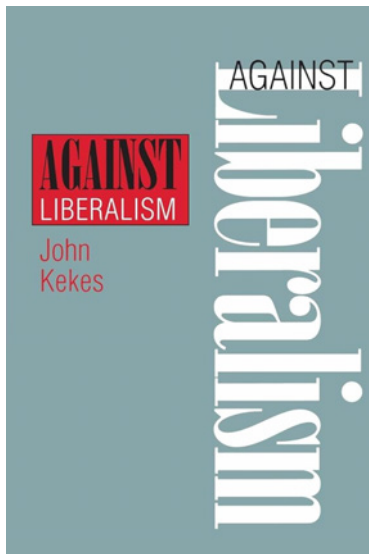


24.150 Liberalism, Toleration, and Freedom of Speech, Fall 2023

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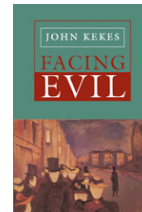
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1936-, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, University at Albany, SUNY; born in Hungary



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1. What, according to Kekes, is liberalism's positive aim? What is its negative aim?

3

Liberalism's 'inconsistencies'

This book is a criticism of liberalism. Its thesis is that liberalism is incapable of achieving its own aims because it is riddled with inconsistencies. Some of these inconsistencies result from the liberal commitment to **two incompatible aims**, one negative, the other positive. The **negative** aim is to avoid evils, such as dictatorship, torture, poverty, intolerance, repression, discrimination, lawlessness, and so forth. The **positive** aim is to create conditions in which individuals can make good lives for themselves.*

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*all text from *Against Liberalism* unless otherwise indicated

4

conditions for the positive aim

individual autonomy, which is fostered if a state guarantees the rights of individuals to make free choices about how they live, equal concern and respect for their endeavors, a just share of the resources they need, and a generous plurality of options.

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5

evil due to nonautonomous actions

According to the second answer liberals may give, the prevalence of evil is due mainly to nonautonomous actions. Although they conform to the **freedom component** of autonomy, these actions are nonautonomous because they violate its **judgment component**.

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6

4. Liberals' "second answer," that is, the second way they might show their aims to be consistent, is to assert that people are "not moral monsters but moral idiots." What does this mean?

7

This answer, of course, is a contemporary and attenuated version of the Socratic dictum that no one does evil knowingly. People are cruel but see themselves as just; they are dogmatic but believe themselves to be principled; they are greedy but it seems to them as taking their fair share; they are prejudiced but appear to themselves as objective about their wretched victims. They are, therefore, not moral monsters but moral idiots....they cause evil nonautonomously because they have violated the judgment component of autonomy.

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8

Varieties and examples

Dogmatism: the southern slave owner.

Insensitivity: the stern and unforgiving father.

Ruthlessness: [fill in the blank.]

9

The liberal response

The [liberal] supposition is [that] making actions more autonomous will makes them less evil.

10

One of Kekes' objections

it is perfectly possible that even if the agents whose actions are responsible for the prevalence of evil evaluated and understood their actions accurately, and thus stopped misperceiving their true moral status, they would continue to act the same way as before. Their reaction to the realization that they are dogmatic, insensitive, and ruthless rather than principled, disciplined, and realistic may just be to embrace these vices and the actions that follow from them.

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Possible...but is it likely?

11

this answer is made plausible by the belief that people are naturally good and that they do evil because of corrupting external influences. This belief is the liberal faith...

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12

the liberal faith is not merely unsupported by the available facts but inconsistent with them as well. The facts are that evil is prevalent in all human societies; the vices of selfishness, greed, malevolence, envy, aggression, prejudice, cruelty, and suspicion motivate people just as the contrary virtues do; and both virtues and vices may be autonomous or nonautonomous, natural and basic, or the products of external influences. It would be as implausible to claim that these facts testify to human wickedness as it is to base the faith in human goodness on them. If the facts warrant any inference, it is that human beings are morally ambivalent.

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13

Liberals will indignantly reject this criticism. They will say that no reasonable liberal ever supposed that freedom, equality, rights, pluralism, and distributive justice should be provided without qualification. They will point out that the liberal tradition has always been centrally concerned not just with increasing individual autonomy but also with protecting the potential victims of the misuse of autonomy. Increasing autonomy by increasing the freedom, equality, rights, pluralism, and distributive justice enjoyed by individuals must go hand in hand with preventing individuals from interfering with the exercise of autonomy by others. Autonomy, liberals will say, is not license to do whatever individuals please but to pursue a reasonable conception of a good life in a way that does not hinder others from doing likewise.

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14

[If evil is prevalent,] liberals must be prepared to curb both nonautonomously and autonomously evil actions. If evil is prevalent, these curbs will have to be considerable. And their imposition, maintenance, and enforcement amount, of course, to a policy of decreasing autonomy, freedom, equality, rights, pluralism, and distributive justice for evildoers.

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Is this plausible?

15

Open Borders?



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16

The thesis of “Open Borders”: If someone is free to move within a country (eg, not justly imprisoned), then it is wrong to prevent them from moving between countries.



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17

A simple argument for open borders

Mex, living in Mexico, announces: “I’d like a job and a place to live in San Diego.” Sandy and Dennis, in San Diego, reply: “We’d like you to work for us, and rent one of our apartments.” Wage and rent agreements are reached. As Sandy and Dennis get in their car to pick up Mex, Fred appears with a gun, and threatens to shoot them if they don’t call off the deal.

18

P1. It is wrong for Fred to forcibly prevent the deal.

P2. If it is wrong for Fred to forcibly prevent the deal, then it is wrong for the government to forcibly prevent the deal.

C. It is wrong for the government to forcibly prevent the deal.

19

Against Open Borders: negative externalities

Joshi:

states may legitimately use coercion to prevent negative externalities...Consider the case of a cheap battery manufacturer. The manufacturer and consumers both benefit from his being able to use cheap toxic chemicals in the process and dumping them in the nearby river. But the state may legitimately prevent this mutually beneficial transaction, because the costs involved are not entirely internalized by the parties.

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20

Joshi:

...while foreign-born people compose 17% of the Swedish population, they receive 60% of the welfare expenditures. 76% of members of criminal gangs have immigrant backgrounds.

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21

Against Open Borders: low SES citizens

Joshi:

Coercion is also often used for the purpose of protecting the interests of the domestic population with low socioeconomic status. Consider for example, minimum wage regulations. Such regulations are coercive – if A is willing to pay B \$X/hour and no more, and B desires to accept this offer, the state forbids this transaction with threat of force if X is lower than the minimum wage set by law.

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22

Joshi:

One foreseeable impact of having fully open borders is that it will drive wages down for less skilled workers. This is just a function of supply and demand – a large influx of less skilled workers from poor but populous countries will increase the number of people willing and able to do retail, agricultural, and fast food jobs, for example. This will push the wages down for this type of work, thus adversely affecting the well being of less skilled workers already in the country.

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23

Against Open Borders: protecting valuable things

Joshi:

Coercive laws are also employed to protect things we deem valuable in and of themselves. States seem to be within their rights to prohibit certain activities with respect to national parks containing valuable ecosystems – most people think it's fine for the state to forbid logging or hunting within such parks, for example.

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24

1. What thing of 'intrinsic value' does Joshi think can be protected by immigration restrictions?

25

Joshi:

liberal, high-trust societies are intrinsically valuable. Such societies embody valuable relationships among their residents, which are valuable in a way akin to the way that friendships are valuable. Liberal societies are also uniquely suited to human flourishing, for individuals there have the relatively robust ability to speak their minds, explore new ideas, create challenging writing and art, and so on.

If liberal societies are valuable in roughly these ways, and if having a regime of open borders would put the existence of such societies at risk, then there may be a further justification for border coercion. It is not unreasonable to think such a risk is substantial.

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26

Joshi:

the majority of people in the [Pakistan] believed that women should not have the choice as to whether to veil, that wives should always obey their husbands, that the death penalty is appropriate for apostasy, and that adulterers ought to be stoned. Now, Pakistan has a population in excess of 200 million. Suppose Denmark, a broadly liberal society with a population of less than 6 million, is deciding whether to have an open borders regime or not. It seems reasonable for one to worry whether Denmark's liberal norms can survive a large enough movement of the representative citizen of Pakistan into its territory.

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