
H-France Review Vol. 13 (September 2013), No. 145

Julian Wright and H. S. Jones, eds., *Pluralism and the Idea of the Republic in France*. Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. x + 270 pp. Notes and index. \$85.00 U.S. (cl.). ISBN 9-780230-272095.

Review by Sean Kennedy, University of New Brunswick.

“The nation as a whole had sovereign rights, while the individual citizen was kept in strictest tutelage; the former was expected to display the sagacity and virtues of a free race, the latter to behave like an obedient servant....It was the desire of combining freedom with the servile state that led during the last sixty years to so many abortive essays of a free regime followed by disastrous revolutions.”[1] This passage from Alexis de Tocqueville’s 1858 work, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, captures something of his influential thesis that revolutionary and Napoleonic centralization built upon that of the Old Regime, bequeathing modern France with a political culture featuring an over-mighty state and an attenuated civil society. This venerable interpretation echoes in the work of François Furet and more recently that of Pierre Rosanvallon. The latter, while noting weaknesses in Tocqueville’s interpretation and substantially revising Furet’s views on the evolution of republican democracy, also stresses the staying power of “the political culture of the generality”—characterized by a centralized state, a limited civil society, and the primacy of national over other identities.[2]

Rosanvallon’s views are engaged by several contributors to this thought-provoking collection. As Julian Wright and H.S. Jones explain in their well-crafted introduction, while the term “pluralism” is certainly capacious, in the present volume it is deployed in contrast to “Jacobinism,” another elastic concept which they use as a shorthand for the belief in a powerful centralized state as the instrument for establishing an “egalitarian civic order” (p. 4). Tracing evolving conceptions of pluralism, the editors specify their focus upon those operating within the democratic republican tradition, rather than monarchists and authoritarians. They also helpfully delineate different streams of pluralism, most notably liberalism (itself encompassing diverse tendencies) and “social realism”—which, in contrast to the liberal emphasis upon the individual actor, takes spontaneous human sociability as its starting point. Corporatism can also be located within the pluralist spectrum, so long as it is not conflated with state control of corporate bodies.

The first section of the book focuses upon intellectuals, with liberals of various stripes dominating the first three chapters. Andrew Jainchill highlights the work of Charles-Guillaume Thérémin, whose efforts to “formulate a truly pluralist republic” (p. 28) in the 1790s have been underappreciated, and was notable for his advocacy of women’s civic equality, though he stopped short of advocating full political rights. Jainchill compares Thérémin’s vision to Germaine de Staël’s more conservative, but also pioneering brand of liberal republicanism, which called for a regime supporting “the liberty of the ancients”—i.e., assuring citizens of popular involvement in government—but also “the liberty of the moderns,” namely the independence of private citizens vis-à-vis the state. Though she prized civic virtue and shared values, Staël paid more attention to ‘modern’ liberty in her writings, contending that in the modern age representative government rather than direct citizen participation was the most feasible option.

K. Steven Vincent also examines Staël's ideas comparatively, this time in relation to those of Benjamin Constant. Situating both thinkers in a broad historical context, he stresses their common desire to keep "fanaticism" (p. 58) at bay and to promote liberty in the religious, political and administrative realms. Vincent concludes that their convictions and prominence underscore the vitality of pluralist liberalism in this period, in contrast to Rosanvallon's view that François Guizot, who advocated rationalism and centrally-directed reform, was the emblematic French liberal of his day. However, as Annelien de Dijn shows, the "aristocratic" variant of liberalism was also a significant tradition in modern French history. Its proponents feared the implications of democracy and held that decentralization and independent elites--though not a traditional aristocracy--were needed to ensure liberty. Tocqueville can be located within this tradition, though he rather grudgingly accepted the premise of universal suffrage.

Thereafter the attention shifts to "social realist" thinkers. Georges Navet examines the complex social vision of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, who asserted that collective social entities were "produced and reproduced *among* individuals" (author's emphasis, p. 88), brought together by "the reason of things" (p. 89)--practical interests such as the exchange of services and credit--rather than lofty sentiments of fraternity. Friction between individual interests was unavoidable, but Proudhon concluded that harmony can be achieved through the nurturing of "public reason" (p. 95), which arises out of the reason of individuals but is superior to the sum of them. Michael Behrent then compares Proudhon's ideas to those of two less prominent thinkers, Pierre Leroux and Alfred Fouillée. All three contested the individualist focus of liberalism, but whereas Proudhon stressed that society had a personality, Leroux envisioned it as a milieu, with the state setting itself against established corporate interests and helping to encourage sociability. Fouillée offered yet another variation of social realism, stressing the contractual nature of social obligations. All of this attests to the diversity and vitality of republican pluralism.

John Humphreys closes part one with a shift in focus to the twentieth century, examining the work of the Russian émigré sociologist, Georges Gurvitch. In an engaging treatment of this neglected figure, who through a "pluralist philosophy of law" (p. 124), promoted the ideal of industrial democracy, the author sees a revealing example of the merits and limitations of French pluralism. Gurvitch, he concludes, focused upon labor and social relations while neglecting matters of religious and cultural diversity, even when reflecting upon the immigrant experience in France. This has limited his appeal in a "post-industrial, multicultural age" (p. 134), though Humphreys adds that perhaps it is time for French public debate to re-focus on economic inequality and its implications for genuinely popular democratic participation.

In part two, the focus shifts to institutions and organizations. Nicolas Roussellier traces the evolution of the electoral system from 1848 to 1914, showing how it gradually moved away from extensive state manipulation under the Second Empire to becoming increasingly competitive under the Third Republic, as the number of uncontested or weakly contested seats declined. Moreover, over time the republican camp itself became more varied in composition, offering a growing variety of options to voters. In a careful examination of the implications of the 1901 Law on Associations, Magali della Sudda provides additional evidence of how republican institutions increasingly nurtured pluralism. Even though the law had been developed in the context of attacking the power of the church, it also established a civic space in which mass movements such as the Ligue patriotique des Françaises and the Ligue des Femmes françaises could energetically promote a radically different vision of French society, in their cases one prizing Catholic values and the family, rather than the individual, as the basic social unit.

Paul Smith's deft analysis of the evolving configuration and role of the Senate between 1940 and 1969 further underscores the pluralist potential of key republican institutions. While under the Fifth Republic the Senate has functioned as an instrument of territorial representation, since the Second World War various proposals have been made to broaden the mandate of the upper chamber. Decolonization meant that plans to incorporate the empire ultimately amounted to little, while hopes of incorporating social

and economic representatives—most notably in de Gaulle’s 1969 proposed constitutional revision, which was defeated in a popular referendum and occasioned the general’s resignation—have not been realized. Still, the Senate remains an expression of diverse interests and identities that wields appreciable power.

The other chapters in part two assess advocates of various forms of pluralism. Julian Wright’s study of Joseph Paul-Boncour shows how effectively a richly contextualized biographical approach can shed light on broader themes. An independent socialist and influential figure on the moderate left who served as a cabinet minister several times and briefly as prime minister, Paul-Boncour was also a believer in decentralization, regionalism and syndicalism. Wright convincingly argues that the significance of his vision is best understood taking a long-term perspective. Influenced by contemporary social theory, Paul-Boncour realized that the revolutionary vision needs to adapt to changing social and economic realities, rather than clinging to outdated orthodoxies, “the better to keep its idealism alive” (p. 194).

The adaptability of republican pluralists was also evident in international politics. Carl Bouchard elucidates the connection between regionalism and internationalism as embodied in the *Ligue d’action régionaliste*, which was first established in 1911. Its leading figure, Jean Hennessy, shifted allegiances several times over his long political career but Bouchard illustrates that his commitment to Proudhonian federalism gives his ideas greater coherence than a cursory inspection would suggest. With the approach and outbreak of war, the *Ligue* (which renamed itself the *Société Proudhon* in 1918) broadened its focus to international politics but retained its commitment to federalism, which its members argued would be a guarantor of peace when applied to inter-state relations. Bouchard concedes that its proposals also sought to ensure France’s survival as a great power but he still credits Hennessy and his colleagues with a measure of idealism. Jean-Michel Guieu also examines the evolution of international federalist activism, this from the perspective of a cohort of interwar French jurists. Faced with the various shortcomings of the League of Nations, they concluded that regional federations needed to be established first before a truly global body could take shape. Ensuing discussions and proposals concerning a federal European union fizzled in the 1930s. But after the Second World War, some of the jurists, finding the new United Nations to be scarcely an improvement on its predecessor, redoubled their pro-federal efforts, which soon bore fruit.

The final word is left to Alain Chatriot, who provides a concise, yet impressively wide-ranging historiographical survey that underscores the extent to which recent scholarship has made clear the salience of pluralism in French political discourse and institutions. In studies of fields such as regionalism, associational life, administration, and even colonial policy, the cumulative effect has tended to be the rediscovery of “a French state which is less Jacobin than that which is often described” (p. 249). As several contributors are careful to point out, this is something that Pierre Rosanvallon has also recognized, though he cautions that the Jacobin legacy is still very discernible.

This volume provides a good deal of food for thought. Given his significance to the book as a whole, it would have been helpful to provide more detail about the career and intellectual evolution of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. But this is a relatively minor point, for the strengths of this collection are many. It encourages a profound rethinking of a common supposition about French political culture. It provokes reconsideration of some well-known figures and movements, while drawing attention to neglected, yet instructive case studies. It also traces intriguing international influences and connections between French and other pluralist thinkers, particularly in Great Britain and Germany, thus underscoring the significance of the French contribution to this outlook. Though the editors characterize pluralism as the “junior, dissident partner in the republican tradition” (p. 17), they convincingly assert that its presence is enduring, and its impact has been considerable. They and the contributors are to be commended for their work.

NOTES

[1] Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, as quoted in Jack Hayward, *After the French Revolution: Six Critics of Democracy and Nationalism* (New York: New York University Press, 1991), p. 167.

[2] A valuable analysis of Rosanvallon's work can be found in Andrew Jainchill and Samuel Moyn, "French Democracy between Totalitarianism and Solidarity: Pierre Rosanvallon and Revisionist Historiography," *Journal of Modern History* 76/1(March 2004): 107-154.

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ISSN 1553-9172