



The Scandal of Reason: A Critical Theory of Political Judgement (New Directions in Critical Theory)

Albena Azmanova

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Theories of justice struggle to balance vision and practicality. As with Habermas, the more demanding the ideal of justice, the less connected the theory is to political reality; as with Rawls, the more politically realistic the theory, the weaker its normative criteria, rendering the theory unreliable. Brokering a resolution to the “judgment paradox,” Albena Azmanova advances a “critical consensus” model of judgment, which serves the normative ideals of a just society without resorting to ideal theory.

Tracing the evolution of two major traditions in political philosophy—critical theory and philosophical liberalism—and the way they confront the judgment paradox, Azmanova critiques prevailing models of deliberative democracy and their preference for ideal theory over political applicability. Instead, she replaces the reliance on normative models of democracy with an account of the dynamics of reasoned judgment, produced in democratic practices of open dialogues. Combining Arendt’s study of judgment with Bourdieu’s social critique of power relations, and incorporating elements of political epistemology from Kant, Wittgenstein, H. L. A. Hart, Weber, and American philosophical pragmatism, Azmanova centers her inquiry on the way participants in moral conflicts attribute meaning to their grievances of injustice. She then demonstrates the emancipatory potential of the model of judgment she forges and its capacity to guide policy making.

The model’s critical force derives from the capacity to disclose common structural sources of injustice behind conflicting claims to justice. Moving beyond the conflict between universalist and pluralist positions, Azmanova grounds the question of “what is justice?” in the empirical reality of “who suffers?” to detect attainable possibilities for a less unjust world.

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