

for simple game-theoretic equilibrium models of political choice will necessarily be tempered by the realization, after reading this book, that such equilibria appear to float on a sea of chaos.

Austen-Smith and Banks, along with their colleagues John Duggan and Michel Le Breton, have made vigorous efforts in the last few years to understand the relationship between the contradictory results of social choice and game theory. The death of Banks just before Christmas 2000 saddened everyone who knew him. Without his deep intelligence and acute perception it will be that much more difficult to build on the work presented in this volume.

East Meets West: Human Rights and Democracy in East Asia. By Daniel A. Bell. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000. 396p. \$65.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

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"I continue to believe," states Brian Barry (*Justice as Impartiality*, 1995, p. 3), "in the possibility of putting forward a universally valid case in favor of liberal egalitarian principles." Barry's belief is not idiosyncratic but widely shared by Western intellectuals. In fact, a traditional trademark of Western philosophy has been to insist on the universal validity of its teachings, while relegating other cultures and ideas to a merely contingent or particularistic status. The belief tends to be shared by much of Western social science. Thus, political science as practiced in America is assumed to be a globally applicable discipline. As part of political science, comparative politics is said to offer a universally relevant scheme or grid, just as rational choice theory claims to provide a general explanation of social behavior irrespective of time and place. In this respect, recent philosophy and political theory show signs of a counterinsurgency aimed not at a simplistic relativism but at the cultivation of a stronger sense of the contestability of dominant frameworks and disciplinary paradigms. Contestation, of course, cannot be a one-way street but must allow for mutual questioning. *East Meets West* is an exemplar of this insurgency. Written in dialogue form, the book is liable to erode absolutist claims on all sides and thus to induce a greater readiness for mutual listening and learning.

Although more broadly relevant, *East Meets West* limits cross-cultural learning and contestation to the East Asian context, focusing specifically on debates around the notion of "Asian values." As Bell emphasizes, the point of his book is not simply to debunk Western liberal democracy and its tenet of universal rights but to make room and provide a hearing for East Asian challenges and arguments, particularly those that address "West-centric perspectives" (pp. 4–6). Attentiveness to such arguments, in his view, is required not only for theoretical reasons—their possibly innovative contributions—but also for practical political motives. If we fail to engage seriously with East Asian perspectives, we risk "widening misunderstanding and setting the stage for hostilities that could otherwise have been avoided" (p. 8). Bell's respect for cultural diversity does not prompt him to overvalue cultural traditions or to take "culture too seriously" (p. 9). After all, cultural traditions are always multiple, partially constructed, and part and parcel of evolving social-political and existential experiences. To avoid the temptation of mummifying traditions, Bell insists, it is important to distinguish "between traditional values that are still relevant today and others that have been relegated to the dustbin of history" (p. 10). To maintain contact with real-life issues, it is hence

desirable to limit one's focus to values "that continue to have widespread impact on people's political behavior in contemporary societies." (p. 10)

The dialogue of the book is divided into three parts and occurs in three different localities: Hong Kong, Singapore, and mainland China. It thus reflects a steadily deepening engagement with East Asian core beliefs. The lead character throughout is an individual named Sam Demo, a program officer for a fictitious American nongovernmental organization, National Endowment for Human Rights and Democracy (NEHRD). In Hong Kong, Demo engages in dialogue with a human rights activist and businessman; in Singapore, with a leading politician (Lee Kuan Yew); and in mainland China, with a political philosopher. Part 1, located almost accidentally in Hong Kong, offers general theoretical reflections on democracy and human rights, and these reverberate throughout the remainder of the book. In Bell's words (pp. 13–4), the discussion here seeks to throw into relief not the untenability of human rights but the importance of "substantial local knowledge" for the assessment of their range and limits; such knowledge may also reveal resources for buttressing human rights practices in indigenous ways while simultaneously leavening and complicating the agenda of Western rights activists. These points are fleshed out in greater detail in part 2, with reference to the specific political realities of Singapore. Countering the arguments of the elder statesman (Lee Kuan Yew) against democracy and human rights, Demo (or Bell) tries to show the compatibility of democracy with local "communitarian" values by emphasizing both the utility of the former for the latter and the usefulness of communitarianism for the pursuit of democratic goals. Adopting mainly a pragmatic or "consequentialist" line of reasoning, Bell notes that "strategic considerations of political relevance strongly speak in favor of communitarian justifications for democracy in Singapore, and perhaps in other East Asian societies as well" (pp. 16–7).

Part 3, devoted to mainland China, offers perhaps the most intriguing and also controversial reflections on the topic of the book. The dialogue is set in Beijing in June 2007, one day before a constitutional convention is to take place on political reform in China. Leaving behind merely pragmatic-consequentialist arguments, the discussion aims to construct a normative case for a distinctive Chinese approach to democracy, an approach that incorporates the traditional Confucian respect for rule by an intellectual elite. Tackling the question whether there are aspects of East Asian traditions that can provide a "moral foundation" for political practices and institutions different from Western-style liberal democracy, part 3 responds resolutely in the affirmative (pp. 18–9). At issue is a reform proposal, advanced by a professor at Beijing University, that would combine liberal democracy with elements of traditional Confucianism, particularly the legacy of guidance by a group of competent and public-spirited intellectuals/scholars. More concretely, the proposal aims at the establishment of a bicameral legislature with a democratically elected lower house and an upper chamber composed of representatives selected on the basis of competitive examinations. In the course of the debate, Demo (or Bell) is "eventually persuaded by the proposal, though he presses the point that the 'House of Scholars' should be constitutionally subordinate to the democratically elected house."

For Western (especially American) readers, Bell's book provides ample food for thought as well as a lively reading experience. Given its aim of nurturing cross-cultural encoun-

ters, the dialogical structure of the book practices what it preaches, which vindicates the author's claim that "the medium is part of the message" (p. 11). Throughout its complex discussions, the book demonstrates Bell's subtle and dialogical bent of mind—that he is not merely a detached onlooker but a seriously engaged participant in contemporary East Asian debates. Given this bent, he would welcome (one surmises) some critical comments, especially when offered in the same dialogical spirit. One small qualm concerns the title of the book, which might have been reversed; over long stretches it is really a case of West meeting East. Still on the level of cross-cultural encounter one can question Bell's assertion that "the most widely publicized challenge to Western liberal democracy has emerged from the East-Asian region" (p. 7). Surely another and perhaps even more explosive challenge has been mounted by elements in Islamic civilization.

A more serious issue has to do with the mingling of pragmatic-consequentialist and normative-philosophical arguments. A book that invites Western readers to "meet the East" must take particular care to present arguments initially persuasive to such readers; appeals to locally pragmatic usefulness are insufficient in this context, as they prejudice questions of justification. As it happens, philosophical resources familiar to Western readers are not lacking and might have been marshaled. Thus, the emphasis on "substantial local knowledge" and the need to reconcile universalism and particularism could gain support from Aristotelian teachings regarding prudential judgment (as well as Hegel's notion of concrete universals).

The issue of normative justification is especially crucial in part 3, which deals with the possible emendation of Western liberal democracy by means of Chinese-Confucian legacies. For many Western liberals, the idea of such an emendation is liable to be anathema; however, outright rejection also means a refusal of reflective learning. Surely, contemporary liberal democracy is not without serious blemishes, ranging from rampant consumerism to voter apathy and public corruption; faced with these defects, friends of democracy should welcome, not simply dismiss, suggestions for improvement. After all, the proposal of the Beijing professor is not altogether alien to the history of Western thought. From Plato's philosopher-king and "nocturnal council," to Aristotle's distinction between corrupt and virtuous modes of popular rule, to Hegel's postulate of a *sittlich* class of civil servants, a long line of Western thinkers have sought to protect the common good against the ravages of factionalism and private self-indulgence.

The issue today is how such notions can be reconciled with the axiom of popular self-government. With specific reference to the "House of Scholars" one may ask: Who guards the guardians, or who examines the examiners? As it seems to me, in a democratic age the protection of the public good shifts from the state to society, which means that public virtue cannot be bestowed "top-down" from the state but must be nurtured among ordinary people (in their local settings). That is why in democracy civic education and voluntary civil associations are important, supplemented occasionally by inspiring *sittlich* leaders (such as Gandhi or Martin Luther King, Jr.). All democrats should worry about the peril of democracy sliding into demagoguery and self-indulgence, and they should vent this concern in public deliberations. Whether or not one agrees with the Beijing proposal, Bell is to be applauded for bringing it to the public forum and thus keeping the dialogue alive.

Oakeshott and His Contemporaries: Montaigne, St. Augustine, Hegel, et al. By Wendell John Coats, Jr. Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, and London: Associated University Presses, 2000. 138p. \$31.50.

Sartre's Radicalism and Oakeshott's Conservatism: The Duplicity of Freedom. By Anthony Farr. London: Macmillan, and New York: St. Martin's, 1998. 266p. \$65.00.

The Skeptic's Oakeshott. By Steven Anthony Gerencser. New York: St. Martin's, 2000. 214p. \$49.95.

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Interest in Michael Oakeshott's political philosophy has been growing for a generation, since the publication of the original edition of his *Rationalism in Politics* (1962), a collection of essays dating from 1947 to 1960. Few then were aware of *Experience and Its Modes* (1933), a book that has since become the subject of much attention as the desire to understand Oakeshott's work as a whole has grown. With the publication of *On Human Conduct* (1975), Oakeshott gave us the work he hoped would confirm his place in the tradition of British political thought going back to Hobbes. Of course, his notable essays on Hobbes are now available in *Hobbes on Civil Association* (2000).

Oakeshott's reception in the United States was mixed. He was branded by liberal critics as a Burkean conservative, irrelevant to the American tradition. But American conservatives have often been cool to Oakeshott's skepticism and apparent lack of strong religious convictions (Irving Kristol and Russell Kirk, among others); Oakeshott is no "movement conservative." He has been called a man of the "right," an aesthete, an elitist, and yet also a postmodernist, a relativist, and an historicist. Yet, Oakeshott has been criticized for not taking politics (or economics) seriously, for seeing politics as a second-rate activity, a "necessary evil," and for insisting that the real strength of civilization lies in art, poetry, and philosophy, whose practitioners do best by remaining aloof from politics.

Oakeshott controversially held to the view that the practical life, although unavoidable and intrusive, is not the foundation of other activities, such as philosophic reflection, historical study, scientific research, or poetic expression. These are not, for him, peculiar ways to carry on the struggles of practical life by other means; rather, they are revelations of the multidimensional character of human experience in which play counters work, enjoyment ambition, conversation debate. Oakeshott thought of himself as a philosopher according to his view of philosophy. His interest in the policy debates that affect much philosophy in our time was modest, and he was as likely to criticize a conservative mixing politics and philosophy together as he was a liberal or a radical.

Philosophy, he thought, seeks to understand, not to prescribe, to reveal and describe the assumptions that people make in order to make sense of the world for themselves and to justify the conclusions they reach. Philosophy, for Oakeshott, is in the indicative mood; to philosophize is to disengage, not to intervene. To consider politics philosophically is, in Oakeshott's view, to describe the necessary character of political activity in its ceaseless efforts at preserving and changing; it is not to prescribe courses of action. In revealing the character of politics, philosophers have done what, as philosophers, they can do. They have no authority to direct politics derived from their philosophical understanding, because to act politically they must, like everyone else, accept uncritically some presuppositions for the purposes of action, thus leaving philosophy behind; they cannot unite theory and practice. Those who seek to do this may use philosophic ideas to lend support to their political dispositions, but they are