

BOOK REVIEW

Justice: Classical Foundations and Contemporary Debates. By YOUNG KIM. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018. Pp. 232. Hardback, \$100.00. ISBN: 978-1-4985-5899-0.

Young Kim's *Justice: Classical Foundations and Contemporary Debates* aims to provide a corrective to contemporary accounts of justice which, Kim contends, tend to focus more on the explicitly political dimension of justice and ignore the classical foundation of justice as a virtue or trait of persons. The author does this over the course of three parts and ten chapters. The book, impressive in its aims and scope, and correct in this general assessment, is more modest in its achievements.

First, the intended audience for the book is unclear. The general division of the book and the title "Classical Foundations and Contemporary Debates" suggests that the book is meant to appeal to both classicists and contemporary philosophers and political theorists. However, I think each of these sets of readers may be unsatisfied with the book.

The sections on Plato and Aristotle are not precise or careful enough to satisfy the specialist in ancient philosophy. In fact, Kim's exposition of each can be breezy and informal. This can result in unhelpful generalizations. An illustrative example: "Plato's approach may be described as approaching justice in an extremely rational manner" (5).

Similarly, several sections of the book on contemporary debates consist in expository retellings of the views of other thinkers. These are not particularly helpful to contemporary political philosophers as they largely contain summaries of the views of well-known major figures (e.g., Rawls, Nozick, Raz, Scanlon, Parfit, Sen, etc.) and little in the way of novel reinterpretation or utilization. Too little of the up-to-date secondary philosophical literature is considered for the professional philosopher.

Second, as alluded to above, too much of the book takes the form of simple exposition. Consequently, the sustained argument of the book is not immediately clear. The thesis (or plan of the book), I take it, is:

To explore the importance of a moral framework, I accept an essentially liberal political context, but one that makes the individual's will to act and take responsibility for her or his actions central. In a sense, then, I prefer the liberal political framework comprising the foundation of contemporary discussions of justice over the hierarchical political framework supporting the conceptualizing of justice by classical thinkers. I nonetheless return the discussion to the classical concern with moral responsibility. Adjusting to our times, and in accord with Immanuel Kant's focus on individual responsibility, I argue that justice must focus on right actions (1).

If so, Kim's final aim—to advance a theory in which justice 'must focus on right actions'—receives just a few pages' treatment at the very end of the book. Kim has written on justice as right actions elsewhere, but the discussion contained here is greatly abbreviated (to the point that it is hard to assess its success *qua* theory).

Third, to build on the last claim, the book lacks a clear thesis with a project effected throughout the course of its pages. Perhaps the book was intended as a survey of contemporary debates rather than a sustained argumentative monograph. If this was the case, it should have been more clearly stated.

In sum, Kim's *Justice: Classical Foundations and Contemporary Debates* is an interesting, if uneven, treatment. I could see its usefulness in an advanced undergraduate course in philosophy as a survey of contemporary ethical approaches to justice. The summaries of the philosophers discussed are largely accurate and suitable to that purpose. It will not be of much use to scholars working in ancient philosophy or contemporary ethics or political philosophy, however, for the reasons mentioned above.

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