WOUNDED LEVIATHAN

John Brenkman: *The Cultural Contradictions of Democracy: Political Thought Since September 11* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007. Pp. 1, 205. $29.95.)

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How have the United States' "global war on terror" and the invasion of Iraq and its subsequent occupation affected contemporary political thought? How can political theorists make sense of these tumultuous times and provide insights for a new ethics that can guide American politics at home and abroad? John Brenkman, a distinguished professor of English and Comparative Literature at the City University of New York, starts out this provocative book arguing that the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 fostered a sense of collective victimhood, which convinced most Americans that their nation was vulnerable to new threats. In this environment, Americans lost their critical faculties and strongly believed that military power and the spread of the nation's democratic values in the wider Middle East would restore the nation's security. Thus, the United States, described by Brenkman as "a wounded, half-blind leviathan," has been engaged in a complex geopolitical struggle, but it has been unaware of the "fragility of democracy at home and the difficulty of inaugurating it abroad" (p. 9).

For Brenkman, al Qaeda's terrorism campaign is a byproduct of "Islam's geo-civil war" (p. 17). Agreeing with the Bush administration, he believes that a strategy of containment will not be able to shield the Western world from these threats. Thus, although Brenkman believes that the United States' reactions to the September 11 attacks have created a more dangerous world, he deems the "war against terrorism a necessity in which the democratic world will be engaged for several years" (p. 16). In this light, the invasion of Iraq was not "immoral or illegal," but "ill-advised" and "ill-conceived," while the post-war occupation was "unconscionable" (p. 16).

Brenkman's analyses of the Bush administration's foreign policy chart the tension between Americans' desire to spread their political ideals and their desire for a strategy that advances the nation's more narrow interests. Hoping for a future based on Immanuel Kant's perpetual peace, but informed by the logic of Thomas Hobbes's realism, Americans have decided to use their country's military power unilaterally to advance its democratic ideals, while often ignoring strategies based on diplomacy and multilateralism. For Brenkman, the problem is not the inherent tensions found in contemporary U.S. foreign policy. Instead, due to post–September 11 feelings of victimhood and vulnerability, Americans have failed to comprehend Max Weber's maxim that "the ethics of political life must include an awareness of politics' inherent potential for tragedy" (p. 3). In this respect, Americans have used their power with little thought regarding their responsibility to their own traditions and to

others' needs and interests, atrophying their ability to judge the morality of their government's actions at home and abroad. He asks his audience to consider a new ethics, informed by Weber's views on politics, but built on the works of Hannah Arendt and Isaiah Berlin.

While Arendt's and Berlin's views are difficult to fuse, Brenkman argues that this tension is the foundation of a healthy democracy. Arendt's insights on self-rule and freedom serve as a reminder that citizen participation and public deliberation define politics in a democracy. In this manner, governmental action reflects the competing interests and values of a diverse citizenry. Arendt also stresses the frailty of democracy, suggesting that the principles that define democracies dissipate once government carries out policies that are not in line with the will of the people. Berlin's differentiation between positive liberty and negative liberty is also important as the former can give life to "revolutionary schemes" (p. 184) that impinge on individuals' freedom. Thus, he promotes a negative sense of liberty, where citizens could be free from the dictates of governments. Thus, the democratic state is one that recognizes the autonomy of the private sphere and does not interfere in this realm. As Brenkman puts it, Arendt's and Berlin's judgments capture the "civic and the liberal dimensions of modern democracy" (p. 16). How can Americans reclaim control over their democratic tradition and still spread their values around the world? One important suggestion is that Americans must "take a real look at the destructiveness [of their] own acts" (p. 22) and take responsibility for their actions. Only then can they keep in check the country's tendency to treat freedom as the ability to enforce its values on others. Thus, Americans must understand that they need to work with others to establish new political institutions abroad that enhance citizen participation and promote other democratic principles.

Brenkman's book also criticizes the neo-conservative ideas of Robert Kagan and other theorists associated with this tradition. This analysis allows him to assess the Bush administration's rationale for its actions after the September 11 attacks. Although sympathetic with the government's desire to spread democracy in the Arab world, he questions the means and the ideas that have influenced this strategy. Brenkman also critiques the work of radical thinkers such as Giorgio Agambe, and that of Left intellectuals as Noam Chomsky and Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt. He also challenges the views of liberals like Paul Berman and Jürgen Habermas. Brenkman believes that these political theorists' criticisms of the Bush administration's reactions are hollow as they have failed to see the significance of the struggle against terrorism and the need to address "Islam's geo-civil war." Of course, not everybody will agree with Berkman's interpretations of their works, but his willingness to interact with their works must be seen as an invitation to political theorists representing different perspectives to debate the causes of terrorism, the impact the attacks had on the United States, and the justifications that have animated the Bush administration's policies.

This book has one important limitation: Brenkman's decision to explain what he means by "Islam's geo-civil war" in the penultimate chapter, rather than in the introduction. Had he done the latter, Brenkman would have made a better case for his decision to criticize the works of other political thinkers and it would have been easier for the reader to follow the logic of his argument. This criticism aside, this is a thought-provoking book that deserves serious consideration. His decision to combine Arendt's views with Berlin's opinions is an important contribution to current scholarly debates on the Bush administration's reactions to the September 11 attacks. Finally, Brenkman's book is a timely intervention at a time when a new leadership takes control over the executive branch.

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DEMOCRACY AS THE CURE FOR DEMOCRACY

Leif Lewin: *Democratic Accountability: Why Choice in Politics Is Both Possible and Necessary* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007. Pp. vi, 247. $45.00.)

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In *Democratic Accountability,* Leif Lewin challenges the claims of politicians in Western democracies that the problems with or failures of their policies can often be attributed to incompetent or unresponsive bureaucracies, the inexorable forces of history and globalization, or unexpected, disappointing outcomes in their policies despite their well-intentioned decisions. Lewin's thesis and findings persuasively and skillfully refute the above perceptions or excuses of Western democratic leaders and provide seven case studies as "counterexamples" to such ideas as "history is predetermined," "nation-states must go to war," and "globalization wipes out the freedom to choose" (p. 7). The organization of Lewin's book and its major ideas are cogently illustrated by several diagrams.

Lewin provides a broad, deep, and useful literature review of democratic, policymaking, and other relevant academic theories. He surveys, compares, and analyzes the ideas and research of Robert Dahl, Arend Lijphart, Joseph Schumpeter, Anthony Downs, Francis Fukuyama, Alexander George, and Seymour Lipset on such topics as pluralism, historicism, competition among policymaking elites, bureaucratic power, and the gap between academics and politicians in American foreign policy. In general, Lewin argues that theories and practices in Western democracies should reject fatalistic determinism: an elitist perception that politicians merely need to develop a docile consensus among their citizens in order to have the concealed, discretionary power to formulate and legitimize their policy decisions, and that such international forces and organizations as the United Nations and