French Political Thought: Its Untapped Traditions

Michael Drolet

A Virtue for Courageous Minds: Moderation in French Political Thought, 1748–1830. By Aurelian Craiutu. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012. 360p. $49.50.

French Liberalism from Montesquieu to the Present Day. Edited by Raf Geenens and Helena Rosenblatt. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012. 318p. $99.00.

Revolution and the Republic: A History of Political Thought in France since the Eighteenth Century. By Jeremy Jennings. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. 608p. $185.00.

The Arab Spring raised the hopes of many for a transition to democracy in the region. The recent events in Egypt and Syria's brutal and cruel civil war appear to have dashed those hopes. The popular protests and general uprisings that defined the Arab Spring represented people's long-standing frustration and anger with regimes that were corrupt and clientalistic to their cores. The Arab Spring also laid bare the profound inequalities and lack of opportunities that marked these societies. International Monetary Fund estimates of unemployment rates for the region are gloomy, with countries like Egypt exceeding 13% and Tunisia over 17%.[1] But such figures are dwarfed by youth unemployment, which, in the case of Egypt, has now reached a staggering 77%, with over a third of those without work having a university degree.[2] The scale of these economic difficulties is itself daunting. When we add to this toxic mix religious and political fundamentalism, and a legacy of deeply entrenched factional divisions, the task before these polities is nothing short of dismaying.

Michael Drolet teaches Political Theory and the History of Political Thought at the University of Oxford. His publications include Tocqueville, Democracy and Social Reform *(2003), which was a Choice Magazine Outstanding Academic Title, and* The Postmodernism Reader: Foundational Texts *(2004). He has written extensively on nineteenth-century French liberalism and is currently writing an intellectual biography of Michel Chevalier. He has contributed most recently to* Re-Imagining Democracy in the Age of Revolutions: America, France, Britian, Ireland 1750-1850*, edited by Joanna Innes and Mark Philp (Oxford University Press, 2013).*

What kind of roadmap might help us foresee and prescribe the region's future? Must stability be brought to the region before social justice can be achieved? And if so, is the recourse to violence necessary to accomplish this? Or is the starting point for stability inclusivity and social justice? What constitutional and institutional designs will achieve justice and stability, and how are those to emerge from weak economies and fractured societies?

Where might we turn for insights into these questions? For students of political science in the Anglo-American world, turning to the French seems a very unlikely choice indeed. The French past, marked by revolutions, unstable governments, religious division, and class enmity, appears to disqualify it as a source of knowledge and insight. Its secular republicanism is, for many, particularly in the United States, alien, serving to widen an intellectual, cultural, and religious "transatlantic gap."[3] And its intellectual traditions, ranging from revolutionary Jacobinism to impenetrable poststructuralism and postmodernism, add to that distance. Yet that distance is also widened by our own outlook, which, in its own way, tends to a kind of insularity. At this juncture, when our own Anglo-American intellectual resources appear deficient to the task before us, we could do worse than to heed John Stuart Mill's remark in the pages of his autobiography, that his "strong and permanent interest" in French thought had "a very salutary influence on my development, keeping me free from the error always prevalent in England," which was to judge "universal questions by a merely English standard."[4]

The books under review here are meritorious for identifying a common ground or point of union between the French and Anglo-American worlds: the untapped traditions of French liberalism and political moderation.

doi:10.1017/S1537592713003800
© American Political Science Association 2014

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592713003800 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The importance of these traditions is immense. The theoretical and analytical breakthroughs they achieved were enormous. Their analyses of the social condition of democracy and the problems pertaining to equality of condition, such as the relation among political economy, self-interest, and the self, were transformative. In exploring those traditions, these books achieve wide insights into French politics, thought, and culture generally. But they do more. For in examining France's long history since 1789 of recasting its polity and remaking its constitutions – five republics, three constitutional monarchies, and two empires – and its long experience at trying to rid itself of factionalism and establish a solid center ground that would allow for the forging of a lasting political settlement, they show just how much the French drew on the American and English experiences and how they integrated those lessons within their own distinctive and imaginative ways of thinking. These three books offer us numerous and constructive lessons in these troubled times.

Raf Geenens and Helena Rosenblatt's *French Liberalism from Montesquieu to the Present Day* takes aim at a widely held prejudice within the Anglo-American world that the French, in their words, "have never been, and never will be, liberal" (p. 1). Aurelian Craiutu's *A Virtue for Courageous Minds* challenges another prejudice, that the concept of moderation is alien to French political thought. And Jeremy Jennings's *Revolution and the Republic*, in furnishing a magisterial history of French political thought since the eighteenth century, does both. And all three books discussed here fulfill their declared objectives outstandingly well.

It is commonly assumed that what distinguished eighteenth-century political thought in France from the traditions of political thought in Britain and America was the experience of the French Revolution. This was certainly a concern for most French theorists and historians from the end of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth. When Alexis de Tocqueville reflected in 1848 that the 1789 revolution had yet to run its full course, he spoke a truth that many of his contemporaries recognized. For Frenchmen like Tocqueville, the revolution of which, in his words, "we, in all probability, shall not live to see the end"[5] demanded some very serious thought, as well as points of comparison. Whether in the writings of Prosper de Barante, François Guizot, or Tocqueville himself, the French compared and contrasted the experience of 1789 with what transpired across the channel more than a century and a half before. The civil war and so-called Glorious Revolution offered some salutary lessons, principally on the contrasting roles played by the English and French aristocracies in their dealings with their respective crowns, a topic dealt with at some length in Lucien Jaume's contribution to *French Liberalism*. Yet this difference pointed to a more interesting question, which was how the respective societies and polities of France and Britain negotiated and assimilated the profound transformations that resulted from the growth of equality of condition, the essence of democracy itself.

In order to understand the French experience more fully, Tocqueville reflected at length on both the British and American experiences. What he discovered in both countries was enlightening. But it was primarily what he saw in America that was most illuminating and instructive, for American democracy represented the future. Americans' experience of democracy had yielded a degree of political peace and economic prosperity that would be the envy of the French. As Tocqueville observed, this happy circumstance was the result of a combination of factors: a vast territory rich in cultivable land and natural resources; the customs, manners, habits, and outlooks of its inhabitants, whom Tocqueville described as "peaceful citizens who by taste or interest sincerely desire the well-being of the country";[6] a robust federation built on a populace that shared "a homogenous civilization as well as common needs";[7] and a complex institutional design that was consciously constructed in order to safeguard against factional government. Although, as Tocqueville acknowledged, America had been "convulsed" by factional interests—"great parties," as he called them—these "never took on the violent character" that marked the French experience.[8] France was not so fortunate. What the study of American democracy afforded was instruction on how factionalism and civil war, the principal threat to any democracy—a threat identified by ancient and modern philosophers alike, from Plato and Aristotle to David Hume and Adam Smith—might be curtailed. This was, in Tocqueville's estimation, precisely the kind of lesson his fellow Frenchmen required. *Democracy in America* was about encouraging the French to reflect on moderation and how it might come to govern individual, social, and political relations in a way that would allow liberty to thrive.

The three books under review all share a common focus on the ways in which the French engaged in that reflection on moderation and liberty. While their approaches are distinct, each is novel, enlightening, and deserving of careful reading and serious study. Of the three, *Revolution and the Republic* offers the most comprehensive account of how the French reflected on their own experience of revolution as a way of trying to achieve what appeared for Madame de Staël, Benjamin Constant, or Tocqueville to be an elusive union of liberty and moderation. Jennings's account, like that offered by Geenens and Rosenblatt's collection, spans more than two centuries and, like the work of François Furet, it is a deep meditation on what the French learned from the experience of 1789.

Sitting comfortably in a long and distinguished tradition going back to works by Jack Greenleaf and Michael

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592713003800 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Oakeshott, *Revolution and the Republic* is informed by an impressive amount of American and French scholarship. It allies itself squarely with what Pierre Rosanvallon has called "a conceptual history of politics." And like Rosanvallon's seminal three-volume intellectual history of the French experience of democracy—*Le Sacre du citoyen* (1992), *Le peuple introvable* (1998), and *La démocratie inachevée* (2000)—Jennings's book sets the standard for future synthetic works on this topic. What it does remarkably well is give the reader an extraordinarily clear account of French thought from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and how it served as the foundation to launch, to resist, and to make sense of the French Revolution. The way French thought developed in the aftermath of the Revolution drew on those prerevolutionary intellectual resources, but refracted them through the lens of that foundational event. The tradition that would develop throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was tethered to the experience of 1789. Just how firmly it was tethered is captured beautifully in the skillful way Jennings navigates the complex labyrinth of twentieth-century French thought in his last chapter, "France, Intellectuals, and Engagement," and in his conclusion.

The French experience of revolution is also the topic of *A Virtue for Courageous Minds*. The common and long-standing view is that 1789 inaugurated a revolution marked by incendiary politics, the Terror, and an authoritarian military regime. Craiutu does not demure from that opinion, but he raises its constitutive elements to a higher level of complexity, by revealing that within the highly charged and uncompromising world of revolutionary politics, a few lone voices sought to uphold a political principle that appeared utterly incongruous for the times. Craiutu seems to be inspired by a disposition toward politics and a way of doing it that is moderate. His earlier book on the French moderate liberals, *Liberalism under Siege: The Political Thought of the French Doctrinaires*, had explored this attitude during the Restorations and July Monarchy.[9] What Craiutu aims to do in the spirited and stimulating book under review here is to give an account of those individuals who, during and immediately after the Revolution, sought in the face of an irresistible pressure of narrow partisan politics—when not taking sides was an unpalatable and dangerous option—to remain true to a middle course, to uphold the cause of political moderation.

As the state of American and European politics in recent years has demonstrated all too well—particularly in the face of the current economic recession—the need for political moderation has an abiding attraction. No doubt, this is an important motivation behind the writing of Craiutu's book and his stated intention to write three more on this topic: one serving as a sequel to *A Virtue of Courageous Minds*, exploring the concept of moderation in nineteenth-century French political thought; another examining the concept of moderation in British political thought; and a third exploring its uses in contemporary political theory. And we have a small taste of this in his chapter on Raymond Aron in Geenens and Rosenblatt's edited volume.

Craiutu's stated approach is eclectic, drawing on various approaches, including those developed by François Furet, the Cambridge School, and the kind of conceptual history of *Begriffsgeschichte*. The author believes that this combination of approaches allows him to capture "the diversity of viewpoints expressed by the thinkers discussed" in *A Virtue* (p. 7). It also reflects the kind of eclecticism and imaginative combination of diverse elements that the defenders of moderation drew on in devising their complex institutional theories, theories that sought to safeguard the diversity, plurality, and complexity of the human condition.

Craiutu's conscious mirroring of method with his object of analysis offers a tidy symmetry, but it presents some problems and raises a number of interesting questions. While he is right to stress that moderation is context bound, that its "various *uses*" and "the varying *intentions* with which it was employed" were defined by "actors placed in specific political, social, and cultural contexts" (p. 6; emphasis in the original), an eclectic approach might well reflect that diversity of contexts, but it is not obvious that it has to. Nor is it entirely clear that Craiutu is fully wedded to the combination of approaches he names. In his chapter on Montesquieu, he stresses how Montesquieu's theory of moderation only comes fully to light after a reading deploying "special hermeneutical skills," though what these are exactly remains unclear. We are told that Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws* is replete with "hidden meanings and erudite allusions" and presents us with a "code of reason and liberty" (pp. 32–34). Only through the deployment of these "special hermeneutical skills" can we "decipher the true message of the book," which is a defense of moderation. Yet if moderation was so central to *The Spirit of Laws*, why did it need to be so thoroughly hidden as to require special undefined skills to discern it? The notion that Montequieu encoded his work because "important and powerful individuals" "might take offence" at its espousal raises some difficult questions. Why would Montesquieu understand that the existence and flourishing of a polity was dependent on the moderate conduct of its rulers and subjects, a practice that was learned in individuals' day-to-day interaction, and yet, according to Craiutu, write a book on the nature of law and politics requiring the recourse to some special code?

One is also left wondering why these remarks preface the chapter on Montesquieu when they are absent from the other chapters? Certainly, this kind of Straussian reading sits awkwardly with *Begriffesgeschichte* and the approach developed by the Cambridge School. A possible explanation is that Criautu, in allowing himself to be

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592713003800 Published online by Cambridge University Press

readily influenced by Pierre Manent's and Thomas Pangle's Straussian readings of Montesquieu, has failed to reflect sufficiently on how they are at odds both methodologically and ideologically with the approaches of *Begriffesgeschichte* and the Cambridge School. It is also very clear that in the first chapter, which surveys the idea of moderation in ancient and early modern political thought, he is guided by a secondary literature that is indebted to Leo Strauss. The chapters that follow—those on the Monarchiens, Jacques Necker, Madame de Staël, and Benjamin Constant—are much freer of this kind of influence and engage much more directly with a large number of familiar and less-well-known primary texts. Had Craiutu not been steered quite so thoroughly by his choice of secondary interpretations, his chapter on Montesquieu might have come nearer to Céline Spector's fascinating and persuasive account of Montesquieu in her contribution to *French Liberalism*. More importantly, he would have avoided the initial casting of his account of political moderation in terms that many may suspect as being ideologically motivated. This may well alienate many readers and place much that is valuable and instructive in this book under a cloud of suspicion.

This criticism cannot be addressed against Spector, who clearly sets her own course by challenging a series of long-established readings of Montesquieu, which cast him variously as liberal, a Machiavellian, or a republican. She stresses the tensions and trade-offs in his work as a way of showing just how complex and sophisticated it is. Her aim is to show that the ideological categorization of Montesquieu's work violates the complexity of his thinking and imposes historically uniform and anachronistic readings on it retrospectively. What emerges is a reading of Montesquieu as someone fascinated with the dynamics of power relations. This informed his primary political concern, which was with the principle of moderation. Although Craiutu and Spector agree on the importance of moderation, Spector offers the more convincing account, showing that, in her words, "Montesquieu neither defends the individual conceived as a rights-holder, nor advocates the minimal state. Rather, he argues that moderation, like liberty, presupposes a 'masterpiece of legislation' and prudence in order to reconcile, in practice, the power of the state and the liberty of the people" (*French Liberalism*, p. 72).

The relation between the power of the state and the liberty of the people highlights one of the central problems treated by all three books—the complex relation between democracy and despotism. French liberals realized that democracy could spawn entirely new types of despotism. The tyranny of the Terror described by Constant is the topic of Stephen Holmes's illuminating, instructive, and rhetorically embellished chapter, "Rethinking Liberalism and Terror," in *French Liberalism*. Holmes offers a detailed exploration of Constant's thoughts on the judicial, extra-legal, and social mechanisms of the Terror. Examining Constant's writings, from his 1797 *Des effets de la Terreur* through to the *Commentaire sur l'ouvrage de Filangieri* (1822–24), with detailed consideration given to his famous 1815 *Principes de politique*, Holmes shows how Constant's late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century reflections on the Terror resonate powerfully with what is occurring in the twenty-first century war on terror. This is an arresting reading of Constant, showing how so much of what he wrote about the Terror—its recourse to special tribunals, extra-legal measures, preemptive war—offers a highly relevant cautionary tale. As Holmes reminds us, Constant showed how "those who suspended the constitution in order to save it ended up losing their bearings and, far from saving the republic, could not even save themselves" (p. 112).

The Terror was one expression of democratic despotism—the tyranny of the majority—that the ancients would have recognized at once. Plato's and Aristotle's classic narrative was that the drive to equality created the conditions for factional politics, which rapidly degenerated into despotic rule. Although the Terror was clearly comprehensible in the terms laid down by the ancients, it had a very particular effect on the moderns. For the early-nineteenth-century French liberals, like Constant and Madame de Staël, the problem was framed, for the most part, in the terms already set by the ancients and repeated in the works of eighteenth-century theorists, such as Rousseau, Hume, and Smith. But for a later generation of thinkers who were able to discern more clearly the developing contours of modern democratic society, despotism was seen to have a new and more insidious form. This was perhaps one of the great intellectual innovations of Tocqueville, who alerted contemporaries to the dangers of both the tyranny of majority opinion—social conformity—and administrative centralization, two distinct forms of tyranny that would mark the reflections of a host of thinkers from Mill through to Max Weber and well into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as Samuel Moyn's fascinating chapter on Claude Lefort and Marcel Gauchet makes clear in the edited volume.

In whatever form despotism took, French liberals discerned it as France's principal danger, and they set their minds to finding ways of alleviating it. Jennings gives over much of his book to exploring how they diagnosed the problem and set about correcting it. Craiutu devotes the whole of his to it. Both sympathize with those nineteenth-century liberals and moderate conservatives whose devotion to liberty and moderation remained fixed points during the years of upheaval and fundamental change. As each points out, these champions of liberty and moderation paid a heavy price for that devotion. Most—such as Jean-Joseph Mounier and Gerard de Lally-Tollendal, Jacques Necker, Madame de Staël, and Benjamin Constant—paid with periods of exile. For others, like Stanislas Marie Adelaide, comte de Clermont-Tonnerre,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592713003800 Published online by Cambridge University Press

or Lucien-Anatole Prévost-Paradol, the price was much higher and they paid with their lives.

Jennings and Craiutu share a preoccupation with the way in which certain French thinkers reflect on moderation as a quality to be embedded in political institutions. Jennings's conceptual history of politics, and in particular its debt to Rosanvallon, results in his attention being focused principally on institutional arrangements, though his impressive forays into political economy, philosophy, history, and sociology add a great deal of weight and intellectual richness to his analysis. Craiutu's focus is more narrowly constitutional and institutional, and what he has to say is also very illuminating. While his methodological choices have something to do with this, there is a more explicit justification offered. Craiutu tells us that the French defenders of moderation, from Montesquieu and Mounier to de Staël and Constant, followed "a trajectory away from an emphasis on moderation as a personal trait to a view of moderation as a virtue that inheres within political institutions and institutional arrangements" (*A Virtue*, p. 3). It is not clear why he believes that this should have been the case. His underlying assumption appears to be that the idea of moderation as a disposition of the person—a quality of the soul—was a preoccupation of the ancients, with Plato and Aristotle writing at length on the subject, but that it became anachronistic in a modern world characterized by the hustle and bustle of commercial activity. Such a view is at odds with what actually transpired.

The history of French political thought shows a concern with moderation, not only as a feature of institutions and constitutions but also as a quality of the self. It was prominent in the works of Jansenists like Pierre Nicole and Blaise Pascal. And it was critical to Rousseau's thinking. Drawing inspiration from stoicism, Rousseau theorized the many ways that human pride, or *amour propre*—the fount of immoderation—might be curbed. Much of his intellectual energies were directed toward understanding human pride and how it might be restrained. This was the case of his reflections in the Second Discourse on amour propre as the cause of civil inequality and the enmity it generates—an enmity that resulted in an endless cycle of revolution and despotism.[10] It was central to his ideas in the *Social Contract* on the role of the legislator and the civil religion as mitigating amour propre. And it was prominent in his autobiographical writings where he examined the role of solitude as a means of abating pride.

The way Rousseau's ideas were interpreted by his followers and disseminated during the French Revolution resulted in the judgment of many liberals, such as de Staël and Constant, that his ideas corresponded better to the world of the ancients than that of the moderns. Such a view may well have influenced Craiutu, but it was a verdict de Staël and Constant passed on Rousseau and not on *moderation* as a quality of the self. That Craiutu—and Jennings, too—should have missed this is the result both of their institutional preoccupations and, more importantly, of their willing acceptance of critical readings of Rousseau that took aim at his ideas on popular sovereignty but missed what he had to say about amour propre and selfhood, reflections that profoundly marked Tocqueville's own considerations on democracy and revolution.

Jan Goldstein, in her fascinating and excellent study *The Post-Revolutionary Self: Politics and Psyche in France, 1750–1850,* examines just how important the idea of selfhood—and moderation as a quality of the self—was to nineteenth-century French thought.[11] The philosophical foundations of that exploration are examined in two outstanding chapters in *French Liberalism*. Larry Siedentop's "Two Liberal Traditions"—a reprinting of his classic 1979 article—and Cheryl Welch's highly illuminating "'Anti-Benthamism': Utilitarianism and the French Liberal Tradition"—one of the best essays in this book—both examine the late–eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century French liberal repudiation of empiricism or sensationalism, the epistemological foundation to utilitarianism. Both chapters illuminate the epistemological differences between French liberalism and Anglo-American liberalism, explaining why utilitarianism should dominate the latter while being marginal to the former. For some thinkers, including the Baron de Gérando, de Staël, Pierre-Paul Royer-Collard, and Guizot, a robust epistemological critique of Locke's and Condillac's sensationalist doctrines served to ground a moral and political critique of Rousseau's works and those of the *philosophes*. For Gérando, de Staël, and those who followed them, sensationalism was not only purely speculative; it was an expression of an epistemological skepticism that led to a moral relativism. This relativism culminated logically, they thought, in the Terror and Bonaparte's political usurpation.

Against this long philosophical chain, from Condillac through Rousseau to the Terror and Bonaparte, critical strands of French liberalism in the early nineteenth century turned to transcendentalism in its German idealist and Scottish Common Sense forms.[12] At the heart of that shift was a concern with the self and the cultivation of a disposition toward moderation within individuals. French liberals traced the rise of sensationalism in eighteenth-century philosophy to an erosion of epistemological and moral certainties, which in turn spawned within individuals the ferment of emotions that would lead ultimately to the kind of disequilibrium, or immoderation of the self, designated by revolutionary "enthusiasm."

Rather than relegating the idea of moderation and selfhood to the ancients, commercial society actually made it acutely relevant to the moderns. And it is one of the great merits of Geenens and Rosenblatt's collection that a whole section of their volume is devoted to French liberal ideas on political economy, a neglected area of

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592713003800 Published online by Cambridge University Press

study, even within French academic circles. Richard Whatmore's and Philippe Steiner's outstanding chapters go some way to illuminating the role that French political economy played in attempting to curb immoderation, whether through Brissot's critique of luxury and corruption or through Jean-Baptiste Say's endeavors through his writings and lectures to promote productive investment and rational economic behavior. Constant's critique of the kind of narrow economic liberalism advocated by Charles Dunoyer is an important case. In his 1826 commentary on Dunoyer's *L'Industrie et la morale considérées dans leur rapport avec la liberté* (1825), Constant worried about the deleterious effects of commercial society. Although it might achieve stability, this came at a cost. Its philosophical and psychological foundation, rooted in a utilitarian calculus of self-interest, eroded "all generous sentiments," and this in turn "reduced men to a state not very different from that of certain industrious animals whose well-organized hives and finely constructed shelters could however never be the ideal of the human race."[13]

The preoccupation with commercial society's corrosive effects marked the work of liberal philosophers, such as Philibert Damiron (1794–1862). He worried that the coupling of sensationalism and materialist culture combined to produce individuals who lacked self-possession, as well as intellectual and psychological depth. For Damiron, this had a direct bearing on politics. Being intellectually and psychologically shallow, individuals lacked those capacities and potentialities that were necessary to the public sphere. Public life would be made both superficial and unstable, as the very capacities necessary to its flourishing could never develop sufficiently. Political moderation was an obvious casualty.

Tocqueville rooted this kind of individual character analysis in a sociological, political, and historical framework that gave it the kind of resonance it has in our own age. His own dialogue with utilitarianism was an important facet to that enterprise. As Welch so convincingly shows, Tocqueville's observations about English philosophical radicalism are revealing. He judged it as posing no revolutionary threat because, in her words, English radicals "combined zeal with an acceptance of compromise" (p. 147). What allowed these countertendencies to coexist? The answer lay in the doctrine of self-interest properly understood.

At the time Tocqueville was writing, the doctrine of self-interest properly understood was neither entirely novel nor particularly ancient. Adam Smith reflected on it at length in *The Wealth of Nations*, and J.-B. Say made much of it in his promotion of productive investment and sage commercial and labor practices, ideas that would be passed down through a host of academic institutions, from the Athénée Royale and the Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers to France's premier engineering school, the École Polytechnique.[14]

What stands out was just how sensitive Tocqueville was to the fragility of the rational and sober calculating foundation to the doctrine of self-interest properly understood. He grasped exactly what Rousseau identified in the Second Discourse, which was that large and fixed inequalities fueled resentments—a form of pride—that disturbed the emotional and psychological equipoise necessary to make reasoned judgments.[15] France's troubled past highlighted this. America's more tranquil experience raised an equally pressing concern, which was that commercial society harbored a fundamental contradiction. It rested on the doctrine of self-interest properly understood, at the same time that it gave rise to a material culture that narrowed the scope of self-interest. The frenetic pace of life Tocqueville and his fellow Frenchman Michel Chevalier observed in America underscored how the conditions for unreflective and intellectually shallow persons were created, and how these, in turn, eroded the basis for self-interest properly understood.[16] Tocqueville identified individualism as one of the manifestations of this danger. But other dangers were present, too, particularly as he reflected on the development of industry, including the rise of an industrial aristocracy, which was, in his words, "one of the hardest that have appeared on earth."[17] Without any bonds between industrialists and workers, an unbridgeable gap formed between them. This gave rise to feelings of resentment that eroded the rational bases for self-interest properly understood, as well as the sentiments of receptivity and reciprocity that were critical to individuals' sense of worth that allowed for a centering in the self also necessary for self-interest properly understood and more altruistic actions.

Tocqueville and many of his contemporaries argued that with the development of equality of condition, of democracy itself, new circumstances had arisen that required a rethinking about those aristocratic dispositions necessary to moderation—principally the kind of reasoned detachment and loftiness of character that afforded distance but not indifference to the fate of others—and how they might be conceived and cultivated in a new and thoroughly modern world.

One of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French liberalism's enduring legacies is the place it assigned to moderation in its reflections on selfhood—on the moral psychology of individuals. What is so important about these considerations on selfhood is that they harbor, however inchoately, the awareness that political moderation was an important outcome of rationally ordered polity and economy. Yet there were dangers to this kind of rational ordering. This was, as Tocqueville identified it, a degree of theoretical abstraction and way of reasoning—with Say and Malthus pointing to the increasing mathematization of political economy as indicative of this development—that fostered a form of detachment that rendered representatives and administrators indifferent to the fate of others.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592713003800 Published online by Cambridge University Press

What today's economic crisis reveals is the extent to which this has occurred, with political and financial leaders detached from the fate of large numbers of their populations. Their recourse to jargon and a lexicon of economic terms and acronyms adds to this remoteness, as does their use of euphemisms, such as "fiscal consolidation," "rebalancing," "haircuts," and "belt-tightening."[18] Successive polls indicate that citizens feel increasingly remote from their elected representatives. And in economically ravaged Eurozone countries such as Greece and Spain, where more than a quarter of the workforce is unemployed and where youth unemployment rates stand at 64.2% and 56.1%, respectively,[19] citizens feel both disenfranchised and dispossessed. It is little wonder that so many turn to the political extremes for a sense of worth and belonging.

Jennings points out that the French experience of revolution "gave birth to a prolonged and immensely sophisticated debate about what it meant to be a member of a political community and how that political community was to be organized" (*Revolution and the Republic*, p. 25). The Arab Spring and the current European Union crisis reveal just how weak and damaged the sense of political membership is in those regions of the world. The considerations and insights that these books have to offer on the untapped French traditions of liberalism and political moderation could not have come at a better time, and they deserve a wide readership.

Notes

1 IMF 2013.
2 Moustafa 2013.
3 Howard 2011.
4 Mill 1989, 64.
5 Tocqueville 1948, 2.
6 Tocqueville 1969, 173
7 Ibid., 167.
8 Ibid., 175.
9 Craiutu 2003.
10 Rousseau 1997, 185–86.
11 Goldstein 2005.
12 For the turn to German idealism, see Azouvi and Bourel, 1991. For the shift to Scottish Common Sense philosophy, see Drolet 2011.
13 Constant 1980, 547.
14 Belhoste 2003; Payen 1998; Staum 1998.
15 The role of resentment has been explored recently by Ferro 2010.
16 Chevalier 1837, 118–19; Tocqueville 1969, 537.
17 Tocqueville 1969, 558.
18 Muzet 2013. A new slang is emerging in countries like Greece, Italy, Spain, and Portugal in response. See also Raphael Minder, "A Slang Born in E.U. Austerity," *New York Times*, Global Edition, 17 July 2013, A1.
19 Burgen 2013; Lowen 2013.

References

Azouvi, François, and Dominque Bourel. 1991. *De Königsberg à Paris: la réception de Kant en France (1788–1804)*. Paris: J. Vrin.

Belhoste, Bruno. 2003. *La formation d'une technocratie: L'école polytechnique et ses élèves de la Révolution au Second Empire*. Paris: Belin.

Burgen, Stephen. 2013. "Spain Youth Unemployment Reaches Record 56.1%." *The Guardian*, August 30. http://www.theguardian.com/business/2013/aug/30/spain-youth-unemployment-record-high (accessed September 6, 2013).

Chevalier, Michel. 1837. *Lettres sur l'Amérique de Nord*. Vol. 2. Brussels: Hauman, Cattoir et cie.

Constant, Benjamin. 1980. "De M. Dunoyer et de quelques-uns de ses ouvrages." In *De la liberté chez les Modernes*, ed. Marcel Gauchet. Paris: Hachette.

Craiutu, Aurelian. 2003. *Liberalism under Siege: The Political Thought of the French Doctrinaires*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Drolet, Michael. 2011. "Carrying the Banner of the Bourgeoisie: Democracy, Self and the Philosophical Foundations to François Guizot's Historical and Political Thought." *History of Political Thought* 32(4): 645–90.

Ferro, Marc. 2010. *Resentment in History*. Cambridge: Polity.

Goldstein, Jan. 2005. *The Post-Revolutionary Self: Politics and Psyche in France, 1750–1850*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Howard, Thomas Albert. 2011. *God and the Atlantic: America, Europe, and the Religious Divide*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

IMF (International Monetary Fund). 2013. *Middle East and North Africa Regional Economic Outlook*. Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund. http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/reo/2013/mcd/eng/pdf/mena0513p.pdf (accessed September 4, 2013).

Lowen, Mark. 2013. "Greece's Young: Dreams on Hold as Fight for Jobs Looms." *BBC News*, May 20. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-22702003 (accessed September 6, 2013).

Mill, John Stuart. 1989. *Autobiography*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Moustafa, Noha. 2013. "Final Issue: Problem of Unemployment Likely to Worsen in Egypt." *Egypt Independent*, April 25. http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/final-issue-problem-unemployment-likely-worsen-egypt (accessed September 3, 2013).

Muzet, Denis. 2013. *Les mots de la crise*. Paris: Eyrolles.

Payen, Jacques. 1998. "The Role of the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers in the Development of

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592713003800 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Technical Education up to the Middle of the 19th Century." *History and Technology* 5(2): 95–138.
Rosanvallon, Pierre. 1986. "Pour une histoire conceptuelle du Politique." *Revue de synthèse* 4(1-2): 93–105.
———. 1992. *Le sacre du citoyen: histoire du suffrage universel en France*. Paris: Gallimard.
———. 1998. *Le peuple introuvable: histoire de la représentation démocratique en France*. Paris: Gallimard
———. 2000. *La démocratie inachevée: histoire de la souveraineté du peuple en France*. Paris: Gallimard.
Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 1997. *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Staum, Martin S. 1998. "French Lecturers in Political Economy, 1815–1848: Varieties of French Liberalism." *History of Political Economy* 30(1): 95–120
Tocqueville, Alexis de. 1948. *Recollections*. London: Harvell.
———. 1969. *Democracy in America*. New York: Doubleday.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592713003800 Published online by Cambridge University Press