

ry's most profound analysts of the ideas that have shaped Western politics. In his masterpiece, *On Human Conduct*, he identified two irreducibly opposed ideal characters, 'civil association' and 'enterprise association,' and he sought to show how together they constituted the political consciousness of modern Europe.

The collection is a mixed bunch. Disappointingly, it does not include Patrick Riley's essay, one of the few which pay adequate attention to Oakeshott's early articles. Norman does, however, include Josiah Lee Auspitz's tribute from *The American Scholar*, which, in the elegance of its composition, its empathy for its subject's manner and concerns, and its balance between life and works, is probably the best single essay I have read about Oakeshott, and an excellent starting point for those who either know little of his work or who have not seen past the critique of rationalism. There are two deft pieces by Kenneth Minogue and a characteristically funny effort by John Casey. Jeffrey Hart's 'The Civilised Imperative,' however, hits a low point when it suggests that the theory of the state that Oakeshott proposed in *On Human Conduct*, 'came down to earth in the practice of Margaret Thatcher.' Whatever one may think of Thatcher, that book was far removed from practical politics. And although Noel O'Sullivan's 'In the Perspective of Western Thought' contains some acute observations, it gives more significance than one would wish to the 'conservative' dimension of Oakeshott's thought.

In addition to the essays, Norman includes an excellent bibliography. This adds to what was listed in previous compilations a number of book reviews and a couple of essays by Oakeshott from the early 1920s. It also does an impressive job with secondary sources up to early 1992, even

recording the correspondence in the *Times Literary Supplement* regarding Paul Franco's book on Oakeshott. I detected only three omissions from this listing, none of them terribly important: a review of Franco's and another book in *The Salisbury Review*, a review of Franco by Wendell John Coats in *The Review of Politics*, and an article on conservatism from the *International Political Science Review* (1987). Such minor glitches notwithstanding, this bibliography is the most thorough available, and scholars especially may find it is by itself sufficient to justify the purchase of the volume.

reviewed by Alan Cocks
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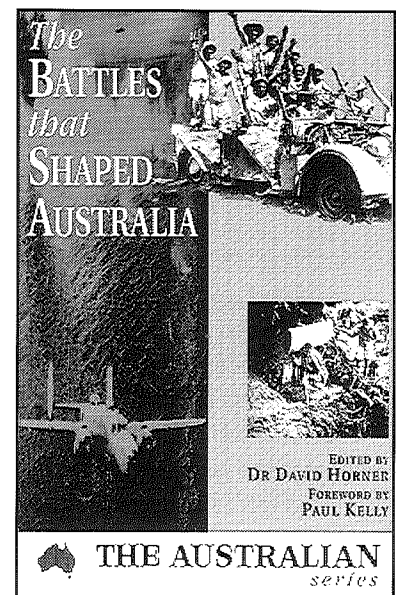
The Battles that Shaped Australia: The Australian's Anniversary Essays
edited by David Horner
Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1994,
293pp, ISBN 1 86373 704 9
\$24.95

After having read *The Battles that Shaped Australia*, I felt that what I was reading was not a sincere recollection of historical accounts, but rather an attempt to justify Prime Minister Paul Keating's wish to choose certain parts of Australia's World War Two sacrifices as the new altar upon which we should all worship.

Far from being a balanced historical view depicting the grand scale in which Australians fought for country and empire, this narrowly focused book came across as politically skewed history.

Of course, the way Australians perceived nationalism and national sacrifice was different in 1939-45 than it is or would be today. Britain and empire were very much a part of what many thought was the national character at the time. It reflected a past reality. Consequently, it was logical for Australians to commit to the defence of Britain and empire during World War Two in areas of little direct relevance to Australia's immediate territorial defence, and even to support such flawed imperial schemes as reliance on the Singapore Strategy. And yet when Australia was threatened with strategic isolation by the Japanese, Australia's commitment to the defence of its own immediate defence requirements was equal to that displayed to the empire – why? Because the two concepts were deemed irretrievably bound together.

The battles that shaped Australia were not only those that were fought in the South West Pacific area of operations. Australians learnt and grew



from their wider experience fighting on the battlefields of Europe and the Middle East as well.

I do not see a contradiction in giving equal historical significance to the battles fought for Australia and those battles fought by Australians elsewhere since they were both placed at a time when loyalties to Britain and Australia were given equal billing. It seems unfortunate that those who have the responsibility of telling history can so easily be lured into picking favourites.

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Australian Political Ideas
edited by Geoff Stokes
UNSW Press, Sydney, 1994,
204pp, ISBN 0 86840 094 7
\$24.95

Australian political ideas? Or political ideas in Australia? This is one of the unfortunate editorial preoccupations in what is an uneven book. Unfortunate, because it raises unduly hopes of clarifying the intellectually vexed, and politically charged notion of Australian identity. Uneven, because the book consists of eight essays of quite different lengths, differing focus, and inconsistent quality. Despite an editorial acknowledgment of eclecticism, and despite the merit of some of the essays, one is left wondering why these particular pieces were brought together between the same covers.

The two most substantial and longest essays in this book (between them accounting for almost half its length) are traditional exercises in the history of political thought. Len Hume's piece, 'Foundations of Populism and Pluralism: Australian Writings on Politics to 1860' — originally written some years ago — is characteristically Len: thoughtful and elegant. Colin Hughes on 'The Ideas and Influence of Edward Bellamy' in Australia, is likewise importantly engaged in filling gaps in the development of political thinking in this country. Of the remainder — a survey of feminist thought, discussion of competing images of democracy, two essays on Peter Carey, and an examination of competing strands of liberalism within the Liberal Party — the last essay by Ian Cook, 'From Menzies to Hewson', is the most promising. The pieces on Carey, thankfully short, are notable for mistaking jargon for insight.

Those essays which avoid the mire of the 'Australian identity' issue are the better for it. Trying to isolate what is distinctively 'Australian' about the political thought in this country is a complex task which requires not just conceptual clarity and historical feel, but a confrontation with the alternate layers of intellectual bravado and defensiveness which have tended to fog considerations of the issue. Similarly, what it means for Australians to contribute to political thought is complicated by confusion over where the goal posts ought to be set. Geoff Stokes gropes towards an understanding of these difficulties in the 'methodological' sections of his introduction, but is ultimately unhelpful.

As the first volume in a projected series on 'Australian Social and Political Thought', Stokes proclaims its rationale in terms of provoking 'reappraisal of Australian political thought' and drawing 'wider attention to a relatively unworked field of inquiry'

(p.17). In both respects, he betrays an exaggerated sense of mission.

Australian political and social thought has appeared in many forms (few of them systematic treatises), and little of it has escaped scrutiny of some sort. Much of that thought is unashamedly 'derivative', without disqualifying it from claims to distinctiveness and distinction. Australians are shaped by the traditions of political thought we inherit and import, as well as by the novel situations we confront. My reading of a number of different political debates up to the 1920s suggests that Australians were in many respects boastful of their political and social achievements, even as they respected the depth of culture in Europe and elsewhere.

Scholars should beware reliving the history of their discipline. Volumes such as this may be useful in getting a grasp on what is established, what is novel, and what remains to be done; but they need to be constructed with a more realistic sense of purpose.

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