human rights mean for this First World person? The common answer is that human rights could raise awareness of the plight of the have-nots, but Lefebvre worries that this stance will risk a type of moralism or paternalism. The fear of moralism for the human rights project, though, is a perennial issue and has been fruitfully addressed by a number of scholars and human rights workers.

Lefebvre is right to point out the important function for care of the self of those privileged to enjoy a panoply of human rights, though it is only partially developed. Nevertheless, he could delve deeper into how care of the self not only diagnoses societal ills but also leads to a questioning of positionality and responsibility. Can we become a self without responding to the Other? Many human rights theorists and stakeholders see a dialectic in responding to others, creating the self, and resistance to injustice, and many claim that they find themselves only in service toward others.

What force, then, is there in religiously holding onto Foucault’s position that care of the self be primary? Lefebvre replies that these thinkers provide a more convincing justification for embracing a human rights perspective, namely, that it will lead to care of the self. Further, his approach promotes discernment between situations where care of the self will be appropriate, what he calls “first world problems” (p. 165) and the problems of catastrophe. This dichotomy is drawn too sharply, as many human rights activists in developing countries are fighting for what might be labeled privileged rights at the same time they face awful abuses. Care of the self as diagnostic and poietic is not relegated to the Global North, and indeed much of human rights work on the ground, even in conflict and oppressive situations with the most marginalized communities, now emphasizes empowerment and self-transformation. While Lefebvre’s examples all come from the Global North, they need not.

This very well written and provocative book is an important contribution to the history and philosophy of human rights, and several of the chapters could stand alone as insightful introductions to major human rights thinkers and controversies in the field.

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— William Bosworth, London School of Economics and Political Science

The audit political philosophy had to have has begun. Jonathan Floyd’s book is an important preface to this probe, but also suggests there is a way to go. Political philosophers ought to be concerned just how persuasive the first “critical” half of Is Political Philosophy Impossible? turns out to be, but then also the extent to which its second supposedly “restorative” half recommits the exact same fallacies. The answer to the book’s title, qua its argument, in other words, is “sure seems like it.”

The proposed approach in the restorative half, called normative behaviourism, is nevertheless both innovative and instructive, and must seem at least partly right to synthetically inclined thinkers (it does to me, at any rate). It is a position the Mr. Scrooges of the political science world might get behind; those Scrooges who dismiss political philosophy as nothing more than emotive utterances hidden behind perplexing jargon like “reflective equilibrium” will find it grist to their mill. The approach looks to the revealed preference of individuals living in alternative social orders and ranks the regimes according to the levels of crime and insurrection. (Hobbes would be beaming from the grave with this book.) Crime and insurrection are treated as proxies for when a society has become unbearable. Real-world unbearable, not flighty philosophical speculation, is the only coherent litmus test for Floyd. Forget the abstract arrangement of thoughts about justice, fairness, and equality then; we should instead be busying ourselves gathering empirical evidence on institutions and dissent.

So (the political scientist will be delighted to hear) we have institutional variation as our independent variable and levels of crime and insurrection as our dependent. Much like Daniel Dennett arguing that the traditional problems in the philosophy of mind should collapse into questions of neuroscience, Floyd argues “How should we live?” is best answered with good, honest, social-scientific analysis. Proper philosophical method is not method from the armchair; it is method enriched by the collection and analysis of data. In this vein, the third chapter of the book serves as a refresher of the political science literature, showing that “liberal-social-democracy” has been established to cause lower levels of crime/insurrection more than any other historical alternative. It is not due to confounding factors that we observe less in egalitarian as opposed to highly unequal societies, in democracies as opposed to hereditary monarchies, in market-based societies as opposed to collectivist ones; it is due to the nature of the institutions themselves. Given that these institutions can be intelligently designed, normative behaviourism suggests that we should design them accordingly. There is no other metric by which we can do so without a strong dose of question begging.

The first two chapters are devoted to demonstrating how alternative metrics fail in this respect. The alternatives constitute the current political philosophy orthodoxy from Isaiah Berlin to Richard Rorty. They are all fatally flawed, Floyd argues, because they presume a set of shared normative thoughts or patterns of thought to which we can axiomatically appeal. He calls this mentalism. The book storms through a number of canonical thinkers, showing that each disagrees with the others on
the content of the grounding normative beliefs, thus demonstrating that they are not in fact shared. John Rawls’s *Political Liberalism*, for instance, makes the case for an egalitarian theory of justice while purportedly accounting for reasonable disagreement. Yet Floyd suggests that Rawls builds in the acceptance of the egalitarian-generating original position into the very condition of reasonableness. It is unlikely a Nozick-style libertarian—an intuitive case of a reasonable disagreeer—would accept the original position procedure when it conflicts with a baseline freedom from coercion. Deliberative democrats similarly suggest using deliberative mechanisms for overcoming reasonable disagreement. But, “[i]f we ask what justifies this deliberation, then they can say that it is required by some further value, such as mutual respect. But what then? If we now ask what justifies mutual respect, we hear silence” (p. 61). It begs the question why we should extend mutual respect to fascists, conspiracy theorists, libertarians, Marxists, or even bourgeois ideologists for that matter. The disagreement that deliberation was introduced to overcome returns in determining the limits of mutual respect. The book also summarizes efforts to appeal to toleration as a reasonable way of dealing with disagreement, but again, when toleration licenses parents to inhibit the opportunities available to their children in the name of tradition, Floyd notes how contestation over its limits abounds. The question is left begged.

The criticism of mentalism cuts deeply for the sample of political philosophers as they have been described by Floyd. I am confident it is not the last word on the thinkers though given many—particularly Rawlsians—will likely contest his interpretations. Yet the criticism can be distilled into a broader and less interpretive worry: If one is to try and analyze the nature of justice, for instance, how will one know they have discovered its true nature if they did not know what it looked like to begin with? The paradox of analysis, in other words. We need pregiven desiderata to judge the success of our mental inquiry. This poses problems particular to the political philosopher due to the nature of politics. Where philosophers have fruitfully challenged commonsense platitudes like “Meaning is conventional” and “Knowledge is true justified belief” by showing they cannot be simultaneously held with other, dearer, platitudes, the contestatory nature of politics means there is no analogous uncontested set of dearer commonsense platitudes for political philosophers to use as axioms to begin with.

Floyd believes that normative behaviourism avoids the paradox trap, however, by taking convergent behavior rather than dispersed and inconsistent thought as its starting point. It looks for patterns in common preferences or for against institutions. The most important section of the book is hidden toward the end of the (near-300) pages. Section 3.8 explains “Reasons to Be Convinced by Social-Liberal-Democracy” to whoever has, or claims to have, a revealed preference for alternate systems (be they Marxist, libertarian, authoritarian, whatever). While normative behaviourism blocks an appeal to a prior principle due to the principle’s likely contestation, this is not to license the claim “Because you and radicals like you have not resisted liberal-social-democracy through risky violence in the past any claim you make against liberal-social-democracies is just cheap talk and may be ignored.” A radical is well justified to respond: “Were I presented with a decisive choice between social-liberal-democracy and my preferred alternative, I would certainly choose the latter, but as it happens any attempt at insurrection I engage in now is simply infeasible thanks to collective action problems.”

To this, Floyd adds on reasons post hoc. Radicals should prefer social-liberal-democracies because they tend to less “cruelty” and tend to promote “human flourishing.” But as Floyd has earlier shown in Chapter 1, there are incommensurable problems with how to measure, aggregate, and interpret cruelty and human flourishing. A Marxist would not claim a market society that incentivizes the division and alienation of labor comes close to promoting human flourishing. The radical can quite easily respond that Floyd is presupposing a prior normative commitment here. Despite denying the charge (p. 229), it is hard to see how he has not reintroduced the paradox of mentalism just under a new empirically charged cloak.

The convinced readers of this book might cut back that the level of cruelty and flourishing produced by a system can be unproblematically measured by the number of individuals who find it unbearable (i.e., through crime and insurrection). To this, however, there are plenty of token case studies of elite insurrection motivated primarily by the desire for further riches, not the unbearability of the current regime. There are even more token examples of white-collar crime. While these counters are not exactly decisive, as the patterns for crime and insurrection still hold were we to control for socioeconomic status, it demonstrates the worry. Floyd claims that it does not “make any difference [to normative behaviourists] if the people whose actions led to the collapse of the regime actually wanted that regime to survive” (p. 252). The only way to maintain the link between unbearability and crime/insurrection, then, is to judge the lives of those engaged in crime and insurrection as unbearable, which, without recourse to some observable preference, is to again apply an assumed (and not necessarily common) normative judgment. Either way, it needs justification, and that justification can only fall back into mentalism.

Irrespective of whether you agree or disagree, *Is Political Philosophy Impossible?* begs important questions and puts new burdens on a discipline that is arguably too cosy with exclusionary assumptions. The conclusion that political philosophy is impossible is—as Floyd notes—too
much to stomach. This rightfully places the burden on political philosophers to respond with a brand of analysis that avoids the snares and fallacies clearly and constructively identified in the book.


— Matthew Landauer, University of Chicago

What might democracy look like detached from its conjoined twin, liberalism? In *Demopolis*, Josiah Ober turns his scalpel to the task of effecting a separation. The aim is to show how “basic democracy,” shorn of all hybridizing prefixes, might be a stable and attractive political regime in its own right. Even without liberalism’s guardrails, Ober maintains, democracy can avoid the pitfalls of “unstable, arbitrary, and casually brutish . . . majoritarian tyranny” (p. 18). The contours of basic democracy are instead given by recourse to the historical example of democratic Athens (Chap.1) and to a thought experiment: the founding of the imaginary basic democracy of “Demopolis” (Chap. 2).

In Ober’s view, Athenian democracy was not a majoritarian tyranny but an example of “collective self-governance by a socially diverse body of citizens, limited by constitutional laws that were also established by citizens” (p. 32). Such a regime would plausibly be chosen by Demopolis’s hypothetical group of founders with shared commitments to security, prosperity, and non-tyranny (p. 40). Demopolis would be committed to the participation of all citizens (including efforts to ensure that the conditions for effective participation are met). Political equality, political freedoms (of speech, of association), and “civic dignity” would be recognized as “conditions essential for the preservation of non-tyranny” (p. 52). These commitments would be entrenched in a constitutional order limiting the passage of future laws “that would threaten the three ends of prosperity, security, and non-tyranny or that would threaten the conditions that make those ends achievable” (p. 52). All of this, Ober argues, was achieved historically before the advent of liberalism and can be robustly established independently of liberal values and arguments (thereby allowing nonliberals, such as those committed to a state religion, also to see democracy as a viable option).

If the author’s conceptual goal is a clean separation between democracy and liberalism, his method is deeply hybridized. Much of the book is dedicated to explicating why and how basic democracy would be stable, successful, and choiceworthy. Ober addresses the argument not only to the reader but also to skeptical citizens of Demopolis, who would learn in the course of their own civic education why basic democracy is valuable and worth the costs of participation. The tools that he deploys are “at once evaluative, explanatory, and historical” (p. 12), drawing widely on the social sciences. Part of the answer is democracies’ proven track record of providing security and prosperity for their citizens (Chap. 4). But Ober also sketches a naturalized anthropology of human capacities, arguing that democratic participation, far from being merely a cost to be borne, offers citizens the chance to develop and freely exercise the constitutive human capacities of sociability, rationality, and communication “at the highest level” (p. 93, Chap. 5). He develops simplified models and games that analyze how basic democracies might control and discipline citizens with desires to violate equal civic dignity or otherwise upset the democratic order (Chap. 6); how the demos can effectively delegate power to representatives while retaining “direct self-governing capability” (p. 133); and how nonexpert citizens might effectively make use of expert knowledge without ceding control to the experts themselves (Chap. 7).

Some political theorists might be wary of the range of tools employed. But Ober rightly argues that something like his hybrid method of normative argument, historical investigation, and strategic analysis is deployed throughout the canon, from Aristotle through Montesquieu and beyond (p. 12). *Demopolis* thus models an approach to political theory that seems both new and historically rooted; indeed, the book contains wonderful nods to the history of political thought. Inhabitants of the hypothetical city who do not share the founders’ preference for nontyranny are sent to “inhabit another territory” (p. 38), reenacting Socrates’ rustication of everyone over 10 years of age in founding Kallipolis (*Republic* 541b). And just as Hobbes thought that *Leviathan* could profitably be taught to subjects of a well-ordered commonwealth, Ober claims that “the pedagogic method of Demopolis’ civic education will be similar to the methodology of this book” (p. 74).

The canonical work that *Demopolis* most closely recalls is J. S. Mill’s *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861). Ober shares with Mill the goal of defending (certain) democracies against the charge of majoritarian tyranny and arguing that they can compete successfully with autocratic regimes in providing the products of good government. Like Mill, Ober recognizes that explicating the benefits of civic participation will be a central feature of that defense. Both also share concerns about the epistemic dimensions of democratic decision making. While Ober shares Mill’s interest in “ensuring fair and efficient inequality of influence,” he rejects Mill’s system of plural voting as a violation of political equality (p. 51, n. 29). But he also argues that citizens who do not complete Demopolis’s curriculum of civic education can lose their voting rights altogether, pushing his position closer to Mill’s (p. 170). Finally, Ober is at his most powerful and persuasive in articulating Demopolis’s commitment to civic dignity, “immunity from humiliation” (p. 20). In Ober’s view,