

devastating state of affairs lies with a close reading of, and *political solidarity with*, the black freedom movement.

* * *

The Quality of Government: The Political Economy of Corruption, Social Trust and Inequality in an International Comparative Perspective. By Bo Rothstein. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011. 301 pp. \$80.00 cloth.

Reviewed by Ararat L. Osipian, Peabody College of Education,
Vanderbilt University

The Quality of Government: The Political Economy of Corruption, Social Trust and Inequality in an International Comparative Perspective by Bo Rothstein suggests that a key feature of quality of government, based on a specific normative and behavioral criterion, is impartiality in the exercise of public authority. The author argues that democracy, which concerns access to government power, cannot be a sufficient criterion of quality of government because if the quality of government would be merely equated to democracy, the importance of the way power is exercised by government authorities would fall out of focus.

Rothstein does a good job of conceptualizing the quality of government. Through the review and criticism of several key works on the quality of governance, he derives the definition of the quality of government. The author also suggests that the quality of government cannot be defined solely as the absence of corruption. Rothstein concurs with Oscar Kurer (2005: 230) in stating that “corruption involves a holder of public office violating the impartiality principle in order to achieve private gain” (15). He builds his argument around the concept of impartiality, which is a truly contested concept, and suggests that the quality of government as impartiality can be measured.

The concept of self-interest as the moving force of the market-based economy is not as simple as the classics would envision it. Rothstein rightly points out that, “We should simply sell to and buy from anyone if the price is right, regardless of family background, ethnicity, or religion. However, the accepted norm in the private sphere is that we should not behave according to self-interest against our family (or clan) members or friends but should pursue what we, from some other-regarding notion, deem good for all

members of this small group. The point here is that such groups do not, as with the market, have free entrance but are restricted to their ‘members’” (20). It becomes obvious to the reader that there are plenty of natural distortions to the ideal market environment and market forces. At the end, individuals are not simply economic agents, but humans as well. Thus, their actions are not only economically rational, but are based on noneconomic considerations. This type of bounded rationality relates to the social character of the economy rather than its classical meaning of rational decision-making, presented by Herbert Simon (1991), where decisions of individuals or market agents are limited or bounded by the information they have, the cognitive limitations of their minds, and the finite amount of time they have to make a decision.

The book by Rothstein reminds one of Eric Uslaner’s (2008) *Corruption, Inequality, and the Rule of Law: The Bulging Pocket Makes the Easy Life*, in its appeal to social trust, inequality, legitimacy, and the rule of law. Rothstein devotes just a small section specifically to the rule of law, calling it an inherently ambiguous concept (27). He is not original in his example of Nazi Germany as an illustration of the ambiguity of the rule of law concept. The author makes a statement that impartiality implies the rule of law and links it to procedural impartiality and legitimation.

Rothstein uses a fair amount of quantitative analysis in order to substantiate his argument. Specifically, he investigates correlations between the quality of government and major economic indicators, such as growth rate of real gross domestic product per capita (45–46), quality of life and social well-being (47), and environmental issues (51). Such correlations may be interesting, but the idea itself cannot be considered as original. For instance, correlations between such indicators as the level of corruption and economic growth per capita are commonly accepted in the field of development economics. Nevertheless, introducing some quantitative analysis in a political science volume is a welcomed addition, which serves well the illustrative task of the book. While the author’s discussion of corruption, political legitimacy, and quality of government in the first part of the book is interesting and brings in some good analytical points, he does not offer anything new in the second part. Overall, the book will be of interest to those who want to see a good work of conceptualization and discussion of fairness, justice, welfare, and social trust, and their antipodes, such as corruption.

References

- Kurer, Oscar (2005) “Corruption: An Alternative Approach to Its Definition and Measurement,” 53 *Political Studies* 222–39.

- Simon, Herbert (1991) "Bounded Rationality and Organizational Learning," 2 *Organization Science* 125–34.
- Uslaner, Eric M. (2008) *Corruption, Inequality, and the Rule of Law: The Bulging Pocket Makes the Easy Life*. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press.