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The Liberal Conscience, by Lucas Swaine. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006. Pp. xix + 215. \$36.50 (paper).

JEREMY NEILL, Saint Louis University

Lucas Swaine's *The Liberal Conscience* is an original and insightful analysis of the troubled relationship between liberalism and religious belief. The arguments of *Conscience* are clear, well-organized, and articulated in a refreshing dialectical style. The central purpose of *Conscience* is evangelization—not the evangelization of religious unbelievers by religious believers, but rather the evangelization of religious believers by political liberals. More specifically, *Conscience* is an attempt to render the norms and institutions of political liberalism acceptable to a particular class of religious believers—a class that Swaine calls 'theocrats.' By 'theocrats,' Swaine means those people who prefer "a mode of governance prioritizing a religious conception of the good that is strict and comprehensive in its range of teachings" (p. 7).

Conscience can be fruitfully divided into two different conceptual moments or emphases. The first of these two conceptual emphases is an attempt to convince theocrats to support liberal political regimes. The second conceptual emphasis is a series of loosely-related practical suggestions that Swaine makes in an attempt to render the relationship between theocrats and liberal political regimes more productive.

The first conceptual emphasis of *Conscience* is an attempt to convince theocrats to support liberal political regimes. The natural inclination of many contemporary theocrats is to prefer a form of government that is centered on a comprehensive religious conception of the good. The way in which liberal political regimes ought to treat these theocrats, Swaine argues, should be dependent upon the way in which the theocrats choose to manifest their particular comprehensive religious conceptions of the good. Swaine draws a strong distinction between two different kinds of theocrats—ambitious and retiring (p. 9). The distinction between ambitious theocrats and retiring theocrats demarcates two wholly different ways of manifesting a comprehensive religious conception of the good. Ambitious theocrats favor vigorous participation in the public square, whereas retiring theocrats intentionally make themselves absent from the public square.

Most contemporary theocrats, whether ambitious or retiring, are uncomfortable in liberal societies (pp. 12–15). For Swaine, the reason why they are so uncomfortable is that liberal political theorists have failed to provide them with adequate reasons for supporting liberal political regimes (pp. 15–20). For this reason, Swaine does not join his fellow liberals in appealing to ideologically neutral reasons to justify liberalism to theocrats. Rather, he aims to "provide reasons for theocrats to affirm liberal institutions on grounds they should accept, without circumscribing or casting aside their most basic otherworldly aspirations and assumptions" (p. 40). At the heart of Swaine's attempt to convince theocrats to endorse liberal political regimes is an appeal to the value of the liberty of conscience (pp. 45–61). It proceeds as follows: to believe in a comprehensive religious good is to believe that it is possible to live erroneously with

respect to this good. But to believe that it is possible to live erroneously with respect to the good is to believe that it is possible for people who desire to live correctly with respect to the good to endorse an erroneous conception of the good, perhaps without realizing it. Theocrats desire to live in a society in which the comprehensive religious good is embraced, legislated, and enforced at the highest political level. Yet even in a society that is wholly devoted to the pursuit of the comprehensive religious good, it is still possible for the view that theocratic political regimes have of the comprehensive religious good to become corrupted over time (and, by extension, for their citizens' understanding of the comprehensive religious good to become corrupted as well).

The way to resolve the problem of belief corruption is to promote the freedom of the individual conscience: "the theocrat ought to understand that he has a powerful rational commitment to the notion that conscience must be free, given his values and the ends he aims to achieve" (p. 48). There are three different kinds of freedom of conscience that Swaine thinks that theocrats ought to endorse: first, the belief that "Conscience must be free to reject lesser religious doctrines and conceptions of the good"; second, the belief that "Conscience must be free to accept the good"; and third, the belief that "Conscience must be free to distinguish between good and bad doctrines and conceptions of the good" (p. 49). Were theocrats to promote the freedom of conscience in these three ways, they would be rendering themselves capable, at least potentially, of always pursuing the correct version of the comprehensive religious good. The problem, of course, is that the liberty of the individual conscience is part of a locus of values that contemporary theocrats have generally repudiated.

To convince contemporary theocrats to support liberal political regimes, Swaine must demonstrate to them that it is to their advantage to do so. To this end he argues that the motivation that theocrats have (or ought to have) to value the liberty of conscience ought also to motivate them to support the kinds of political regimes that promote the freedom of the individual conscience (pp. 51–54). The kinds of political regimes that promote the freedom of the individual conscience are liberal political regimes. Suppose a theocratic citizen were to lose her confidence in her understanding of the comprehensive religious good. Were she then to attempt to alter her understanding of the comprehensive religious good in pursuit of an understanding that she believed to be a better understanding, the liberal political regime would not mistreat or persecute her for altering her beliefs. Since liberal political regimes promote the locus of values that theocrats ought to embrace by virtue of their commitment to the pursuit of the true version of the comprehensive religious good, it makes sense for theocrats to favor them.

Let us evaluate Swaine's argument. The strength of the argument is that it appeals to a political reality that is quite evidently true—liberal political regimes do tolerate a diversity of belief systems among their citizens. The weakness of the argument is that it seems to overlook some of the negative characteristics of contemporary liberal societies. Consider the following objection. Liberal societies allow their citizens to pursue their own private conceptions of the comprehensive good. Yet no human being is an island. We are all deeply dependent upon each other. To pursue what we

understand to be the true version of the comprehensive good (whatever it might be), we are continually compelled to rely upon the financial, social, and institutional support of our friends, family, and neighbors. The moral ecology of our society is, therefore, an essential and necessary component of our ability to pursue the good. If the moral ecology of our society were to become significantly different from our own beliefs, such that it was no longer conducive to our ability to pursue what we understand to be the true version of the comprehensive good, then it would render our ability to do so very difficult (if not impossible). Our every effort to attain the true version of the comprehensive good would be thwarted, whether intentionally or inadvertently, by the efforts and interests of the citizens around us. The likelihood of this happening is significant in a liberal society whose tolerance for a diversity of comprehensive goods promotes the existence of numerous different belief systems.

Many contemporary theocrats feel that this is just what has happened to modern liberal societies. Modern liberal societies, through their tolerance of a diversity of possible belief systems, have destroyed a once cohesive moral ecology and have rendered it extremely difficult for theocrats to pursue what they take to be the true version of the comprehensive good. Theocrats favor religiously-centered political regimes because religiously-centered political regimes are capable of forestalling the hostile moral situations of the kind that exist in modern liberal societies. So Swaine's attempt to convince theocrats to support liberal political regimes still seems to need to deal adequately with the issue of what it means to really *live* as a dependent human being who is attempting to pursue a particular understanding of the comprehensive religious good in a moral environment that is hostile to this particular understanding.

The second conceptual emphasis of *Conscience* is a series of loosely-related practical suggestions that are designed to render the relationship between theocrats and liberal political regimes more productive. One of the most interesting and optimistic of these practical suggestions is the legal framework that Swaine develops to address the issues raised by the existence of communities of retiring theocrats. Swaine's proposal is that communities of retiring theocrats should be allowed to retain a large amount of semi-sovereignty over their internal social affairs (pp. 90–94). There would, of course, be general human rights conditions which communities of retiring theocrats would have to fulfill in order to retain this right of semi-sovereignty for an extended period of time.

Swaine's suggestions for dealing with ambitious theocrats, outlined in chapter four, are just as optimistic as his suggestions for dealing with retiring theocrats. He is particularly interested in the possibility of including ambitious theocrats in a peaceful and productive way in liberal political processes. Part of this inclusion process, Swaine argues, is a willingness on liberal political theorists' part to re-evaluate the doctrine of public reason, and to consider again what should be included and what should be excluded from the public square (pp. 121–126). If liberal political theorists were to conduct a genuine re-evaluation of the doctrine of public reason, Swaine believes that they would find it productive to allow ambitious theocrats to use religious forms of reasoning in the public square. Liberty of conscience is the value that is at the heart of

public reason. Ambitious theocrats endorse the positions that they do for religious reasons. In appealing to religious reasons, ambitious theocrats are embodying the value of liberty of conscience, for it is by their exercise of the liberty of conscience that they come to endorse the positions that they do. For this reason, liberal political theorists ought to be open to the possibility of allowing ambitious theocrats to invoke religious reasons in the public square (p. 125).

Swaine's book should be commended for its sensitive and nuanced treatment of religion. The paradox, of course, is that *Conscience* is not likely to be read by the very theocrats that could most profit from reading it. The most likely readers of *Conscience* are the liberal political theorists who already agree with Swaine's message. The fact that fine books like *Conscience* are probably only going to be read by the people who already agree with them is a testament to the reality that we are not really dialoguing with the other belief systems that exist alongside our own in the contemporary public square. If both sides of the public religion debate were to read reconciliation proposals like Swaine's *Conscience*, it would go a long way toward overcoming this reality.

Immortality Defended, by John Leslie. Blackwell, 2007. Pp. 97. \$19.95 (cloth).

LESLIE STEVENSON, University of St. Andrews, Scotland

The title of John Leslie's new slim volume is potentially misleading. Although he offers three varieties of immortality, two of them involve it only in a Pickwickian sense. And the defense he has to offer (of all three) may be thought rather loose, at best. In fact, Leslie uses more than half his space trying to make plausible the underlying metaphysical picture that he is enamoured of, namely a combination of Platonism and Spinozist pantheism.

The most fundamental principle inspiring Leslie's thought in this book is one he attributes to Plato: "The actual world of people and objects is a good one and *it exists simply because it ought to*. Its ethical requiredness—the fact that there is an ethical need for it—is *itself creatively effective*" (p. 2). To this, Leslie adds his own interpretation of Spinoza: "There is a divine mind, a mind whose reality is due to the eternal ethical need for it. We, like all the other intricately structured things of our universe, exist merely because the mind in question thinks of this universe in all its details" (p. 3). As Leslie acknowledges, some theologians will not identify this metaphysical "divine mind" with the personal, self-revelatory (indeed incarnate) God they believe in.

Not content with this degree of speculation, Leslie proceeds to add two dimensions of infinity. Unsatisfactory features of our lives prompt him to speculate that the divine mind might also think of immensely many other universes, thereby making them just as real as the imperfect one we inhabit (pp. 7, 10). Then, without apparent motivation, Leslie announces that "this book will defend a pantheism of infinitely many divine minds,