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### Ben-Ami Scharfstein. *Amoral Politics: The Persistent Truth of Machiavellism.*

Micheal E. Meagher

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Ben-Ami Scharfstein. *Amoral Politics: The Persistent Truth of Machiavellism*. State University of New York Press, 1995. 342pp., bibliography, index, notes.

Political theorists frequently study the classic texts of the Western tradition without the insight provided by a comparison with non-Western civilizations. However, Ben-Ami Scharfstein's *Amoral Politics* explores "the political theory and practice of the non-Western civilizations, principally those of China and India, with the same detail, seriousness, and measure of respect as those of modern Europe" (p. xi). The main theme of the book is that "Machiavellism" represents the defining characteristic of political life. Scharfstein claims that leaders are prone to use force and fraud during the exercise of political responsibilities. While this is not an original thesis, political theorists have failed to examine this issue from a comparative perspective, and Scharfstein's willingness to do so is the main virtue of this work. Scharfstein describes the political theories of several Chinese "Machiavellis," including Han Fei and Hsun Tsu, and several examples of Machiavellian thinkers from ancient India, most especially Kautilya. His coverage of the European writers Francesco Guicciardini and Niccolò Machiavelli is excellent. Indeed, his discussion of European Machiavellianism is not confined to these two theorists. Instead, there is an effort to relate Machiavellian thought to Shakespeare, Montaigne, Bacon, Hobbes, and Spinoza. While presenting the political theories of the "Machiavellis" from Western and non-Western civilizations, Scharfstein admirably describes the historical contexts that shaped their ideas.

Scharfstein claims that the "Machiavellis" of China, India, and Europe shared a similar theory of human nature. However, his description of the "Machiavellis" theory of human nature is at odds with his claim that his study "does not imply an original sin, a fixed, unchanging characteristic" (p. xi). Writing that the "Machiavellis" conceived of human nature in "negative" terms, the "Machiavellis," Scharfstein says, recognized the need to use forceful, even deceitful, policies in dealing with an undeserving populace (p. 10). Claiming that the Machiavellian thinkers "furnish us with an extraordinary historical experiment in what I take to be universal traits of human politics" (p. 8), he claims that "Machiavellian behavior is normal" and is "to be expected" (p. 263). The reader is left wondering: "normal" in terms of human nature? While the author furnishes an admirable historical survey of several Machiavellian theorists, more care should have been taken in differentiating the theory of human nature from the institutional influences on these thinkers.

While recognizing that political theorists have produced theoretical materials from traditions other than the Machiavellian, Scharfstein dismisses the seriousness of these competing approaches. According to him, "political and ethical theories that do not take Machiavellism into serious account are inadequate to human affairs in general and are of doubtful relevance to actual politics" (p.

xii). In Chapter Seven, Scharfstein poses the question: "Have philosophers raised any decisive arguments against Machiavellism?" (p. 248). Scharfstein's answer is disappointing, for he bases his analysis on Kant's essay "Perpetual Peace." Clearly, a theme as important as this is deserving of more extensive consideration. Although he claims to demonstrate that the Machiavellian approach to political theory is "the persistent truth," his inadequate handling of this question leaves the reader with serious doubts.

The main virtue of this work is its comparative approach. With its comparison of the Western and non-Western Machiavellian traditions, political theorists and historians will find this volume a useful addition to the literature, despite some weaknesses in argument and organization.

Michael E. Meagher

Eugene D. Genovese and Leonard Hochberg, eds. *Geographical Perspectives in History*. Blackwell, 1989 (reprinted, 1992, paperback), 342 pp.

We have here a welcome marriage of geography and history: not a *festschrift* in honor of historian Edward Fox, author of "History in Geographic Perspective" (1971), but a selection of essays by scholars in several fields inspired by his teaching and writing. The first eight essays constitute Part One, France and Europe. The remaining eight form Part Two, Europe and the Atlantic World. Each essay stands by itself, however, testimony to a wide variety of topics and of geographical quality. Several are of outstanding value.

Martin Bernal's contribution begins the collection: "First By Land, Then By Sea: Thoughts About the Social Formation of the Mediterranean and Greece" is a splendid integration of geography and history, handling the changing role of the Mediterranean (as barrier between, and link among, peoples), the diffusion of agriculture and languages, the importance of location, and the interaction of regions, in an integrated whole.

Historian Charles Tilly, in "The Geography of European State-Making and Capitalism Since 1500" reveals a fine appreciation of the importance of scale, location, central-place hierarchies, the State as a geographic phenomenon, and the changing relative importance of land and sea transport. It is rich in empirical data as well.

Traian Stoianovich has provided "The Segmentary State and La Grande Nation." This is worthy of inclusion in a political-geographic anthology on Europe. Focusing on Serbia, he treats classes and ethnicities in terms of the scale of political and economic organization, as well as the importance of trade and