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1-18-2020

### January 18, 2020: Tamsin Shaw and “the need for us to converge on some shared values to have a functioning form of government.”

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#### Repository Citation

Ledewitz, B. (2020). January 18, 2020: Tamsin Shaw and “the need for us to converge on some shared values to have a functioning form of government.”. Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/ledewitz-hallowedsecularism/1283>

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Title: Tamsin Shaw and “the need for us to converge on some shared values to have a functioning form of government.”

Date: 2020-01-18T09:11:00.004-05:00

1/18/2020—I received this in an email from the NYR Daily, which is a really interesting effort by the New York Review to bridge the gap between the day to day and the magazine itself, which comes out twenty times a year. Shaw wrote an essay on William Barr and Carl Schmidt, which I understand because of the friend/enemy distinction that Barr is prone to, but which is also really overblown given that Barr is a practicing democrat. Shaw’s first book was about Nietzsche’s political ideas—Nietzsche’s Political Skepticism (2007). This is from the Princeton Press description: “Shaw argues that the modern political predicament, for Nietzsche, is shaped by two important historical phenomena. The first is secularization, or the erosion of religious belief, and the fragmentation of moral life that it entails. The second is the unparalleled ideological power of the modern state. The promotion of Nietzsche’s own values, Shaw insists, requires resistance to state ideology. But Nietzsche cannot envisage how these values might themselves provide a stable basis for political authority; this is because secular societies, lacking recognized normative expertise, also lack a reliable mechanism for making moral insight politically effective.”

The quote in the title of this entry is actually quite despairing given Shaw’s view. She clearly believes that Nietzsche is on to something. But the problem is the lack of “recognized moral expertise.” Well, how could there be expertise about the will to power? Why should the will to power “converge on some shared values?” There is a pretty obvious answer to this problem, but Shaw would say that it just isn’t true—moral realism of some form. If values are real—leaving aside what real would mean—then such a thing as “recognized moral expertise” would be possible. The problem would be to convince a culture that one moral answer is better than another—closer, at least, to true. This would be difficult but not insurmountable. It would be a task that one might attempt. As things stand, Shaw must remain essentially hopeless—as was Nietzsche. So, why should she even hold out the possibility of achieving political legitimacy? Should she not admit that this is now impossible and we are doomed? Why does she lack the fortitude to face the facts? I suggest that her inability to do this stems from Shaw’s unwillingness to give up. Good for her. I suggest, however, that she then get to work and stop lamenting. Are there real values or not?