



In Praise of Intransigence: The Perils of Flexibility

Richard H. Weisberg

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Flexibility is usually seen as a virtue in today's world. Even the dictionary seems to dislike those who stick too hard to their own positions. The thesaurus links "intransigence" to a whole host of words signifying a distaste for loyalty to fixed positions: intractable, stubborn, Pharisaic, close-minded, and stiff-necked, to name a few.

In this short and provocative book, constitutional law professor Richard H. Weisberg asks us to reexamine our collective cultural bias toward flexibility, open-mindedness, and compromise. He argues that flexibility has not fared well over the course of history. Indeed, emergencies both real and imagined have led people to betray their soundest traditions.

Weisberg explores the rise of flexibility, which he traces not only to the Enlightenment but further back to early Christian reinterpretation of Jewish sacred texts. He illustrates his argument with historical examples from Vichy France and the occupation of the British Channel Islands during World War II as well as post-9/11 betrayals of sound American traditions against torture, eavesdropping, unlimited detention, and drone killings.

Despite the damage wrought by Western society's incautious embrace of flexibility over the past two millennia, Weisberg does not make the case for unthinking rigidity. Rather, he argues that a willingness to embrace intransigence allows us to recognize that we have beliefs worth holding on to -- without compromise.

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