

Governance, civil society and cultural politics

absolute war outcomes—practically never occur. This may make good sense in practice: even Japan and Germany in 1945, like the Confederacy in 1865, were able to save lives by conceding defeat. But it does mean that the Realist critique—namely, that there may be certain wars in which fighting on in the hope of a battlefield ‘miracle’ makes sense regardless of costs—still stands, at least in the abstract. Second, sharp reversals of fortune save belligerents whom Reiter would code as having ‘almost no hope for ultimate victory’ (p. 213) too often for this possibility to be disregarded; in short, battlefield performance data at, say, the midpoint of a conflict seem only a weak guide to eventual war outcomes. Combining these two insights, there could still be a theoretical subset of cases in which the information proposition entirely breaks down, making it rational to fight on in a bid to solve the credible commitment problem regardless of both adverse battlefield data and the expected massive costs.

The empirical evidence presented in *How wars end* is impressive. Reiter uses the case-studies of the Korean War, the Allies in 1940–42, Finland and the USSR in 1939–44, the American Civil War, Germany in 1917–18 and Japan in 1944–5 to test his hypotheses. While specialist historians may perhaps be able to challenge his findings, most generalist political scientists will find them detailed and engaging. His choice of cases has proved particularly effective, since he combines an array of ‘easy’, ‘hard’ and ‘crucial’ tests, and his addition of the Civil War case demonstrates generalizability beyond the interstate level. There are occasions when one has the sense that evidence is being slightly stretched to fit the theory—such as the Soviet case, which he concedes is ‘spotty’ (p. 116)—but this is never a severe problem.

Despite these empirical strengths, the inclusion of the Korean case highlights the ambiguous relation between Reiter’s theory and the so-called ‘nuclear revolution’. On the one hand, the United States’ decision to abandon the total conquest of North Korea as soon as there was the slightest risk of escalation with the Soviet Union would seem to give his model solid roots in deterrence theory. Yet on the other hand, if belligerents fight to solve their credible commitment problems unless faced by the threat of prohibitively high costs, one is left wondering what this means in an age when all secure second-strike nuclear powers are capable of threatening such costs. Of course, this does not undermine his theory’s causal logic, but it does raise questions over its contemporary explanatory reach. Certainly, the impact of nuclear weapons and their potential to inflict unacceptable costs on even the most formidable of conventional military powers is an avenue that deserves to be investigated further in rationalist theory. Nevertheless, such questions should not detract from the overall contribution of Reiter’s book, which will no doubt become an essential read for anyone interested in understanding war termination, as well as for those seeking to further explore rationalist theories of conflict.

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The life and death of democracy. By John Keane. London: Simon & Schuster. 2009. 958pp. Pb.: £30.00. ISBN 978 0 74323 192 3.

Considering the pre-eminent place of democracy in contemporary politics, it appears odd that its history remains so poorly understood. The overly easy habit of naturalizing and universalizing democracy’s present value and meaning has been underwritten by a complicit refusal by many scholars to seriously engage with democracy’s long and complex past. An avowed aim of John Keane’s ambitious new study is to shatter this damaging conspiracy of silence, by returning democracy to its history, and in so doing, providing a comprehensive account of democracy’s past, present and possible future. The author is clear that ‘this book supposes that democracy has no built-in historical guarantees; that its future is bound up with what happened in the past, and with what is happening in the present; and that the history of democracy is therefore the business of everybody’ (p. xxxii). Indeed, one of the most important—and persuasive—claims made is that democracy and history are deeply interconnected, and far more attention needs to be paid to the complex ways they interact.

Throughout the text, Keane is at pains to democratize the story he is telling by challenging accepted truths about democracy’s past. In both temporal and spatial terms, the account provided in

Book reviews

The life and death of democracy is considerably more expansive than that found elsewhere. Keane strongly refutes the commonplaces that ancient democracy was an invention of ancient Athens, and that its modern successor emerged from either side of the Atlantic. Against this western-centric narrative, the author presents a more global history, illustrating how developments have appeared in many unexpected places. This broadening of the conventional story is of great value, notably showing the important role Islam has played, as well as unearthing the curious tendency for institutional innovations to emerge from the periphery. Nonetheless, at certain points Keane goes too far in countering the longstanding problem of western-centricism. In particular, insufficient consideration is given to the monumental French Revolution. It is well-traversed ground, but still remains a pivotal moment in the development of representative democracy, and since this book seeks to provide a comprehensive history, greater attention should have been given to the event. In addition to providing a far greater geographical scope, the author further unsettles received opinions by providing a drastically different historical periodization. For most observers, the prevailing form of democracy is representative in nature: it may be fraying around the edges, and undergoing some changes, but most would accept that democracy still means representative democracy. Keane thinks otherwise, even suggesting that the era of representative democracy has ended, replaced by an emergent form he terms 'monitory democracy': 'What is distinctive about this new historical type of democracy', Keane proposes, 'is the way *all fields of social and political life* come to be scrutinized, not just by the standard machinery of representative democracy but by a whole host of *non-party, extra-parliamentary* and often *unelected bodies* operating within, underneath and beyond the boundaries of territorial states' (italics in original, p. 695).

The third part of the book is devoted to considering the mutation of representative democracy into this more complex and multivalent version, monitory democracy. In making his case, Keane provides an impressive list of power-monitoring inventions, and illustrates at length the shifting nature of contemporary democratic politics. Democracy may not be quite the same beast it was half a century ago. It is less clear, however, whether all the changes Keane identifies collectively constitute something coherent enough to be considered a new kind of democracy. Indeed, one could acknowledge all the trends the author identifies, but still remain unconvinced that what one is left with is actually democracy; it could simply be a post-modern pastiche of modes of governance. Regardless, what Keane's bold account of monitory democracy provides is a valuable opening to begin discussing these issues, as part of considering the current shape and likely future of democracy. In this sense, even though *The life and death of democracy* is a history, the focus is very much on the now, and what is to come. The book is motivated by a genuine, but carefully tempered, belief in democracy—understood through the key virtue of humility—and a recognition generated by historical reflection that democracy remains something fragile, contingent and incomplete. One of the great strengths of this impressive work lies in the way history is employed to construct a compelling normative defence of democracy. In this regard, Keane even shows how writing history itself can be a democratic act. At a time when democracy's fortunes are looking unclear, *The life and death of democracy* is a powerful intervention from a considered student and supporter of democracy, one that will surely be a benchmark text for years to come.

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Democracy kills: what's so good about the vote?. By Humphrey Hawksley. London: Macmillan. 2009. 356pp. Pb.: £12.99. ISBN 978 0 23074 408 0.

During the past decade, as 'democracy promotion' and military campaigns against enemies dubbed terrorists have gathered pace, war, violence and democracy have become fashionable publishing topics. Scholarly interest in the realist writings of Thomas Hobbes, Carl Schmitt and René Girard is flourishing. Some commentators daringly conclude that democracy is a strange impossibility because it always rests on founding acts of violence. Others insist that it has a 'dark side' (Michael Mann), or that electoral democracy sups with the devils of political violence (Paul Collier). The English journalist Humphrey Hawksley joins the chorus with the eye-catching dust jacket claim that 'democracy, far from setting us free, might actually kill us'. Drawing on data gathered by an outsourced

16

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