

Oakeshott views Hegel through the British Idealists, and through Bradley in particular. It is also worth noting that Rawls differs from Oakeshott in insisting on the independence of political philosophy from philosophy.

A fuller comparison with Rawls would also have been welcome because of Franco's professed concern to shed some light on the so-called liberal-communitarian debate, and on the debate about liberalism more generally. The six pages on this subject form the least satisfactory part of the book, largely because Franco allows himself only the space to make a few suggestive observations and does not pursue the analysis to any great depth. Perhaps it is because it is difficult to go deeper without exposition becoming embroiled in critical analysis. Yet had a scholar of Franco's considerable talents chosen to take this path, we might have enjoyed an even finer study of Oakeshott's thought.

—Chandran Kukathas
Australian Defence Force Academy

THE PLACE OF MORALITY IN FOREIGN POLICY by Felix E. Oppenheim. Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath, 1991. Pp. xi, 112. \$27.95.

This book sets forth the author's view of the place that morality should play in the formation of foreign policy. The answer is that it should play only a small role and none when its recommendations conflict significantly with national interest. National interest must be the chief consideration behind foreign policy.

Oppenheim does not explain what he means by a "morality." He might accept my own definition of "a person's morality," as a person's having aversions to *types* of conduct A, along with a disposition to feel guilty or remorseful if he does A without an excuse, and to disapprove others who do A without an excuse, and also his thinking that these attitudes are in some appropriate way justified. If we so define it, there are, as he says, many varied moralities around the world. Oppenheim's view is that there is no "objective" way to resolve disagreements among them (p. 19). They are matters of subjective commitment. So he is a noncognitivist about morality. These views about moralities are not seriously argued in the book.

Let me now summarize the structure of his argument.

First, his conception of "rationality." He states that "an actor acts rationally if he maximizes his net expected utility, where 'utility' is taken in the broad sense of satisfaction of the actor's preferences, whatever they may be" (p. 16). So he takes an instrumental view of rationality but with the exception

that the ruling preferences of a person are to be his "true" preferences. (But how about preferences that discount the future, or take no account of desires he knows he will have in the future, or desires affected by temporary mood or satiation, and so on? Are these preferences not subject to criticism, maybe as not "true" preferences?) There is a conceptual connection between rationality and self-interest. "It is in the interest of A to do X" implies that "it would be rational for A to do X," but not rational just in relation to *any* goals A might have, but only to *welfare* goals, where these include not only wealth but health and personal security.

Thus his view is that basic *goals* are *not* subject to *rational* criticism (perhaps aside from excluding nonwelfare goals like achievement or being a good father?) with one exception: that it is *irrational* to select an end that is "practically unobtainable," meaning by definition (p. 27) that "anyone in the agent's position would normally find it too risky or difficult or costly to do otherwise." (So it is irrational for a bank clerk to risk getting killed in a holdup rather than hand over money.) Why is there this exception? It is because "ought" implies "can," but only in the sense that any prescription to do what one *cannot* do is "pointless as advice." Such judgments of what is "practically impossible," however, are relativistic; societies may differ in their judgments of what is practically impossible—one society deeming it practically impossible to risk swimming out to save a drowning child (if one can swim), whereas ours does not. (Is it irrational to risk one's life in attempting to reach the North Pole?)

The same holds for foreign policy choices. We live in a world where there is no supranational authority to enforce general principles for action. So, like the bank teller, states "have no choice but to aim at their own self-preservation" (p. 29). Thus it is *rational* for a government "to aim at the protection of its nation's territorial integrity, military security, and economic welfare . . . and not rational to adopt foreign policy goals in conflict with the national interest" (p. 29). Moreover, he says that it is "not rational to trade off even a small loss in terms of a practically necessary goal against a great material or moral gain with respect to some alternative but incompatible end" (p. 51), and that "the national interest of a wealthy nation includes maintaining its existing level of economic well-being with its relatively high living standard" (p. 54). He concedes that this must be construed in a long-term sense; thus it can be rational for the Western European nations to give up some of their sovereignty for the sake of economic growth, or for France to give up Algeria for the sake of peace, and perhaps for Israel to trade some land for peace (p. 32). In some circumstances, cooperation with rival nations may, if they are trustworthy, permit achieving joint goals (e.g., creating a good environment). It is also rational, sometimes, for officers of the state to sacrifice the national

interest to some extent in order to keep themselves in power. (Is seeking the national interest what they *ought* to do? He says this is a “moral dilemma” [p. 35]).

Oppenheim, however, is willing to make a concession to “morality.” For he says that if there are alternative policies, one of which best provides for the national interest but the other *nearly* does and is markedly superior from the moral point of view, it would not be irrational to favor the second. He does not explain this exception. But he rather despairs of any way of comparing some detriment to the national interest with the “gain of moral worth” (p. 68).

One might wonder why it is supposed to be “practically necessary” for states to adopt policies protective of self-interest. Oppenheim’s view appears to be that realism requires recognizing that states *do* make foreign policy choices mostly in this way. So the decision of Britain to go to war with Hitler’s Germany, or the accommodation at Munich, or the decision to apply force to eject the Iraqi army from Kuwait (a consideration about the control of oil supplies and its implications for U.S. well-being)—all were self-interested. But he concedes that the war in Vietnam was not justified by U.S. self-interest (unless one accepts the domino theory), nor was, possibly, the bombing of Libya, mining Nicaragua’s harbors, or invading Grenada and Panama. His suggestion is that they were *thought* to be based on self-interest but mistakenly so.

So much for Oppenheim’s argument. What should we say to it? First, his definition of “rational” is a stipulation on his part. While it reflects the usage of most economists, the English language permits one to say that some *goals* are irrational (e.g., to have a big funeral) or even, as some have held, that it is irrational to prefer one’s own benefit to the equal benefit of someone else. However, we need not object to his definition since it allows that certain acts, rational in his sense, are ones we might not wish to *recommend*. Second, his view that it is rational to do only what is possible without major loss or risk may be questioned, in view of possible sacrifices on moral grounds. But anyway, it remains to be shown that hewing to the “national interest” is the only “possible” course. For instance, it is *possible* that the United States might decide, for the present, to increase its contribution in aid of underdeveloped nations suffering from starvation and extreme poverty, say, to an extent that would require an increase in income tax, say, from 31% to 36%. (I do not deny that it might be hard to get the enthusiasm of taxpayers for this move!) I would say this is far more than a “minor” cost to the national economic interest, but why should one say it is *impossible* to take that step? What Oppenheim thinks possible or impossible appears to correspond just with his own preferences. (He thinks the relatively large contributions by

Sweden and France to underdeveloped countries are a result not of moral concern but of self-interest—for what reason I do not know.) Third, his account of the “national interest” includes territorial integrity, military security, and maintaining the level of economic well-being (but not seeking prestige or imperialist expansion—but why not?). There may be trade-offs here (e.g., land for peace). What is his proposal about deciding how these various factors are to be measured and compared? Is it to the U.S. “national interest” that it pay up its millions of indebtedness to the United Nations? Would he say that it was to the national self-interest of the Soviet Union not to take military steps to prevent secessions? Remember that it has not been proved *impossible* to put the national self-interest second to some other aims, such as worldwide justice or the rights of groups to choose their own government.

—*Richard B. Brandt*
University of Michigan