greater equality of economic opportunity, and ultimately support national defense. Chan finds an underlying Aristotelian logic here: a good life—or at the least the American way of life—made possible through the fiscal policies of wise statesmen who recognize the manifold benefits of commerce. Hamilton's commercial republic sought to employ "economic policy to forge Americans into a frugal, industrious, temperate, orderly, prudent, liberal, and law-abiding people" (p. 140). Though this interpretation strikes me as too classical in the tight connection it assumes in Hamilton's mind between good lives and good policy, Chan is right to remind readers just how instrumental commerce is for accomplishing Hamilton's primary ends: national security and a strong central government. Protecting domestic manufacturing, for example, has the potential for leading to technical innovation crucial in modern warfare. Sound public credit is equally useful for securing foreign assistance in times of conflict. In this way, commercial activity is a necessary addition to the classical military virtues of strength and courage. Hamilton saw close links among commercial, political, and social ties and recognized how advantageous it was for federal power and for the creation of a national identity for the central government to assume state revolutionary war debts and to establish sound public credit. Such fiscal policies would contribute to the strength of the central government by joining its fate to that of powerful economic interests.

By inviting us to see Hamilton as a prudent statesman, the book reveals otherwise hidden affinities between Hamilton and the classical tradition. Yet such heavily laden concepts as "prudence" and "statesmanship" used uncritically may themselves be impediments to a more complete inquiry into Hamilton's thought. "Is Hamilton a prudent statesman in Aristotelian terms" is a guiding question that severely limits inquiry into the origins, contradictions, lacunae, and ultimately, the significance of his policies. Although in all fairness the book is devoted to the quasi-classical sensibility of Hamilton's political economy, it is still strange, for example, for Chan to neglect Hamilton's views on the proper power of the executive branch, and to fail to attend more critically to Hamilton's brand of federalism in which the central government would clearly dominate state governments. These are controversial and difficult strands of Hamiltonian statesmanship that prudent scholars and citizens alike should consider.

Pessimism: Philosophy, Ethic, Spirit. By Joshua Foa Dienstag. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006. 314p. $35.00.
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— Ryan Patrick Hanley, *Marquette University*

This stimulating book has two aims, one descriptive and one normative. Its first goal is to provide an "appraisal" of pessimism and recover it "as an important tradition in the history of political thought" alongside more familiar -isms. Its second goal is to offer an "endorsement" of this neglected tradition and "reanimate" it by presenting its "appeal" in such a way as to "recreate it" in us (pp. ix, xii–xiii, 265, 271).

On the former front it is an unqualified success. Its first chapter presents pessimism's core ideas: "that time is a burden; that the course of history is in some sense ironic; that freedom and happiness are incompatible; and that human existence is absurd" (p. 19). In developing the connections between these, Joshua Foa Dienstag argues that pessimism results from consciousness of the tragedy of man's time-bound existence. Where optimism is characterized by a faith in progress founded on acceptance of linear temporality, pessimistic awareness of our predicament "liberates" us from the optimist's false hope that the future will be better than the past (p. 110). Against optimism's "endless deferral of freedom," pessimism "makes freedom possible *now*" (p. 247). Its freedom thus lies in a rejection of "transcendental meanings" (p. 198 f.), and an embrace of a "remarkable diversity of trajectories" (p. 185). Life is best regarded, as by Don Quixote, as a "quest-for-no-object" rather than a quest for happiness or virtue (p. 194), and pessimism's freedom is necessary in order to fortify us "to a degree sufficient to confront our condition without lapsing into despair" (p. 81). Pessimism is therefore less a systematic philosophy than a "'form of life'" (p. xi)—"a philosophy of personal conduct, rather than public order" (p. 7).

The book's second part examines historical expressions of pessimism, with one chapter each on "cultural" (Rousseau and Leopardi), "metaphysical" (Schopenhauer and Freud), and "existential" (Camus, Unamuno, and E. M. Cioran) variations. Together they reconsider "the history of Western political thought since the Renaissance" (p. 266). Remarkably, this project is largely a success thanks to Dienstag's careful scholarship. His historical study of the development of the concept of linear temporality between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries is excellent (pp. 12 ff.), and through a series of admirably detailed textual interpretations, he succeeds at arguing for the centrality of time-consciousness to each of the thinkers under review. He deserves further commendation for achieving his objective while avoiding simplistic reductionism—as evident, for example, in his recognition of the limits of his thesis for the later Rousseau (p. 74).

The third part of the work turns from description to advocacy, though here again historical thinkers (Nietzsche and Cervantes) are used as a vehicle. But three questions might be raised here. First, who are pessimism's opponents? Dienstag claims that we live in a "relentlessly optimistic world" subject to the "imperialism of optimism" (pp. xi, 202). But who is the enemy at the gates? A note lists names from Virginia Postrel to Terry Eagleton (p. x); elsewhere we get brief references to technology and an "ever-more powerful faith in science" (p. 270).

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But are these the dominant strains of our political or philosophical moment? Reading this one thinks of Nick Bostrom, the Oxford advocate of "transhumanism"—a philosopher, if ever there was one, who believes that an "increase in human mental and technological abilities will inevitably produce a society of happier, freer individuals" (p. 32). But Bostrom has also speculated that the human race has at least a 25% chance of being extinguished before the end of the twenty-first century; even our greatest optimists, it seems, have their pessimistic side. Dienstag himself emphasizes optimism's "Platonic form" and "enlightenment form" (p. 32)—a grouping justified on the grounds that on a certain view "rationalism *is* optimism" (p. 270). But in postmodernism's wake, one wonders whether rationalism is the view that requires redress.

Next, is pessimism the best route to the insights it affords? Nobody likes a Pollyanna, and few will disagree that "it is surely better to live with a clear view of the world than to remain optimistic by averting one's gaze from its fearful and terrible moments" (p. xii). Yet one worries that the pessimist's insights are bought at the cost of blindness to much else. In particular, given his fixation on the "constant presence of death in our lives" (p. 22), there seems little room in the pessimist's worldview (or the book's index) for a range of experiences—virtue, friendship, love, beauty, wonder—that one suspects are hardly the exclusive province of hopelessly blinkered optimists, but daily realities of great numbers. Schopenhauer worries that "life is a business that does not cover the costs" (p. 116), but pessimism may well suffer from a similar accounting problem.

Finally, how will pessimism help us meet the challenges of our present political moment? Dienstag usefully defends pessimism as a route to self-awareness. But what happens when psychology is transformed into political philosophy? We are cautioned not to confuse pessimism with cynicism, skepticism, or nihilism (p. 4). But if it requires a belief in the futility and meaningless of the world, it is hard to imagine that those who act on this belief will act toward others in ways different from nihilists. Dienstag's hope is that the rejection of an "overarching Meaning of Life" will lead us to realize that we can create meaning for ourselves (p. 182). But there are good reasons to be pessimistic about what may happen if this doctrine emerges from the study and into the streets.

Dienstag's study of Don Quixote concludes with the observation that "to be unique is to be different from all the rest, and to follow one's own law is necessarily to run afoul of the laws of the community" (p. 223). The observation is apt. Dienstag's own book is not just a study in political theory but a challenge to its contemporary practice, and for this he deserves our gratitude. His resuscitation of the aphorism, his recovery of philosophy as a way of life, his reorientation of the trajectory of modern political thought—all of this is bold, original, and admirable. In light of such achievements, one hesitates to say he should have done more. But as it stands, the cost of entry to the normative argument is an acceptance of several propositions that will strike some as self-evidently true and others as self-evidently false, including the beliefs that the world offers only "disappointment and boredom" (p. 58); that "the condition of unsatisfied desire is the true constant in our lives" (p. 96); that life is characterized by "the agony of ordinary human existence and the inescapability of it" (p. 133); that strength is a capacity "to tolerate the meaninglessness of life" (p. 178); that sexuality is at its core a "violation of the self" (p. 189); and that "the prospect of a world of constant flux and chaos" should be welcomed (p. 197). *Pessimism* masterfully demonstrates the centrality of these claims to a diverse range of thinkers, but a different sort of book would be necessary to convince the skeptic that such postulates are preferable to hope.

Journeys to the Other Shore: Muslim and Western Travelers in Search of Knowledge. By Roxanne L. Euben. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006. 330p. $29.95.
DOI: 10.1017/S1537592707071617

— Susan McWilliams, *Pomona College*

Travel narratives, as Mikhail Bakhtin once noted, have a dialogic quality. Putting the unfamiliar into conversation with the familiar, they have the capacity to deepen our understanding of each. Travelers themselves have a third voice in this exchange, at times standing in each culture but never becoming located completely in either. At their best, then, travel narratives reflect multiple positions, connect multiple traditions, and speak to multiple audiences. They transgress the boundaries that most people take as given or fixed, and in the resulting blur of borders, they open new conceptual and imaginative spaces.

In those ways, Roxanne Euben's book exemplifies the highest virtues of the travel-narrative form. For hers is not only an investigation into the intellectual linkages between travel and knowledge but also an example of the ways in which those linkages operate; she both discusses and practices theorizing through comparison. Each of the three central chapters couples a text regarded as canonical to Western political thought with a text from the Arabic literary genre of *rihla* (books that recount travels, particularly those undertaken in the pursuit of knowledge). Within and around these striking comparisons, Euben develops a series of arguments that speak across many of the conventional boundaries—or, rather, conceits—of contemporary academic and political life.

The strongest and most arresting of these comparative analyses is in the book's fourth chapter, which sets Rifaʿa Rafiʿ al-Tahtawi next to Alexis de Tocqueville. At first it seems that al-Tahtawi, a young man appointed *imam* for an Egyptian student mission to Paris in 1826, shares little

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