

Charles A. Beard and American Foreign Policy. Thomas C. Kennedy. (The University Press of Florida, 1975. 199 pp. \$8.50.)

Soon after the eighteen nineties American foreign relationships completed a kind of transitional development which many at first did not comprehend, others severely criticized, some almost completely misjudged, and still others tried to ignore. In time, a growing number insisted that these new foreign relationships required new responsibilities of a moral as well as of a physical character that the nation, because of its Christian character, could not deny. Many also recognized that these new foreign relationships required a substantial remodeling and reorientation of several major American institutions, particularly the presidency and the Congress.

At the start, certain American intellectual leaders were vigorous in their appraisal of these matters and have continued to keep their views at the center of a very stormy discussion. Among these intellectuals none provoked more thought and response than Charles Austin Beard (and his brilliant wife Mary). So imposing were his views that he still remains a *volte force* (though he died in 1948) in any meaningful historiographical study of twentieth century American foreign policy. This worthy contribution by Thomas Kennedy to the study of the historiographical importance of Beard is evidence of that.

Much of what Kennedy writes about Beard is old hat but his study is unique because it is primarily oriented in historical theory and deals mostly with the philosophical basis of Beard's treatment of history, narrowing it down, of course, to the impact of American foreign relations. Along the way, Kennedy convincingly shows that Beard did not deviate appreciably from those philosophical principles he had advocated from the start of the century. Beard did amend his conclusions in the application of those principles as the nation passed from war to war and through other foreign crises. This was for one basic reason. Americans and their leaders, he insisted, were not of adequate moral and philosophical fiber to fulfill the kinds of commitments they had made. Consequently, Beard charged, advertently or inadvertently, much of the moral and humanitarian purpose of the nation's new foreign relationships became undermined, such as the newly adopted course of American enlightened imperialism following the Spanish-American war and finally the righteous reasons why America entered two world wars. Of course the forces of foreign evil collaborated with their American counterparts.

But what was the alternative to this new course of American foreign involvement about which Beard was now so critical? The making of an alternative by Beard and basing it upon acceptable philosophical principles are the main targets of Kennedy's analysis. As Beard, Kennedy notes, was a superior product of rugged American individualism and therefore an antagonist of the formidable forces of nineteenth and twentieth century academic formalism and continued strains of nineteenth century isolationism, he was soon caught between two opposing forces that the twentieth century tended to make more and more difficult to bear: nationalism vs. internationalism. As Beard wrote soon after the Spanish-American war, "never again can the

United States assume the isolated position which once had to be the national destiny." He soon felt forced to retreat from that conclusion, however, because the new course of American foreign relations did not remain enlightened and free from greed. Only a short time later he became even more despaired about the prospects of the widely heralded organized forms of humanitarian internationalism. What especially aroused his criticism was the failure of American and world leaders to achieve an honorable and durable peace following World War I. This was the crowning act of folly, proving that American leadership could not cope with the overpowering evils that had come to control the new course of international cooperation and organization. Even the Open Door Doctrine with its humanitarian principles would have to be abandoned. The Kellogg-Briand Pact was an outrage because its principles of outlawing war was accompanied by a greater determination to rearm. As Kennedy and others have long noted, Beard by the close of the 1920's was becoming more "ambivalent and shifting" in his views about nations, their leaders and their foreign policies. Again this was because he was continuing to lose confidence in the human use of human-made institutions. The Great Depression made him especially cynical about *laissez-faire* economics and the spreading course of national militarism, prompting him at last to conceive an alternative, "continental Americanism." He had become an avowed neo-isolationist—and the brunt of a new storm of criticism.

Beard had become a new kind of cynic and pessimist. As he admitted, his proposed new course of isolationism would limit the extent of the nation's growth and moral uplift. Such was necessary because it was the only way to avoid an American attachment to prevailing corrupt forms of internationalism. Consequently, still clinging to the principle that man is in charge of his own destiny and his environment, Beard advised that the American people reaffirm their faith in their already established nationalistic destiny and in their long established principles of success; to insure continued success the nation must return to a more restricted bilateral course of foreign relations. After all, the nation owed no further credits to "irresponsible governments" or military protection for greedy and irresponsible American investors in foreign lands. And when, it seemed, President Franklin D. Roosevelt became determined to undermine Beard's preferred course of destiny by leading the people again and quite deceitfully into an ever-ready quagmire of foreign military destruction, Beard reached his fullest stage of revolt. FDR's urge to do "good around the world" was, Beard said, the height of deceit and immoral judgment. It was the *coup de grâce* of any semblance of public morality in American leadership.

Beard, of course, had he experienced Watergate, would probably have stormed to even greater heights in his determination to restrict American leadership and the American political process because both had become the most responsible for undermining and destroying the basic philosophical principles and design of the national character. In fact, he had already partially decided that the force of politics was more destructive than economics, which could well be regarded as his one important deviation from his strong economic deterministic views. This was because in the course of politics the most far

reaching decisions affecting society are made—under the influence of corrupt principles.

Many, even Kennedy, still continue to criticize Beard because his conclusions seemed born more of personal philosophical preferences than of judgments resulting from professional research. But Kennedy, because he had access for the first time to certain private papers of the Beard family, does add some new insights and historical perspective to those philosophical preferences. And he does so with such effectiveness that even the sternest of Beard's critics (including this reviewer) will find cause to give more thought to the philosophical basis of foreign policy than they have heretofore thought proper and pertinent in deciding what is in the best national interest.

MITCHELL W. KERR
Professor of History
Towson State College