editorial

In this issue of *EPS Reviews*, David Robertson, in his review of David Runciman's *Politics of Good Intentions*, raises an interesting question about the claims on our attention made by academics when they stray outside their specialisations and write in genres different from those of the learned journal article or the monograph. He focuses on practitioners of what he calls the 'public essay'.

> *"It consists, as far as I can see, of very clever people writing about things they are not actually experts in, and freed from all the normal academic obligations to cite evidence, to justify assertions, and above all, to make arguments in depth. Aphorisms abound, and ideas which one desperately wants to see spelled out so that one can evaluate and learn from them are thrown casually down with no development".*

Robertson's comments are polemical and involve an attack on the *London Review of Books* which he thinks of as the home of British Public Essayism, compared to the *Times Literary Supplement* where, he claims, there are 'real experts talking about something they know a lot about'. There is almost a hint here of classic British anti-intellectualism in the preference for scholars sticking to their specialisations and meticulously footnoting their sources as well as the implied unseemliness of going around uncovered by a decent bibliography.

Such scholarly practise is never to be lightly dismissed, but there is not much evidence to show that it has ever provided an easy passage to wide readership. Yet, the other qualities that make for good scholarship – command of sources, argumentative acumen, critical judgement, and (sometimes) linguistic dexterity – are also those that make for engaging public essays. Robertson does not provide a precise definition of what counts as a public essay, but it will involve a range of variables wider than the ones he mentions above and would surely include some of the following: the role of authors and their claims to be recognised (as scholars, politicians, opinion-makers, public intellectuals); the place of publication and its reach and authority (a major newspaper, a weekly, a think-tank's web-site); the genre involved and the authors' intentions (polemic, commentary, book-review, exhortation, denunciation, disclosure, etc.). It would be fascinating to carry out a comparative European survey of the phenomenon. *EPS Reviews* deals largely with scholarly books written by professionals and reviewed by professionals for other professionals. However, it is interesting to look at this year's contents bearing in mind some of the comments above.

John Bruton, who is a European politician and currently the EU's ambassador in Washington, turns his attention to the latest offering of John Gillingham, a well-known American scholar of the history of European integration. But Gillingham here is not in scholarly mode: his book, *Design for a New Europe*, is decidedly polemical: his proposals include cutting the staff of the European Commission from 18,000 to 500; and disposing of the EU's properties. Bruton counter-attacks, claiming to find incoherences in Gillingham's proposals and is motivated to offer his own proposal for furthering the currently stalled European project through the adoption of *ad hoc* democratic mechanisms such as the popular election of the President of the European Commission. It is interesting

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that Washington's Cato Institute made the same match as *EPS* and organized a debate between the ambassador and the professor in September 2006.

On the surface Glyn Morgan's review of Stefano Bartolini's *Restructuring Europe* is a classic scholarly book review of Bartolini's highly theoretical account of European integration as a sixth stage of European historical development conceived along Rokkanian lines. But moving towards his conclusion, Morgan touches more and more on public issues to do with democracy, legitimacy, and stability and points to the same concerns in Bartolini himself: 'this entire book can be read as a powerful defence of the nation-state; a polity that unifies political practices, institutions, and identities, thereby providing citizens with a sense of political agency'. Furthermore, writes Morgan of Bartolini 'he cannot conceal his worries that this new sixth stage will never be able to match the achievements of the nation-state in the fields of democratic representation and social solidarity'. Perhaps, such an interpretation is not surprising from a normative theorist and author of *The Idea of a European Superstate: Public Justification and European Integration* (Morgan, 2005).

Gianfranco Pasquino who reviews recent Italian books on the 'never-ending' Italian transition will be well known to readers of *EPS* as a prolific scholar. To those who are familiar with the Italian scene, he is also well known as a regular political commentator whether on television or in the editorial pages of leading Italian newspapers. In the past, he has also been an active member of the Italian Senate and a member of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs. Part of his review is devoted to Giovanni Sartori, winner of the ECPR's 2005 Lifetime Achievement Award, but better known in Italian public life as a regular political commentator both on television and in the editorial of *Corriere della Sera* from whose pages *Mala Costituzione e altri malanni* has largely been culled. In fact, given the closeness of the 2006 Italian electoral outcome, it could be claimed that Sartori's efforts were in part responsible for the victory of the centre-left and Prodi's elevation to the premiership (always presuming that more voters were convinced by Sartori's arguments than the contrary). In the English-speaking world whose Italian expatriate votes proved crucial in depriving the governing coalition of a senate majority, perceptions of Berlusconian exceptionalism were shaped more by journalists such as Tobias Jones, David Lane and Alexander Stille, rather than by academic scholars, though the historian Paul Ginsborg is here a notable and important exception.

A central question, raised in John Madeley's review of recent books on religion and politics, is that of the relationship between the public and the private. Academic research is largely carried out in publicly funded institutions and is subject to rules of transparency, openness, and impartiality but rarely attracts much public attention. Religion, on the other hand, is considered by many to belong to a purely private sphere where claims about what is essentially non-justifiable in rational terms are quarantined. Yet, it is religion and issues touching on religious beliefs and identity that generate a great deal of public heat and noise, often in the form of public essays that could benefit from the introduction of academic protocols. Madeley argues for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between religion and the state based on the revival of a modernised version of 'antidisestablishmentarianism' involving public recognition and support of 'communities of conviction', but he expects opposition both from secular liberals and radical religious activists: '[f]or very different reasons they both favour open

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markets in matters of religion, the secular liberals because they believe that in such an environment religion will be deprived of artificial supports on which it should have no claim and the religious radicals because in such an environment merely conventional religion will fade in favour of more authentic religious forms which demand higher levels of commitment'.

Three of our contributors review books dealing with issues of wide public concern and impact. Kees van Kersbergen tackles some of the extensive literature on the fate of the welfare state and addresses the question of the mutual interaction of the political and social spheres. Andreas Dür looks at recent work dealing with EU trade policy, which, as a keystone of globalisation and all it entails, probably has more effect on our daily lives than many other elite-driven projects. Max Spinner's review looks at the results of a global research project on democratisation in which 'a multinational group of well-established scholars in the field set about the ambitious endeavour of investigating the consolidation of democracy on a global scale, comparing the most successful cases of third-wave democratising countries from four continents and looking at the preconditions and outcomes of regime changes'.

Finally, Michael Keating reviews two books dealing in different ways with the phenomenon of the Celtic Tiger, which has generated a great deal of interest not only from the commentariat of public essayists, but also from scholars of different disciplines. He finishes his review with that observation that '[i]t will be a welcome conclusion to readers of this journal that political scientists can do better than economists in explaining these matters, but we still have a long way to go towards a real comparative understanding'.

We conclude this year's issue of *EPS Reviews* with a bibliography of the scholarly publications of Robert Wokler who died in July 2006. Even scholars at their most scholarly cannot avoid involvement in the public sphere, because the practice of scholarship itself has political implications. In a letter of May 2005 protesting at a proposal by Britain's Association of University Teachers (AUT) to introduce a ban on academic contact with Israeli universities, Wokler wrote that a professional association such as the AUT '…ought almost above all others to be devoted to free speech, collaborative research, the permeability of borders in the international republic of letters, and the critical exchange of ideas' (Wokler, 2005).

The clarity of concepts, the acceptability of evidence, and the validity of arguments available for incorporation into public discourse depend on the existence of established practices of rigorous scholarship and the operation of open systems of academic self-criticism. However, such is the current state of the world that some might like to append 'if only' to the previous sentence. As a small contribution to the dissemination of scholarly research, we have added to some of our reviews reading lists of recent publications in the relevant field. The choice of titles is the editor's alone and *EPS's* reviewers are not responsible for any occurrences or omissions.

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