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Book Reviews

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Maurice Roche, *Exploring the Sociology of Europe.* London: SAGE Publications, 2010, 296 pp. (incl. index) £70.00 ISBN 9780761940715 (hbk), £23.99 ISBN 9780761940722 (pbk)

Not many British sociologists—unlike their other European colleagues or their own compatriots in political science and institutional economics—have taken much interest in the macro-sociology of Europe. Maurice Roche's book is therefore to be welcomed as a rare contribution. This does not mean that he writes from a somehow typically British perspective; he manages to achieve a completely non-national view of his subject. It is an important test of any comparative study whether one can guess the nationality of the author from the text; the less that one can, the better the author has achieved her/his goal. At the same time, he does not walk some predictable European tramlines—whatever those might be. He brings us some fresh insights.

Particularly interesting is his take on the growth of modern citizenship, which he sees as emerging from the overwhelming dominance of war in Europe's transition to modernity. This is not a particularly paradoxical insight; the origins of Greek citizenship, the founding model of the idea, lay in the exchange of citizenship rights and the offer of military service to the city state. But it is important nevertheless. As the once relatively homogenous medieval continent fragmented, particularly after the fall of Constantinople to Islamic Turkish power and the consequent westward shift of Christendom's centre of gravity, it split into the fierce, competing entities that were to become the nation states. These engaged in a pattern of frequent wars against each other that culminated in the two world wars of the 20th century. Over the centuries, this process eventually required the construction of popular loyalty to, and identity with, these states and their rulers among the people (or, at least, the men) who were frequently called upon to fight or otherwise bear the costs of war. From this, the Greek idea of citizenship and the exchange of rights and responsibilities gradually re-emerged. This generally benign form of relationship between political authorities and populations was a distinctive achievement of Europeans and their settler societies in the European imperial diaspora. But it was born in that darkest of human activities: organized mass violence.

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For Roche, therefore, the motor of history is not, as for the Marxists who continue to be important within macro-sociology, purely economic, but also political and cultural. This leads him to also give due weight to religion, including its role in the formation of the 20th century welfare state.

This is, therefore, a well rounded account of the sociology of Europe. The author does not share the reluctance of many more theoretically rooted members of the discipline to accept the full importance of history and geography. The evidence used and the findings are, for the most part, not highly original in themselves. This is a book that is mainly based on secondary sources. Also, in place of hypothesis testing and an exploration of counter-factuals, we have a thoughtful, ruminating, questioning form of reflection as a kind of methodology. It is the combination of themes and direction of the reflection that makes the book useful.

Most significant for many readers will be the implications of the author's overall argument for contemporary Europe and the construction of the European Union (EU). Roche's arguments here flow logically from his fundamental view of European history as a combination of a basic unity of culture, broken over centuries of war by the rise of proud, tough nation states. And modernity developed under *their* aegis, not that of the more conservative and religious unifying forces. Today, this becomes the fundamental paradox of the European adventure. The nation state, Roche correctly maintains, is becoming an anachronism in a world where the other major geopolitical (and geo-economic) forces are based on far larger units of population. The institution that presided over (one cannot really say 'brought us') the quintessentially modern achievements of citizenship, democracy and the welfare state has reached its 'use by' date. Can these achievements, or their equivalents, be raised to transnational levels, or must they pale into insignificance with the European nation state itself?

Roche is not optimistic about this, a perspective supported by both the logic of his own historical and geographical account and the record of the development of European integration to date—a process that has intensified in the months since he wrote his book. The basic issue was posed in its most fundamental form several years ago by Fritz Scharpf—an author whom Roche uses well, but perhaps not enough. For Scharpf, negative integration (the breaking down of barriers to markets) is always far easier to achieve than positive integration (the construction of substantive unified European social and political institutions). This is true if only for the simple, formal reason that it is far easier to agree to break something down than to choose among a number of alternative replacement constructions. As a result, neoclassical economics rather than political science or sociology has provided the guiding ideas for the construction of the EU. The politicians, officials and expert advisors of the Union, like the Marxists Roche criticizes, see only economic variables and neglect the importance of the social and political. The stricter the neoclassical bias of the economics used, the more political, cultural and social factors can be ignored and treated as irrelevant superstructures that must eventually give way to economic reality. This helps explain why, as Roche shows, the concept of constructing a 'Social Europe' was halted so early in its tracks. It also explains why the builders of the single currency and the European Central Bank were unable to anticipate, or even perceive, how the economic assumptions behind them would be unable to cope with the accumulation of sovereign debt. One of the many paradoxes of the EU is that,

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although it is seen by its friends and enemies alike as a kind of somehow 'social democratic' or at least 'social' challenge to Anglo-American neoliberalism, it (and particularly its Court and central bank) is often, in practice, far more purely neoliberal than British and US institutions. The UK, the USA and, indeed, the individual European nation states developed higgledy-piggledy over centuries and therefore embody no single doctrine of construction. The EU has not just been constructed in a (somewhat) more coherent way, but that way has been that negative and therefore primarily market integration.

However, Roche also finds grounds for optimism about the European project. Important normative commitments, emerging as a response to the negative aspects of the European past, are embodied in the Union: for example, about transcending war as a means of dispute resolution (not only within European but globally), asserting certain human rights and combating xenophobia. Of course, these are normative while the neoliberal assumptions tend to take institutional form. But Roche is anxious that the normative is not under-played or written-off as of no account. In an interesting passage, he comments on how contemporary citizenship discourse—in Europe and elsewhere—has more to say about responsibilities than about rights. This runs counter to the familiar politicians' and newspaper editors' grumble that asserts the opposite. But here Roche is thinking of something more substantial than the problem of benefit claimants that people usually have in mind in 'rights versus responsibilities' discussions. He is thinking of responsibilities to the commonality of mankind, to the world's poor and oppressed, to the planet and its natural environment. Buried away in the European ideal are important statements on these matters, and they do embody a concept of citizenship that far transcends the nation state. Will disillusion with a solely economic vision for Europe—currently so utterly dominant—lead to greater concern for these issues or to a decline in the whole project? Roche's historical trajectory makes both possible.

'Hedgehog or fox?': John A. Hall, *Ernest Gellner: An Intellectual Biography*. New York: Verso, 2010, pp. xii + 400. $49.95. ISBN 9781844676026 (hbk), 978184467021 (pbk).

Routinely described as 'one of the last great Central European polymaths', Ernest Gellner (1925–1995) remains something of an enigma in the history of English intellectual life as well as in the histories of the many disciplines to which he contributed – philosophy, anthropology, sociology, intellectual history. He held chairs of Philosophy ('with special reference to Sociology') at the London School of Economics and of Social Anthropology at the University of Cambridge; towards the end of his life he was instrumental in setting up the Sociology Department at George Soros's new Central European University in

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