partners, and finally as alternative citizens, thanks to the technological literary work of Valentin Hâitày and Louis Braille. Closer to home, Douglas Baynton explains the close connections between immigration law and modes of disability. Rather than being based on ideology, he shows, the historical practices of immigration acceptance and rejection operated mainly along lines of “defect,” with race operating as a component (though not necessarily a determinative one) of someone who is likely to be (or become) defective. Linker and Emily Abel show how differences between patients suffering from tuberculosis—namely, between bone tuberculars and pulmonary tuberculars—translated into profoundly disparate treatment and policy particulars, based entirely on visibility and presentation.

Other authors engage with the more formal aspects of political philosophy. Allison Carey addresses the potential rights conflicts between parents (whose care and concern for their disabled children can lead them to curtail autonomy) and the disability rights movement (whose focus on self-determination can lead to a dismissal of the importance of familial care). Lorella Terzi attempts to combine the focus on “human capabilities,” promoted by authors such as Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, with the complex set of needs and desires of the wide range of people with disabilities, ultimately concluding that such a perspective does more to inform capability theory than it does for the disabled as a group. Susan Schweik attends almost entirely to the complexities of representation, from Homer to 20th century novels and film.

Certain terminologies and concepts will prove particularly useful to those working in the intersection of politics and disability. Susan Burch and Hannah Joyner’s essay suggests “disremembering” to describe the conceptual isolation and affiliations of individuals, groups, and even policies in current conceptions of history. Every society has grappled with disability in legal and political institutions, yet we too often presume our own engagement to be a new achievement. Faye Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp understand “ocularity” as the highly mediated sets of “meanings, scripts, and images” that circulate among scientific, personal, and popular representations (p. 111).