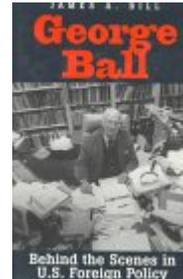




**James A. Bill.** *George Ball: Behind the Scenes in U.S. Foreign Policy.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997. xiii + 274 pp. \$30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-300-06969-3.



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Although he never held an elective or cabinet-rank office and never served as a kingpin in either political party, George Ball is a familiar name. Why? Because he was influential, courageous, admired, provocative, and uncannily prescient. James Bill, a professor of government at the College of William and Mary, whose previous publications include an excellent study of American-Iranian relations, has fleshed out the illustrious career of a State Department official best known for his bold contrarianism.

George Ball was also an insider, a well-connected lawyer who adroitly slid between the worlds of business and government. His broad vision of the world tempered the rigid orthodoxies held by many during the Cold War. But floating in and out of the world of multinational corporations, he also represented the type of leadership that has alienated the American public toward government. Ball proved to be a brilliant diplomat, and a perfect example of the dangers of elitism.

I once had the good fortune to interview him at his Princeton home. His study looked exactly like the photo on the book's cover. Mounds of journals, shelves stuffed with books testified to his absorption in foreign affairs. When entering the study, one walked past a Who's Who of photographs showing Ball with leading dignitaries. Knowing the right people was a key to his success and fame.

Drawing on Ball's extensive writings, the detailed diaries of Ball's wife (but disappointingly, few personal papers), and numerous interviews, James Bill has dissected the private and public sides of this statesman. The author implies that Ball's ideas and style should serve as a model for American diplomats. Such praise is understandable. Ball gave advice at pivotal moments and contributed to the cause of internationalism. His sagacity toward some of the toughest issues that faced the United States over the past forty years was exceptional. Bill goes further by setting Ball apart from a crowded field of experts by focusing on his "phronesis," or a "practical wisdom that involves the selection of the proper means to achieve a good or moral end" (p. 203).

The author builds toward the notion of phronesis through two hundred pages of history. A biographical section covering the high and low points of Ball's career and personal life comprises roughly half of this history. The next one hundred pages deal with the major events that occupied Ball: European integration and trade, the Congo, Vietnam, Cuba, Cyprus, and Arab-Israeli relations. The biography should have been integrated into the events to make the narrative more seamless and less repetitive. Still, the author ably argues that Ball's style of diplomacy should be the preferred course for the future.

Leaving aside the issues of European integration and free-trade for a moment, a look at Ball's interests in other

arenas reveals his prudence. At heart a Europeanist, Ball nonetheless gave counsel on Third World hotspots which defied easy solution. He was not always successful but his responses were thoughtful. The complex Congo crisis of the mid-1960s was a good example. Ball waded a tightrope between endorsing the pro-business stance that favored the Katangan secession and the idealistic hope for political unity. Holding to form, Ball eschewed both *realpolitik* and one-world thinking in a search for answers that protected lives but did not get America overly involved. That approach failed to prevent the rise of the Mobutu dictatorship but it ended the crisis.

Regarding Ball's famous dissent on Vietnam, Bill reminds us that the Undersecretary of State's plea against escalating U.S. involvement in 1965 was not public knowledge at the time. Only with the release of the Pentagon Papers in 1971 did Ball receive recognition as the sole, prominent opponent of the disastrous course in Southeast Asia. He publicly defended Lyndon Johnson's policy and also supported bombing on occasion, remaining loyal to the administration. Bill admits that Ball had ambitions for higher office and was unwilling to burn his bridges over Vietnam. Still, the author documents Ball's impressive pamphleteering against escalation. Ball profoundly believed that America had abandoned logic for dogmatism, and he was right. He thus engaged in a constant rearguard action against Cold War ideologues and technocrats who ran the administration.

In one of the strongest sections of the book, Bill describes Ball's skillful bureaucratic machinations that earned him respect in the administration on Vietnam. Although he remained in the second tier of the State Department, outside the top levels of decision-making, Ball was a skilled tactician in the game of bureaucratic politics. The author is superb in parrying the criticism that Ball should have resigned in a display of disgust to force debate over Vietnam into the public arena. Quitting in this way would have been an empty gesture that Johnson would have easily overcome. An establishment man, Ball also had no intention of joining up with the anti-war protesters, an unsavory lot in his eyes. And after all, Ball did eventually resign.

In the final chapter of the historical section, Bill addresses Cuba, Cyprus, and the Middle East. There is little new in the discussion of Cuba, but he builds his case that Ball's prudence helped John Kennedy choose the blockade over the inflammatory air strike. The author also criticizes Ball's aggressive intervention in the sticky Cyprus crisis of 1964, even though Ball's tireless efforts

staved off massive casualties in the short-term. Regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict, the author is thorough, fair, and perceptive in explicating Ball's notorious berating of Israel's aggressive behavior. Ball despised shuttle diplomacy and viewed the Camp David Accords as narrow stop-gap measures that would not ease tensions on a permanent basis. To the end of his life, he excoriated Israel's search-and-destroy strategy against the PLO. His idea of involving all parties with interests in the region, including the Soviet Union, turned out to be the one followed in the progressive era in Middle Eastern relations in the 1990s. Bill shows the polemical side of Ball as Israel's lobbyists censured him, but the author also notes how insulting these critics were when they simplistically labeled Ball an antisemite.

The finale of the book examines Ball's statecraft. Bill develops the notion of phronesis, replete with a figure that shows how a statesman must balance means, ends, and praxis in a way that goes beyond mere prudence. A statesman must be moral without being idealistic. Diplomats must decide the appropriate and proportionate means to attain an end, choose a goal that is in the public rather than individual's interest, and remain empathetic to others. By being sensitive and passionate but cautious and measured, a statesman practices diplomacy as a moral, responsible, and accountable leader. According to Bill, George Ball held these traits, a point he drives home by comparing Ball with the vain, self-interested, and amoral Henry Kissinger.

Taking Kissinger to task, Bill's presentation is a bit unfair. Unlike the top policymakers, Kissinger included, Ball operated in a sheltered environment. Political ramifications confronted their every move. Ball could offer his views from the bleachers of the State Department, insulated from critics and protected from Congress. The author makes much of Ball's Midwestern common sense (whatever that stereotype is), but immunity from Congress and the electorate made life much easier for him. Perhaps he seemed such a maverick because he operated in the second tier. Would he have continued to express his views so freely if he had been secretary of state?

In addition, is Ball really all that special? One might argue that George Marshall, Kennedy, and Cyrus Vance, to name just a handful, also practiced phronesis. The author lists Ball's long-term goals: upholding international law, democracy, and peaceful resolution of conflict. That is a wide-ranging list. Dean Rusk, for example, had the same objectives. It is doubtful, however, that James Bill

would consider Rusk a practitioner of phronesis.

Ball operated in the Cold War milieu, yet was he more prudent than other Cold Warriors? He embraced the fundamental beliefs of the day. He hated McCarthyism—like many liberals—but he backed a tough stance against communism. There is NO evidence that Ball despised the Shah of Iran in the 1950s and 1960s, or that he wanted to pull back from the containment policy in the early 1960s, even in places like Vietnam. But in pushing the idea that Ball was a statesman of singular qualities, the author downplays Ball the Cold Warrior. In reality, Ball differed from his colleagues over the means—but not the oftentimes myopic ends—of American foreign policy.

The author clearly approves of Ball's public-good vision. And like many observers, James Bill is taken by the awesome powers of prediction held by this respected diplomat. Curiously, he allots part of the final section to illustrating, in quite convincing fashion, that Ball's flaws undercut some of his greatness. These flaws included a Eurocentrism, a galling elitism, and an irritatingly dogmatic debating style. Yet for the author, Ball stands between the useless do-goods like Adlai Stevenson and Jimmy Carter and the power-hungry Machiavellians like Johnson and Kissinger as an archetype for diplomacy. But let us consider George Ball in a different light.

Ball was, pure and simple, an elitist. This opinion in no way denigrates Ball's capacities or, for that matter, James Bill's superb scholarly effort. To be sure, Ball was dead-on about many issues. His planning papers for the Kennedy administration were amazingly reflective. America should be more prudent, maintaining an "acute sense of proportion, objectivity, and balance" (p. xvii), as Ball did in his career. We should be wiser, more prepared, and more moral now that the Cold War has ended. Yet's Ball's elitism makes phronesis extremely difficult.

Unlike the politicians under whom he served, Ball was not in tune with the needs of the common people (which the author admits). But Ball's linked cardinal interests in European politics, the growth of the Common Market, and free trade reveal him to be less than the statesman who championed the public goods of equity and democracy. As Bill admits, Ball was no populist. But Ball was more than aloof; he was a big business global lawyer claiming to be a liberal. Is that position hypocritical? Yes, unless we accept that today's terms, in an era in which New Democrats and New Labour gleefully separate ideology from ideas, Ball's masquerade would represent mainstream liberal thought.

Ball was raised and thrived in corporate America. His father rose in the corporate ranks. Ball's real career was not in government but in international law and finance. The most striking aspect of his career is the connections he made among the elites. He knew not only the Dean Achesons and John Kenneth Galbraiths, but he befriended the business bigwigs, including financier Robert Lehman and the Rockefellers. The clever George Ball also profited in the American Century.

Ball was a lobbyist for international corporate interests. He converted the law firm of Cleary, Gottlieb into a voice for Jean Monnet, multinational business, and free trade. Bill repeatedly shows that Ball valued his business ties. Ball was a facilitator of relationships among influential men, a fixer who smoothed out conflict among businessmen, lawyers, and bureaucrats. His membership in the secretive Bilderberg group of global economic and political elites attests to his stake in the establishment. This network, which also led to the creation of business's advocacy group for free trade, the Committee for a National Trade Policy, concerned itself very little with the deleterious effects of multinational corporations on the little guy or on poor nations.

Networking and market capitalist values were critical to Ball's rise. He unabashedly backed the ideas of free trade and the quest for regional (and global) integration of markets. Faith in the market, and its institutionalization in the multinational corporation, OEEC, European Coal and Steel Community, and the European Community, made him a disciple of the father of European integration, Jean Monnet. Both used the other for contacts in the bureaucracies of America and Europe. Both operated behind the scenes, away from the grind of democratic politics. And both endorsed free trade, thereby revealing a certain insensitivity to the masses that belies the label of phronesis (and, ostensibly, the values of American Liberalism).

Corporate internationalists like Ball had long white-washed protectionists as reactionary small thinkers. Progress for the George Balls of the world lay in globalization and erasing national boundaries, in order to enhance Western unity in the Cold War and bring mutual prosperity for the allies. That strategic vision rendered Ball contemptuous of those who disagreed with the corporate ethos that included free-trade doctrine. But is it really all that funny—as he believed—that Ball felt the need to don a suit made in Britain when meeting with American textile producers unhappy about the effect of imports on jobs and towns? Or rather, is that a sign of elitist con-

tempt from a man out of the people's reach, regardless of his liberal credentials? His sense of humor, to be generous, had much to be desired for those put out of work during the economic downturn of the 1970s, after he had left government.

John F. Kennedy hailed from the upper crust, so we would expect him to toe the corporate liberal line. But he did not. Kennedy was much more of a nationalist, out of necessity, for he was a politician. George Ball the bureaucrat instructed Kennedy about the theoretical benefits of free trade, as Bill discusses. Unfortunately, the author neglects the real reasons why the landmark Trade Expansion Act of 1962 passed so easily through Congress: pragmatic politics. It certainly did not go through, as Bill argues, because of Ball's testimony before Congress, his lobbying before business groups (which already supported the cause), or Ball's arrogant belief that "he invented the Trade Bill." He might have taught the President and his subordinates about theory but Kennedy made the PROTECTIONIST deals that persuaded legislators to vote for the law. And, Kennedy accepted a major provision, backed by liberals, for employment adjustment assistance that won over labor unions to the bill. Small "d" democrats, not elitist Democrats, gave Kennedy his victory.

George Ball thrived as a liberal elitist, a model for his contacts and subordinates. A recent gathering of participants in the Kennedy Round of GATT (1964-1967) brought an outpouring of well-deserved praise for this absent free-trader and teacher. Also absent during this roundtable, however, was discussion of whether we should continue with global McDonalidization and integration shaped by a regime of free trade. The French people gave their opinion on the vision of Monnet and Ball in the elections of May 1997, just as the oft-ridiculed Charles de Gaulle did three decades ago. The French want more nationalism. Many Americans, from the Left and the Right, are also uncomfortable with the market capitalism that has so captured the imagination of presidents, bureaucrats, Wall Street investors, and diplomatic historians. Many average Americans, a handful of opportunistic politicians, and just a few academics have lobbied for protection from the seemingly inevitable forces of globalization by some form of economic nationalism. Ball's approach has stirred up a hornets' nest of populism; at

the very least, it will prompt Americans to stop and consider the rush toward globalization. If not, we run the risk of giving greater voice to the unrestrained politicians in the mold of Ross Perot and Patrick Buchanan, the very enemies of George Ball's free-trade vision.

If alive today, Ball would vehemently oppose these people. This time, however, he would not take up his usual position as devil's advocate or dissenter. Instead, he would spout the establishment dogma, pointing to a violent history caused by nationalism as vindication for his free-trade beliefs. He would advocate his "cosmocorp" idea, in which nation-states would be replaced by a supranational body of citizens (business leaders and lawyers, no doubt) that would oversee the behavior of ruling international corporations. He saw the European Common Market as a start toward this utopia. He might have the last laugh, for national barriers are rapidly falling. On the other hand, there is an alternative to Ball's vision: some form of nationalism is not such a bad thing.

Nations defend people, corporations and cosmocorps tend to defend themselves and bureaucracies. This the French people seemed to grasp in the Spring elections. It is possible that Americans will also try to slow down the onslaught of large-scale international corporate dominance perpetuated by the elites, including liberal elitists. This is not a Marxist critique or some sort of populism, but a call for true American liberalism, of the New Deal/Great Society mold, to reassert itself. Ball never really adhered to these values, for true liberalism considers the interests of average Americans who are always called on by the multinational interests to make painful adjustments to market forces. Perhaps we will come to realize that the imperious de Gaulle was not far off base in trying to prevent Europeanists from over-running his country. Perhaps we will elect leaders who are not so enamored by the workings of global market mechanisms as to ignore the domestic implications of free trade, as well as their roots in twentieth century American liberalism. If that were the case, however, George Ball would surely turn in his grave.

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