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# Books in Brief

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## *Public Corruption: The Dark Side of Social Evolution*

BY ROBERT NEILD

(London: Anthem Press, 2002) \$24.95 paper

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For Robert Neild, author of *Public Corruption*, corrupt government is the norm, not the exception. "There is always a temptation to break rules for the sake of economic or other gains," he writes, "and one can be sure that a fraction, large or small, of any population will yield to that temptation." It is a bleak picture, but one difficult to dispute.

Neild's basic premise is that in order to understand why corruption is such a pervasive phenomenon, one must examine the few instances where it has successfully been suppressed. He selects three countries from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that, in his opinion, were relatively uncorrupt: Britain, France, and Germany (Prussia). He maintains that these countries were able to drastically curtail corruption in public institutions largely due to the high degree of external military competition to which they were exposed.

The link between corruption and external military competition may seem untenable at first glance. Conventional wisdom might suggest that corruption is less a function of a country's external problems and more a function of its internal ones, such as poverty, unequal income distribution, or a lack of sufficient anti-bribery legislation. But Neild makes a compelling case, at least with respect to the three countries in his study. In Western Europe in the eighteenth century, he says, states that were exposed to a great deal of military competition were forced to maximize their ability to mobilize for war. The more efficient a government's ability to finance its military operations, the more likely it was to succeed on the battlefield. For example, Neild points out that in the process of reorganizing his country into a hierarchical military state, Frederick the Great, who ruled Prussia from 1740 until 1786, outlawed the sale of public offices, created examination standards for civil servants, and regularized the country's tax collection system. Likewise, he argues that the French government under Napoleon became efficient, standardized, and relatively uncorrupt.

Extrapolating this theory to the present day would lead one to the bizarre conclusion that more war means less corruption. But, as Neild points out, as the nature of military competition has evolved dramatically since the nineteenth century, so too

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has its relationship to corruption. In the nuclear age, when one bomb can wipe out an entire city, governments have little need to mass-mobilize their resources on an efficient, nationwide scale. Furthermore, because the goal of the Cold War was to avoid direct, overt military confrontation at all costs, states increasingly relied on covert operations to achieve their military goals. Neild writes that Henry Kissinger once joked, "The illegal we do immediately; the unconstitutional takes a bit longer." Such operations, according to Neild, have created a culture of corruption where crookedness and dishonesty are the *modus operandi* for many governments.

Neild's analysis is important in one more respect. For many years, corruption was a taboo topic, a necessary evil that businessmen, politicians, and academics alike were loath to discuss. In the past decade, Transparency International and other anti-corruption groups have stressed the significance of engaging in dialogue about corruption. Neild's original and thought-provoking work takes that process of raising awareness one step further.

—*Waqar Hasib*

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### ***The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought***

BY MOHAMMED ARKOUN

(*Saqi Books, 2002*) \$55 cloth

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*The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought* makes available for the first time the breadth and depth of Mohammed Arkoun's work to an English readership and reaffirms the significance of his contribution to Modern Islamic Studies. Based at the Sorbonne in Paris and writing mostly in French and Arabic for the past four decades, the Algerian-born Arkoun provides a distinctive voice in the timeless debate between Islam and modernity.

Drawing on the tools and methodologies of history, sociology, psychology, and anthropology, the work combines a critical review of modern studies dedicated to what is generally labeled "Islam" with an assessment of the original scriptures treated in those studies as sources of genuine information. By doing so, Arkoun's approach subjects varying belief systems (including non-belief), traditions of exegesis, theology, and jurisprudence to a critique aimed at liberating reason from dogmatic constructs.

By treating Islam as a religion as well as a time-honored tradition of thought, Arkoun's work aims at overcoming the limitations of a purely descriptive, narrative, and chronological treatment of history. He does so by recommending that the entire development of Muslim thought, from the Qu'ranic worldview to the range of contemporary discourses, be subjected to critical analysis—an analysis that will engender a discussion as to how Islamic studies and

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thought can be brought to the level of the fertile criticisms witnessed in European scholarship and historical development since the seventeenth century.

In this current work, Professor Arkoun pays as much attention to exploring the epistemological options underlying the different types of discourse, as to the development of facts, events, ideas, beliefs, performances, institutions, works of art, and individual biographies based on reliable archives. He argues that writing history without taking issue with each word, concept, and attitude used by the social protagonist is misleading and even dangerous for people who assimilate the representations of the past proposed by historians as the undisputable truth. Arkoun asserts that this is why each social group has built itself an image of its past without having the means of differentiating the mythical or ideological image from the critical approaches provided by modern historians.

Each of the book's eight essays addresses some of these concerns by referring to a number of larger tensions which, Arkoun believes, remain "unthought" in contemporary Islamic discourse. These topics have been addressed, at least to some extent, in Islamic scholarship, but have generally been relegated to the domain of the "unthinkable."

The first two chapters of this work introduce ways of "problematizing" the larger category of revelation through the example of the Qu'ran. They propose a program of research aimed at constructing a new field for the comparative study of revelation as a historic, linguistic, cultural, and anthropological articulation of thought, common to Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

Likewise, seven other themes related to large and complex domains of modern debates within Islam are introduced in the following chapters: problems of the state, civil society, the individual, and human rights; the concept of the person, the individual, and the citizen; belief, non-belief, and the construction of the human subject in Muslim contexts; authority and power; and the "religious *imaginaire*" construct.

Presenting Arkoun's oeuvre in English for the first time, the essays that compose this book explore the tensions that have challenged the author since the beginning of his academic career, providing an up-to-date and acute insight into his thought and methodology. This dense and challenging work will be an invaluable asset for those concerned with the contemporary world as viewed through the disciplines of Islamic and religious studies, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and history.

—*Maliha Masood*

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## *The End of Eurasia: Russia on the Border Between Geopolitics and Globalization*

BY DIMITRI TRENIN

(Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002)

\$24.95 paper

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Watching Russia trying to emerge from the wreckage of the Soviet Union has been painful. To be sure, post-Soviet Russia has struggled to find its place in the modern world. Since the Soviet collapse, Russia has experienced a financial crisis, two wars in Chechnya, and severe social dislocation and economic hardship. What will be next?

In *The End of Eurasia*, author Dimitri Trenin presents a fascinating and pragmatic look at what potentially lies beyond the horizon for Russia. This glimpse of the future is informed by Trenin's clear-headed analysis of Russia's contemporary geopolitical realities. He not only examines Russia's traditional challengers such as China and the West, but also expands his study to little-known autonomous republics within the Russian Federation including Tuva, Buryatia, and Karelia. *The End of Eurasia* is a must read for anyone trying to understand today's Russia, as well as the manner in which its international identity will be shaped tomorrow.

Trenin begins his book by examining Russia's historical pattern of expansion. This look into the past sets up his argument that Eurasia—the term he uses for the Russian empire—is dead. In other words, Russia can no longer reclaim its identity as an empire; czarist Russia and the Soviet Union are anachronisms in the twenty-first century. In Trenin's view, "Russia simply cannot continue as before, either in its international organization or in its relations with other countries. In order to survive, it has to reinvent itself."

Thus, at the turn of the twenty-first century Russia finds itself at a crucial juncture. It must decide if it will become a part of the post-modern, modern, or pre-modern world. According to Trenin, the choice is self-evident: Russia must integrate itself into the post-modern world, which means that it must become a part of Europe. As Trenin affirms, the only rational option for Russia's leaders "is to fully stress Russia's European identity and engineer its gradual integration into a Greater Europe." How will Russia chart its course into Europe?

As the largest country in the world—stretching across eleven time zones—Russia, by natural extension, is entangled with influences from the European west, the Islamic south, and the Asian-Pacific east. Fortunately for Russia, Trenin argues, its western frontier is relatively stable. In recent years, Russia's relations with NATO, the EU, and Eastern Europe have been improving. Russia's southern tier, however, is a different story. The southern periphery is Russia's most vul-

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nerable area—its “soft underbelly,” he says. Numerous problems plague this region. These include ongoing conflict in Chechnya, unstable regimes in Central Asia, and porous borders that expose Russia to sources of instability emanating from the south. In Trenin’s view, from Osh to Orenburg to Omsk, there are virtually no obstacles to prevent drugs, refugees, and terrorists from entering Russia.

Trenin’s analysis of Russia’s Far East reveals his most provocative insight. It is Russia’s “Far Eastern backyard” that warrants the greatest concern, he asserts, further insisting that the fate of Siberia and the Russian Far East “is likely to be Russia’s most crucial geopolitical problem.” Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, economic degradation, crumbling infrastructure, and de-population of the Far Eastern provinces have essentially cut off Russia’s Far Eastern citizens from the rest of the country. Trenin warns that this trend needs to be reversed, or else “Russia might well lose thirteen million square kilometers (three quarters) of its territory east of the Urals, and the vast expanses and the natural riches of the territory might become an object of intense international competition.”

Trenin concludes by arguing that Russia needs to build a “Europe” within its borders. To this end, he advocates that Moscow seek EU membership and implement “imaginative” policies to develop the country’s hinterlands. As Trenin states, “Russia will need to concentrate on the development of its resource-rich, but backward and increasingly degraded borderlands.” Such a move, he believes, will promote Russia’s security and ultimately help it to integrate into the modern world.

—*Kimito Mishina*

