

them. And you are reminded of just how appealing and frightening and sad the humanity in all of us is.

Buckley is writing speeches for George Bush these days. I would have advised against that job too if I

had been asked. But on the evidence of this book, Buckley might even be able to make the Vice President of the United States fresh and interesting. I will never presume to advise Buckley on anything again. And I look forward to his next book as much as I cherish this one. □

TRADITION

Edward Shils / University of Chicago Press / \$20.00

Stephen Miller

Tradition, as Edward Shils says in the preface to his new book, is a "bewildering subject." It can also be a deadly boring subject. One thinks of the solemn defenses of tradition heard at commencement exercises and other ceremonial occasions or the humorless attacks against tradition by those who preach the gospel of liberation. Edward Shils does defend tradition, but his defense is far from boring—mainly because he complicates the notion of tradition in ways that make his argument far more interesting than those of most staunch traditionalists.

The strenuous defense of tradition, Shils observes, is a modern phenomenon—the work of the counter-Enlightenment. Deploring the scientific, rationalistic, and individualistic strains of modern society, many of these writers looked back in nostalgia to pre-industrial societies, which they assumed lived "in a condition of unbroken traditionality." Not so, Shils argues. Far from being locked into traditionality, such societies continually modified their traditions, since questions continually arose for which tradition had no answer.

If traditional societies were not as wedded to tradition as their defenders have suggested, modern societies are far from being completely devoid of traditional elements. All relatively complex societies are shot through with different traditions. "The body of traditions prevailing in a differentiated society," Shils says, "is a very heterogeneous thing." Not only are societies permeated by different traditions, but so too are individuals; one can be a biophysicist (or a hard-nosed businessman for that matter) as well as, say, a devout Roman Catholic. As Shils nicely puts it, we

are all—whether we realize it or not—in the grip of the past; we are all creatures of tradition.

But how can that be, bearing in mind that many regard themselves as resolutely opposed to tradition, which they equate with oppression, ignorance, and superstition? Shils argues that some patterns of thought strongly opposed to what he calls substantive tradition are themselves traditions; there is a scientific tradition, a Marxist tradition, a progressivistic tradition. When someone chooses to embrace one of these he enters into "an already charted territory with its own already established rules, demands, and exigencies."

Shils's notion of antitraditional traditions enables him to question those who make absolute distinctions between scientific and humanistic forms of inquiry. Like the humanist, the scientist never begins from the beginning, since no new knowledge is possible without a grounding in old knowledge. All traditions of inquiry—scientific, humanistic, religious—begin with a study of old knowledge, begin, that is, with a study of the tradition. "A novice in science must master a body of established knowledge which is his tradition just as a novice in training for a religious profession has to do."

Does Shils make too much of the notion of tradition, asking it to do too much explanatory work? At times I find Shils's distinctions somewhat unclear, but generally his approach is appropriate. By dwelling on what we might call the varieties of traditional experience, Shils highlights the absurdity of assuming that we can escape totally from tradition. "Where

could the totally new come from?" he asks. "In fact, no imagination is so free as to be able to contrive something wholly new, comprehensive, and detailed." Everyone, not only those who engage in scholarly inquiry, must rely on tradition. "Most human beings do not have enough imagination to think up an alternative to what is given; nor do they feel an urgent need to think up something new when there is already a pattern at hand." At the very least, tradition is a convenience, something the individual can fall back upon because the idea of continually inventing new ways of doing—or thinking about—things is a terrible burden.

Few people, I think, are strongly opposed to substantive tradition—preferring traditions that are anti-traditional. "Not everyone in society wishes to live according to the emancipatory ideal," Shils says. I would put it another way: Very few people are strongly opposed to traditional ways of doing things. Shils, in fact, exaggerates the extent to which writers of the past 200 years have subscribed to a tradition of genius

whereby the author feels compelled to "do what has not been done before by others. . . ." No significant writer of the last 200 years has been so anti-traditional. Rather, many writers have argued against the dominance of a particular canon of literature—a canon that included Alexander Pope yet left out William Blake. Shils himself acknowledges his debt to T.S. Eliot's writings on tradition, yet Eliot attempted to revise dramatically the traditional canon of English literature.

If Shils makes too much of the anti-traditional animus of the tradition of literary creation, this is nonetheless a minor flaw in a book whose importance cannot be overestimated. For its argument goes against the grain of modern social thought, especially modern sociology. Shils strongly questions the views of a seminal modern thinker whom Shils himself did much to introduce to the American scholarly public: Max Weber. According to Shils, Weber was wrong to assume that traditional beliefs and patterns of thought could not resist

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the corrosive power of rationalization. Traditional patterns of thought and feeling have much more staying power than Weber realized; they are continually modified but rarely do they disappear. Those political leaders and intellectuals engaged in a promethean project to bring instant modernization to their countries, Shils says, have been sorely disappointed, unable to "reconcile themselves to the obduracy of the human beings whom they would treat as malleable materials."

But if modernization generally has been unsuccessful, aggravating disorder in nearly every country, the fact that people rarely abandon traditional patterns of thought ought to be good news for the human race. Orwell, it seems, was much too pessimistic in 1984. Individuals of course will break down under torture, others will completely swallow the reigning ideology, but many will resist the ideology of the state, preferring to remain attached to more traditional patterns of thought. A look at modern Russian literature—from Solzhenitsyn to Sinyavsky—reveals that such is the case. Traditions, especially religious traditions, are alive and well. The traditions of rationalization or liberation are embraced by very few people. "Although substantive traditions have been shaken, they have not been obliterated."

Which, for the most part, is a good thing. I say "for the most part" because, as Shils himself makes clear, it would be foolish to endorse the traditionalist point of view totally. "The tradition of emancipation from traditions is also among the precious achievements of our civilization." Traditions always need to be modified and sometimes need to be overthrown, but Shils is certainly right when he says that "a mistake of great historical significance has been made in modern times in the construction of a doctrine which treated traditions as the detritus of the forward movement of society." □

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INSIDE THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION John D. Stempel / Indiana University Press / \$17.50 MISSION TO IRAN William H. Sullivan / W.W. Norton & Co. / \$14.95

Rustam

Can penguins live in a desert? On official holidays, high-ranking Iranian government functionaries and foreign diplomats attended audiences with the late Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. Imperial Court protocol required participants to wear formal morning suits. This meant a stiff white shirt and bow tie, dark trousers, and long black morning coats. These ceremonies lasted all morning and, given Tehran's climate, often occurred on very hot days. Officials nevertheless stood stiffly erect, perspiring but never protesting, even though the penguin-like outfits did not have a long Iranian pedigree. Such was the order of the day, and the parade continued.

Ceremonies, regardless of their formats, are only part of a diplomat's routine. As far as is known, American diplomats in Iran acquitted themselves well in this respect. But there are two other functions diplomats fulfill.

One function is to provide information and facilitate communications between their home and host governments. This requires diplomats to acquaint themselves with all aspects of their host country. If not prior to arrival, at least shortly thereafter, diplomats must come to understand the politics, culture, and history of the assigned nation. The other function, which may be called the political one, is to advise, cajole, persuade, and, if necessary, threaten the host government. In certain instances, depending on bilateral relations and the political circumstances, this function may expand. A foreign diplomat may find himself a central actor in the domestic politics of the host nation. Hence, books written by diplomats can either provide general information or shed light on the political role,

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if any, played by the author or his colleagues. (The best diplomatic writing is done by the British, who, even if at times wrong and patronizing, always exhibit a remarkable ability for penetrating a local culture, folklore, and language. Unfortunately, most American diplomatic memoirs read as if written after a long stay not abroad, but in Washington.)

It is with all this in mind that the recent testimonies of two top American diplomats in Iran need to be judged. They may, after all, provide answers to the two questions being posed about the performance of the American diplomats in Iran. Was the American embassy ill-informed about the political currents in Iran during 1978? Did the American diplomats fail to comprehend the situation and in fact, by their actions, undermine an ally?

Inside the Iranian Revolution is by John D. Stempel, who served as deputy chief of the Political Section of the American Embassy in Tehran from 1975 to 1979. He has attempted to provide a general history of recent Iranian politics and describe the role played by the American participants during the revolution. He falls short of both goals. The book is too long, often repetitive, and ultimately unsatisfying. There are factual mistakes. (To cite only two: Cooperation between the clerical and secular opposition did not, as he states, begin in 1963; rather, it had a long lineage going back to 1905; the Shah did not receive an undergraduate education in Switzerland; he only attended secondary school there.)

Stempel's main point is that the revolution in Iran was not preordained, and it could have taken a variety of different routes. So why did it take the Islamic fundamentalist road? Here a series of answers is offered: the Shah's short-sightedness, the military's indecision, the establishment's overconfidence, etc. Stempel is of course correct to point out the missed opportunities, the foolishness of officials, and the

alternative policies not pursued. But one searches in vain for an integration of these factors in this book.

No clear explanation of the secular historical forces at work—such as the emergence for the first time in Iran of a centralized state—or of the sudden and peculiar coalescence of a social, economic, and political crisis is presented. More telling is the absence of any insights into the rich cast of personalities involved. Even the controversial role of Stempel's superior in Tehran, American Ambassador William Sullivan, is glazed over. Stempel's rendition of Sullivan's performance would win an award for diplomatic verbiage. ("The President rejected the Sullivan thesis that the U.S. should take advantage of its historical position and mediate the turmoil, orchestrating an outcome more consistent with American interests in regional stability. . . .")

If Stempel fails to provide an adequate interpretation of events in Iran, what about the political role he as an American diplomat undoubtedly played during 1978 in Iran? Stempel's book unfortunately reveals neither his actions nor his thoughts at the time, and his discussion of the protracted negotiations sounds secondhand. There is one clue to his thinking and actions in a political capacity, but for that one will have to look elsewhere.

In the first week of September 1978, the Iranian government, in response to rising civil unrest, weighed the decision to impose martial law. Given the close relations between Washington and Tehran, the Iranian leadership was anxious to know the American government's attitude. The Carter Administration was a puzzle to the Shah and his advisers. On the one hand, human rights and reduced arms sales were central tenets of the Administration's foreign policy. On the other hand, the President had quite clearly backtracked on pressing these issues in his two meetings with the Shah. Iranian officials felt uneasy about official American opinion, since imposition of martial law would mean bloodshed and far more draconian measures than previous policies involved.

Martial law was declared, bloodshed did ensue, but no national crackdown comparable to recent measures in Poland followed, only a hemorrhaging of concessions which quickly undermined the basis of martial law. Nearly all analysts, including the two authors reviewed here, have noted that the simultaneous attempt at repression and politi-