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Review: Cultural Variables

Reviewed Work(s): Paradoxes of Democracy: Fragility, Continuity, and Change by Samuel N. Eisenstadt

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Abraham investigates all such appointments by American presidents, not simply those commencing with the Truman administration. He covers the background of the nomination, how each was received, and the legacy which a justice left. Yalof's study is distinguished from Abraham's by its much greater attention to the early selection stage and by its employment of more primary sources.

Despite its unique focus, *Pursuit of Justices* does have a few drawbacks. First, the positioning of the final two chapters should be reversed so as to create a natural concluding section. Second, Yalof is inconsistent in the attention paid to justices' performance on the high court. Although this material is secondary to the main theme, it should either be eliminated or balanced more fairly. Finally, the overlapping nature of the three decision making strategies identified makes it difficult to assign every Supreme Court selection to a single category.

Still, the value of Yalof's study to a more complete understanding of Supreme Court recruitment cannot be underestimated. His research highlights the role which a president's goals, administration personnel, and prevailing political conditions have on the choice of a nominee. It likewise illustrates that who prospective justices know is as critical to their success as what they know.

—Samuel B. Hoff

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## CULTURAL VARIABLES

Samuel N. Eisenstadt: *Paradoxes of Democracy: Fragility, Continuity, and Change*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999. Pp. xxi, 120. \$29.95.)

*Paradoxes of Democracy* is a compressed, highly abstract overview of democratic systems, in theory and practice. Eisenstadt attempts a general assessment of democratic forms, taking into account non-Western as well as Western democracies and the implications of recent developments, including recent examples of democratic consolidation, protest movements, and postmodern thought. On page 2 he notes but is apparently unimpressed by the striking stability of Western democracies since the end of World War II. His central paradox is that, while democracy is ascendant, especially with the recent collapse of authoritarian regimes in Eastern and Southern Europe and Latin America, it is also inherently fragile. While many scholars have explored the conditions that contribute to democratic stability, he is interested mainly in "the tensions or contradictions inherent in [democratic regimes'] very constitution, in their basic premises, and in the basic characteristics of the political process that developed within them" (p. 2).

Eisenstadt demonstrates magisterial command of a range of subjects. He roams freely over democratic societies, Western and non-Western, existing and their historical precursors. Although discussion is on the whole highly theoretical, his observations about specific societies are uniformly pungent

and insightful. He also surveys central tendencies of Western political theory, and important offshoots, mainly Jacobin and utopian thought.

Eisenstadt's main argument concerns the contribution of cultural factors. Economic, social, and political conditions are not sufficient to ensure democratic success, but must be supported by essential attitudes, mainly widespread acceptance of a "non-zero-sum" conception of politics and the development of trust. Only when political competitors are confident in continued access to the centers of power and that institutional norms will be adhered to in future conflicts will they accept defeat. Among factors necessary for development of the requisite attitudes are dispersion of centers of power, promotion of rules of the game, accessible public spheres, and movement between major elites and the state. To this list, Eisenstadt adds the development of collective identity. His main distinction is between absolutist and more open or multifaceted conceptions of identity, which reinforce absolutist or pluralist regimes respectively—somewhat along the lines of Isaiah Berlin's familiar association of value pluralism or its denial with nontotalitarian and totalitarian regimes. Eisenstadt traces European conceptions of identity back to the settlement of religious conflicts in the Reformation and Counter-Reformation (pp. 71-75). Central components of European identities in regard to nationalism and ethnicity are strongly influenced by "secular, universalistic, and civic components of collective identity." "The way these different components interrelated greatly influenced the fate of constitutional democratic reforms that developed in European societies" (p. 75).

Tracing recent cultural tendencies back to their roots in the "metanarratives of modernity," Eisenstadt identifies three main variants: the "Christian," which affirms this world in terms of higher though not fully realizable visions; the "gnostic," which imbues the world with deep hidden meanings; and the "chthonic," which emphasizes full acceptance of the world and the vitality of its forces (p. 18). These highly abstract orientations towards reality underlie modern ideologies and current political and cultural programs. Deep seated cultural differences, "always simmering, ready, as it were, to erupt in situations of intensive change" (p. 44), find root in social and protest movements, many rooted in communalist and fundamentalist visions. Chapters 7 and 8, on social movements and means of dealing with them, are the two longest in the book. Discussion is mainly classificatory, presenting the factors involved in both movements themselves and means of accommodation, with the main lesson the central role of non-zero-sum conceptions of politics and the need for trust. The only case considered in detail is the failure of the fascist movement in Sweden in the 1930s (pp. 81-83).

In spite of the impressiveness of Eisenstadt's *tour d'horizon* of contemporary democracy, there is room for criticism. One cannot find fault with his main thesis. Instead of the economic factors abundantly analyzed in the literature, Eisenstadt concentrates on the cultural variables we have noted. Such factors obviously are important to democracies; structural factors alone do not "automatically assure their continuity or reproduction" (p. 89). But given the range of factors Eisenstadt considers, some attempt to

assess their relative importance is clearly in order—whether in general or in regard to specific cases. Focussing on cultural conflicts, moreover, could well exaggerate the threats to established democracies. These states are beset by conflicts of varying intensity, and as Eisenstadt notes, resulting protest movements. But given the overweening stability of the developed democracies over the last half century, one can ask about the significance of these factors. Systematic analyses of individual states would be helpful here. In the absence of this, Eisenstadt provides rather more a descriptive account of democratic systems than an explanation of their rise and fall. Especially in view of his interest in new democracies and their implications, comparative analysis of more and less successful instances would contribute markedly.

—George Klosko

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### OLD HAT, NEW BIRD

A. James Gregor: *Phoenix: Fascism in Our Time*. (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1999. Pp. xiv, 204. \$32.95.)

The appearance of a new publication by A. J. Gregor on generic fascism is a major event for all those concerned with this unusually contentious specialism. With a series of highly original, impeccably researched books produced between 1969 and 1979 Gregor became an important member of a small group of (mostly American) academics who helped the topic come of age as a rigorous and respectable field of academic enquiry. At a time when it was conventional wisdom to dismiss (generic) fascism as ideologically vacuous, reactionary, antimodern and hence not worth studying, he demonstrated the deep ideological debt of (Italian) Fascism to currents of European sociological and political theory, its relative coherence and cogency as a theory of state and society, and its profoundly revolutionary and modernizing thrust. Moreover he elaborated his own theory of generic fascism as a form of “developmental dictatorship,” and wrote one of the earliest comprehensive surveys of existing theories of fascism. Having migrated for over a decade to other intellectual climes he has now flown back to his original feeding ground.

He is not alone. The collapse of the Soviet Empire led to a surge of nationalism and radical right activity in the 1990s which stimulated a dramatic revival of interest in generic fascism among “younger scholars,” some of whom impetuously tried their hand at resolving the fascist conundrum. This prompted several doyens of the discipline, notably Alexander de Grand, Ze'ev Sternhell, Walter Laqueur, George Mosse, and Stanley Payne, to formulate new pronouncements on the subject, and Gregor has now made his bid to become a prominent force in this second wave of fascist studies. Having produced a new edition of his *Interpretations of Fascism* (1997), we are now regaled with *Phoenix: Fascism in our Time*, a title which could be said to betoken the rekindling of his interest in fascism as the theme of the book.