
A Statement from the Book Review Editor

It was with great pleasure that I recently assumed the reigns as Book Review Editor of *Perspectives*. I am fortunate to have had excellent predecessors—Greg MacAvoy and Susan Bickford—who themselves had an excellent staff. This has made the transition relatively painless and successful. But, like all transitions, this one has involved glitches and has required patience and perseverance. We greatly appreciate the cooperation and flexibility that so many of our colleagues have shown.

I took on this task because I believe that *Perspectives* is a most important APSA initiative, one whose creation reflected many exciting and liberalizing trends in our profession, and one that promises to improve scholarly discourse within our profession and between it and the rest of the academy and the broader public. The *Perspectives* Book Review already has established a tradition of publishing first-class reviews. This tradition has built upon the much longer traditions associated with the Book Review section of the *American Political Science Review*.

The primary function of the Review, as I understand it, has always been fairly straightforward: to offer informative and critical book reviews of the most important newly-published books. These reviews highlight, in a serious way, recent books and their authors. At the same time, commissioned reviews offer opportunities for critical engagement for scholars who, whatever their rank, have already experienced the level of scholarly recognition associated with publication. In this way the Review long has served an essential communicative function within the discipline. As Review Editor I intend to continue this practice.

A few words on this score would be helpful to all authors, of books and of reviews, as a way of clarifying our editorial policies.

The Book Review is and always has been highly selective. We receive between two and three thousand books every year, and can review approximately three hundred and fifty. This logistical reality imposes two constraints that necessarily involve serious editorial discretion and judgment.

The first regards the selection of books to be reviewed. In short, we can only review those books that appear to have some measure of scholarly breadth and to address important theoretical questions. We also try to review only books that clearly fall within the general parameters of “Political Science,” or, in exceptional cases, are at least clearly of strong interest to political scientists. As you can imagine, decisions about such things are complicated, and

even the most judicious of such decisions will result in many fine books being passed over for review. There is simply no alternative for a general periodical such as *Perspectives*. And when we make such difficult choices, we do so with the hope and expectation that the books that don’t make it to review will be reviewed in other scholarly publications.

The second constraint involves the editing of the reviews. In short, we can only afford to publish reviews that are clearly and strongly written, according to the criteria described in our invitation and commission letters. We take these formal letters very seriously, because they lay out the basic criteria according to which all reviews will be judged and edited by our staff. Space limitations are serious in a periodical in which space is a precious commodity. Deadlines are serious in a profession that values currency and that prizes the honoring of professional commitments. More importantly, the Review takes the literary quality of the reviews very seriously. The reviews are designed to promote fair and high-level collegial discussion of newly-published books. Such discussion requires that reviews be clearly and well written. Even more crucial, reviews should not simply describe books, but explain to readers how the books in question address serious theoretical debates within political science, and speak to broad questions of interest to political science. In the same way, it is important that criticism of books centers on the principal scholarly purposes and merits (or demerits) of the books.

These have always been the expectations associated with the Book Review. It is my intention as editor to take these expectations very seriously. I read each review carefully. I read for grammar and style as well as substance. I intend to be proactive as an editor in helping each review to be a first-rate piece of writing. I owe nothing less to our book authors or our reviewers or our profession in general. Indeed, such literary seriousness is fully consistent with one of the original and animating purposes of *Perspectives*.

In these ways the Review will remain pretty much the same as it long has been. At the same time, *Perspectives* is a new and innovative publication, and it is the intention of Jim Johnson and myself to see the Review section edited in a creative fashion, consistent with the broader purposes of *Perspectives*. So there will also be some changes, experimental to be sure, designed to further promote new forms of scholarly discussion.

We will encourage imaginative review essays and symposia. We will feature books of general Political Science relevance, and creatively seek out reviewers of such books. We will sometimes place “political theory” books on international justice in the “international relations” section, and assign them to “international relations” scholars. We will sometimes pair a book on “comparative politics” and a book on “international relations” or “American politics.” We will organize theme reviews, linking together books in “theory” and “comparative” and “IR” that deal with, say the European Union. Some of these more creative efforts require special care in selecting reviewers who are qualified, fair, and generally appropriate. Many of our professional colleagues already feel comfortable “thinking outside of the sub-disciplinary box.” Many more will feel comfortable, as writers and as readers, if they see that this is acceptable and that it can be done well. One of my goals as editor is to consider this acceptable and to see to it that it is done well. In the same way that we all ought to be able to read much of each others’s work—and we do routinely assume responsibility, especially on tenure and promotion committees, for judging the quality of each others’s work—we are capable of reading and even writing serious reviews of each others’s books that are not always narrowly oriented by subfield. As editor I will actively promote such reviews, at the same time that I know that most reviews will be more “conventional,” and that it is important to satisfy the authors and readers who prefer such conventional reviews.

Most importantly, as editor I will own my genuinely *editorial* activities and priorities, and will take responsibility for them. It is impossible for any journal of quality to simply run “automatically.” And while there are many fairly routine tasks associated with the Book Review section and its elaborate and formidable database, the basic tasks associated with the Review Editor are not routine—making difficult decisions about which books to review, who to assign to which books, how to “classify” books

within sub-fields, how to pair books and, most especially, the ultimate question: how to decide whether and when a review is good enough to be publishable and ready to go to the press. This is not an easy decision, especially for one who takes editing seriously. But we will only publish reviews when we decide—when I decide—that they are high quality reviews.

As you may have noticed, in my prose I have slipped back and forth between the “I” and the “we.” This has been deliberate. For at the same time that I am the Review Editor, I can only function along with a highly qualified and efficient staff. I am very lucky to have a terrific team of assistants. All are graduate students, each is assigned primary responsibility for a field, and all work together to make the Book Review a highly professional organization. In the months to come you will be hearing from them, and it is my pleasure to introduce them now: Shanna Dietz (Indiana University, responsible for American Politics), Margot Morgan (Rutgers University, responsible for Political Theory and for special symposia and review essays), James Moskowitz (Indiana University, responsible for International Relations), and Rafia Zakaria (Indiana University, responsible for Comparative Politics). These excellent young scholars, along with the superb support staff and infrastructure of the Indiana University Department of Political Science, make it a pleasure to serve as Review Editor. I regard this job as a most important service to the discipline. It is a position of great scholarly responsibility. I hope to discharge it wisely and well, and I look forward to hearing from you and to working with you.

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