

challenged some if not all of the premises of the Bush approach. And regardless of their campaign rhetoric, if a Democrat does win, once in office he will be obliged to decide in practice how much of the Bush agenda to preserve as he seeks to protect an American public that feels more vulnerable than it has for decades.

The debate between proponents of a targeted approach to confronting terrorism and proponents of the broad approach is thus a healthy and important one. These are serious issues and both approaches entail genuine risks and genuine benefits. In the American political context, the trauma of 11 September has produced an inclination to favour the more aggressive approach. As former President Clinton has pointed out, when Americans feel insecure they will always be tempted to support policies that are 'strong and wrong rather than weak and right'. The challenge to the next US administration – indeed, to the United States and its allies – is to conceive and implement policies that are both strong, and right.

End of the European Idea?

Erik Jones

A Certain Idea of Europe

Craig Parsons. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003. £25.50. 256pp

The collapse of constitutional talks in Brussels on 13 December 2003 marks a turning point for European integration. The intergovernmental conference (IGC) will continue and, eventually, the heads of state and government of the European Union will agree on a constitutional treaty. They may even succeed in getting the treaty ratified by each of the 25 EU member states. Yet European integration has become much more difficult. The question is why.

An economic explanation would centre on bargaining and self-interest. The EU has at last reached a stage where the differences between the member states are too great to bridge. The resulting conflict between large and small, rich and poor, has shattered consensus on the basic rules for decision making. This argument is pessimistic, and yet not fatalistic. Bargaining is an ongoing process and self-interest springs

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eternal. European integration is only on hold, not dead. The process will resume once the differences between member states diminish or the advantages of integration become compelling enough to forge a new consensus. Hence, the new Europe will be much like the old, although the number of players is larger and the deals they make are correspondingly more complicated.

A more troubling explanation would centre on the clash of grand ideas and not on economics or self-interest. In this view, the present crisis represents a fundamental clash of competing visions of Europe's future. France and Germany see Europe evolving into a superpower capable of decisive action on the world stage. Poland and Spain see Europe as a framework for protecting their national interests and taming the power of the larger member states. Of course such visions reflect national self interest, and of course they are part of any bargaining within the IGC. Nevertheless, there is more at stake than just self-interest. The outcome of the intergovernmental conference will not easily be reversed and will have lasting effects beyond any simple formula for compromise. Hence the new Europe may be fundamentally different from the old.

This more troubling explanation hinges on the notion that ideas matter at least as much as self-interest, if not more. Such arguments were once common in reference to European integration. At the start of the 1960s, there were a number of works that attempted to divine Europe's future from the contrast between 'grand alternatives' or 'conflicting perspectives'.¹ Now such arguments are more rare (although important exceptions can be found).² The major works on Europe today tend to emphasise economic rationality over the role of ideas.³ Such analysis has made great strides in helping to connect the politics between countries to the politics within countries. However, the danger is that excessive emphasis on economic rationality will lead to a complacent reading of the forces at work in Europe today.

Craig Parsons offers an important tonic for such complacency. His recent book, *A Certain Idea of Europe*, makes the strong case that ideas

¹ See, for example, David P. Calleo, *Europe's Future: The Grand Alternatives* (New York: The Norton Library, 1967); Ellen Frey-Wouters, 'The Progress of European Integration', *World Politics*, vol. 17, no. 3, April 1965 pp. 460–477; George Lichtheim, *The New Europe: Today and Tomorrow* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963); Arnold Wolfers, 'Integration in the West: The Conflict of Perspectives', *International Organization*, vol. 17, no. 3, Summer 1963, pp. 753–770.

² David P. Calleo, *Rethinking Europe's Future* (Princeton: Princeton University Press for the Century Foundation, 2001).

³ Andrew Moravcsik, *The Choice for Europe: Social Purpose and State Power from Messina to Maastricht* (London: UCL Press, 1998).

matter. Often, Parsons claims, ideas matter even more than economics. The choice for a supranational Commission, the decision to launch a common agricultural policy, the pattern of monetary integration from the European Monetary System to the single currency, and the relaunching of Europe in the 1980s are the result of visionary ideas, rather than narrow self-interest. Where specific economic interests were present, their influence was often confused and occasionally even opposed to the policies and institutions that were adopted. Hence, only by understanding the beliefs advocated by key actors at crucial moments in time can we begin to explain why the European Union is structured as it is today. By implication, some understanding of the role of ideas is essential to shed light on Europe's future.

Parsons' argument is persuasive, if not exactly path-breaking. Although Parsons has conducted interviews and consulted archives, he presents no startling documentary revelations and relies overwhelmingly on narrative material drawn from secondary sources.⁴ He is not the first to argue that ideas play an important role in European integration; he is not alone in analysing Europe's failures as well as its successes; and he is not unique in asserting that ideas have an independent causal significance. These qualifications should not detract from what Parsons has accomplished; however, they tend to deflate the author's exaggerated claims to originality.⁵

⁴ Parsons asserts (p. 32): 'With respect to sources, I am a pragmatist. I draw first and foremost on my own archival research and interviews'. By my count, Parsons cites archival material on only 42 of the 193 pages of the main text he cites interviews on only another 29. Of course such quantitative measures may not be wholly revealing. Therefore, readers might contrast Parson's analysis of De Gaulle's position on Europe in the early 1960s with that provided in Marc Trachtenberg, 'De Gaulle, Moravcsik, and Europe', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol. 2, no. 3, Fall 2000, pp. 101–116.

⁵ The earlier literature on the role of ideas in Europe is cited in note 1, above. Parsons complains (p.68) that most authors ignore the significance of the European Defence Community (EDC) episode, but does not mention that at least two of his own sources – one by F. Roy Willis and the other by Achille Albonetti – give the EDC extensive coverage. The real target of this complaint is Andrew Moravcsik's work (see note 3). However, Parsons neglects to point out that Moravcsik starts his argument only in 1958. We may disagree with this choice of starting dates – and I certainly have – but we have to concede that Moravcsik had to start somewhere. See *Governance*, vol. 13, no. 1, January 2000, pp. 107–109. Finally, for an excellent analysis of the causal significance of ideas in another context, see Daniel C. Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights, and the Demise of Communism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

Parson's argument has two principal axes: choice and constraint. Politicians make choices based on what they believe to be the best of the alternatives available. In turn, these choices influence what alternatives will be available in the future. If Giscard had not chosen to promote the European Monetary System in 1978, Mitterrand would not have chosen to implement austerity measures in 1983, to re-launch the European Community in 1984–85, or to advocate monetary union in 1989–90. Moreover, the cycle of choice and constraint is mutually reinforcing. The French politicians who first imagined Europe in the 1950s perceived a wide range of alternatives. Fast-forward to the 1990s, and the range of alternatives is so narrow as to constitute consensus.

The system that Parsons describes is driven at the outset by important ideas, but not ultimately determined by them. Politicians cannot predict how their choices will constrain politicians in the future. Instead, the pattern of European integration is highly contingent on later circumstances. As Parsons explains:

[H]ad unrelated electoral competitions installed more continuous pro-community French leadership, Europe might look still more like a supranational federation today. Given a heart attack or two and some plausible coalitional reshuffling, such leadership might have saved the EDC [European Defence Community (1954)], or perhaps the Werner Plan [to form an economic and monetary union by 1980 (1970)]. The end of the millennium might have seen a Europe with even more powerful international institutions (p. 235).

What is striking about this argument is that ideas matter much less than the act of choosing. Parsons is convincing in his assertion that French attitudes, and not interest group politics, determined French decisions. These decisions in turn had an impact on European development. Therefore, ideas are an important force in European integration. However, it would be a mistake to take this argument to its logical extreme. Ideas were not always the most important causal factors. And French actions were not always decisive. Other countries had a critical influence on the integration process and they were often motivated by narrow conceptions of self-interest rather than by any broader ideas of Europe. For example, the Dutch opposed the supranational High Authority in the early 1950s and insisted that the European Coal and Steel Community be endowed with a Council of Ministers and a Court of Justice. By the early 1960s, the Dutch stood against De Gaulle's proposal to multiply and strengthen intergovernmental councils (the Fouchet Plan) and fought hard to protect the interests of the supranational European Commission. Had the Dutch not prevailed in both cases, the European Union would certainly look different today. However, these examples are united by self-interest and not by ideas.

Taking a somewhat broader view, Parsons' argument can be read as a plea to regard history as a set of choices made by individuals who are motivated both by ideas and self-interest. At some points, these individuals will succeed in imposing their designs on institutions and agreements. At other times, they will fail. The future will be influenced by the outcome regardless. We could cast this theory of history in the complicated language of political science. Or we could place it more easily in the classic debate between E.H. Carr and G.R. Elton⁶. Carr argued that history is caused by broad social forces and that historical accidents, while important, should not be allowed to obscure analysis. By contrast, Elton insisted on the importance of individuals and circumstance. Parsons would no doubt agree.

The European Union has entered an Eltonian moment. We might admit that the forces for integration are deeply rooted and that they have great momentum. However, we must accept that the actions of individuals over the next few months will matter a great deal for Europe's future. If Europe's heads of state and government succeed in generating political support for constitutional reform, they stand a good chance of having a decisive impact on the pattern of integration. However, if – as is more likely – Europe's statesmen find that they cannot garner the political support for a great leap forward, then they will have to adapt to incremental reform and muddling through. Grand ideas may have been influential in Europe's past, but self-interest and broad social forces will predominate in Europe's future.

⁶ E. H. Carr, *What is history?* (London: Penguin, 1990); G.R. Elton, *The practice of history* (London: Fontana Press, 1987).