presidential power vis-à-vis the prime minister. In this context, Robert Elgie's typology of "highly presidentialized semi-presidential regimes," "semi-presidential regimes with ceremonial presidents," and "semi-presidential regimes with a balance of presidential and prime-ministerial powers" offers a valuable corrective (Robert Elgie, "Variations on a Theme," *Journal of Democracy* 16, no. 3 [July 2005]: pp. 98–112).

A second shortcoming of Skach's study can be found in the more general drawbacks of new institutionalism. Skach's findings highlight effectively the fact that "institutions matter" in determining the fate of a democracy, but so, too, do noninstitutionalized factors, such as political culture, economic security, and sociocultural traditions. This is especially true for a transitional democracy such as the Weimar Republic, where deep-seated authoritarian traditions, antidemocratic forces, a political culture inexperienced with the virtues of debate and compromise, and economic crises would pose a serious challenge to the stability and effectiveness of just about any democratic constitutional design, be it presidential, parliamentary, or semi-presidential. These noninstitutionalized factors do not find an integral place in Skach's narrative.

Despite these reservations, Skach's *Borrowing Constitutional Designs* clearly sets a new benchmark in new-institutionalism studies on semi-presidential constitutional designs as well as in the comparative historical examination of semi-presidential constitutional systems. Skach offers a timely and penetrating analysis of the perils of semi-presidentialism.

–David C. Durst

PROBLEMS OVER THEORIES

Ian Shapiro: *The Flight from Reality in the Human Sciences* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005. Pp. x, 223.)

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This volume is a compilation of modestly amended essays published between 1987 and 2004. These essays include a considerable variety of topics, from rational choice to normative theory, from jurisprudence to pedagogy. What they have in common is that they all represent attempts by Shapiro (and Alexander Wendt and Donald Green, each of whom co-authored one of the essays) to respond to what he calls "one of the central challenges for political theorists: serving as roving ombudsmen for the truth and the right by stepping back from political science as practiced, to see what is wrong with what is currently being done and say something about how it might be improved" (p. 179). Shapiro's targets also come in many guises: They include not only those he calls "Hume's bastard

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stepchildren" (p. 4), who are "logicists" and behaviorist empiricists, but also the stepchildren of Gadamer and Derrida, the interpreters who think society "should be conceived of as a text" (p. 5), and those political theorists who, in effect, act like Plato's stepchildren by habitually seeking to find the essence of what Shapiro calls "gross concepts."

One chapter, "Revisiting the Pathologies of Rational Choice," updates the book Shapiro coauthored with Donald Green, *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory*, together with responses to some of their critics. The authors seek to show that the specific pieces of social science research cited by these critics as examples of rational-choice theoretical research that make important contributions either do not make such contributions or do so only because these pieces of research venture beyond the confines of the rational-choice paradigm. In general terms, what emerges from their analysis is a clarification of the central burden of their critique of rational choice as directed not so much against its deployment per se but instead principally against the "universalist ambition" of some of its practitioners. As they put it, "We have never contended that anything in the maximization postulate itself leads to the pathologies we described. They are generated, rather, by the conviction that some manner of utility maximization must account for all political outcomes or the enterprise of political science is dead" (p. 88). What this clarification does, in turn, is to open the way to the useful recognition that rational-choice models may, indeed, have considerable explanatory purchase, but only within a particular domain. Specifically, rational-choice explanations can be expected to perform reasonably well when the stakes are high and the players are self-conscious optimizers, preferences are well-ordered and relatively fixed, actors have a clear and constrained range of options, the strategic complexity of the situation is not overwhelmingly great, and the actors can learn from feedback (p. 94). Perhaps, since some of the exponents of rational-choice theory have evinced a similar recognition, future debates about rational-choice theory can turn more productively toward the breadth and the defining criteria of the relevant domain instead of simply being a pitched battle between those who think all social science should be subsumed under rational-choice models and those who find such models universally defective.

If there is a more general argument or common theme of the chapters on empirical research issues, it would be that the social scientific enterprise would be better off if its inquiries were problem driven rather than driven by a priori commitments to specific methodological precepts or theoretical tenets. This admonition is presented as cohering with a preference for what Shapiro calls, following people such as Rom Harré, Roy Bhaskar, and Richard Miller, "scientific realism." In the chapter Shapiro coauthored with Alexander Wendt, "The Difference That Realism Makes," he seeks to reinforce and illustrate these general claims by favorably comparing the treatment of power and consent in John Gaventa's *Power and Powerlessness* with what he depicts as the theory-driven work of sociologists like Floyd Hunter and C. Wright Mills and the method-driven behaviorist work of Robert Dahl and others. The

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authors may be right to commend the nuanced picture of the nature and multiple dimensions of power and its exercise that Gaventa delivers in his study of Appalachian mining communities. The nexus between that specific study and the theoretical and methodological claims it presumes to illustrate, however, is not exactly a slam dunk. For one thing, it is a long way from the "core commitment of scientific realism" which "consists in the twofold conviction that the world consists of causal mechanisms that exist independently of our study—or even awareness—of them, and that the methods of science hold out the best possibility of our grasping their true character" (pp. 8–9), on the one hand, and any specific methodological moves Gaventa makes, on the other. Second, it is fine to commend research that is driven by problems and questions rather than by prior commitments to particular theories or methods. But nothing in scientific realism tells us much about how to ascertain what counts as a significant problem. Scientists, both natural and social, presumably identify relevant problems in one of two ways. Either the problems appear as such because they constitute anomalies from the standpoint of some widely influential scientific paradigm, in which case one would have to say that their recognition is theory driven. Or else they are perceived by very knowledgeable scientific researchers as some kind of missing piece or perturbation within their somewhat intuitive and partly tacit apprehension of their subject matter. So while Shapiro and Wendt are probably on strong ground in deploring the distortions and limitations induced by mechanistic obeisance to specific antecedent theory or method, counsels to attend to any methodological insights allegedly derived from the tenets of scientific realism do not seem to add much to the equation in a positive sense.

Two chapters of the book deal with somewhat different types of flights from reality in the explicitly normative disciplines of jurisprudence and political philosophy. One of these chapters is a critique of Richard Posner's theory of law and the prescriptive recommendations he derives from that theory. Shapiro argues, quite persuasively, that Posner's interpretation of the implicit logic of the law as a quest to generate policies and institutions that maximize economic efficiency is an ideological partial truth at best. Posner then uses this functionalist model of immanent purposes in the law as a basis for criticism of practices in the law and for efficiency-maximizing reform proposals. The consequence is, in Shapiro's words, that Posner "imports his version of the *Social Statics* into judicial opinions in predictable ways, all the while portraying them as uncontroversial economic theory" (p. 13).

The other chapter on normative theory argues that a lot of politically philosophical arguments go wrong by focusing upon what Shapiro calls "gross concepts." These concepts, including familiar ideas such as freedom, rights, community, and virtue, lead us astray by reifying, in effect, one element of a situation composed of relations among multiple agents, actions, and purposes. His wish is that theorists would avoid interminable debates over these reified notions, all of which can be persuasively argued to be misleading and inadequate by those who oppose particular versions of them,

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and instead engage more in "first-order" arguments about the actual relationships on the ground from which these concepts are derived. In the course of this chapter, Shapiro offers useful critical insights about specific theories and controversies in political theory—involving figures such as John Rawls, Robert Nozick, Isaiah Berlin, Ronald Dworkin, and Robert Paul Wolff. The general argument about the nature and failures of the so-called gross concepts itself seems somewhat unclear. I think Shapiro is onto something here, but I would be more inclined to see the problem in Wittgensteinian terms as difficulties created by language "going on a holiday." When concepts become too abstracted from the functional contexts out of which they arise, that is when linguistic bewitchment rears its ugly head and pushes philosophers—and others—into empty disputes about fictional essences of some sort or other. Perhaps, however, I am but restating Shapiro's point in somewhat different terms.

This book is more of a miscellany than a single argument with a single topic. But it offers worthwhile insight and provocation for all who concern themselves with the theoretical dimension of political inquiry, whether the theory be explanatory, critical, or prescriptive. At their deepest levels, all methodological doctrines and practices in social science have roots in some kind of ontology or philosophical anthropology; they all have implications for praxis. By digging deeply into these doctrines and practices, Shapiro helps us confront our methodological choices and problems within the proper frame of reference.

–Thomas A. Spragens Jr.

BETWEEN INTEREST AND LOYALTY

Catherine E. Rymph: *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage through the Rise of the New Right* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006. Pp. xi, 338. $24.95, paper.)

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Political women are often difficult to see. At the Founding of our nation, the exclusion of women from politics was deemed so natural that the Framers of the Constitution did not bother expressly to deny women the right to vote; they simply assumed that the electorate would not include women. Women challenged their exclusion from politics through activism in various nineteenth- and twentieth-century movements, including, most notably, the suffrage movement. Yet after the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 granted women a formal political role, women again appeared largely hidden from view in political life. For many decades, women were less likely to vote (and thus deemed less consequential). When active, they

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