

As social criticism, *Political Vices* is acute, learned, and judicious: no one interested in the moral psychology of democracy will fail to learn from it. The same cannot be said, alas, for its proposed remedies. Throughout the book, and culminating in his final, programmatic Chapter 5, Button calls it not only desirable but necessary (if we are to achieve democratic ideals that he upholds in rather uncompromising terms; the word “maximize” appears frequently) that educational and cultural institutions all expand their missions radically, alter them drastically, and pull together all but unanimously. Chapter 5 envisions political salvation through the arts: re-cast as “macro-public” institutions (like the Athenian theater), they are to provide the “esthetic-critical education” that can overcome our political blindness and complacency (pp. 148–49). Indeed, each political vice is to be vanquished by a cultural counterforce. Against recalcitrance, “art, philosophy, literature and the sciences” must strive for a political culture “capable of cultivating and sustaining attentiveness and responsiveness” (p. 124). Against moral blindness, “schools, organizations, and the media” along with “diverse artistic forms (like drama, music, literature and film),” as well as “the comparative study of history, philosophy, and religion . . . critical historical genealogy, tragedy, satire, and irony” must facilitate “a disciplined and principled exercise of momentary detachment from the sources of one’s first-order convictions” (p. 81). Against hubris, we need an “alternative civic *paideia*”: “public institutions (associations, parties, the media, and the academy) . . . must actively and reciprocally work to maximize good counsel, deliberation, and mutual listening” (p. 57).

To wish for this degree of political-cultural consensus, under modern conditions of diversity and disagreement that Button not only recognizes but insistently celebrates, is, to put it mildly, ambitious. Citizens are to differ vastly in morality, ideology, religion, and lifestyle, but unite in support of cultural, educational, and journalistic institutions that have not only a common mission but a universally *uncomfortable* mission: the mission of spurring us to do the opposite of what we would normally feel like doing. If we allow ourselves to wish for that state of affairs, considering it a serious proposal, we may just as well allow ourselves simply to wish that our political vices (and the moral psychology that grounds them) would disappear, instantly and spontaneously. One is as likely as the other. Nor does Button pause to consider, much less address, the obvious hazards of teaching citizens to consider the arts, culture, journalism and education not only as political institutions but as institutions whose purpose should be settled collectively (through a “democratic” discussion that somehow transcends democracy’s actual, vice-ridden functioning).

Thus, *Political Vices* is in effect two books: a careful, keen, often deep work of social criticism, and a regrettably

unserious program of political *cum* cultural reform. Athenian visions are dazzling in the original sense of the word: they prevent us from properly assessing what’s in front of us. Unsatisfying though it may be, the wisest counsel a book on the political vices can usefully provide is that each citizen do her best to speak up within, and work for reform of, the modern institutions that embody our liberty and diversity. Those institutions enable individuals and groups to call out, and work against, the civic vices and social evils we perceive—in the knowledge, admittedly frustrating but unavoidable, that other individuals and groups will predictably and permanently perceive them differently (or may even devote themselves to personal goals: *pace* Button, not everyone has, or aspires to, a political vocation). In other words: modernity indeed allows for, perhaps even fosters, a certain degree of political vice. That is the price of letting citizens pursue a variety—not a civic unity—of dreams.

Assembly. By Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. 368p. \$27.95 cloth. doi:10.1017/S1537592718000233

— Jason Frank, *Cornell University*

Assembly is Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s most recent attempt to survey the dynamics of power under contemporary global capitalism and to identify the fissures within that reveal immanent possibilities of popular resistance. Taking their cue, and their title, from the international proliferation of encampments, occupations, and assemblies that followed the financial crisis of 2008—from Zuccotti Park to Tahrir Square, Gezi to Biblia and the Puerta del Sol—Hardt and Negri further develop the distinctive conceptual vocabularies they first articulated in *Empire* (2000), *Multitude* (2004), and *Commonwealth* (2009), while also departing from these earlier works, in part by absorbing the arguments of some of their most trenchant critics. Most notably, *Assembly* urges readers to disenthral themselves of the “fetish of horizontality” (p. xiv) and its debilitating suspicion of institutions and political leadership. Writing under the sign of Machiavelli, and proclaiming the creation of a “new Prince,” Hardt and Negri now affirm a “new political realism” that charts “a way forward to not only take power but to pose what kind of power we want and who we want to be.” No more solely prefigurative politics; no more beautiful souls; no more “unarmed prophets,” who, as Machiavelli warned, are “not only useless but dangerous to themselves and others” (p. 7). In *Assembly*, Hardt and Negri affirm a realist politics of the multitude in order to better understand the failures of egalitarian movements of the Left, and to more effectively respond to the victories of a resurgent neo-fascist Right.

This realist turn will strike some as a significant departure, since one of the most familiar criticisms of

Hardt and Negri's earlier work was that it was invested in a naïve political romanticism rooted in an ontology of the inherently emancipatory desire of the immanent and self-organizing multitude. Ernesto Laclau memorably described their theory of the multitude as a metaphysical wish and a "gift from Heaven" (Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, 2002, p. 240). While Hardt and Negri have responded to such criticisms in the past, their response sets the frame of the new book and explains its central preoccupations. We now read that the "multitude designates a radical diversity of social subjectivities that do not spontaneously form together but instead require a political project to organize" (p. 69). The multitude, now conceived as a "political project" and "communitary anthropogenesis," must "move from the ontology of the common to a project of its political affirmation" (p. 238). The multitude must also, therefore, be understood through its internal relation to tactics and strategies, coordination and mobilization, and leadership. *Assembly* not only engages with Machiavelli, Marx, and Gramsci, but also with Pareto, Mosca, Weber, and Schumpeter. While Hardt and Negri reject recent efforts on the theoretical Left to resurrect "the corpse of the modern vanguard party" (p. 8), *Assembly* places them in the orbit of contemporary neo-Jacobins attempting to reconcile radical egalitarian political commitments with a realist view of politics that embraces a new role for leadership, even if stopping short of Slavoj Žižek's disturbing call for "a new figure of the Master" (p. 44).

An indication of what Hardt and Negri mean by political realism can be glimpsed from what they learn from Machiavelli, or how they, as Negri had already influentially done in his earlier work, bring Machiavelli into resonant articulation with Marx. Rather than a theorist of *raison d'état*, Machiavelli is "a man of revolution, of constant mutation, of constituent power" (p. 98); rather than counseling the glory-seeking new prince who recognizes it is better to be feared by the people than loved, Hardt and Negri's Machiavelli recognizes that power is generated first from below in the incessant popular struggle for freedom; and rather than turning Machiavelli into a theorist of "the autonomy of the political," they approach him as a preeminent theorist of social conflict, for whom "political action can no longer be considered autonomous but always completely embedded in the circuits of social and economic life" (p. 45). To understand the workings of power and identify immanent sources of resistance we must "descend into the abode of social production and reproduction" (p. 63). Political theory is also and always a social theory.

Applying this realist orientation to contemporary capitalism means treating "neoliberalism" as a reactionary effort to contain and canalize, extract and accumulate, the free and expansive powers of social production and reproduction generated from below. As in their earlier collaborations, Hardt and Negri offer extended and elusive

discussions of how the contemporary stage of capitalism engenders both new forms of domination and new emancipatory capacities. "Political realism," they write, "consists in recognizing the tendency animated by the movements of contemporary society, illuminating the desires embedded in them, and bringing the future back to the present" (p. 284). If Marx and Engels were brilliantly and brutally clear about how the social, economic, geographical, and political conditions of industrial capitalism dialectically produced the system's "gravediggers" in the form of a revolutionary class-conscious proletariat, Hardt and Negri more ambiguously assert that the "circuits of social cooperation" and unregulated diffusion of intelligence, social knowledges, and technological skill characteristic of contemporary capitalism produce "insurgent coalitions among diverse social subjectivities" (p. 205). The table they provide to explain how the productive process is "ever more cooperative and socialized" under contemporary capitalism helps a bit (pp. 192–193), but some of their earlier work does a better job of articulating why under current conditions "without the common, capital cannot exist" (p. 29).

The multitude is presented in the new book as a "political project," but it is also continually referred to as a "symptom" of this deeper social reality. Hardt and Negri deploy a host of metaphors to capture the dynamic relationship they envision between the incessantly productive ontology of the common and the political project of the multitude—an army of worms, a swarm of bees, a chemical precipitate, Kleist's enchanted marionettes, and so on—but the discussion centers around the question of the "new Prince" conceived as a "political articulation that weaves together the different forms of resistance and struggles of liberation in society today" (p. 18). The "new Prince" is not a leader or a party—although they elaborate an important tactical role for leaders, leaving strategy to the movements—but rather the "center of gravity" or interface where the multitude as productive social ontology of the common meets the multitude as political project of collective emancipation.

Presumably, this is where "assembly" comes in, but unlike other keywords in Hardt and Negri's conceptual arsenal—"empire," "multitude," "commonwealth"—assembly is never theoretically elaborated in the book that takes it as a title. It is a timely concept that nevertheless remains so capaciously vague—it "is meant to grasp the power of coming together and acting politically in concert" (p. xxi)—that it is not at all clear how it could operate as the kind of "effectual truth" they admirably derive from Machiavelli. Hardt and Negri describe assembly in the book's opening pages as "a lens through which to recognize new democratic political possibilities" (p. xxi), but if it applies equally to crowds and church congregations, labor unions and legislative bodies, how does this productive "lens" really contribute

to enabling the emergence of “new political subjectivities”? Once the term appears in the book’s preface, it more or less disappears until the exhortation of its final pages. *Assembly* proclaims a new political realism of the radical egalitarian Left, and it offers an engaging extension of Hardt and Negri’s longstanding and important political collaboration, but the political vision of assembly it affirms in the end remains yet another plea and another wish.

The Transformation of American Liberalism. By George Klosko. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. 304p. \$49.95 cloth.

The Age of Responsibility: Luck, Choice and the Welfare State. By Yascha Mounk. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017. 288p. \$29.95 cloth.
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— Joan C. Tronto, *University of Minnesota*

Two political theorists venture in these texts to address a pressing political problem: Why is the American welfare state so stingy? Yascha Mounk observes that “the conception of responsibility that now prevails is deeply punitive” (p. 5) and attempts to correct it, and George Klosko explores how existing social welfare policies in the United States are justified “in terms of individual rights and other approaches compatible with individualist political cultures . . . thereby hampering the development of universal programs in which benefits are a matter of right” (p. 4).

Klosko’s work is a meticulous account of how public officials justified changes in American welfare policies (security income, disability and poverty protection, and health care provision), seeing Franklin Roosevelt’s support for Social Security as a critical point in this history. Klosko’s main purpose is to explain the ongoing, “path-dependent” (p. 35) weakness of *justifications* for the welfare state. He views these as growing out of American attachments to Lockean notions of desert that provide assistance only for those who have earned it (which are “baked into the foundations” [p. 8] of American policy) and a simultaneous downplaying of more communal elements of Locke’s and some other liberal thought. The end result is that “the transformation of American liberalism is incomplete” (p. 248). In making this argument, Klosko provides a detailed account of how American political elites justified the welfare state. He also compares the United States to the UK, where imaginative leaders such as William Beveridge were able to turn the post-war concern for welfare in a more collective direction, as citizens demanded that government address Beveridge’s “five giants’ of Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor, and Idleness” (p. 89). While the sense of post-war national unity did not continue in the UK, Klosko observes, nonetheless “the temporary changes in British culture

brought about by the war were made more long-lasting by Beveridge’s reforms and the ideals that they expressed” (p. 98).

“FDR’s Original Sin,” as Chapter 6 is entitled, was to leave strong property rights in place in an attempt to justify an expanded welfare state in the United States. As a result, egalitarian arguments never entered this discussion: “Our striking finding in regard to justification of the relevant social welfare programs [for the poor] is an absence of strong egalitarian arguments if programs were publicly justified at all” (p. 249). Indeed, in some cases—the expansion of social security disability programs, for example—Klosko shows that more generous policies were a result of obscure bureaucratic changes rather than any form of public debate or justification. He follows these policies, especially health care, up to the present, providing a useful guide to the shape of policies and how elites thought about them. In the end, then, Klosko carries the brief for a “moderate liberalism” (p. 10) that would not grant such an absolute strength to property rights and that would stress other values, such as equality, as a way to think again about the welfare state.

Klosko’s main claims are powerful, but there are other competing views to consider as well. Klosko emphasizes the policy discussions within the federal government, ignoring the effects that social movements have had on bringing important changes to these policies. Pre-FDR social policies, the fore-runner to WIC, for example, were a result of the expansion of the franchise to women. Others have argued that FDR was fundamentally concerned with preserving American capitalism in shaping the New Deal (see, e.g., Thomas Ferguson, “From Normalcy to New Deal: Industrial Structure, Party Competition, and American Public Policy in the Great Depression” *International Organization* 38[1]: 41–94, 1984). Others have also discussed the importance of race and gender, which is not prominently discussed here, but these authors’ (e.g., Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time*, 2013; Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare*, 1999; George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, 2006; Suzanne Mettler, *Dividing Citizens: Gender and Federalism in New Deal Public Policy*, 1998) main thesis—that U.S. policies are structurally and systematically shaped to benefit whites over blacks and that one cannot understand U.S. social policy without this as a starting point—is not addressed. Klosko’s contribution is to emphasize the grip of Lockean thought on the United States, but perhaps something deeper than “path dependence” is at work in the maintenance of such strong individualism.

Yascha Mounk has written an ambitious work that aims to change how Americans think about responsibility. He is correct to see this concept as central, and also correct to see current views as problematic. As responsibility has gone from being about duties towards others to