editorial

In the current *London Review of Books* (20 September 2007), Perry Anderson, whose most recent collection is reviewed in this issue by Michael Freeden, has an article entitled 'European Hypocrisies' (although strangely enough the online version is called merely 'Depicting Europe') in which he rails against elitist European narcissism and self-satisfaction regarding their distinctive polity. By contrast, looking at the tables of contents of the past three years of *EPS Reviews*, one is struck by the slant towards the problematical and the ambiguous when talking of Europe whenever a strictly neutral title has not been adopted: the word 'paradox' and its familiars are favourites. In this issue, for example, both Martin Westlake and Michelle Everson use the term when referring to the European Parliament and European political order respectively. Taking things a step further, and running some title keyword searches on European Integration Current Contents, a bibliographical database indexing about 50,000 articles since 1999 from the top journals dealing with European integration,[1] delivers the following results: 'Challenge*' returns 414 items; 'Ambiguit*' or 'dilemma*' or 'paradox*' returns 164 items; 'Success*' or 'Achievement*' returns 113 items; and 'Failure*' returns 73 items. Hardly narcissistic or smug.

Similar searches on Google Scholar return roughly equivalent results of a larger magnitude. Perhaps there is not much to be surprised about here. The study of politics is just as much the study of things going wrong or turning out unexpectedly as of things going according to plan. The immense political achievement scrutinised by one generation of scholars becomes the problematic object of examination of another. Obviously times change and we, along with our political arrangements and values, change in them. What is not so clear is the subsequent fate of socio-political knowledge created by any given generation of scholars. Is it simply added to the stock of knowledge archived in libraries and digital depositories and looked at exclusively by academics? Or is it taken up by party political ideologues, political activists, think-tanks and policy-makers thereby indirectly affecting the object that was under examination and leading to a recursive double, if not triple, hermeneutic of free floating ideas, actors' intentions, institutional outcomes and scholarly investigation?

Freeden, a scholar of political ideologies, is looking at a recent collection of work by Perry Anderson, a university-based intellectual of Marxist provenance, and comments on the risk of being a purveyor of ideas that are without any immediate impact:

> *Denied the opportunity to effect major social and economic change, the left-wing intelligentsia is regrettably reduced to internal conversations with friend and foe alike.* La trahison des clercs *is at the centre of its concerns, in many cases emphatically so over current issues such as Iraq.*

Freeden is broadly sympathetic to Anderson's critique of Rawls for being 'an unabashed incantation of North American values, while at the same time remaining aloof from the political arena with which Rawls professes to connect.' However, he

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adds a further point on the multiple impact of ideas:

> *The subtitle of Spectrum is 'from right to left in the world of ideas' and there is a case for arguing that ideas matter on two diverse dimensions. The one is indeed the impact ideas have on the world of action, and the reflection by ideas of material relations. But the other is the impact ideas have on other ideas, and here Rawls's influence has been tremendous.*

That the gigantic impact of Rawls on the world of academic ideas does not need to be emphasised is obvious from Andrew Mason's book on equality of opportunity reviewed here by Matthew Clayton:

> Levelling the Playing Field *is a welcome addition to theories of justice and equality. It […] is packed with philosophically sophisticated arguments that merit the attention of philosophers and political theorists. Since it also broaches several issues of public concern… it also warrants the attention of those working in the formation and delivery of economic and social policy.*

Yet intriguingly Clayton highlights Mason's claim that the implementation of principled egalitarian policies can have unintended social consequences through a kind of negative intellectual blow-back:

> *One possible instance […] is positive discrimination in which candidates are preferred because of their sex, say: positive sexism, he claims, might unintentionally, but foreseeably, send the condescending message that women are, by their own efforts, unable to compete on equal terms with men.*

Another possible take on this process of the interaction of ideas, policy and social perceptions is suggested by Mercedes Mateo Diaz in her review of Joni Lovenduski's book on women and politics. She points to Lovenduski's argumentative pragmatism and suggests that the context and impact of an equality argument can be as important as its philosophical rigour and normative coherence:

> *Lovenduski sees the different strategies used to support arguments in favour of increasing numbers of women in representative institutions as a dynamic process. No argument or strategy is good or bad in itself but responds to the functional necessities produced by a changing environment.*

It is instructive to contrast Lovendusk's functional approach with Miklos' account of Benhabib's normative puzzle regarding cosmopolitanism which is rendered both at a high level of abstraction and with unrelenting normative and intellectual consistency.

> *We are used to thinking about moral issues in universal terms. What makes an act right or wrong depends on the features of the act, and not on the group membership of the agent or the subject. This is also how cosmopolitan theorists think about cosmopolitan norms such as human rights: they are thought to bind everyone, regardless of nationality, religious conviction, or race, with regard to all other humans. This is not how we think about laws, however. They bind only a circumscribed group of persons. On the one hand, their validity is contingent on there being a sovereign authority with the powers of enforcement. On the other hand, their authority depends on the fact that they are the outcome of a people's democratic self-determination. Both features are problematic for cosmopolitan norms, however. There is no world-wide sovereign authority capable of enforcing human rights on a global scale, at least not at present. Moreover, there is no global democracy either. Democracies have always, so far, claimed to make law in the name of*

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some circumscribed group of persons, narrower than that of humankind. As long as we have separate demoi *claiming to be the ultimate source of law within a circumscribed territory, however, the authority of international human rights norms rests on at best fragile foundations. Those of us who want to see human rights as having a binding force similar to that of positive law will find this unsettling.*

The dangers of legal formalism are also pointed out in Everson's critique of Johan Olsen's views on European political order but the background assumptions are similar: that debate and argumentation should be open, coherent, transparent and democratic. The difference from a theorist such as Leo Strauss could not be greater as Peter Lassman points out in his review of Daniel Tanguay's recently translated biography:

One of his central claims was that most of the writers in the tradition of political philosophy practiced the art of esoteric writing. That is to say that it was an essential aspect of their work to hide their intended meaning.

And the pessimistic assumption that lies behind such an interpretation?

Philosophy, and for Strauss the essence of philosophy is political for this reason, will always question and threaten to undermine those conventional opinions that are necessary for the stability of the city. It follows for Strauss that the philosopher must hide his true meaning in order to survive in the city.

Strauss is most recently famous for being the inspirer of the bellicose neocons who emerged under the Bush presidency as imperial puppeteers without any sense of limit. It would be sheer paranoia to attribute the practice of esoteric writing to Giscard d'Estaing[2] and his fellow convention members but there is some indication that public suspicion of their intentions as the constituting elite, unassuaged in France at least by all voters receiving a copy of the bulky 'esoteric' text, led to the subsequent debacle. As Everson puts in her review of Olsen:

One possible source of their [the public's] dissatisfaction, is their own disillusionment with integration processes; a disillusionment, born not of any crude euro-scepticism, but with irritation at the arrogance of a European convention process, which promised establishment of a 'citizen's Europe' with enhanced involvement and participation for individual Europeans, but was itself perhaps one of the worst historical examples of the 'counter-majoritarian paradox'.

There is not the space here to pursue this theme across all of the articles in this year's *EPS Reviews* so let me conclude by returning to Perry Anderson and asking whether his strictures on European self-satisfaction and narcissism might also apply to European political science as well as to the European political elite?

Martin Bull's review seems superficially to supply some evidence for this. Not only is he a co-editor of *European Political Science* but he is also the Academic Director of the ECPR (though writing here in a personal capacity). The book under review is called *The State of Political Science in Western Europe* and is edited by Hans-Dieter Klingemann who was the president of the European Political Science Network. Moreover, Bull adopts the language of political science to talk about the state of political science although one has the impression that underneath he is not so much reviewing the book as making a political statement:

In the past, neither the ECPR nor EPSnet were free of proponents of the

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idea that they should be competing for the representation of European political science. Such struggle was neither worthwhile nor fruitful and may, in fact, have detracted from these organisations' pursuing more positive agendas for the benefit of European political science. No organisation can or should lay claim to a monopoly role in the representation of European political science unless it has a genuine organisational monopoly, is comprehensive in its representative scope and represents adequately all aspects (research, teaching, professional matters) of the discipline. Until that situation evolves, we should accept and recognise representation through a pluralist structure of organisations.

The language is not narcissistic but realist and reflective of an energetic and internationalised discipline as evidenced by the presence of more than 1,700 participants at the ECPR's General Conference in Pisa this September. Is it however coincidence that Anderson finds the EU to resemble the USA in ways that do not generally chime with its own self-image and that a distinguished US visitor to Pisa and long-time supporter of the ECPR found it all to be a bit too American?

Peter Kennealy

Notes

1 European Integration Current Contents http://centers.law.nyu.edu/jmtoc/index.cfm, accessed 20 September 2007.

2 Although one should not forget that Alexandre Kojève, house philosopher to the post-war French political elite, was also close to Strauss.

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Review copies should be sent to:
Peter Kennealy, *EPS Reviews*, European University Institute, Badia Fiesolana, San Domenico di Fiesole, I-50014 Firenze, Italy.
Suggestions for review articles can be sent to peter.kennealy@eui.eu

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