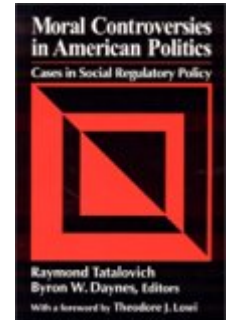


Raymond Tatalovich, Byron W. Daynes, eds.. *Moral Controversies in American Politics: Cases in Social Regulatory Policy*. Armonk, N.Y. and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1998. xxxiv + 283 pp. \$92.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-56324-993-8.



Reviewed by Jan C. Hardt

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The purpose of this book is to examine eight areas of moral controversy, by looking at the institutions of American politics, and how other political actors such as interest groups and the media have worked to shape these issues on the political agenda. As a result, this book is similar to many "political issue" books that endeavor to give students a wide background in issues confronting policy makers in American politics. However, this book does not use the point-counterpoint format that is common among books in introductory American politics classes. That has both its advantages and disadvantages as discussed below. Instead, each controversy in this book is organized as a case study, where the various political actors (Congress, the President, the Judiciary, interest groups, public opinion, the media, professional groups, etc.) are discussed somewhere within each chapter. As a result, this book while suitable for some advanced introductory American politics students, is probably most appropriate for sophomore/junior/senior college students. This book would be great as a public policy text in advanced American politics, public policy, civil

rights and liberties, and contemporary political issue classes.

This book seems to have both its strengths and its weaknesses. On the positive side, by avoiding the point-counterpoint format, this book seems to recognize that not every issue has just two sides. By creating public policy books that examine only two sides to every issue, we leave the impression that every issue has only two sides, thus missing many of the nuances and coalitions that create our public policies. Abortion is a fine case in point. Although there are certainly the pro-choice and pro-life positions, public opinion surveys show that most Americans when asked to examine their views further are not solidly in either camp. Many Americans find abortion acceptable when used in the case of the potential death of the mother or when rape or incest is involved, but find abortion less acceptable when used as a contraceptive device or as a limit on family size. Moreover, there are many Americans who find abortion unacceptable given any circumstance. Thus, the case studies as presented here help students to recognize that each of these controver-

sies does not divide equally among two issue positions. However, this can be a disadvantage as well. By not organizing this book according to issue positions, this can make it more difficult for the introductory student to understand the various sides on a political issue.

Another strength of this book is its documentation. From the various laws passed by Congress to the numerous Supreme Court cases discussed, this book made sure that it covered each issue thoroughly. Rather than include a comprehensive bibliography at the end, this book included extensive notes at the end of each chapter as well as a court case index at the end. Thus, even if I did not use this book in one of my classes, I would wholeheartedly recommend this book to my students. Often, students come to my office seeking books on such controversial topics for papers they plan to write for other classes. This would be a book that I would recommend to such students because of its documentation.

A third strength of its book was the way it covered American politics. Often when covering American politics, many political scientists focus most of their attention on the Congress and the President, sometimes at the expense of numerous other political actors. Fortunately, this book does both very well. It not only provides detailed information about how Congress and the President have handled each controversy, but it also looks at the Supreme Court, interest groups, professional groups, the media, public opinion, and numerous other actors. Each case study includes separate subtitled sections on interest groups, the media, public opinion, etc., that are appropriate for that moral controversy. Thus, for students this would be a great book to show them how these political actors work in practice. The way this book is organized, however, is a disadvantage for students as well. While recognizing that some actors are more important than others on some issues, the organization of this book does make it harder for students to compare how interest

groups or public opinion acted across on several issues, because each chapter is not organized in the same way.

Finally, this book in both its foreword and introduction contain two great theoretical introductions to this topic. The foreword, by Theodore Lowi, replicates several of his public policy typologies--the different types of public policy, how policies are defined in mainstream and radical politics, and the different dimensions of policy. Not only are these categorizations described in full detail, but Lowi also provides several helpful, explanatory charts as well. Similarly, in the introduction, the editors provide their definition of social regulatory politics, as well as a complete explanation of status anxiety and identity politics. Both of these efforts are beneficial to students because they make an effort to show students how these different moral controversies are linked. Unfortunately, except for the concluding chapter, these two theoretical avenues were unevenly explored throughout the rest of the book. While the last chapter does make an effort to do this, it seems to come too late for students who have been trying to figure out how mainstream/radical politics or status anxiety related to each of these issues.

Overall, this is a good book that I would recommend to students and professors alike. This book helps students by not only providing lots of detail about the various actors in American politics, but because it is very well-documented, particularly in the congressional and judicial history of each controversy. For professors, I would recommend adopting this book in the more advanced American politics, public policy, and civil rights/liberties classes that could benefit from the information but also handle some of the format problems that made this book slightly harder to read.

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