In her classic *On Violence* (1970), Hannah Arendt noted that despite its prevalence in political life violence is rarely singled out for study in its own right. The study of civil (and ethnic) wars, which grew significantly during the 1990s, did little to prove Arendt wrong. For the most part, this field of study overlooked the actual problem of violence, focusing instead on the origins of the war, or its termination, but only occasionally on variations in its incidence. In this masterful new work, Kalyvas presents a highly original and complex theory of the logic of violence in civil wars. It is a work of tremendous theoretical and empirical richness, and is destined to become a classic in the field of civil war studies.

Taking as his starting point that violence within civil wars and civil wars themselves should be analytically decoupled, Kalyvas sets himself two theoretical tasks: (1) to present a coherent theory of irregular war and (2) to present a micro-foundational theory of violence which sheds light on its discriminate and indiscriminate variants. His theory of irregular war posits that a political actor’s control of a particular region or town shapes the population’s willingness to collaborate with them. Through a combination of persuasion and coercion, these dominant forces—which can be the incumbent government forces or the insurgents seeking control—induce the population to provide information and to betray those favourable to the other side. Through this interrelationship between collaboration and control, violence is jointly produced between political actors and individuals who are willing to denounce their fellow citizens, sometimes if only to settle a personal score. He develops this line of thought further by specifying two types of violence that can be produced: discriminate (or selective) violence, which targets only those who are accused of collaboration with the enemy, and indiscriminate violence, which targets a broader spectrum of the population. His micro-foundational theory of violence holds that the provision of information, which arises from collaboration and control, determines what kind of violence is produced.

This is one of the most sophisticated (and counter-intuitive) theories of violence to be produced in recent memory and it will have to be taken seriously by all students of political violence. Beyond that, however, this book is rich in description and anecdotal detail. Kalyvas does not produce a theoretically impoverished account of violence, but rather allows for a diversity of motivations, including greed, honour and revenge, that are often left out of many rational choice accounts of violence. His portrayal of the interactive production of violence also provides a compelling explanation for why violence varies within civil wars, producing cities in relative peace and in living hell sometimes side by side within the same war. He has amassed a great wealth of empirical data from dozens of cases to back up his claims and rigorously tests his predictions on the micro-foundations with a highly detailed case-study of violence in the Argolid region of Greece in 1943–4. In sum, the theoretical complexity of this work, and the scrupulous empirical analysis attached to it, will make this the benchmark study of civil wars for the foreseeable future.
That said, there is reason to quibble with some of the assumptions of Kalyvas’s theory and his somewhat unsympathetic appraisal of other methodologies. First, his theory makes some fairly strong assumptions, namely that individuals have no prior political attachment to one side of the conflict or another and that these individuals can freely choose between two groups who are both equally capable of establishing control. He also assumes internal cohesion of actors, so that no incumbent or insurgent units will use more violence than their commanders have allowed. These are reasonable starting assumptions for building a model, but they impose strict scope conditions for the theory which may limit its applicability to other cases of civil war violence.

Second, Kalyvas clearly aims at making a methodological point about the proper way to do research on violence. In an extensive chapter on the ‘pathologies’ of violence research, he rightly points out some of the common flaws in study design, in particular the urban bias (focusing on violence in cities instead of the countryside) and over-aggregation of the data, which jettisons the contextual details surrounding things like crime statistics and increases the risk of misinterpretation. Most of these critiques are valid and well taken, but his somewhat scathing assessment of case-studies is perhaps unfair. Additionally, Kalyvas may overestimate the number of cases where the kind of fine-grained micro-foundational work that he undertook with the Greek civil war is possible. Most cases of civil war violence are not as well documented and data rich as the Argolid, and some pressing cases of violence in civil war—for example, Iraq—are not conducive to ethnographic work. Locating the micro-foundations of violence, as he did with impressive results here, is certainly desirable, but the field of violence studies must be sufficiently broad to encompass a wide variety of methodological approaches and to allow for variance in the quality of the data.

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These two volumes are part of a new, and highly ambitious, series that sets out to both map the field of political science and help to establish its agenda over the coming years. The ten volumes of the Oxford handbooks of political science seek to encompass virtually every major element of the discipline as it is generally understood in the English-speaking world. Aside from the volumes under review, they include: public policy, political economy, political institutions, political behaviour, political methodology, comparative politics, and law and politics. A Handbook of international relations, edited by Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal, is due to appear in 2008.

Both of these handbooks will be of interest to International Relations scholars. The Handbook of political theory is innovative in organization and exciting in execution. It is the most valuable of the numerous handbooks of (or companions to) political theory currently in print. It avoids a conventional breakdown of the field into different ‘approaches’ (analytical, post-structural, contextualist, Straussian, etc.) and different ‘theories’ (liberalism, socialism, feminism, etc.), instead identifying clusters of related themes to explore from different angles. For example, a section on ‘The body politic’ includes essays on property and rights (Moira Gatens), new ways of thinking about privacy (Beate Roesler), the body (Cécile Fabre) and ‘Paranoia and political philosophy’ (James Glass). This organizational device generates interesting juxtapositions that help illuminate the variety and richness of contemporary political theorizing. There are also chapters discussing the ways in which political theory has been, and continues to be, shaped by a constructive engagement with other scholarly fields, including cultural studies, political economy, history and social theory. The editors have written a valuable introduction—useful especially for those new to the field, or who are deeply enmeshed in only one part of it and seek a broader picture—which ranges widely, discussing the often uneasy relationship between political theory and the rest of the discipline of political science, as well as identifying key trends in the evolution of the field over the past 30 years. One point in particular frames their essay: the rise to dominance of liberalism. They highlight the sophistication of