BOOK REVIEWS

Political Theory

Positive Political Theory I: Collective Preference. By David Austen-Smith and Jeffrey S. Banks. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999. 208p. $39.50.

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This study is intended as the first of a two-volume presentation of positive political theory. As the authors indicate in the preface, in this volume they develop what may be termed Arrovian direct preference aggregation, a theory that examines the properties of a direct aggregation rule, f, mapping from a domain of preference profiles on a set, X. For any profile, ρ, the image of f is a social preference relation denoted $f(\rho)$. The social relation may exhibit maximal or unbeaten outcomes, $mf(\rho)$, in X itself. Thus, the volume is concerned with the "classification" of all social rules that map from preference profiles into X itself.

An alternative way to study social preference is to incorporate strategic behavior by individuals. Such a theory constructs a behavioral map, b, say, from preference profiles to a strategy space, denoted S. In this game-theoretic context, the behavioral map will be induced by appropriate psychological theories of "rationality," by the nature of the strategy space S, and by the rules of the game, including f. Finally, the "outcome" function, g, aggregates strategies into outcomes, in X itself.

Typically, the behavioral map is assumed to select Nash equilibrium strategies $N(S,g,\rho)$ of the "game" (S,g,ρ) defined by preferences, strategies, and outcome functions. In actual political contexts the players will include not only an electorate but also more complex entities, such as parties, interest groups, and institutions. The "primitive" theory abstracts away from this complexity, however, by considering what may be called a simple committee. In such committees, complicated agenda rules, and so on, are ignored. In this context there may be an isomorphism between the direct aggregation theory and the indirect game-theoretic model, but only when a core exists. The core, $C_f(\rho)$, at the profile ρ and under the rule f is simply the set of unbeaten alternatives in X. When this set is nonempty, the Nash equilibrium of the induced game $(S,g\rho)$ should coincide with the core.

In essence, the present volume studies those conditions on f and ρ sufficient for core existence. Chapters 1 and 2 construct the fundamental building blocks of the primitive theory by carefully defining the properties of preference relations and by showing essentially that the social relation will itself be "rational" only when there are veto groups in the society. In particular, an elegant proof of Arrow's General Possibility Theorem is presented: Only if the social rule, f, is dictatorial can $f(\rho)$ be transitive for all transitive individual preferences.

Transitivity is an unnecessarily strong property for core existence, however. A weaker sufficient property is "acyclicity." As Kotaro Nakamura showed in 1979, if the set of alternatives X is finite, then f is "classified" by a number, denoted $s(f)$ and called the Nakamura number. If f is simple, in the sense that it is characterized by its winning coalitions, then $f(\rho)$ is "acyclic" for any ρ whenever the cardinality of X is bounded above by $s(f) - 1$. If the cardinality of X is at least $s(f)$, then a profile can be constructed such that $f(\rho)$ is both cyclic and has an empty core. The results of chapter 3 on restricting cardinality of X are then complemented by chapter 4, in which restrictions on profiles themselves are shown to be sufficient for existence of a core.

Whereas the first four chapters assume X is finite, chapters 5 and 6 develop the model when X is a subset of Euclidean space, $\Re^{\kappa}$. The main result of chapter 5 extends Nakamura's result by showing that the condition $\kappa \leq s(f) - 2$ is both necessary and sufficient for core existence (when individual preferences are assumed to be both "continuous" and "convex"). The final part of chapter 5 develops the theory when preferences are induced from smooth utilities. In 1967, Charles Plott (*The Probability of a Cyclical Majority*) essentially showed that a point was a core, under majority rule, if and only if the gradients of individual voters could be paired off. This result was extended by Richard McKelvey and Norman Schofield ("Generalized Symmetry Conditions at a Core Point," *Econometrica* 55 [July 1987]: 923–33) in 1987, who demonstrated that a particular gradient condition, for any voting rule, was both necessary and sufficient for core existence at a point. This technique leads to the main result, due to Jeffrey Banks and Don Saari.

The resulting "generic" classification or "chaos" theorem is based on Thom Transversality Theory. ("Generic" refers to an open-dense set in the topological space, U, of all smooth utility profiles. The topology involved is very fine, using information encoded in the gradients.) As an illustration, suppose f is induced from a simple rule, whereby any coalition of size q or above, out of n, is winning. Then f is generically classified by an integer $\sigma(q,n) \equiv 2q - n + \beta(q,n)$. Here $\beta(q,n)$ is a correction term that can be calculated explicitly. For majority rule $\beta = 0$, while $\beta(n - 1, n) = \frac{n-5}{2}$.

In particular, the core of f is generically (or almost always) empty whenever $\kappa > \sigma(q,n)$. For majority rule with n odd, this integer is 1; for n even it is 2. When the core is empty, voting cycles can "fill" the policy space X.

These results, first noted in a less general form about twenty-five years ago, led William Riker ("Implication from the Disequilibrium of Majority Rule for the Study of Institutions," *American Political Science Review* 74 [September 1980]: 432–46) to conclude that, "in the long run, nearly anything can happen in politics."

This core generic nonexistence result has led theorists in the last decade to focus on the indirect, game-theoretic model as the basis for positive political theory. As Austen-Smith and Banks observe, however, in the form of their last corollary, the theorem can be interpreted as follows. Consider a game form (S,g) for the social rule f on X, such that the Nash equilibrium $N(S,g,\rho)$ is always nonempty. If f has no vetoers, and if the dimension κ of X exceeds $2(n - 2)$, then for almost every profile, ρ, it is the case that, whenever $x \in N(S,g,\rho)$ there is a point $y \in X$ preferred to x by at least $(n - 1)$ individuals.

Although the game-theoretic models attempt to avoid the chaos theorem, it reappears as a generic nondemocratic result. Austen-Smith and Banks prefer to use the weak dimension restriction of $2(n - 2)$, valid for any f (without vetoers), but the result also could be stated for majority rule: If $\kappa \geq 3$, then for almost every profile ρ, if x is a Nash equilibrium of (S,g,ρ), a majority prefer some y to x.

Overall, the volume is an extremely lucid and self-contained presentation. It collects together every important result of the fifty years of research in this field, since Kenneth Arrow's book in 1951. The first four chapters use fairly well understood techniques and could readily be used in an introductory graduate class. Chapters 5 and 6 are increasingly more difficult but reward close study. In fact, readers will realize why Riker was moved to make his assertion about the fundamental feature of politics. Moreover, any enthusiasm

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 Confuciansim, 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-