

other hand, some prophecies propounded in the book, such as the approaching unification of the 'Arab' world (p. 122), have not (yet) materialised.

The big picture, however, remains. The seeds of contemporary American political incompetency, Kolko asserts, were sown long ago, in the first decade following the Second World War, at the latest; George W. Bush – considered by many as one of the worst US presidents ever – did not initiate the decline but simply exacerbated it (p. 165). The core problems of the US, the author argues, are its self-centred political system and its old-fashioned, useless military apparatus, which make it repeat the mistakes it made in Vietnam – now in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Chapters 2 and 3 may be of special interest to students of American history in the twentieth century. The analysis in chapter 6 would probably interest those studying the art of intelligence and political decision making. Chapter 4 ('Israel: A Stalemated Accident of History') should be read by citizens of that political entity, as it may provide them with an external perspective on their state's international situation.

By its very nature as a collection of articles, *World in Crisis* does not fully knit together all of its threads – financial, technological, political and economic. But it certainly lists the symptoms of the current situation, which in itself is an important thing.

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**Appeals to Interest: Language, Contestation, and the Shaping of Political Agency** by **Dean Mathiowetz**. University Park PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011. 228pp., £53.95, ISBN 9780271048505

The conceptual poles that orient *Appeals to Interest* by Dean Mathiowetz are, on the one hand, an insistence that 'interest' ought to be brought back to the fore of political thought and, on the other, that the rich constitution of the concept be rendered active by revitalising its layered linguistic meaning. Given this outlook, the key argument made by Mathiowetz turns on the claim that the 'impulse of political philosophy ... has been to remove the question of interest from politics and quarantine it instead in the realm of theory' (p. 4). The author then draws attention to the ways in which our understanding of interest can be deepened through encounters

with language, a possibility that he suggests has slipped through the net of contemporary political discourse.

In the spirit of a hermeneutic method that is indebted to the likes of Michel Foucault, Charles Taylor and Hans-Georg Gadamer, Mathiowetz suggests that one of the key conditions of possibility accruing from the linguistic turn is to provide students of politics with the tools to reinvigorate the language of interest. As it turns out, Mathiowetz's real objection is not to the notion of interest per se; rather, he believes we should be enlarging the terrain of the meanings associated with it. The word 'interest', he contends, 'is the best way to study the concept interest, because the historical and analytical study of language must emphasize heterogeneity and account for, or at least be open to, the variegated and even contradictory uses of words in political discourses' (p. 13).

This leads to another aspect of Mathiowetz's objective, which is to critique – and move beyond – the usual refrain of calculating self-interestedness associated with discourses of interest and lay claim to its agentive potential. So what is at stake in this call for agency as an integral part of interest and the refusal of the limited vocabulary of self-interest? Mathiowetz urges a move back to the framework of identity, specifically political identity, as the foundation of political action. This sort of approach, he argues throughout, opens up the space for an alternative genealogy and imaginary of interest as action oriented in terms of its juridical and plural bearings and attuned to the realities of conflict and contestation. In sum, *Appeals to Interest* is a meticulous work, compelling and full of insight. It provides a resoundingly astute analysis of *how* and *why* appeals to interest depend on agency, specifically in terms of 'who' an agent is. There is no doubt that this book has the potential to add substantially to our understanding of the ever-evolving realm of politics.

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**Democracy, Equality and Justice** by **Matt Mat-ravers and Lukas H. Meyer (eds)**. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010. 262pp., £85.00, ISBN 978 0 415 59292 5

Of the many endeavours to restate the central aspirations of contemporary political philosophy through a

comprehensive reader, this book is one of the more balanced and nuanced ones. Yet the term democracy as used by the volume's contributors is potentially complex, since there is a tension, pointed out by Wilfried Hinsch, between the ideal of popular sovereignty and that of constitutional liberties. Paul Kelly shifts the debate from this tension to the ideal of egalitarianism as it has come to dominate liberal theory. By assuming that all rival theories are based on a fundamental sense of equality the debate now centres on 'equality of what?' questions related to the distribution of goods instead of traditional questions about fundamental equality.

Carrying the theme of justice and equality further, Keith Dowding examines the weaknesses in those claims which argue that the only justifications for inequalities in society are those which result from the choices made by individuals. Clare Chambers and Phil Parvin rebut libertarian challenges that question redistribution. They argue that the attempt to defend liberalism without involving arguments that depend on some comprehensive conception of the good may make it hospitable to current multicultural or communitarian theories, but it does so by making liberalism vulnerable to libertarianism. Charles Jones identifies a restricted view of human rights that represents the common element of political legitimacy across the world's cultures in contrast to the liberal view in which human rights provide standards by which to assess the justice of any society's institutions. The final section begins with the problem posed by Dennis Thompson on contract accounts of justice. Simon Caney, Lukas H. Meyer and Dominic Roser address questions of climate change as a unique case of historical injustice involving a complex intersection of global and intergenerational justice.

Many of these papers emerged from a symposium hosted by the British Academy which was inspired by the work of Brian Barry, to whom the volume is dedicated. Part of its success, however, lies in the editors' willingness to stretch the boundaries of what Barry meant by liberalism, but in doing so they bring liberal theory into better alignment with contemporary concerns underlying liberal societies. In all, this is a masterful literature review through selected articles that make a number of connections between the ways that democracy, equality and justice have changed since the 1980s.

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**Mimesis and Reason: Habermas's Political Philosophy** by Gregg Daniel Miller. New York: State University of New York Press, 2011. 185pp., £53.50, ISBN 9781438437392

Recently, there have been increasing attempts within the paradigm of critical theory to move away from Habermasian orthodoxy. In keeping with this trend of scholarship, Gregg Daniel Miller attempts to 'refigure' critical theory away from strictly procedural accounts of communication in order to provide an answer to 'the question of meaning and motivation in modernity' (p. 136). Miller highlights the 'bonding effect in intersubjectivity' as a potential source of democratic legitimacy, and prescribes a rethinking of mimesis (imitation) as central to this theoretical endeavour. In order to achieve this, Miller seeks to dissolve the characteristic understanding of reason and mimesis as opposites, advancing the argument that maintaining it in post-metaphysical Habermasian thought inevitably means to 'remain within the rhetorical argument set out by metaphysical thinking in general' (p. 35). Tracing the philosophical attitude towards mimesis from Plato through to Habermas, Miller identifies a form of mimetic theory in Habermas' theory of communicative rationality and points to a way in which this may be utilised to 'negotiate a passage across the reason-aesthetic divide' (p. 6).

Miller's analysis raises considerable questions concerning the possibility of Habermasian thought remaining true to its fundamental intentions, most notably a commitment to the Enlightenment and the project of modernity, and more specifically the Kantian notion of autonomy. This reconstruction of Habermas is sure to be met with hostility and will inevitably boil the blood of any card-carrying Habermasian. In critiquing certain foundations of Habermas' thought and integrating aesthetic theory within the theory of communicative action, Miller will be seen to have walked the theory down a line that is alien and perhaps too far removed from its initial foundations. However, he walks the line with the force of clear intention, and the book is a highly original addition to the growing body of literature that recognises the brilliance of Habermas, yet seeks to move past perceived problems or tensions within aspects of his thought. Well written, though at times (perhaps unavoidably) philosophically dense, Miller